

THE COMPATIBILITY OF CALVINISM AND MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE

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I. INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of middle knowledge has seen a revival of interest in the last twenty years, primarily among philosophers of religion.¹ However, it has recently enjoyed much attention in theological circles as well. More and more Calvinist thinkers are attempting to incorporate middle knowledge into their systems of thought. In this paper, I hope to evaluate the prospects of this endeavor. That is, I hope to determine whether or not a compatibilist view of freedom (as opposed to a libertarian view of freedom) can be reconciled with the doctrine of middle knowledge.

In order to prosecute this agenda, I will begin with a brief look at the basic differences between libertarianism and compatibilism and follow with a brief discussion of the doctrine of middle knowledge. I will then move to an examination of how it may be incorporated into a Calvinistic model of divine providence, using Terrance Tiessen's *Calvinistic Middle Knowledge Account* as representative of the effort to wed the two systems of thought.

Libertarian freedom is generally thought to include a freedom of choice that is self-determined and not caused by events outside the control of the agent. Thus, given a choice between competing alternatives, the individual can choose either way, and once a choice has been made, it is asserted that the agent could have chosen otherwise. Compatibilist freedom is generally thought to include a freedom of choice that is self-determined but may, in some instances (or in all instances), be causally determined by events outside the control of the agent. As Feinberg has put it, "an action is free even if causally determined so long as the causes are nonconstraining," by which he means that the causes can be sufficient to bring about an action, but not contrary to the individual's will, desires, or wishes.² Of course, the meaning of *self-determination* in each view is somewhat different. In libertarianism, it means both that the choice was made by the individual and that it was

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¹ This revival is largely credited to Alvin Plantinga, who apparently unwittingly reinvented the theory in his book on modal logic and the nature of God. See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974) 174–80.

² John Feinberg, "God Ordains all Things," in *Predestination & Freewill: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom* (ed. David and Randall Basinger; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986) 24.

not caused by anything outside the individual. By contrast, compatibilism uses the language of self-determination to mean that the choice was made by the individual in accordance with his or her will, desires, or wishes, but there are sufficient causes for the action, and those causes are either external or internal to the individual. The nature of such causes will be discussed in our evaluation of the Calvinist Middle Knowledge approach.

II. THE DOCTRINE OF MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE

The doctrine of middle knowledge was, for lack of better terminology, invented or discovered by Jesuit theologian Luis Molina during the Counter-Reformation period as an answer to the difficult question of how divine foreknowledge and providence can be reconciled with human freedom. Molina adhered to the traditional epistemological categories handed down by Aquinas, natural and free knowledge,³ but he added a third type of knowledge which he called *scientia media*, or middle knowledge.

Natural knowledge refers to that part of God's knowledge which he knows by his very nature. Included here is God's knowledge of all metaphysically necessary truths and all possible truths.⁴ Thus, natural knowledge, properly conceived, is that part of God's knowledge which could not have been different from what it is. It follows from this that the content of God's natural knowledge is independent of his will; God has no control over the truth of the propositions he knows by natural knowledge. Since God has no power over these truths, they may be thought of as *logically prior* to any act of will on God's part; natural knowledge is prevolitional.⁵

Free knowledge refers to that part of God's knowledge which he knows by his creative act of will. Included here are truths which refer to what

³ Actually, Aquinas did not use the terms "natural" and "free" in reference to divine knowledge—these are the names used by Molina. However, Aquinas did hold to the same kinds of divisions, referring instead to *Scientia Simplicis Intelligentia*, or Simple Intelligence, and *Scientia Visionis*, or Knowledge of Vision, respectively. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia* 1.14.9; and idem, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.66.4.

⁴ Flint correctly points out that all possible truths are necessary truths and *vice versa*. See Thomas P. Flint, "Chapter 5: Two Accounts of Providence" in *Divine and Human Action* (ed. Thomas V. Morris; Ithaca: Cornell, 1988) 156. Thus, the content of God's natural knowledge can be conceived of as a virtually infinite number of propositions of the form, "It is possible that p."

⁵ Important to the Molinist conception of divine knowledge is the idea of a logical priority or order within the knowledge of God. Craig has correctly pointed out that this concept was not new with Molina. Both Scotus and Aquinas held to similar ideas. Craig writes, "The notion of a sort of conceptual, atemporal priority within the knowledge of God is nothing new. Scotus had posited three moments in God's timeless knowledge of future contingents: (1) God's knowledge of contradictory pairs of all logically contingent propositions, (2) God's decision to actualize the state of affairs described in one disjunct of each contradictory pair, and (3) God's knowledge of all logically contingent propositions that as a result are in fact true. Similarly, Aquinas had posited three logically consecutive aspects of God's timeless act of knowledge: (1) *scientia simplicis intelligentiae*, by which God knows all the possibles; (2) *scientia approbationis*, by which God decides to create certain of the possibles; and (3) *scientia visionis*, by which God knows what exists at any time in the actual world." William Lane Craig, "Middle Knowledge, A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (ed. Clark H. Pinnock; Minneapolis: Bethany, 1989) 145.

actually exists (or will exist). Since free knowledge comes from God's creative act of will, it follows that the content of that knowledge is contingent. It includes only metaphysically contingent truths, or truths that could have been prevented by God, if he had chosen to create different situations, different creatures, or to not create at all. Thus, free knowledge can be characterized as dependent upon or *logically posterior* to God's will.

To these two distinctions in divine knowledge, Molina added a third which he believed incorporated facets of each. This he called *scientia media*, or middle knowledge. According to the theory, middle knowledge is similar to natural knowledge in that it is prevolitional, or prior to God's choice to create, and therefore its truth is independent of God's determining will. Likewise, it is similar to free knowledge in that the truths that are known are contingent (not necessary) because they are dependent on creaturely will.

The doctrine of middle knowledge proposes that God has knowledge not only of metaphysically necessary states of affairs via natural knowledge, and of what he intends to do via free knowledge, but also of what free creatures would do if they were created. Thus, the content of God's middle knowledge can be seen as a virtually infinite number of propositions of the form, "If person P were in situation S, then P would freely perform action A." It should be noted that the actual existence of P or the occurrence of S or A is not necessary for God to have this knowledge.

This means that the theory of middle knowledge proposes that God's omniscience extends beyond mere knowledge of the past and the future to include knowledge of conditional future contingents (or propositions which refer to how free creatures will choose if circumstances turn out a particular way) and knowledge of counterfactuals (or propositions which refer to how things would actually be if circumstances were different). Finally, middle knowledge also proposes that God has knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (or propositions which refer to what a given free creature would have chosen to do if things had been different).

God's decision about what sort of world to create is informed by his middle knowledge and, therefore, God's foreknowledge should be viewed as derived from the combination of all three forms of knowledge, but most importantly, his middle knowledge and his creative decision. God's providence and human freedom can both be preserved not because of God's *foreknowledge*, but because of this combination.⁶

⁶ It has become generally accepted that Arminius was familiar with Molina's and Suarez's work and made use of the idea of middle knowledge. See Eef Dekker, "Was Arminius a Molinist?" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27 (1996) 337–52; Richard A. Muller, "Arminius and the Scholastic Tradition," *CTJ* 24 (1989) 263–77; Barry E. Bryant, "Molina, Arminius, Plaifere, Goad, and Wesley on Human Free-Will, Divine Omniscience, and Middle Knowledge," *Wesley Theological Journal* 27 (1992) 93–103. One of the most common misunderstandings of Arminianism is that its proponents claim that predestination and election are based on God's *foreknowledge*. This, however, is not quite correct. Rather, the claim is that God's predestining work, his choice of individuals to salvation is based on his knowledge of who *would* respond to his call in various circumstances, if he were to so act. Thus, according to Arminians, predestination is based on middle knowledge, not foreknowledge.

The prevolitional character of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom leads to the belief that God's power, in the Molinist system, is somewhat limited by the content of his middle knowledge. On more than one occasion, David Basinger has noted the limits of divine power in a Molinist account of providence. All events that God wishes would occur may not. He may not be able to actualize just any state of affairs that he wishes. Basinger explains:

However, if God has MK and has chosen to create a world containing significant freedom, the situation is quite different. God is assured that this world will not turn out differently than he envisioned. He will not be surprised. But since God has no control over which possible worlds are actualizable, there is absolutely no guarantee that this world does not (or at least will not) contain a great deal of evil that is "pure loss." There is *no* assurance, for example, that a student's failure to be admitted to graduate school or the murder of a young child is a necessary component in the actual world in the sense that this world would have been less desirable overall if this event had not occurred. Such events may simply stand as undesired, but unavoidable, by-products of misguided freedom.⁷

In comparing a compatibilist view of providence with a middle knowledge view, Basinger argues that the God of compatibilism is more powerful than the God of Molinism because the God of compatibilism is limited only by logical possibility, whereas the God of middle knowledge is constrained by logical possibility *and* the true counterfactuals of freedom. An extended quotation will prove helpful.

It is important to emphasize that, even if a God with middle knowledge has brought about a world in which his ends and purposes are always achieved freely, such a being is not as powerful as is the God of the theological compatibilist or paradox indeterminist. The God of the theological compatibilist and paradox indeterminist is limited only by logical possibility. He could have created any possible world but chose to actualize this one—including those free choices involved—because it is the manifestation of his ideal creative plan. A God with middle knowledge, however, is not limited simply by logical possibility. With respect to those creative options that include significant freedom, God is limited by what he sees that those with freedom will in fact do with it. Or, to put it more directly, if God has middle knowledge and desires a world containing significant freedom, then his creative options are limited by something over which he has no control—namely, how individuals will use their freedom in any given situation in which they are allowed to do so. Thus, even if this world is exactly what God wants, it must be remembered that for a God with middle knowledge this is so only because God had the good fortune to see that he would be able to actualize a world in which all individuals would always freely choose to do exactly what he wants done.⁸

Basinger notes that the limits placed on God (in the Molinist model) due to his inability to cause counterfactuals of freedom to be true (or false) may

⁷ David Basinger, "Middle knowledge and divine control: Some clarifications," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 30 (1991) 137.

⁸ David Basinger, "Divine Control and Human Freedom: Is Middle Knowledge the Answer?," *JETS* 36 (1993) 63.

indeed lead to situations in which that which God most desires cannot be actualized. God cannot be *surprised* by the future, but he may still be *disappointed* in some sense of the word. Basinger writes,

But since a God with middle knowledge cannot control what we will choose to do in any situation in which we possess meaningful freedom, it can hardly be said that middle knowledge allows God to “plan” the world he wants in the sense that he can insure that the most desirable “ends and purposes” of which he can conceive will always be achieved. Rather, it is possible for a God with middle knowledge to find himself disappointed in the sense that he may often have to settle for much less than the ideal.⁹

Basinger has here assumed that a compatibilist Molinist account cannot be given. Yet some theologians in the Calvinist camp have attempted to utilize the doctrine of middle knowledge.

III. A CALVINIST MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE ACCOUNT? A MOLINIST COMPATIBILIST ACCOUNT?

Terrance Tiessen has recently argued for what he calls a middle knowledge Calvinist model of divine providence. He accepts that God possesses knowledge of how non-actual states of affairs would have been actualized; that is, he claims that God does have knowledge of counterfactuals. It is this knowledge which Tiessen equates with middle knowledge. For example, Tiessen writes, “I am particularly impressed with the significance of God’s knowledge of what *would* have happened in situations that never actually occur (counterfactuals). The most enthusiastic proponents of this concept have been found in the Molinist model, which called it ‘middle knowledge.’ I am somewhat reluctant to use the term to describe my own position because it is usually associated with a commitment to libertarian freedom. However, it is a simple handle to refer to the concept of God’s knowledge of counterfactuals of human freedom, and I will use it in my own model even though I do not believe human freedom to be libertarian.”¹⁰ In a similar fashion, compatibilists John Feinberg and Bruce Ware have also claimed that God possesses middle knowledge.¹¹

Tiessen clearly sees his own position as a compatibilist position in opposition to libertarianism, for he derides libertarian freedom as *radically indeterministic* and *arbitrary*. He notes that most libertarians claim that reasons do exist for why any given individual chose any given course of action,

⁹ Ibid. 62.

¹⁰ Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000) 290.

¹¹ It should be noted that while Feinberg is skeptical about the value of such knowledge, Ware, like Tiessen, seems to believe it to be quite promising. See Feinberg, “God Ordains All Things” 34. Ware claimed to hold to a Calvinistic Middle Knowledge position at the EPS session (2000 annual meeting, Nashville, TN) which discussed the book, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (ed. James Beilby and Paul Eddy; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001) and has confirmed this in personal conversation.

and admits that an explanation of why a decision was made can be given. Yet he insists that since libertarianism requires that an individual really had the ability to choose in a way contrary to how she did, in fact, choose, the choice made had to be arbitrary. Tiessen explains:

... if the complete set of factors leaves the person with a final choice that is influenced by nothing in or outside himself, then it escapes me how the decision between two equally viable and possible courses of action can be anything but arbitrary. Granted, there are many contributing factors or "reasons" but, since the sum total of them is insufficient to explain this choice rather than that one, the decision appears to be "random." I see no way to escape that conclusion given all the premises.¹²

This seems to be a common understanding among Calvinist thinkers. For example, Crabtree argues that counterfactuals of freedom cannot be known because of the indeterminacy of (libertarian) free choice. He writes,

If Peter's will is what Molina says it is—utterly autonomous—then nothing at the time of Jesus' prediction necessitates that Peter deny Jesus. In fact, Molina's view requires that Peter could have done otherwise. . . . Peter's choices were not determined ahead of time. So, if they had not yet been decided, how could God know the outcome of those decisions? No one, not even God, can know the outcome of an autonomous decision that has not yet been made, can he?¹³

¹² Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer* 313.

¹³ J. A. Crabtree, "Does Middle Knowledge Solve the Problem of Divine Sovereignty?" in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, vol. 2, *Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism* (ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 436. Crabtree argues that Molina presents two accounts of middle knowledge: an *official* account and a *covert* account. According to Crabtree, the official account is that God knows future subjunctives and counterfactuals non-inferentially. In this account, the immensity of God is pointed to as the reason why God has such knowledge available to him. Crabtree charges that Molina makes an appeal to mystery in order to hide the incoherence of his system. The covert account portrays God comprehending particular wills and gaining knowledge of the choices the individuals who possess those wills will make through that comprehension. Crabtree argues that these two accounts are in tension. He writes, "By Molina's own official account, it would seem that the nature of a person's faculty of choice does not determine, cause, or otherwise necessitate the precise choice he will make. How, then, is a knowledge of Peter's faculty of choice relevant to the issue of what Peter will choose?" (ibid. 439).

In order to illustrate this problem, Crabtree draws a comparison of the non-inferential middle knowledge (official account) with human knowledge of how others will freely act. He uses the analogy to demonstrate, in a way similar to Robert Adams, that individuals may act out of character. He writes, "My wife knows that, were she to offer me a piece of pie tonight, I will accept it. . . . Even more importantly, even if she has a thorough grasp of the situation and knows me as well as any human being can know another, she still could be wrong. I could surprise her. I could, for some inexplicable reason, refuse the pie or the coffee" (ibid. 440). However, Crabtree is correct in pointing out that the Molinist will claim that this analogy fails because humans will always have finite knowledge of others, but God does not. He describes what he believes to be the Molinist response: "Whereas my wife could be surprised and find my choosing what she never would have predicted, God cannot and will not be similarly surprised. . . . No aspect of my will and being is beyond his understanding. God, therefore, can have utterly certain and totally infallible middle knowledge; his grasp of who I am is perfect" (ibid. 441). But according to Crabtree, this is not consistent with what he calls Molina's official account of middle knowledge. Crabtree contends that the type of freedom Molina hopes to affirm makes the account just described impossible because it relies on the premise that an individual's choices are caused by his personality, brain processes, or

Feinberg echoes this argument, claiming that this is the reason that middle knowledge does not resolve the indeterminist's (libertarian's) problem. As he sees it, although God possesses knowledge of counterfactuals, the content of the knowledge had to be determined by *something*. Exactly what determines the truth of the content of *middle knowledge* so construed, Feinberg does not disclose. He writes,

Middle Knowledge (as knowledge of counterfactuals) is knowledge of possibilities, not actualities. Since middle knowledge is knowledge of what *might* occur, it is irrelevant to the question of how God can know what *will* happen in the future. Moreover, middle knowledge does not entail that God knows what *could* happen if something else occurred, but rather what *would* happen if something else occurred. However, given indeterminism, how can God *know*, even counterfactually, what *would* follow from anything else unless some form of determinism is correct.¹⁴

Part of the problem is no doubt due to some libertarians whose position is accurately described by Tiessen and others, but another part is due to the

will. Yet, according to Crabtree, Molina wants to affirm that “nothing whatsoever determines in advance of a person's choice what that choice will be” (ibid.).

Crabtree points to 4.53.1.10–14 in Molina's *Concordia* as proof of his contention, yet in this section, Molina seems to argue that free acts cannot be known by simple natural knowledge because of their contingency. In the alternate accounts given by Molina's opponents, which Crabtree believes to be the same as Molina's so-called covert account, the argument is made that God knows future contingents because he is the Creator of choice. Molina writes, “God knows all the things that are in fact going to exist because of created choice on the hypothesis that He should decide to create it in such-and-such an order of things and circumstances, intending that it should do these particular things and permitting it to do those particular things. . . . They add, however, that God knows this through *natural* knowledge in His essence and in the ideas. . . .” Luis de Molina, *Concordia Liberi Arbitrii cum Gratiae Divina Praescientia, Providentia, Praedestinatione et Reprobatione* 4.53.1.10 (trans. Alfred J. Freddoso; under the title *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*; Ithaca: Cornell, 1988) 204. The argument of Molina's detractors here is that if future contingents have truth value, then they are necessary and can be known strictly through natural knowledge. Molina expressly rejects this, not by making some new appeal to absolute autonomy, as Crabtree suggests, but by referring the reader back to his argument in 4.52.15. Now, it must be admitted that Molina does comment that it seems curious to affirm human freedom while at the same time affirming that “one part of a contradiction is determinately going to obtain because of free choice itself” (ibid., trans. Freddoso, p. 205). However, Molina must be understood here *in context*. He is rejecting the idea of knowledge of future contingents by natural knowledge (which everyone does!). The idea of *determinately* obtaining is important here—Molina holds this to mean that it is such that it could *not obtain*, which contradicts all forms of contingency. See Freddoso's comments in the footnote; Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge* 165 n. 4.

¹⁴ Feinberg, “God Ordains All Things” 34. Feinberg has reaffirmed this position in his recent book on the nature of God. He writes, “Moreover, I don't believe God has middle knowledge, if middle knowledge includes knowledge of what humans would freely do in the libertarian sense. On the other hand, if one holds some form of determinism as I do, there is no reason to deny that God has middle knowledge of what humans would do (compatibilistically) freely. The only question is whether the conditionals would be true or false. Given God's knowledge of all possible worlds, I think God does know which conditionals would be true of each possible world. He could know them because he would see in every case the causal antecedents that would bring about actions of which the conditionals speak. So, while I doubt that an indeterminist could consistently hold that God has middle knowledge, I see no reason for a determinist to deny this.” John Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001) 752.

fact that this is a mischaracterization of the position held by many libertarians. For example, Feinberg, in discussing the libertarian sense of “can,” writes that it “means that though there were various causal factors playing on one’s will at the time of decision making, none of those factors individually nor all of them conjointly were sufficient to incline the person’s will decisively one way or the other. Thus, though causes may have pointed to one choice, the agent still could just as easily have done the other.”¹⁵ Tiessen echoes Feinberg in his assertion that libertarian freedom requires that an individual “had to be in a position where she could *just as easily* have made a different decision” than the one she did, in fact, make.¹⁶ Most libertarians make no such claim. Instead, they make the weaker claim that the individual had to be in a position where she really *could have* made a different decision than the one she did, in fact, make. The opposing option does not have to be *as likely* as the option chosen, but rather all that is required is the individual had the ability to choose otherwise.¹⁷ This is the point of the discussion of one’s ability to act out of character.

Nevertheless, this view of libertarian freedom has led many compatibilists who are intrigued by middle knowledge to accept the *grounding objection*—the argument that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom cannot be true, because nothing can be pointed to which *grounds* their truth. Feinberg approvingly cites Robert Adams’s article, which presents a version of the grounding objection to the truth of counterfactuals of (libertarian) creaturely freedom.¹⁸ Ware has also noted that he finds the *grounding objection* to be convincing, and Tiessen seems to tacitly agree that a real problem exists for the grounding of the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian creaturely freedom. In response to the claims of Basinger regarding the limitations on God in a Molinist system, Tiessen writes, “His criticisms of that model [Molinism] are justified, but they do not apply to my own compatibilist model, which puts together divine knowledge of the outcome of hypothetical situa-

¹⁵ John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* 724.

¹⁶ Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer* 313, emphasis added.

¹⁷ Interestingly, Feinberg denies that libertarian freedom is ever true. He writes, “Soft determinists would deny that anyone can do otherwise in this eighth (contra-causal) sense of ‘can,’ for to admit that there are such actions undercuts soft determinism” (*No One Like Him* 725). An implication of this assertion is that even God does not possess this sort of freedom and therefore, for instance, he could not have refrained from creating. Following Feinberg’s discussion of the uses of “can,” we may assert that God had the *ability* to refrain from creating, he had the *opportunity* to refrain from creating, he would have *felt no ill-consequence* from refraining, he had the *authority* to refrain, and it may even have been *reasonable* to refrain, and he had the *option* to refrain, but given the prevailing conditions, he could not have refrained from creating. This appears dangerously close to theological fatalism. It seems to be a much wiser move to merely deny that humans possess libertarian freedom, rather than deny its possibility outright.

¹⁸ Robert M. Adams, “Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977) 109–17. See also Robert M. Adams, “An Anti-Molinist Argument,” in *Philosophical Perspectives 5: Philosophy of Religion*, 1991 (ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen; Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1991) 345; William Hasker has also written extensively on the problems of Molinism associated with the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian creaturely freedom. See his *God, Time, and Knowledge*, esp. pp. 28–45; “A Refutation of Middle Knowledge,” *Nous* 20 (1986) 223–36; “A New Anti-Molinist Argument,” *RelS* 35 (1999) 291–97.

tions and human freedom of a voluntary type.”¹⁹ In other words, Tiessen does not believe that God is limited by the counterfactuals of compatibilist creaturely freedom in his own system in the same way that he is limited by the counterfactuals of libertarian freedom in the traditional Molinist system. How, though, can Tiessen (and other compatibilists who make use of middle knowledge) escape this supposed weakness of the Molinist model? How can they overcome the force of the grounding objection and others like it? What can ground the truth of counterfactuals of compatibilist creaturely freedom?

It seems that few options are open to the Calvinist Molinist. In order to investigate these questions, consider the following counterfactual:

- (1) If John were offered an extra night’s stay for free, he would (freely) decline.

Is this true? Probably so—I am inclined to think that I would, indeed, decline the offer of a free night’s stay because my plane tickets are set and I traveled here on Permissive TDY with the United States Army [I was mobilized for Operation Noble Eagle]. However, perhaps I would accept. My lack of epistemic confidence, however, should not detract from the truth or falsity of the proposition under consideration. Let us suppose that (1) is true.

The proponent of middle knowledge must claim that (1) was true *prior to the creation of the world*. After all, the content of middle knowledge informs God’s decision about what sort of world he will actualize. We must ask if the moderate Calvinist can make this claim. It seems that a moment’s reflection will lead us to conclude that she can. It may be the case that God determined (1) to be true from all eternity. He may have determined to create a world where I, if offered, would decline a free night’s stay.

However, this reveals the problem with the Calvinist Molinist approach, for the proponent of middle knowledge must make the further claim that the truth of (1) is in no way dependent upon the will of God. Can the moderate Calvinist make this claim as well? She may be able to, but it seems that she would be reluctant to do so, for most Calvinists want to claim that God is able to work in such a way as to bring about his will through the free actions of creatures, even if the creatures do not want to perform the required action(s).²⁰ Feinberg writes,

God can guarantee that his goals will be accomplished freely even when someone does not want to do the act, because the decree includes not only God’s chosen ends but also the means to such ends. Such means include whatever circumstances and factors are necessary to convince an individual (without constraint) that the act God has decreed is the act she or he wants to do. And, given the sufficient conditions, the person will do the act.²¹

¹⁹ Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer* 316–17. It should be noted that Basinger does not mean his comments to be seen as a criticism of Molinism.

²⁰ Hence, Tiessen’s confidence regarding the strength of his position as opposed to the libertarian Molinist position.

²¹ Feinberg, “God Ordains All Things” 26.

Feinberg goes on to note that in his view of providence, the basis for God's sovereign decisions is his good pleasure and purposes and not what he foresees (and presumably, not what he sees via middle knowledge). Obviously, then, Feinberg does not really hold to a form of Calvinist Middle Knowledge and his use of the phrase, *middle knowledge*, only refers to a divine knowledge of counterfactuals which is *not* prevolitional. But this is not middle knowledge at all! Rather, it is merely a part of God's free knowledge! Interestingly, Molina's chief opponent, Domingo Bañez, also held to a belief that God knows all true counterfactuals of freedom (which are true in virtue of an act of his will).

Thus, it seems that the fundamental difference between the compatibilist and the libertarian views of freedom, at least as viewed by many compatibilists, has to do with the relationship between the creaturely will and God's work in creation. Consider, again, (1). In the situation described, I could either accept or decline the offer. That is, either (1) is true, or "(2) If John were offered an extra night's stay for free, he would (freely) accept" is true. Again, suppose that (1) is true. Many compatibilists claim that (1) is true because God created my will in such a way that I would freely choose to decline instead of accept. The point in calling the choice free is that the choice was self-determinative; I chose to decline freely, but in accordance with how my will was created to function. My will was created by God to function so that I will choose to decline.²² In contrast, the libertarian view of freedom states that God created the human will in such a way that I can freely choose to either accept or decline. The choice here is self-determinative as well, but it is not arbitrary. The choice I make is made in accordance with my will. It must be noted that those libertarians who claim that nothing, not even the individual's will, is determinative of the choice made, seem to

²² This assertion is supported by Crabtree's discussion of the problems (as he sees them) with middle knowledge. Crabtree argues that an inferential middle knowledge (what he calls Molina's covert account and which I claim is the correct understanding of Molina) cannot reconcile divine foreknowledge and human freedom, because if a free creature's choices are determined by the nature and workings of his will and/or mind, then "that is tantamount to acknowledging that Peter's choices are necessitated by God; for God is the creator and designer of Peter's will" ("Does Middle Knowledge Solve the Problem of Divine Sovereignty?" 444). It should be noted that Crabtree recognizes that not all will agree with such a conclusion. After all, God's brining about a particular will (or essence or nature) does not necessarily entail that God determines how that will will choose or work. Crabtree responds by first noting that it is "outside the scope of this chapter to explore this issue at length" (ibid.). Yet Crabtree then moves to charge those who disagree with *philosophical confusion*. He argues that sense cannot be made of the idea of God creating without determining the workings of that which he has made, presumably down to the details: "How can God bring X into existence without thereby defining the nature of X, which will be determinative of how it will function and behave? If God has not defined its controlling nature, in what sense is it X that God has brought into existence (rather than not-X)? Suffice it to say that my argument *assumes* that there is an inextricable link between God's creating something and God's determining that nature of its being and functioning in reality. Hence, to create Peter's will is to create the nature, essence, and mode of working of Peter's will. If not—if God does not determine its nature, essence, and mode of working—then in what sense is it distinctively Peter's will that God has created, and how do we explain the origin of its nature, essence, and mode of working?" (ibid. 446, n. 16).

have backed themselves into a corner—in that case, the choice does seem to be arbitrary. However, most libertarians claim that the individual's will is what is determinative for the choice made, but God made the will so that it chooses on its own. Thus, the fundamental difference between these views of libertarianism and compatibilism lies in the implications drawn from the belief that God creates the individual with a free will. This understanding of compatibilism, though, would not be conducive to a middle knowledge position because it requires divine knowledge of counterfactuals to be part of God's free knowledge, as already noted. However, some compatibilists may complain that this presents a view of determinism that is much stronger than their own positions. Some may want to make the weaker claim that compatibilistic freedom merely states that sufficient reasons can be given for actions and that it is this view of freedom which does work well with the Molinist view.

It may be possible for the compatibilist to argue that the truth of (1) is independent of the will of God, but the grounding objection becomes a problem for her at this point. What grounds the truth of a counterfactual of compatibilist freedom in a Calvinistic Molinist Account? The only option that seems to be available is to ground the truth of the counterfactual of compatibilist freedom in the psychological makeup or character of the individual in question. This, however, seems problematic, for some of the same reasons it cannot ground the truth of counterfactuals of libertarian freedom—the individual does not yet exist at the logical moment of God's middle knowledge, for God has *not yet* created, and may *not* create, him. The truth of (1) cannot be grounded in my character or psychological makeup because (1) was true prior to God's decision to actualize a world where I am faced with such a decision, prior to his decision to actualize a world where I exist, and prior to his decision to actualize a world at all! This problem, however, may be overcome.

Elsewhere, I have argued that Molina believed that individuals do pre-exist in the mind of God as ideas.²³ If this is indeed the case, then the compatibilist may claim that the truth of propositions regarding how any given creature would act in various circumstances are grounded in the creature as he or she exists in the mind of God as ideas. But what sorts of sufficient reasons for creaturely actions would the Calvinist Molinist be able to offer under this approach? It appears that the only option available would be simple self-determination. In the example that we have been considering, I would choose to decline the offer of a free night's stay—that is, (1) is true—because I would exercise my freedom in that way. I am such that, if I were faced with the option of staying an extra night for free, I would decline, but I am not that way *because God created me that way*—the truth of (1) and the falsity of (2) are prevolitional. Then why am I *that way*? The only answer that seems plausible is that I am *that way* because it is a correct description of how I would exercise my freedom if faced with that decision. But is this view any different from a libertarian conception of freedom, and can it properly

²³ See my "Molinism and Supercomprehension: Grounding Counterfactual Truth" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000).

be called a *Calvinistic* approach? It does not seem to be. Rather, it seems to be the same kind of answer that the libertarian would give. The only sufficient reason for my choice to decline the offer is my exercising of my freedom in that way; it is a choice of my free will.

We must also ask if this approach really does avoid the pitfalls of Molinism as expounded by Basinger. It does not seem that it can. Consider the following counterfactual of freedom: (3) If given the choice to eat the forbidden fruit, Adam will (libertarianly freely) eat. We may suppose that (3) is true. Let us suppose further that (3) is true in all feasible worlds. That is, there is never a time when (4) If given the choice to eat the forbidden fruit, Adam will (libertarianly freely) fast is true because Adam will always freely choose to eat the fruit when given the choice. Thus, although a world where Adam freely declines the offer of the forbidden fruit is logically possible, it is not a live option for God; he cannot actualize a world where Adam freely fasts. Now consider the following conditionals of freedom:

- (5) If given the choice to eat the forbidden fruit, Adam will (compatibilistically freely) eat.
- (6) If given the choice to eat the forbidden fruit, Adam will (compatibilistically freely) fast.

In a way similar to (3) and (4), suppose that (5) is true and (6) is false. According to Tiessen, God can actualize a world where (6) is true and (5) is false. But how can he, apart from Adam's choice being in some way dependent upon the will of God? If it is dependent upon the will of God, then the truths of (5) and (6) are not part of God's middle knowledge. If it is not dependent upon the will of God, then it seems that God is just as constrained in terms of the kind of world he can actualize in the Calvinist Molinist model as he is in the traditional (libertarian) Molinist model because Adam may never compatibilistically choose to abstain from eating the fruit. The compatibilist may retort that there are always *some* ways of making Adam freely choose to eat the fruit, but this is, in effect, a rejection of the possibility of (6) always being false. That is, the compatibilist must reject (7) There is a possible world where (6) is never true, no matter what the prevailing circumstances, a claim made by the Molinist and essential to the Free Will Defense. Not only must the compatibilist maintain that (7) is false, but she must make the further claim that any possible free action can be elicited from any given creature, if the proper circumstances and influences obtain. It is hard to believe that every person can be influenced to make every kind of choice freely, no matter what action is under consideration. For example, consider the following counterfactual:

- (8) Under certain circumstances, a mother will (freely) eat her own child.

(8) is true (Lamentations 2:20), but if the woman were specified, would it always be true? There may be circumstances which could influence *some* women to eat their own children, but it is difficult to believe that every

mother who has ever lived (or could live) could be influenced to freely choose to eat her own child. Instead, it seems that (9) At least one mother could never be influenced to freely eat her own child is true. At least, it seems to be more likely than (10) Every mother could be influenced to freely eat her own child. Therefore, it does not appear to be the case that every set of conditionals of freedom is subject to overcoming the constraints placed upon God by the doctrine of middle knowledge, whether freedom is conceived of as libertarian or compatibilist.

IV. CONCLUSION

The proponent of a Calvinist-Middle Knowledge position seems to be caught between the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, if she claims that the truth of counterfactuals of compatibilist freedom is grounded in the will of God or in the way God created the creaturely will, then she has denied the prevolitional character of divine knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom and therefore, her position is not in the middle of anything. On the other hand, if she claims that the truth of counterfactuals of compatibilist freedom are grounded in the character of the creature as he pre-exists in the mind of God, or that the truth of counterfactuals of compatibilistic freedom do not need to be grounded, then her view of freedom is virtually indistinguishable from libertarian freedom. Furthermore, she cannot make use of one of the most attractive features of Molinism, the Free Will Defense. Thus, although we may be sympathetic to the theological concerns of those who attempt to combine middle knowledge with moderate Calvinism, we must reject it as an ultimately untenable position. The soft determinist may claim that God possesses knowledge of counterfactuals of compatibilist freedom, but she cannot claim that such knowledge is prevolitional; it must be part of God's free knowledge.