

# Still Another Anti-Molinist Argument

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**Abstract:** Molinists offer a tempting bargain: accept divine middle knowledge, and reap solutions to a number of philosophical/theological problems. The prime benefit we are meant to reap from middle knowledge is a solution to the problem of freedom and providence. I argue that they cannot deliver. Even if we make metaphysical and semantic assumptions that have generally been considered friendly to Molinism, Molinism is in danger of undermining divine providence altogether. The spectre of this “collapse” persists despite Molinism-friendly assumptions and plagues the best Molinist theories defended in the literature.

**Keywords:** Molinism, Counterfactuals of Freedom, Providence, Divine Agency, Freedom

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Molinist philosophers and theologians claim to have a fruitful theory. If we accept the theory of divine “middle knowledge,” we can reconcile libertarian freedom, divine foreknowledge, and a robust theory of providence, perhaps finding tools to help analyze salvation, the problem of evil, and other salient theological notions along the way. A number of challenges have been raised against the coherence of Molinism, but most parties agree: if coherent, Molinism has much to offer contemporary philosophers of religion.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a descendant of one of the first papers I wrote while Dean’s student and was heavily inspired by his 2009 anti-molinist argument. Fittingly, his 2009 paper appeared in a volume in honor of Robert Adams. In addition to Dean, I owe special thanks to Robert and Marilyn Adams, Howard Robinson, Eddy Chen, and the rest of the Rutgers Center for Philosophy of Religion crew for helpful conversations and feedback. I have also received helpful comments and discussion from Andrew Chignell, Lara Buchak, Ryan Darr, Alexander Englert, Elisabeth Li, and the rest of the Princeton Project in Philosophy and Religion Working Group. A referee for this journal also provided detailed and helpful comments.

30 I challenge this consensus. Let Molinism be fully coherent. Consequences of key  
 31 elements of the view undermine important work to which its partisans put it. My  
 32 focus here will be on the Molinist concordia of freedom and providence. The  
 33 debate around it has produced a vast and complicated literature, which in the  
 34 name of brevity I will not survey.<sup>2</sup>

35 My objection, in its simplest form, is an instance of an old anti-molinist  
 36 argument: the argument from unacceptable possibilities. In schematic form:  
 37 molinism entails that possibly P. The possibility of P is unacceptable. Therefore  
 38 molinism is unacceptable. Plantinga (1974) considers an early version of this  
 39 argument when addressing the question: what if the molinist conditionals entailed  
 40 that God could create only very bad worlds? Molinists have been content to  
 41 answer: God would sit by Himself, alone in perfection. Another instance appears in  
 42 Zimmerman's (2009) voodoo-worlds objection: what if the molinist conditionals  
 43 gave God so much control, we could not meaningfully count as free? Here, I ask:  
 44 what if the molinist conditionals entailed that God only has very few worlds  
 45 available for creation, or very little variety among them? I argue (a) that molinism  
 46 raises this possibility (a situation I call providential collapse), and (b) that the  
 47 possibility of providential collapse undermines divine aseity. An unacceptable  
 48 result.

49 A note on technical terminology. I will generally use uppercase greek letters  
 50 such as  $\Gamma$ ,  $\Delta$ , and  $\Upsilon$  as sets of propositions. I will generally use the subscript  $\models$  to  
 51 denote the deductive closure of a set of propositions (so if  $\Gamma$  stands for a set of  
 52 propositions,  $\Gamma_{\models}$  will stand for its deductive closure), and lowercase greek letters  
 53 such as  $\varphi$ ,  $\psi$ ,  $\chi$ , and  $\varrho$  as propositional variables. When it makes sense contextually,  
 54 I will put an uppercase Greek letter in a propositional variable position where  
 55 technically the conjunction of the elements of the set should go.

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## 57 2. Molinism and the Problem of Providence

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59 Strong views of providence and libertarian views of human freedom appear to  
 60 conflict. According to traditional doctrines of providence, God has foreknowledge  
 61 of the world's history, and control over that history's development. According to  
 62 Libertarian theories of free will, true freedom is incompatible with any form of  
 63 determinism. Thus, we get a prima facie puzzle: how is it that God can exercise  
 64 control over the development of a world's history containing free agents, if any

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<sup>2</sup> Adams (1977), Plantinga (1985), Freddoso (1988), Adams (1991), Flint (1998), Hasker (1999), Zimmerman (2009), and the essays in Perszyk (2012) give a taste and hit many of the highlights.

65 determinism nullifies the agent's freedom?

66 Much ink has been spilt on this problem. Starting with the 16th century Jesuit  
67 theologian Luis de Molina, Molinism has emerged as one of the main contenders  
68 for a solution. Molina's main idea: if God knew what free agents would do in  
69 various circumstances, God could arrange for the circumstances to obtain in which  
70 the free agents would do as God wills them to. Thus, by giving God a suite of  
71 conditionals—known in the literature as counterfactuals of freedom—to guide  
72 God's act of creation, Molina hoped to defuse the tension. The term  
73 "counterfactuals of freedom," while popular, is misleading as a description of the  
74 things the Molinist God learns. As Flint (1998) makes clear, they do not presuppose  
75 free agents, or even agents. The Molinist God needs providence over everything,  
76 not just the agents. I will refer to this group as "Molinist conditionals" throughout.

77 To fill out the picture, following Flint (1998) in presentation and terminology,  
78 we can think of God's omniscience as unfolding in four "moments." These are  
79 understood to represent the priority order of information as it is made available to  
80 God in creating the world. They are not temporal. We can divide these into pre-  
81 volitional and post-volitional moments, with the divine creative act occurring  
82 between moments two and three. And we can divide subjunctive Molinist  
83 conditionals into two classes: counterfactuals of divine freedom and  
84 counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

85 The first moment of God's knowledge we call God's necessary knowledge, and  
86 it includes all necessary truths. These include most of the truths of math, logic,  
87 metaphysics, natural theology, and similar areas of knowledge. Their presence is  
88 uncontroversial.

89 The second moment, Molina's key addition, brings the truth values of all  
90 creaturely Molinist conditionals. We will spend a fair amount of time investigating  
91 exactly which counterfactuals count as Molinist conditionals, but in general they  
92 are instances of the schema "if S were in C, S would A," where S is an agent, C is  
93 some circumstance, and A is an action. This is, at best, a heuristic device. For  
94 present purposes, I will make no substantive assumptions about what these  
95 conditionals are like. I will not, for instance, assume that their antecedents imply  
96 that determinism is false, or indeed that their antecedents must contain much more  
97 information than the tautology. Later, I will introduce and defend some minimal  
98 assumptions about them.

99 Molinist conditionals are also contingent—the first contingent truths on the  
100 scene. And their truth values are in no way dependent on God. God does not select  
101 the truth values, and can do nothing to change them. They simply present  
102 themselves to God, bringing information about the actual world. In the process,

103 they create a situation that has been noted by a number of philosophers: there are  
 104 possible worlds which are ineligible for creation, and God gets no say which.  
 105 Plantinga exploited it in his infamous Free Will Defense, and various Molinist  
 106 solutions to other problems use it as well (e.g. Craig (1989) defending hell). It has  
 107 also featured in various objections to Molinism, such as Robert Adams's (1977)  
 108 "grounding objection." We will occasionally find it useful, following Plantinga, to  
 109 refer to the worlds left after the Molinist conditionals have their say as "feasible"  
 110 worlds.

111 God then combines the contingent information revealed in the second moment  
 112 with the necessary truths to choose the truth values of the counterfactuals of divine  
 113 freedom. We note the asymmetry here between divine and creaturely freedom. No  
 114 mere set of conditionals can dictate what a God would do without that God's say-  
 115 so. Since choosing the true counterfactuals about divine actions is equivalent to  
 116 choosing an actual world, God chooses the counterfactuals of divine freedom that  
 117 result in actualizing the world. This marks the third moment, and the first post-  
 118 volitional one.<sup>3</sup>

119 Finally, in the fourth moment, God gets the truth value of all other propositions  
 120 (presumably by applying modus ponens to the appropriate counterfactual of  
 121 divine freedom), in what has often been called God's "free" knowledge.

122 So Molinism offers a concordia of divine providence and creaturely freedom. It  
 123 does so by dividing God's knowledge into four moments, and then carefully  
 124 weaving them around the divine creative act. This way, prior to creation, God has  
 125 enough contingent information to place agents in circumstances where they will  
 126 do as God wants. The promise: accept Molinist conditionals, known to God before  
 127 creating, which narrow the field of possible worlds it is feasible for God to create,  
 128 accept that these have their truth or falsity independent of and not subject to veto  
 129 by God, and solve the freedom/foreknowledge/providence puzzle. But can  
 130 Molinism deliver? As we shall see, if the (deductive closure of the set of) Molinist  
 131 conditionals that present themselves to God in the second moment is (or could  
 132 have been) too rich or too anemic, then it cannot.

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<sup>3</sup> It is once more worth noting that I will assume the entire third moment to happen synchronically. God makes a single decision, and that decision carries out all of its implications at once. Views on which this moment unfolds in "stages"—such as that of Zimmerman (2009)—introduce complications that we need not consider while getting the basic argument on the table. Climenhaga and Rubio (2022) map out the explanatory structure of theories like this.

### 135 3. The Self-Undermining Problem

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137 I argue that Molinism leads (or may lead) to a providential collapse. God has no  
 138 control over which Molinist conditionals obtain. And God has no control over the  
 139 logical consequences of the set of such counterfactuals. These two facts combine  
 140 with a few assumptions about those counterfactuals and the logic governing them  
 141 to create situations that are at best uncomfortable for a robust theory of  
 142 providence. Although I will often speak of “collapse” as if it were a single state of  
 143 affairs, it is really a family of states.

144 Before we say what a collapse is, it is important to say what collapse is not.  
 145 Nothing in my argument requires or assumes that divine freedom requires  
 146 libertarian leeway. Leibniz, with his view that God had exactly one option to  
 147 create, does not fall prey to my objection.<sup>4</sup> What I object to is the overly narrow  
 148 winnowing—prior to and independent of any divine volitions—of the possible  
 149 worlds God is able to actualize.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to traditional accounts of creation and  
 150 of providence, Molinism introduces a new modal distinction: possible worlds that  
 151 are nevertheless uncreatable. My objection only has traction with this distinction in  
 152 place, for I charge the Molinist with reducing the space of available worlds in  
 153 objectionable ways.

154 The most extreme bad case for Molinism I will call total agential collapse. Let  $\Upsilon$   
 155 be a set of propositions describing what each actual agent actually does. If, for each  
 156 member  $\psi$  of  $\Upsilon$ , there is a Molinist conditional  $\varphi \square \rightarrow \psi$  such that the set of  
 157 Molinist conditionals imply  $\varphi$ , total collapse has occurred. In this scenario, when  
 158 the Molinist conditionals present themselves to God, they also tell God which  
 159 creatures will do what and when. And since God had no say over the  
 160 counterfactuals, God gets no say over which creatures there are or what they do.  
 161 This more or less eliminates providence.

162 A second noteworthy collapse I will call single-career collapse. Single-career  
 163 collapse happens when, for each agent whom God could have created, there is a  
 164 true conditional (career conditional)  $\varphi \square \rightarrow \psi$  where  $\varphi$  states that the agent is  
 165 created and  $\psi$  gives the agent’s entire career. This is not quite so bad as total  
 166 collapse, since God still gets a little bit of say over which agents are created. But  
 167 since agents inevitably interact over the course of a career, there will be certain (a  
 168 great many) combinations of agents which will come as a package deal. For

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<sup>4</sup> Thank you to Robert Adams for pressing me on this point.

<sup>5</sup> In particular, I make no assumptions about the content of divine desires or the rational structure of the creation decision. See Rubio (2018), Tucker (2020), and Johnston (2019) for further discussion.

169 instance, if Smith's career-conditional includes "has a conversation with Jones,"  
 170 then Jones's career conditional must include "has a conversation with Smith," and  
 171 God creates Smith iff God creates Jones. We don't need to map how involved these  
 172 entailment networks between the consequents of career conditionals can become to  
 173 see that this really isn't much providence.<sup>6</sup>

174 These are particularly sharp types of collapse. But we can think of collapse in a  
 175 more general sort of way. A respectable theory of providence should get God lots  
 176 of choices amongst worlds to create, and lots of variety amongst those choices  
 177 (optimally all of them, but Molinists hope to trade a few worlds for a resolution to  
 178 the various theological problems). God could have many choices with virtually no  
 179 variety. For instance, if all God gets to pick is the number of stars, the number of  
 180 particles, and the number of elements, God gets a vast array of choices (infinitely  
 181 many), but very little variety. Or God could have a great variety amongst the  
 182 choices, but altogether too few. For instance, if God gets only a very small subset of  
 183 the possible worlds to choose from, none of which have any of the same people,  
 184 things, or events in them, God gets lots of variety, but a very small number. A  
 185 robust providence requires both. It is important to note that even infinitely many  
 186 worlds can count as "very few choices." What we care about when we speak of  
 187 number of choices is not the cardinality of the set of feasible worlds, but the  
 188 proportion of logical space that it occupies.<sup>7</sup>

189 This thought can be made precise with a little geometry. Suppose in the first  
 190 moment there are continuum many possibilities.<sup>8</sup> Then we can represent logical  
 191 space on a cartesian plane, with each point as a world and distance between points  
 192 representing distance between worlds.<sup>9</sup>

193 If figure 1 represents God's options before the second moment, figures 2-4  
 194 represent ways for God's options to be after the second moment. The shaded  
 195 points represent worlds that God can choose amongst.

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<sup>6</sup> Some readers may worry here about the option of God not creating at all. We will discuss that further later.

<sup>7</sup> This presupposes that measure theory can sensibly be applied to the plurality of worlds. We will pretend here that it can.

<sup>8</sup> This is almost certainly false, but for reasons that will become apparent trying to use a plausible assumption would make our precise version too complicated to be useful.

<sup>9</sup> Distance depends on similarity, so that if we have a set of worlds all of which are distant from each other we have great variety amongst the members of that set. We might even give a formal measure of the variety within a set of worlds by taking the measure of its convex hull within the plane, but for our present purposes we do not need a formal measure of variety.

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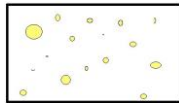
Figure 1: Logical Space Before the Second Moment

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201 In figure 2, we have a decent number of worlds and a decent amount of variety  
202 between them.

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Figure 2: Logical Space When Molinism Works

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207 In figure 3, we have a lot of worlds, but little variety. This could well be what a  
208 total collapse looks like: a tight cluster of worlds, where all God gets to choose are  
209 minor details like the number of stars.



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Figure 3: Logical Space In a Total Agential/Low-Variety Collapse

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213 In figure 4, we have alot of variety, but very few worlds. The options are spread  
214 out, but because of the career networks amongst the possible creatures, there aren't  
215 many choices.



216

Figure 4: Logical Space In a Single-Career/Low Number Collapse

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219 We could perhaps model the robustness of providence as having a strictly  
220 increasing relationship with the proportion of shaded worlds and their  
221 distribution, but we don't need to get too technical here to see the basic point: the  
222 fewer and more tightly grouped the worlds God chooses between, the less  
223 providence God has. Even when there are infinitely many worlds to choose

224 amongst.

225 We can now move on to the argument. Throughout, I will make a few modeling  
 226 assumptions. I will assume that with each proposition, we associate a set of  
 227 worlds. In so doing, I make no substantive claim about the metaphysics of  
 228 propositions (or of worlds). I merely claim: for each proposition, there exists a set<sup>10</sup>  
 229 of worlds at which that proposition is true. We can thus model the interaction of  
 230 propositions under various operations (negation, conjunction, disjunction,  
 231 consequence) by the interaction of their associated sets under various operations  
 232 (complement, intersection, union, subset). To be a little more accurate, we create a  
 233 Boolean algebra with the singletons of the worlds as atoms. Amongst the  
 234 significant consequences of this model: almost any proposition we care about can  
 235 be represented as a conjunction, a disjunction, or a material conditional.

236 Suppose  $\Gamma$  is a sufficiently rich set of counterfactuals. Then  $\Gamma$  will entail lots of  
 237 non-counterfactual information. For instance, because the counterfactual implies  
 238 the material conditional, for every counterfactual  $\varphi \Box \rightarrow \psi$  in  $\Gamma$ , there is the  
 239 corresponding proposition  $\neg\varphi \vee \psi$  in its deductive closure  $\Gamma_{\models}$ . Combinations of  
 240 these sentences may yield even further inferences. For instance, if  $\varphi \vee \chi$  &  $\psi \vee \neg\chi$   
 241 are in  $\Gamma_{\models}$  as well, then  $\psi$  will be in  $\Gamma_{\models}$ .<sup>11</sup> Thus, starting with the right three  
 242 counterfactuals— $\varphi \Box \rightarrow \psi$ ,  $\neg\varphi \Box \rightarrow \chi$ , and  $\chi \Box \rightarrow \psi$ —we can infer that  $\psi$ . Suppose  
 243 we add a further counterfactual to our set,  $\psi \Box \rightarrow \Delta$ . Then, from these four, we can  
 244 infer  $\Delta$ . Or, in the case of God, who may not require inferences: knowing these four  
 245 entails knowing  $\Delta$  as well.

246 Variations on this theme give us many ways to extract categorical information  
 247 from sets of conditionals. Any member with a  $\Gamma_{\models}$ -necessary antecedent gives us its  
 248 consequent, and some members with  $\Gamma_{\models}$ -contingent antecedents will get their  
 249 antecedent from other entailment relations between the conditionals, and thus  
 250 their consequents. For example, if  $\varphi_1 \Box \rightarrow \psi_1$  and  $\varphi_2 \Box \rightarrow \psi_2$  are in  $\Gamma$  and  $\psi_1 \models \varphi_2$ ,  
 251 then if  $\varphi_1$  is in  $\Gamma_{\models}$ , so is  $\psi_2$ .

252 To fill in the example, let  $\varphi_1$  be “Curly is offered a \$10,000 bribe,”  $\psi_1$  be “Curly  
 253 reports the bribe to the police captain,”  $\varphi_2$  be “The police captain hears of a bribe  
 254 offered to Curly,” and  $\psi_2$  be “She arrests the briber,” and let it be  $\Gamma$ -necessary that  
 255 Curly is offered a \$10,000 bribe. Then “the police captain arrests the briber” is in  
 256  $\Gamma_{\models}$ . So, when the Molinist God learns which Molinist conditionals are true, the  
 257 Molinist God also acquires categorical information about the actual world—in this

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<sup>10</sup> More precisely: a class. But having acknowledged the distinction between sets and proper classes, and the various cardinality worries usually associated with the need to make it, I propose to ignore it.

<sup>11</sup> We leave the proof as an exercise to the reader.



258 case, that the police captain will arrest the briber (and all of its implications).

259 At this point, some readers will hold up a stop sign. “Steady on,” they object.  
 260 “Simply supposing that Curley must be offered the bribe is unfair. Why couldn’t  
 261 God just create nothing, leaving a world with nothing but God enjoying  
 262 unperturbed bliss? Isn’t that always an option? The short answer is: no. Given the  
 263 right set of conditionals, God’s creatorly hand is forced.

264 Perhaps the Molinist conditionals include some with very “thin” antecedents,  
 265 such as “if God exists, Eve would eat the apple.” Since God does exist, Eve must  
 266 eat the apple, and so there had better be an Eve and an apple. Molinists may have  
 267 to say that all conditionals with such “thin” antecedents are false, or only true as  
 268 part of God’s free knowledge. We will discuss this issue further in later sections.  
 269 But on our minimal assumptions so far, God could be stuck creating. An important  
 270 question will be whether there is a principled way for the Molinist to avoid  
 271 something like this happening. With that clarification, we move on to the  
 272 argument. Let the following assumptions hold:

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274 PLENITUDE: For any agent *S*, Circumstance *C*, and Action *A* such that it is  
 275 possible that *S* perform *A* in *C*,  $\Gamma$  (the set of conditionals God knows  
 276 prevolitionally) includes either the proposition “if *S* were in *C*, then *S* would  
 277 freely perform *A*,” or the proposition “if *S* were in *C*, then *S* would not  
 278 freely perform *A*,”<sup>12</sup>

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280 LOGIC: Stalnaker’s System (C2)<sup>13</sup> is the correct logic for counterfactuals.<sup>14</sup>

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282 A few words in defense of these assumptions. I think something like plenitude is  
 283 required for the Molinist theory to get off the ground. There has to be some  
 284 guarantee that God has sufficient and sufficiently rich Molinist conditionals to  
 285 sensibly guide the world. It is also useful to the Molinist against the “might  
 286 argument” of Hasker (1989), or the general skepticism about counterfactuals  
 287 defended by Hájek (2013).

288 I will say more about logic in § 3.2, but I will note that C2 (and its fragment VC)  
 289 either are (or are fragments of) the most popular conditional logics, and a  
 290 weakening of either would put the Molinist at odds with natural language

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<sup>12</sup> We will later explore the consequences of weakening this assumption. Note now that it amounts to an application of Conditional Excluded Middle to Molinist conditionals.

<sup>13</sup> See Priest (2008) and Nute and Cross (2001) for thorough discussion of major counterfactual logics. We provide a complete axiomatization of C2 in §3.2.

<sup>14</sup> Later, I will explore the argument with weaker systems.

291 semanticists and a great many other philosophical users of conditionals.

292 We can now show a collapse on these minimal assumptions. Of course, all this  
293 shows here is that no Molinist should accept both assumptions. But it will be good  
294 to illustrate the basic mechanics of the argument on a stripped-down theory. Later,  
295 we will explore whether theories that Molinists have accepted or would be prone  
296 to accept escape the argument.

297 Take any necessary proposition  $T$ . Then, by an application of conditional  
298 excluded middle, for every agent  $S$  and action  $A$ , there is a true Molinist  
299 conditional, either “if  $S$  were in  $T$ ,  $S$  would  $A$ ” or “if  $S$  were in  $T$ ,  $S$  would not  $A$ .”  
300 We can think of  $T$  as a description of the most general circumstance (one that  
301 obtains whenever  $T$  is the case). But since  $\Gamma$  entails “ $S$  is in  $T$  if  $S$  exists,”  $\Gamma$  will  
302 entail “ $S$  performs  $A$  if  $S$  exists,” and thus the only way for God to prevent  $S$ ’s  
303 performance of  $A$  is to fail to create  $S$ . This gets us the single-career collapse. If we  
304 are a bit less picky about forcing our conditionals to conform to the heuristic  
305 schema and allow true instances of  $T \square \rightarrow \varphi$ , where  $\varphi$  says that an agent performs  
306 an action, we can get total collapse. Depending on how general we allow the  
307 antecedents to get, we can get other less severe collapses.

308 The Molinist has two possible responses to this argument. She can adopt the  
309 way of constraint, or the way of restriction. The way of constraint constrains the  
310 eligible substitution instances for  $C$  in the schema for Molinist conditionals. Thus,  
311 although there may be true conditionals with very general antecedents, they are  
312 not the ones that present themselves to God in the second moment of creation. God  
313 does not know them prevolitionally. This leaves too few conditionals in  $\Gamma$  with  $\Gamma$ -  
314 necessary antecedents for the collapse to occur. Think of it as a way of constraining  
315 plenitude. By contrast, the way of restriction allows any substitution for  $C$ , but  
316 restricts the background counterfactual logic to the point where there are not  
317 enough conditionals in  $\Gamma$  with  $\Gamma$ -necessary antecedents for the collapse to occur.  
318 Since defenders of this route are freewheeling about which propositions can go  
319 into the antecedents of their conditionals, I will often refer to them as freewheeling  
320 Molinists.<sup>15</sup>

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### 322 2.1. *The Way of Constraint*

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324 The Way of Constraint limits which propositions can be the antecedents to  
325 Molinist conditionals. Exactly how to characterize these antecedents is a question

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<sup>15</sup> The way of restriction was suggested to me in personal correspondence by Alvin Plantinga.

326 that has been studied independently from the collapse argument.<sup>16</sup> However, the  
 327 literature is not full of precise accounts of how the constraints go. We will examine  
 328 the most popular and detailed option: that advanced by Thomas Flint. After  
 329 arguing that Flint's theory is in danger of leaving too little room for providence, I  
 330 will leave it to the Molinist to give a precise and well-motivated constraint that  
 331 blocks the argument, but I doubt it's a task that can be done. Before diving into the  
 332 details, it is good to flag and then set aside a very broad concern for the way of  
 333 constraint. Molinist conditionals aren't the only conditionals in town. Any  
 334 adequate Molinist theory will give an account of why certain conditionals present  
 335 themselves to God in the second moment, while others do not. Proponents of the  
 336 way of constraint face a special case of this problem; for while perhaps  
 337 freewheeling Molinists can say something about individual essences or possible  
 338 persons (assuming there are such things), followers of the way of constraint need  
 339 to say something more specific: they need to explain why certain conditionals  
 340 about the actions of people are true in the second moment, while others are not. In  
 341 the interest of pursuing the current line of reasoning, I will pretend that this  
 342 question has been satisfactorily answered, although I am by no means confident  
 343 that it can. The best Molinist theory of the antecedents for their conditionals has  
 344 been set forward by Thomas Flint.

345 Flint calls for circumstances to be "complete," which he roughly defines as  
 346 including all simultaneous and prior causal activity by all agents in the world. At  
 347 first glance, Flint's restriction looks quite promising—after all, many of the eligible  
 348 instances of C will be information-rich. Exactly the kind of proposition that is  
 349 unlikely to be  $\Gamma$ -necessary.

350 It is tempting to modify Flint's condition to require circumstances to contain,  
 351 rather than just an account of agential activity, a complete world-history from the  
 352 moment of creation to the moment before the agent acts. This includes more  
 353 information by letting in the non-agential influences. But this still leaves out  
 354 important information. By failing to include facts simultaneous to S performing A,  
 355 we risk leaving out important influences. Instead, we should begin with the  
 356 complete world-history up to t, and from there "remove" S performing A in such a  
 357 way that our remaining proposition is non-entailing, but information-rich. In order  
 358 to do that, it will be helpful to talk of worlds as containing initial segments. So I  
 359 will briefly introduce the notion of an ordered world. The rough idea: we treat

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<sup>16</sup> The best of these efforts can be found in Zimmerman (2009), Flint (1998), Craig (1990), Flint and Freddoso (1983), and Wierenga (1989).

360 worlds as sets of propositions,<sup>17</sup> and then order the sets. We want an order where  
361 the propositions describing the world's history are indexed in the same order as  
362 the appearance of their truthmakers (or the occurrence of the events they are  
363 about), propositions about large scale features of the world come at the beginning  
364 of the order, and various boolean propositions are placed in their natural spots.

365 Let an ordered world be a set of ordered pairs obtained by taking a world and  
366 indexing its members with the ordinals by way of the wo-procedure:

367

368 WO-I. The necessary proposition(s) comes before any contingent proposition.

369 WO-II. Propositions about the laws, theory of chance, and other large scale  
370 structural features of the world are ordered prior to all propositions about  
371 the world's history.

372 WO-III. Propositions that obtain at a given time in the world's history are  
373 indexed in their temporal order (so if the world has a beginning, the  
374 propositions describing it are the first historical propositions, and are all  
375 mapped to the same index; if it has no beginning, then every historical  
376 proposition is after the propositions about large scale features, in order of  
377 appearance).

378 WO-IV. Any proposition entailed by propositions indexed prior to or at  $\alpha$ ,  
379 but not by propositions only indexed prior to  $\alpha$  (so that propositions  
380 indexed at  $\alpha$  are essential to their deduction), is indexed at  $\alpha$ .

381 WO-V. Contingent Molinist Conditionals go last.

382

383 A brief justification for WO-I-V. WO-I places the necessary proposition first, ensuring  
384 that all worlds trivially share an initial segment. Since this plays no important role  
385 in what follows, it is primarily an aesthetic/convenient choice. So long as the  
386 placement of the necessary proposition(s) is uniform, it shouldn't matter. WO-II  
387 places 'large scale' features of the world next. WO-III sets out the world's history in  
388 order. WO-IV ensures that the set of propositions sharing an index is deductively  
389 closed (crucial for our purposes), takes care of all boolean propositions and the  
390 like, and prevents any propositions from slipping into an index where they  
391 shouldn't be.<sup>18</sup> We put the Molinist conditionals last for purely pragmatic reasons,  
392 because we do not want them embedded in their own antecedents. This will make  
393 some propositions multiply indexed (disjunctions will accompany all disjuncts),

---

<sup>17</sup> Those with metaphysical scruples may apply their favorite paraphrase, so that we represent worlds as sets of propositions and so on.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, if it didn't have the second clause, all propositions prior to an index would be placed at that index.

394 but that is the price of deductive closure. We will call the ordered world produced  
 395 by taking a world  $w$  and applying the WO-procedure to it  $\sigma(w)$ .

396 With ordered worlds in hand, we can speak sensibly of initial segments. Let  $S$  be  
 397 an initial segment of  $\sigma(w)$  iff:

398

399 i.  $S$  is a subset of  $\sigma(w)$

400 ii.  $x \in S$  implies that  $\forall y \in \sigma(w)$  if the index of  $y \leq$  the index of  $x$ , then  $y \in S$

401

402 Now let  $\Delta$  be an initial segment of  $w$  iff:

403

404 i.  $\Delta$  is a subset of  $w$

405 ii. There exists some initial segment  $S$  of the ordered world  $\sigma(w)$  such that  
 406 the members of  $\Delta$  are all and only the propositions contained in the  
 407 members of  $S$

408

409 We next lay down the following stipulations about these world-histories. Our final  
 410 goal is a rigorous definition of circumstances.

411

412 CLOSURE: Circumstances relative to an action are all described by a set of  
 413 propositions that is closed under strict implication.

414

415 RICHNESS: The descriptions of circumstances relative to an action are derived  
 416 from initial segments of worlds by removing the desired consequent  
 417 (proposition saying that the agent performed the action) and anything that  
 418 entails it.

419

420 NON-TRIVIALITY: The descriptions of circumstances relative to an action must  
 421 contain more than tautologous information.<sup>19</sup>

422

423 In order to complete the story, we must specify the kind of contraction that takes  
 424 us from an initial world-segment to a circumstance. Fortunately, the kinematics of  
 425 changing logically closed sets of propositions have been studied by proponents of  
 426 AGM. Unfortunately, their efforts have shown that contraction is not a simple  
 427 matter.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Note here that this does not rule out collapse by fiat.  $\Gamma_{\neq}$ -necessary propositions need not be tautologous.

<sup>20</sup> For further discussion of these issues I refer the reader to Alchourrón and Makinson (1982), Alchourrón et al. (1985), and Levi (2004).

428 AGM is a formal system for modeling changes in logically closed belief states,  
 429 using the resources of mathematical logic and set theory. And while our interest is  
 430 not epistemological, we can borrow some of AGM's formal machinery.  
 431 Specifically, we are interested in contraction: deleting information from a logically  
 432 closed set of sentences in such a way that obtains a new logically closed set of  
 433 sentences that does not include the deleted information.<sup>21</sup>

434 More precisely, letting  $\Sigma$  and  $\Lambda$  be sets of propositions, we are interested in the  
 435 remainder set of  $\Sigma$  without  $\Lambda$  (hereafter  $\Sigma \perp \Lambda$ ). We can think of a remainder set as  
 436 the options for "removing"  $\Lambda$  from  $\Sigma$  while staying closed under implication. It is,  
 437 therefore, a set of subsets of  $\Sigma$ . A set of propositions  $\Pi$  is a member of  $\Sigma \perp \Lambda$  iff:

- 438
- 439 i.  $\Pi \subseteq \Sigma$
  - 440 ii.  $\Pi \neq \cap \Lambda = \emptyset$
  - 441 iii. There is no set of propositions  $\Delta$  such that  $\Pi \cup \Delta \subseteq \Sigma$  and  $\Delta \neq \cap \Lambda = \emptyset$ .
- 442

443 Informally, condition 1 requires  $\Pi$  to be a subset of  $\Sigma$ , condition 2 requires that  $\Pi$   
 444 not imply any proposition in  $\Lambda$ , and condition 3 is a maximality condition: there  
 445 can't be some other subset of  $\Sigma$  which strictly includes  $\Pi$  without implying  $\Lambda$ .

446 Generally, there are multiple members of a remainder set, because there are  
 447 many maximal ways of removing a proposition from one set while staying closed  
 448 under implication. A quick example: we can remove a conjunction by removing  
 449 either of its conjuncts. With this in hand, we can now give a more precise definition  
 450 of Flint's Molinist conditionals.

451 MODIFIED FLINT'S CONDITIONALS:  $\varphi \square \rightarrow \psi$  is a Molinist conditional iff there exists  
 452 some pair of sets of proposition  $\{\Sigma, \Lambda\}$  such that:

- 453
- 454 FC-I.  $\Sigma$  is an initial segment of a world;
  - 455 FC-II.  $\Lambda$  describes a creaturely agent's free action;
  - 456 FC-III.  $\varphi$  is the result of conjoining all the members of some  $\Delta$  such that  $\Delta$  is a  
 457 member of  $\Sigma \perp \Lambda$ ;
  - 458 FC-IV.  $\psi$  is the conjunction of all the members of  $\Lambda$ ; and
  - 459 FC-V.  $\varphi \neq \top$ .
- 460

461 As given, MODIFIED FLINT'S CONDITIONALS formalizes the idea that circumstances  
 462 are obtained from initial segments of worlds by deleting an agent's free action, but  
 463 retaining as much information about that world as can be done without entailing

---

<sup>21</sup> My presentation here follows Alchourrón and Makinson (1982).

464 the deleted action. We note that FC-I-IV imply RICHNESS and CLOSURE, but do not  
 465 imply NON-TRIVIALITY, which must be stipulated in FC-V.

466 We can now evaluate the collapse argument on the assumption that MODIFIED  
 467 FLINT'S CONDITIONALS both exclusively and exhaustively characterizes the  
 468 conditionals God knows prevolitionally. First, we note that MODIFIED FLINT'S  
 469 CONDITIONALS itself is  $\Gamma_{\neq}$ -necessary. Even if the eligibility condition on the  
 470 antecedents for Molinist conditionals is contingent, as soon as the conditionals  
 471 present themselves, the eligibility condition is fixed. Thus, from God's necessary  
 472 knowledge of logical space and God's knowledge of Molinist conditionals as  
 473 described in MODIFIED FLINT'S CONDITIONALS, we can, for every world, collect the  
 474 (prevolitionally true) Molinist conditionals whose antecedents were obtained from  
 475 an initial segment of that world. Call these sets CFA sets. CFA sets are unique up  
 476 to sameness of creaturely actions: if two worlds differ in some initial segment  
 477 containing a creaturely action, they will differ in their CFA sets. And if God's only  
 478 options to create are identical in which creaturely acts they contain, we are already  
 479 in a total agential collapse.

480 With CFA sets in hand, we can begin. Because we are using a background  
 481 conditional logic at least as strong as VC (see § 3.2 for discussion of weaker  
 482 systems), we accept the inference known as centering:

483  
 484 CENTERING:  $(\varphi \ \& \ \psi) \models \varphi \ \Box \rightarrow \psi$

485  
 486 And centering gives a unique status to the actual world, which we can exploit.  
 487 Recall that absent some special condition or construction, remainder sets have  
 488 multiple members. Nothing in our construction guarantees that, if both  $\varphi_1$  and  $\varphi_2$   
 489 are in a member of  $\Sigma \perp \Lambda$  and  $\varphi_1 \ \Box \rightarrow \psi$  is true, then  $\varphi_2 \ \Box \rightarrow \psi$  is. But centering  
 490 guarantees that for the actual world, it does hold.<sup>22</sup> And so the actual CFA has a  
 491 special property: CFA-COMPLETENESS. We define this as follows:

492  
 493 CFA-COMPLETENESS:  $w$  has a complete CFA-set iff every conditional obtained  
 494 from an initial segment of  $w$  via the FC-procedure whose consequent obtains  
 495 at  $w$  is in the CFA set for  $w$

496

---

<sup>22</sup> Proof: Let  $\varphi_1, \dots, \varphi_n$  be the members of a remainder set from an actual initial segment. They are implied by a true proposition, so true. There are two options for  $\psi$ . It is either actually true or actually false. If it is actually false, then the conditional  $\varphi_1 \ \Box \rightarrow \psi$  is false. But by assumption,  $\varphi_1 \ \Box \rightarrow \psi$  is true. So  $\psi$  must be actually true. But if  $\psi$  is actually true and  $\varphi_n$  is actually true, then by centering  $\varphi_n \ \Box \rightarrow \psi$  is actually true.

497 CENTERING makes sure the actual world has a complete CFA set. This means that,  
498 any time we have an actual action, we get a true Molinist conditional with an  
499 actual antecedent. By assumption, all of the conditionals in that CFA-set satisfy the  
500 FC-criteria, and so are known prevolitionally. But there is no guarantee that  
501 otherworldly actions accompanied by otherworldly-true antecedents will have a  
502 true Molinist conditional. For there is no guarantee that counterfactuals whose  
503 antecedent and consequent are true at other worlds will in fact be true. Indeed, if  
504 we think of counterfactuals from the perspective of Lewisian system of spheres  
505 models, we should expect very few worlds to have all (or even most) of the same  
506 counterfactuals true at them as are true at the actual world. Which counterfactuals  
507 are true at a world depends on which sphere a world falls in (and on which world  
508 is at the center of the system of spheres), and the more distant we go from  
509 actuality, the more variance there is in relative closeness between worlds.

510 It seems possible that the counterfactuals of freedom be so arranged that there is  
511 only one complete CFA set. No principle of logic disallows it. So, although we  
512 cannot outright prove whether Flint's constraint implies or makes it possible that  
513 there be a collapse without a model, we do have some positive reason to think it  
514 possible which we would not have if Molinism were false. But giving a model that  
515 even begins to look satisfactory from a Molinist perspective would involve writing  
516 infinitely many infinitely long sentences. This is often the situation for hypotheses  
517 about the shape of the counterfactuals of freedom. Well known uses of Molinism,  
518 from Plantinga's free will defense to Craig's defense of hell, find themselves  
519 similarly situated. Molinism gives us reason to think them possible, while without  
520 Molinism their possibility seems dubious, but we have no rigorous proof of their  
521 possibility. Worlds that agree with the actual world as to which agents do what are  
522 the best candidates for having the complete CFA sets, but if those are God's only  
523 options, then the only available worlds for creation are clustered in a tight sphere  
524 around the actual world, giving us a low variety collapse.

525 So, it appears that suitably regimented as MODIFIED FLINT'S CONDITIONALS, Flint's  
526 constraint gives us reason to think that a collapse is possible in the same way it  
527 gives us reason to think other hypotheses about the shape of the counterfactuals of  
528 freedom are possible. And while the possibility of a collapse is not as bad as one  
529 guaranteed, it is still an unwelcome implication of the view. Molinism is meant to  
530 ensure providence, not give us reason to think it might be crippled altogether.  
531 Perhaps there is some alternative to these constraints which will guarantee non-  
532 collapse. In fact, I am certain an ad hoc one could be constructed. But they are the  
533 most popular and most intuitive, and so we will focus our attention on the  
534 Molinist's other escape route: the Way of Restriction.



535 2.2 *The Way of Restriction*

536

537 The way of restriction looks to avoid collapse not merely by giving constraints on  
 538 eligible antecedents for Molinist conditionals (an enterprise primed for charges of  
 539 ad hockery, especially in light of Robert Adams's (1977) grounding objection; bad  
 540 enough that Molinist conditionals are ungrounded, but now which of them present  
 541 themselves to God before God choose a world to actualize is extremely sensitive to  
 542 the content of the antecedent), but by restricting the logic of counterfactuals to the  
 543 point where the closure of  $\Gamma$  is not (or at least need not be) much more informative  
 544 than  $\Gamma$  itself.

545 The way of restriction walks a delicate path. Part of the appeal of Molinism is  
 546 the ability to go from some set of conditionals about who would do what and  
 547 when to a bunch of categorical information about the world. Molinists who wish to  
 548 take advantages of many of the theological projects Molinists tend to engage in as a  
 549 primary selling point of the view must be careful to leave the logic of conditionals  
 550 in good enough shape so as to be able to (potentially) extract information like  
 551 "there is no feasible world in which every free agent does no evil," (Plantinga's  
 552 Free Will Defense) or "in order to secure  $n$  heaven-bound agents, God had to create  
 553  $n$  hellbound ones" (Craig's Molinist defense of hell). Thus, on pain of leaving God  
 554 high and dry, Molinists must embrace certain richness constraints on the set of  
 555 available conditionals together with their implications.

556 An additional factor besetting the way of restriction is the need to maintain a  
 557 logic of counterfactuals that holds with ordinary usage. Molinist counterfactuals  
 558 are not special beasts; their conditional is the conditional of ordinary language.  
 559 Thus, any attempt to do away with theorems and inferences implicated in the  
 560 collapse argument must answer to natural language semantics. If the best theory of  
 561 counterfactuals endorses (say) C2 or something stronger, so must the Molinist.  
 562 Bearing these warnings in mind, we begin.

563 We are faced with a dizzying array of proposals for the semantics of  
 564 counterfactuals. From Lewisian sphere models to Pearl-style causal modeling, an  
 565 impressive box of mathematical tools has been brought to bear in the conditionals  
 566 debates. Fortunately, many of these have been shown to be inter-translatable.<sup>23</sup>  
 567 Even attempting to summarize all of the options would take us far beyond the  
 568 scope of this paper. Instead, I will provide axiomatizations of the logics in  
 569 question, recognizing that most of the major semantics can be made to give rise to

---

<sup>23</sup> The proofs can be found in Lewis (1981), Nute and Cross (2001), Marti and Pinosio (2014), Marti and Pinosio (2016).

570 them by appropriate restrictions on their models.<sup>24</sup>

571 We begin with a language. Our syntax is that of the propositional calculus,  
 572 supplemented by the counterfactual operator  $\Box \rightarrow$ . The rules for well-formed  
 573 formulae (wffs) are as usual, with the addition that interposing  $\Box \rightarrow$  between any  
 574 wffs makes a further wff.<sup>25</sup> A set of formulae is a conditional logic just in case it  
 575 includes all tautologies and is closed under modus ponens.<sup>26</sup>

576 Stalnaker's C2, which we have so far treated as our background logic, is the  
 577 smallest counterfactual logic closed under the following rules:

578

579 RCEC:  $\varphi \leftrightarrow \psi \vdash (\chi \Box \rightarrow \varphi) \leftrightarrow (\chi \Box \rightarrow \psi)$

580 RCK:  $(\varphi_1 \& \dots \& \varphi_n) \rightarrow \psi \vdash ((\chi \Box \rightarrow \varphi_1) \& \dots \& (\chi \Box \rightarrow \varphi_n)) \rightarrow (\chi \Box \rightarrow \psi), n \geq 0$

581

582 and containing all instances of the following:

583

584 ID:  $\varphi \Box \rightarrow \varphi$

585 MP:  $(\varphi \Box \rightarrow \psi) \rightarrow (\varphi \rightarrow \psi)$

586 MOD:  $(\neg \varphi \Box \rightarrow \varphi) \rightarrow (\psi \rightarrow \varphi)$

587 CSO:  $((\varphi \Box \rightarrow \psi) \wedge (\psi \Box \rightarrow \varphi)) \rightarrow ((\varphi \Box \rightarrow \chi) \leftrightarrow (\psi \Box \rightarrow \chi))$

588 CV:  $((\varphi \Box \rightarrow \psi) \wedge \neg(\varphi \Box \rightarrow \neg \chi)) \rightarrow ((\varphi \wedge \chi) \Box \rightarrow \psi)$

589 CEM:  $(\varphi \Box \rightarrow \psi) \vee (\varphi \Box \rightarrow \neg \psi)$

590

591 As perceptive readers will note, CEM played a key role in the initial collapse  
 592 argument. Thus, a natural move for those Molinists opposed to any restriction on  
 593 C-eligibility is to deny its validity.<sup>27</sup> Those who do so are in good company: W.V.O  
 594 Quine, David Lewis, Jonathan Bennett, and a majority of contemporary  
 595 philosophers reject it.<sup>28</sup>

596 But, setting aside the general arguments in its favor, CEM is not without its  
 597 charms for committed Molinists. First of all, it guarantees PLENITUDE, a non-trivial  
 598 task in even slight weakenings of C2 (such as our next logic, VC). Secondly, it

---

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed presentation of most of the major options, and the axiomatizations of various logics from which the following paragraphs are drawn, see Nute and Cross (2001).

<sup>25</sup> This allows for arbitrary nesting of counterfactuals.

<sup>26</sup> see Priest (2008) for a conditional logic that does not include MP.

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, this was Alvin Plantinga's first response to the collapse argument in personal correspondence.

<sup>28</sup> But see Stalnaker (1980), Williams (2010), and Swanson (2012) for a spirited defense.

599 prevents Hasker's "Might Argument" from getting off the ground.<sup>29</sup> And despite  
 600 the generally dismissive tone with which some have greeted Hasker's argument,  
 601 its defeat is work that must be done somehow. Third, counterexamples to CEM are  
 602 often precisely pairs of the type of counterfactual Molinists need to come out true:  
 603 counterfactuals in which the antecedent describes an indeterministic process while  
 604 the consequents specify outcomes of that process.<sup>30</sup>

605 The first natural weakening of C2 is David Lewis's VC. Its axiomatization is just  
 606 like that of C2, but we replace CEM with CENTERING.

607

608           CENTERING:  $(\varphi \ \& \ \psi) \rightarrow (\varphi \ \Box \rightarrow \psi)$

609

610 Unfortunately for the freewheeling Molinist, this weakening does not get her out  
 611 of the problem. CENTERING ensures that there are just enough counterfactuals for  
 612 the collapse to occur. For any counterfactual of the form "if S were in T, S would  
 613 freely A" with a true consequent will be true. As inadequate compensation (and  
 614 for more or less the same reason), VC still allows something close enough to  
 615 plenitude to obtain, for  $\Gamma$  will at least be rich enough to allow God to create the  
 616 actual world. Molinists who embrace Flint's restriction will recognize CENTERING as  
 617 the axiom deployed against them. And so they may see good reason to combine  
 618 the way of constraint with the way of restriction, adopting both Flint's rule for  
 619 antecedents and a logic no stronger than VW (the result of dropping CENTERING  
 620 from VC).

621 Just as there are general arguments for and against CEM, there are general  
 622 arguments for and against CENTERING. Most of the arguments in favor of it are  
 623 based on the preferred semantics (in combination with pragmatic defenses against  
 624 alleged counterexamples). The rough idea behind much recent work on  
 625 counterfactuals has been: see what changes need to be made to actuality to make  
 626 the antecedent true, and then see if the consequent is true too (this may be seen as  
 627 an ontic version of the Ramsey Test). In cases where the antecedent is actually true,  
 628 the answer to the question, "what must change to make the antecedent true?" is  
 629 "nothing."<sup>31</sup> Thus, we can see that centering is motivated by the "minimal change"  
 630 conception of the truth conditions for counterfactuals. Unsurprisingly, then, all of  
 631 the major work in this tradition is friendly to it.

---

<sup>29</sup> See Hasker (1989), Hasker (2012), Flint (2012), and Mares and Perszyk (2012) for further discussion.

<sup>30</sup> For example, the pair "if a fair coin were flipped, it would land heads" and "if a fair coin were flipped, it would land tails." are commonly taken to both be false.

<sup>31</sup> The canonical defense can be found in Lewis (1973) and Stalnaker (1968).

632        Nevertheless, there are several classes of common counterexamples. The first we  
633 might call “irrelevance” examples like (1).

634

635            (1)    If London were the capitol of the UK, then Washington would be the  
636                    capitol of the US.

637

638 In these sorts of cases, a conditional is sandwiched between an arbitrary pair of  
639 truths.

640        The second, we might call “counterevidential” examples like (2), supposing that  
641 John is in general a bad party guest and that the party went well.

642

643            (2)    If John were to attend the party, it would be a success.

644

645 In these cases, the antecedent counts as evidence against the consequent, but not  
646 decisively.<sup>32</sup> And finally, we have indeterministic examples like (3):<sup>33</sup>

647

648            (3)    If atom  $R_1$  were in a sample of radium-226, it would decay after 1600  
649                    years.

650

651 It has been suggested that these sorts of (probabilistic) cases render not only  
652 centering, but most counterfactuals false.<sup>34</sup>

653        In response to these examples, I can do no better (and see no reason why better  
654 need be done) than Lewis. Counterfactuals with (known) true antecedents are odd  
655 to assert, because the counterfactual construction carries a presupposition of a false  
656 (or at least not known) antecedent, and because the conversational purpose in most  
657 contexts would be better served by asserting the conjunction than by asserting the  
658 counterfactual (in fact, failure to do so violates the maxim of quality). Thus, we are  
659 right to be suspicious of (1), (2), and (3). But since they are known to be flawed  
660 assertions, we cannot take intuitions as to their truth value all that seriously.

661        Not only so, but it is unclear that merely retreating from VC to VW will solve all  
662 the problems. Walters (2016) has argued that most extant attempts to do so either  
663 fail to solve the various counterexamples that motivate dropping CENTERING or end  
664 up dispensing with some other valued principle of counterfactual logic. Space does  
665 not permit a thorough discussion of Walters’s arguments here, but combined with  
666 Lewis’s point about the infelicity of asserting counterfactuals with known

---

<sup>32</sup> We can see this objection crop up in Bennett (1974).

<sup>33</sup> Bennett (2003) favors these sorts of examples.

<sup>34</sup> Hájek (2013) is the primary prosecutor; see Lewis (1986) for an attempted fix.

667 antecedents, they make for a compelling defense.

668 Not only so, but the Molinist may get less than she hopes for by weakening the  
 669 logic. By dropping centering from VC, we obtain VW. This frees Flint-style  
 670 Molinists from a logic that guarantees the possibility of a collapse. But even so,  
 671 there will be many true instances of CENTERING in the Molinist's intended model.  
 672 Applying FC already filters out many of the sorts of counterfactual used as  
 673 counterexamples to CENTERING. When we have a counterfactual of the sort Flint is  
 674 interested in, it is fairly intuitive that it is an instance of CENTERING. Thus, it is  
 675 unclear how much the Molinist gains by falling back to VW. Even though  
 676 CENTERING is not a theorem of VW, neither is its negation; there is nothing VW-  
 677 inconsistent about a strongly centered model. So, it does not free her from the  
 678 possibility of a collapse. It merely frees her from the possibility of collapse being  
 679 guaranteed by the background counterfactual logic. Her own richness  
 680 requirements may well do her in.

681 Furthermore, the retreat to VW brings a new danger onto the horizon. In logics  
 682 as strong as VC, plenitude or something near enough is a logical truth. God at least  
 683 gets enough counterfactuals to make the actual world. But there are VW models in  
 684 which this does not happen; for instance, models in which the only true  
 685 counterfactuals are those in which the antecedent entails the consequent. In fact,  
 686 the crucial step in the attack van Inwagen (1997) launches on Molinism is the step  
 687 from VC to VW. The VW-embracing Molinist owes us a story about why  $\Gamma$  is rich  
 688 enough to fulfill its role in the theory of providence. And in doing so, she must not  
 689 recreate the resources needed for a collapse argument.

690 Logics weaker than VW have nothing new to give the Molinist, and only make  
 691 the richness issue more pressing. They also bring her into direct conflict with the  
 692 philosophical mainstream, where the debates over counterfactuals almost  
 693 uniformly presuppose stronger logics.<sup>35</sup> So we shall pay them no heed.

694 Instead, we shall consider a broad issue (often hinted at) facing the way of  
 695 restriction. As I have argued,  $\Gamma$  (and its accompanying logic) can fail to live up to  
 696 its theoretical role in two ways. It can be so powerful that God gets little to no  
 697 choice as to which world is actual, or it can be so anemic that God gets little to no  
 698 help in selecting a world. Call a Molinist theory that avoids these two extremes  
 699 Goldilocks Molinism. We are faced with a question: should Molinism entail  
 700 Goldilocks Molinism? In our survey of the most common/popular counterfactual  
 701 logics, we have seen that—by the lights of the logic alone—Molinism does not

---

<sup>35</sup> Pollock's SS, Lewis's VC, Stalnaker's C2, and the strict conditional logics of Gillies and von Fintel are the main contenders. See von Fintel (2001) and Gillies (2007) for details on the latter.

702 entail Goldilocks Molinism. In system VC and stronger, there is a possibility of  
 703 collapse. In system VW and weaker, there is the possibility of an anemic set of  
 704 counterfactuals being of little to no help to divine providence. The only difference  
 705 between the two is centering.

706 So, suppose Molinism does not entail Goldilocks Molinism. Is this a problem?  
 707 Molinists have shown a general willingness to accept *prima facie* undesirable  
 708 modal consequences of their view, such as the possibility that once the Molinist  
 709 conditionals have been set, there is no feasible world that God finds worth  
 710 creating. But the problems here are worse than that. Unlike the all-terrible  
 711 situation, the collapse and anemic situations are providence-depriving. It is the  
 712 difference between selecting amongst a large variety of bad options, and selecting  
 713 amongst very few or very homogenous options. Collapse is a structural flaw in the  
 714 menu of feasible worlds, not a substantive flaw in the worlds on the menu.

715 We have already seen how the collapse is providence-depriving. To see how the  
 716 anemic case is, too, consider the (extreme) VW model in which all counterfactuals  
 717 are false (except those required by ID and by various strict conditionals). When  
 718 God is considering whether to put someone in some situation, God has no idea  
 719 what that person will do: it is both false that she would A, and false that she would  
 720 not A. And without that knowledge, God cannot use Middle Knowledge to guide  
 721 the world in the way that Molinism is meant to preserve.

722 So, whether God gets to exercise providential control depends on how the  
 723 Molinist conditionals turn out. This runs head on into the doctrine of divine  
 724 aseity.<sup>36</sup> As traditionally understood, divine aseity is the ultimate declaration of  
 725 metaphysical independence. It requires that God not depend on anything beyond  
 726 Godself for the possession of God's "important" (for some suitably spelled out  
 727 notion of importance) properties. On the uncontroversial assumption that  
 728 providence is an important divine attribute, we get a conflict: unless one of the  
 729 right sets of Molinist conditionals are the true ones, God cannot exercise  
 730 providence. But the Molinist conditionals are independent of God. And so whether  
 731 God exercises providence depends on something beyond divine control. This is  
 732 unpalatable.

733 As a final throw, the Molinist may once again appeal to the possibility of God  
 734 choosing to create nothing to try and defuse the worry.<sup>37</sup> As long as not creating is  
 735 always an option, then God at least has one choice: to create, or not to create. The  
 736 Way of Constraint, executed competently, will dissolve the objection from thin

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<sup>36</sup> Rusavuk (Forthcoming) offers a similar line of attack on Molinism, arguing that Molinists deprive God of *aseity* by subjecting God to moral luck.

<sup>37</sup> Credit to a referee for this journal for pressing this line of response.

737 antecedents I raised to the possibility of non-creation in the most basic type of  
 738 collapse arguments. So, the Molinist will not have to pay a heavy price to maintain  
 739 at least one providential decision. If, in addition, the world in which God and  
 740 nothing else exists is a good option for God, perhaps the loss of all other  
 741 providence isn't bad enough to threaten *aseity*. This addition, unfortunately, is  
 742 neither cheap nor obvious. Traditional theism (and the decree of Vatican I) holds  
 743 that creation is contingent. God could always have failed to create. It is much less  
 744 dogmatic about the explanation for why that is the case.

745 One suggestion, sometimes called *manifestationism*, is certainly friendly to this  
 746 thought. According to Manifestationists, God creates as a way of manifesting the  
 747 divine glory. But God's reasons for manifesting glory are non-coercive. In  
 748 particular, contemporary manifestationists (e.g. Johnston (2019), O'Conner (2022))  
 749 tend also to be anti-meliorists, who hold that nothing God created could add to the  
 750 value of the world, given that God is already in it. So, God could always have  
 751 refrained from creating without thereby forfeiting a worldly value-add. This  
 752 naturally supports the idea that a world with God alone is a pretty good option—  
 753 maybe just as good as any of the other options.

754 But anti-meliorist manifestationism is not the only way to defend the  
 755 contingency of creation. Another line of thought, developed by Alexander Pruss  
 756 ((2016), (2022)), gives incomparability center-stage. According to Pruss, the kinds  
 757 of values (many of them artistic) exemplified by the world with God alone create  
 758 incomparabilities with the kinds of values that worlds with creations in them  
 759 would exemplify. And incomparabilities lead to permissive choice situations. But it  
 760 is consistent with the letter (if not quite the spirit, although Pruss's (2022)  
 761 suggestion that God might not create because any creation would be a misleading  
 762 manifestation of God points to a disappointing array of options) of Pruss's defense  
 763 of divine creative freedom that God find the creationless option a disappointment.  
 764 While unsurpassable in a technical sense, God may have dispreferred the lonely  
 765 world to many possible worlds (indeed, at worlds where God creates God does  
 766 prefer creation to loneliness, and these are most of the possible worlds). Here the  
 767 Molinist disrupts a standard story wherein God surveys the options,<sup>38</sup> forms  
 768 preferences (guided but not coerced by reason) over them, and then makes a  
 769 creative decision. In between God forming preferences and God performing a

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<sup>38</sup> It is standard among analytic philosophers of religion to think of these options as worlds or world-seeds (starts to indeterministic worlds), they could just as easily be whatever representational widget opponents of the world-actualization model of creation such as Page (2022) prefer. All talk of worlds, with care and proper bookkeeping, in this debate can hopefully be translated into talk of whatever those widgets end up being.

770 creative act, God gets some news about what creation is feasible. And for all the  
 771 incomparabilist has to say, the news might be bad. While a disappointing option is  
 772 not quite the same as a bad option (psychology need not be axiology, although in  
 773 God’s case it would be most fitting if the two moved together), it’s not a good  
 774 shield for a Molinist defending a single choice—create or not—as providence  
 775 enough.

776 A third way to defend the contingency of creation is positively consistent with  
 777 the lonely world being a mediocre option. Work by Daniel Rubio ((2018), (2023)) in  
 778 defense of No-Norms Theism<sup>39</sup> suggests that creation is contingent because no  
 779 norms govern divine action, and so God could well have chosen to create nothing  
 780 regardless of where that world stands on the axiological ladder. While it is not  
 781 plausible that the lonely world be a lousy option—it beats any creation that would  
 782 be a negative contribution to the world’s value—the fact that it’s missing all of the  
 783 valuable things that are not God suggests room for improvement.<sup>40</sup>

784

### 785 3. Conclusion

786

787 The Molinist sets out a grandiose project: to reconcile a strong doctrine of divine  
 788 providence with a strong theory of human freedom. In order to do so, she  
 789 introduces Molinist conditionals: true counterfactuals about what possible agents  
 790 would do in possible situations. These counterfactuals are not only contingent, but  
 791 are beyond divine control. God gets no say in which are true and which are not.  
 792 Further, they are known to God prior to God’s choice of a world to actualize. The  
 793 promise is that, in doing so, they allow God (within their own constraints) to  
 794 exercise providential control over who does what by only putting agents in  
 795 situations where they would do as God wills they do.

796 But his control comes at a price. Rather than giving God all of logical space from  
 797 which to choose an actual world, Molinists “filter” the possible worlds through the  
 798 Molinist conditionals (and their logical consequences), so that it is only feasible for  
 799 God to actualize worlds that survive the filter. However, as we have seen, things  
 800 are not so tidy. The logical consequences of a set of counterfactuals can be quite  
 801 broad. Very rich sets of counterfactuals imply a good deal about which world is  
 802 actual. In fact, using the standard background counterfactual logics and making  
 803 some minimal assumptions about what the set of Molinist conditionals is like, we  
 804 have seen evidence that they can pin down one or only a very few candidates for

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<sup>39</sup> Although it is an ancient position, common among the medieval, this name is due to Reilly (2023).

<sup>40</sup> Rubio (Forthcoming) makes this case in detail.



805 the actual world. Moreover, they can dictate some of the very facts that they were  
806 supposed to allow God to choose: facts about who does what.

807 In the face of this problem, the Molinist has two options: the way of constraint—  
808 setting out constraints on what kinds of information the antecedents of Molinist  
809 conditionals can contain- and the way of restriction—restricting the background  
810 logic of counterfactuals so that the original set has very few extra consequences. I  
811 have argued that both of these options face problems. The way of constraint is  
812 extremely tricky to implement successfully. I have shown how the best proposed  
813 restrictions in the literature do not rule out the possibility of a collapse. I conjecture  
814 that in logics as strong as VC, a route to collapse will present itself. The way of  
815 restriction introduces a new way for Molinism to fail to deliver on its promises: in  
816 VW and weaker logics, there are models in which the set of Molinist conditionals  
817 does not contain enough information to be of use to God in guiding the world.

818 Thus, amongst possible sets of Molinist conditionals, there is a zone of sets that  
819 are strong enough to cause a collapse, a zone of sets that are too weak to be usable,  
820 and a zone of sets that are just right. Molinists have yet to offer a guarantee that the  
821 set God gets will be in the third zone (and many contemporary variants of  
822 Molinism entail that it is not). And without one, their theory undermines the  
823 doctrine of divine aseity. Rather than God's exercise of providence being wholly  
824 dependent on God, it depends on whether God is dealt a favorable hand. So the  
825 Molinist concordia fails. Molina's theory does not deliver.

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