



On the incoherence of molinism: incompatibility of middle knowledge with divine immutability

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Abstract

We argue that there is an incompatibility between the two basic principles of Molinism, i.e., God's middle knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, and divine immutability. To this end, firstly, we set out the difference between strong and weak immutability: according to the latter only God's essential attributes remain unchanged, while the former affirms that God cannot change in any way. Our next step is to argue that Molinism ascribes strong immutability to God. However, according to Molinism, some counterfactuals of freedom need to be actualized by divine will. We argue that this claim does entail a change in God because it attributes a knowledge to God that involves moving from possibility to actuality through divine will. Therefore, claiming God knows counterfactuals of freedom leads us to reject the strong sense of divine immutability. Further, we argue that assuming God's knowledge encompasses counterfactuals of freedom cannot be consistent even with weak immutability because, according to Molinism, a change in God's knowledge requires a change in His essence. We conclude that Molinism is incoherent.

Keywords Molinism · Middle knowledge · Counterfactuals of creaturely freedom · Divine immutability · Divine will · Incoherency

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Introduction

To answer the problem of the apparent incompatibility between divine providence and creaturely freedom, Molinism proposes the theory of ‘middle knowledge’. According to the theory, God possesses middle knowledge, meaning that He knows all true counterfactuals of freedom—i.e., the subjunctive conditionals whose consequents imply the creatures’ free actions.¹ In other words, He knows all propositions about all possible creatures’ free actions in all possible circumstances. For example, by knowing the counterfactual, “If Elizabeth were offered a scholarship grant by her supervisor, she would freely accept it”, God knows that if He actualizes the situation (locating her in a circumstance where the grant is offered by the supervisor), Elizabeth will freely accept the grant.² Therefore, by knowing true counterfactuals and actualizing their antecedents (circumstances), God knows what Elizabeth and all other creatures will freely do—these truths about (what will be in) the future are called actual future contingents (see Flint, 1998, ch. 2; Laing, 2018, ch. 1). Hence, Molinism argues that, since counterfactuals of freedom are contingent and prevolitional, creaturely freedom is preserved; and on the other hand, because God knows these counterfactuals and actualizes their antecedents, His providence over the world and creatures’ free actions can be maintained.

But the problem here is that the assumption of such counterfactuals in God’s knowledge is incompatible with the Molinist picture—a traditional one—of God. This paper focuses on God’s attribute of divine immutability, which traditionally all theists ascribe to God as a concomitant of His divine perfection. In order to establish our thesis, first, in Sect. 2, we introduce the two most common notions of immutability: weak and strong immutability. In Sect. 3, we put forward some arguments to indicate that Molinism ascribes the strong sense of immutability to God. Finally, in Sect. 4, we argue that God’s knowledge of counterfactuals is incompatible with His immutability, not only in the strong sense but also in the weak sense. Therefore, there is an incoherence in Molinism, and presupposing counterfactuals of freedom in God’s knowledge is untenable.

¹ On the Molinist view, there are four moments for God’s knowledge. First, natural knowledge: in this moment of knowledge, which is prevolitional, He knows all *modal* propositions (see Freddoso, 1988: 12), all *necessary* truths, so to speak, because these features (modalities) are necessary for these propositions. Second, middle knowledge: like the first, this moment is prevolitional, but in contrast, it contains contingent truths; in this moment, God knows all true counterfactuals of freedom. In the third, the creative act of will, He decides which beings to create in which circumstances. In the fourth moment, His knowledge is postvolitional, and He knows all the contingent truths under his control (Molina, 1988; Freddoso, 1988; Flint, 1998). The three moments of God’s knowledge, natural, middle, and free knowledge, are called by Craig respectively the Knowledge of *what could be*, *what would be*, and *what will be* (Craig, 2001: 121). Also, based on possible worlds semantic, Flint calls them: Knowledge of all *possible worlds*, all *feasible worlds*, and *the actual world* (Flint, 1998: ch. 2). Also, note that Molina did not use the term *counterfactuals of freedom*, but rather he used the term *conditional future contingents* (see Molina, 1988). The term was first used in the second half of the 20th century with the appearance of counterfactual semantics.

² See also: “the third type is middle knowledge, by which, He saw in His own essence what each such faculty would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or in that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things” (Molina, 1988: Disputation 52, Sect. 9).

Divine immutability

As most commonly discussed, “divine immutability” can be understood in two ways: in a weak or in a strong sense. According to the former, God is unable to change in respect of His essential attributes, such as omniscience, omnipotence, perfect goodness and so on (Swinburne, 2016: 232). Borrowing from Powell, we call this kind of immutability “*characteristic immutability*” because it implies that God’s character is always constant. For instance, since God is always perfectly good, He will remain faithful to his promises and covenants. In this way, He would indeed be immutable, but it should be noted that this view does not rule out other sorts of change (including intrinsic) in God: it guarantees only that His character is unchanging (Pawl, 2009). It seems the proponents of Open Theism consider God immutable in this sense, for they believe that God’s knowledge as an intrinsic attribute undergoes change, but this does not entail a change in His essential attribute of omniscience.

In contrast, the latter sense goes beyond this and defines God as a being who does not accept change in any respect, not just in terms of His essential attributes. In other words, “a stronger understanding of divine immutability is that God is literally unable to change” (Pawl, 2009). In the words of Thomas Aquinas, a commonly cited proponent of this view: “God is altogether immutable ... it is evident that it is impossible for God to be in any way changeable” (Aquinas, 1920: pt. 1, qu. 9, art. 1, resp.).

‘Not changing’, here, means the absence of a *real change*. But what does ‘real change’ mean? To answer this question, we must distinguish between two types of change: extrinsic and intrinsic. As the name implies, intrinsic change refers to changes that occur within the intrinsic attributes of a substance. It can be said that a substance’s intrinsic attributes are those it possesses by virtue of itself or its own nature (Allen, 2016). Take, for instance, a wooden writing desk with a height of one meter, a mass of 50 kg, a rectangular shape, and a dark brown color. These attributes are intrinsic because they are inherent to the table and independent of its relations with other objects. It is also important to note that a change in its relations with other objects does not affect these attributes. To put it another way, the table’s intrinsic attributes give it individuality and enable it to stand out from other tables or objects.

The table also has some other attributes, however, which are considered extrinsic because they result merely from its relations with other (external) objects. For instance, that the table is 30 centimeters from a wall, someone is sitting behind it, or a book is on it. By changing these attributes, there is no change in the table, and it maintains its individuality and intrinsic attributes which are independent of its relations with other objects: it is still the same rectangular brown wooden table with a height of one meter.³

After clarifying the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic change, in response to the above question “what does the real change mean?” it should be noted that a real change is an intrinsic change, whereas an extrinsic change cannot be classified

³ Marshall suggests a similar definition for intrinsic and extrinsic properties: “We have some of our properties purely in virtue of the way we are. (Our mass is an example.) We have other properties in virtue of the way we interact with the world. (Our weight is an example.) The former are the intrinsic properties, the latter are the extrinsic properties” (Marshall, 2018).

as a real change because it does not affect the substances supposed to change. For example, when Richard's son becomes taller than him, Richard's relation to his son has changed without affecting him; indeed, it is the son who has changed, not Richard. Thus the extrinsic attributes of a substance can change, but we still consider it immutable (see Swinburne, 2016: 232–33).

Hence, "divine immutability" in the strong sense can be revised as follows: God does not undergo *intrinsic* change in any respect. Therefore, in opposition to the open theists, the advocates of the strong sense contend that God's intrinsic attributes, such as knowledge,⁴ like His essential attributes, are not changeable. However, they accept extrinsic changes for God because, as we have said, this type of change does not affect a substance. For example, God could be worshipped by Maria at one time and not be worshipped at a later time, and that would not be a real or intrinsic change in God, but rather a change in Maria because it was she who started and then stopped worshipping God. Likewise, in other similar situations, God does not go from being one way to being another; rather, something else changes (Swinburne, 2016: 233).

Finally, it should be noted that this sense of immutability has generally been linked with traditional Christianity, but some thinkers, such as Swinburne, think that this is not the case. He says that it must have come from the philosophy of Neoplatonism, which had a considerable influence on much early Christian theology in the third or fourth century AD because, according to this view, changeable things are inferior to the unchangeable. However, as Swinburne remarks, the perfection of a perfect being might not be due to its being in a static state, but to its being in a certain process of change. Therefore the claim that God is wholly changeless would seem to be an unnecessary dogma for theism (Swinburne, 2016: 233–34).

The Molinist picture of divine immutability

In this section, we intend to show that the Molinist picture of divine immutability is based on the strong sense: that is, Molinism believes that God does not undergo change in any *intrinsic* respect, or in other words that God is wholly unchanging.

First of all it is noteworthy that Luis Molina, upon whose ideas Molinism has been developed, says in his famous work *On Divine Foreknowledge*

⁴ It is important to note that knowledge is considered, at least in human beings, to be an intrinsic attribute, since it relates to the mind, and when it changes it affects the mind. Although our knowledge can be influenced by external objects, this will not be a reason to consider it as an extrinsic attribute. For the knowledge is the product of our cognitive faculty, and it is a process that takes place within us; so any change in it causes a change in us, whereas extrinsic attributes are not like this. In addition, our knowledge can distinguish us from other people. For example a difference between one person and someone else is that the former knows some things the latter doesn't, or vice versa. Regardless of whether knowledge is an intrinsic or extrinsic attribute for us creatures, in the Molinist view it is an intrinsic attribute for God, since He is impassible and does not acquire His knowledge from others. Regarding this, Flint writes: "Foreknowledge follows immediately from God's conjoining his creative act of will to his prevolitional knowledge; he has no need to observe or to be causally impacted in any way by the events he foreknows in order to know them" (1998, 44–45).

It follows that the contingency of things and freedom of choice with respect to the future are perfectly consistent with God's certain knowledge and will, a knowledge and will that are not only altogether unchangeable, but also fixed and stable to such a degree that (Molina, 1988: Disputation 51, Sect. 18)

He also says in *Disputation 52*:

He does not begin to know these things when they are actual—since that would be for Him to change from not knowing to knowing, and a shadow of alteration would plainly befall God. (Molina, 1988: Disputation 52, Sect. 8).

As we can see, Molina holds God to be immutable in the strong sense, because it is only in the strong sense that God's knowledge does not allow of change, whereas the weak sense considers it to be changeable.

The second clarification stems from Thomas Flint, who revived Molinism early in the second half of the 20th century. On the one hand, he states that the traditional view, unlike Open theism, does hold that God is immutable:

The overall picture of God which the devotees of openness (or, as we shall call them, the openists) offer is one which not only weakens the traditional notion of providence in the ways which will be discussed shortly, but also significantly alters the traditional concept of God by renouncing such divine attributes as simplicity, eternity, immutability, and impassibility.⁵ (Flint, 1998: 95)

On the other hand, he tries to show that Molinism holds the traditional view:

The Molinist picture of providence constitutes an attempt to blend together two distinct notions which are independently attractive to the orthodox Christian. The first of these is the strong notion of divine providence typically affirmed by Christians through the centuries ... a notion I shall refer to as the traditional notion (or traditional picture) of providences (Flint, 1998: 11–12)

Or he says:

Some might be led to abandon the libertarian account of freedom. Others might argue that the traditional picture of a provident God as one with foreknowledge and sovereignty needs to be rejected. As Molina saw it, though, neither of these responses is tolerable, either philosophically or theologically... The problems we have outlined can be solved without surrendering either libertarianism or a strong traditional concept of providence. (Flint, 1998: 36)

⁵ His use of 'immutability' here refers to the strong sense. This is because he claims that open theism does not believe in immutability; however, as has been mentioned, open theism believes in divine immutability in the weak sense. Thus, we can conclude that immutability is used in its strong sense here.

The third clarification is based on the nature of God's knowledge. We mentioned that on the Molinist view there are four moments in God's knowledge: Natural knowledge, Middle knowledge, the Creative act of will, and Free knowledge.⁶ Flint points out that the priority and posteriority between these moments of divine knowledge is *logical*, not temporal: "It should be noted that, in speaking of priority and posteriority, the traditionalist is not to be thought of as speaking of temporal notions" (Flint, 1998: 37). And elsewhere he says: "On the Molinist view, the knowledge of a providential God can be thought of as in a sense growing through four **logical** moments" (Flint, 1998: 43).

The emphasis on the point that priority and posteriority in the moments of God's knowledge are not temporal but logical indicates that the Molinist believes in immutability in the strong sense. For the temporality of God means that His life continues through time, and He does experience temporal succession: for example, He experiences the first century before experiencing the twenty-first century, or, in the 13th century, He first listened to Aquinas's petitionary prayer for understanding and then answered it. And this entails a change in God's knowledge and His will, implying that God has moved from one state to another. Therefore, according to the defenders of strong immutability, God is timeless. That is, God does not exist at any temporal location, but is beyond time altogether and does not experience temporal succession. So, He does not experience the first century before He experiences the twenty-first, but rather both of these centuries are experienced by God in one "timeless now", and He listens to and answers Aquinas's prayer in one "timeless moment" (Ganssle, n.d., Sect. 1). That is, "everything is present to God at once", and not in a temporal present, but rather in an eternal present in which all of time is encompassed. So the succession of events is excluded in this presence, and the past and the future, or before and after, are not relevant to God. In other words, God's relation to each event in a temporal succession is the same as his relation to any other event (see Stump, 2019: 23–24).⁷

Meanwhile, according to immutability in the weak sense, God can be regarded as a temporal being without His immutability conflicting with His essential attributes: for while there can be changes in some of God's non-essential attributes in time, His essential ones remain the same.

Another clarification traces back to Molinism's answer to the problem of petitionary prayers. The problem is that it cannot be consistent with God's immutability and impassibility if our prayers do make a difference to God's eternal providence and will. The meaning of God's answering our prayers in a traditional sense is that He answers them through His eternal knowledge that we would pray in a certain situation in which we have indeed 'already' prayed. Otherwise, answering our prayers

⁶ See note 1, above.

⁷ This paper does not claim that God's being timeless is incompatible with the existence of any temporal being. Our purpose in discussing God's timelessness is merely to show that the Molinists believe in strong immutability. Moreover, how God's timelessness deals with temporal beings is not the concern of this paper. Nevertheless, it seems that the definition of God's timelessness mentioned above has explained how God can know temporal beings in a nontemporal way. Furthermore, the main argument of this article against Molinism is merely focused on the moments of God's knowledge before the creation. Therefore, it does not make any suggestion about the relationship between divine knowledge and created temporal beings.

would entail God moving from one situation (before answering) to another (after answering), which is in conflict with the divine immutability thesis.⁸ Flint claims that the problem can be resolved without leading to any real change in God, by appealing to the theory of middle knowledge as follows:

We can also now see, I think, how, from a Molinist perspective, Peter's prayer can be thought of as making a difference even if we don't think of that prayer as having any causal effect upon God, or as leading to any real change in God. For God's decisions as to how to act will be based upon his middle knowledge of how Peter and others would freely act in various circumstances, not upon his free knowledge as to how they will act. Since his middle knowledge is not caused by Peter's action ... Peter's act of praying neither causes God to know anything about Peter nor effects any change in God's intentions (1998: 226).

So it seems that one of the major motivations for Molinists in proposing the theory of middle knowledge is to save the divine immutability thesis in its strong sense. The other main reason that Molinists support the divine immutability thesis in a strong sense is the relation between divine impassibility and divine immutability. In order to save divine immutability in a strong sense they must reject divine passibility. Hence, to avoid any form of God's passibility, Molina claims that, "God acquires no knowledge from things but instead knows and comprehends everything He knows in His own essence and in the free determination of His own will" (Molina, 1988: Disputation 52, Sect. 19). In explaining this claim, Flint writes

It is important to note that, on this Molinist picture, God's foreknowledge is neither the effect nor the cause of our free actions. Foreknowledge follows immediately from God's conjoining his creative act of will to his prevolitional knowledge; he has no need to observe or to be causally impacted in any way by the events he foreknows in order to know them ... God's foreknowledge and the contingent event foreknown are, in effect, two separate consequences of the creative act of will God selects (1998, 44–45).

It seems that this lack of passibility for God implies that He is immutable in the strong sense, because when we say that a being is affected by other things, it means that a change has been made in it.⁹

⁸ For more on this problem, see also Flint, 1998 ch. 10; Davison, 2021.

⁹ For the same argument, see also Azadegan, 2022. Leftow, however, argues that there is no necessary relation between divine impassibility and immutability, so that God can also change in His own essence without being affected by others. Hence the fact that God is impassible does not justify concluding that He is immutable in any sense. "DDI neither implies nor is implied by divine impassibility. Something could be impassible but mutable if it could change itself, but nothing else could change or affect it. God could be immutable but passible. For he could be changelessly aware of events outside himself—perhaps even caused to be aware of them by the events themselves—and due to them changelessly feel such responsive emotions as grief. But he would feel them without change, and so always feel them" (Leftow, 2014). His argument is not convincing, though, because it seems difficult to deny the temporality of a mutable God. For God to be changeable, He must first possess an attribute, then lose it; that means He must exist at least two times (at the first time He has that attribute and at the second time He does not);

Moreover, unlike the strong sense, immutability in the weak sense is indeed compatible with passibility. For in the weak sense, as we have mentioned, it is possible for God's knowledge and His will to be affected and changed by things without changing His essential attributes such as omniscience or omnipotence.

The incoherency of Molinism

In this section, we try to demonstrate that there is a contradiction between the two basic principles of Molinism: God's (middle) knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom, and His strong immutability. According to Molinism, as we have seen, God knows all true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, and at the moment of will He (weakly) actualizes some of these counterfactuals; that way, He obtains divine free knowledge, which contains knowledge of actual future contingents. In other words, before the moment of will, God had no knowledge of actual future contingents, but He acquired that knowledge after actualizing the counterfactuals of freedom. Therefore, at one moment, God lacked knowledge of actual future contingents, and at another, He gained that knowledge; and this means a change in His knowledge.

In response to the above criticism, it might be argued that a change in God's knowledge is not possible because the priority and posteriority in the moments of His knowledge are not temporal, but rather are logical. In other words, all the moments of His knowledge are simultaneous, and He knows both counterfactuals of freedom (i.e., conditional future contingents) and actual future contingents all at once.

However, it seems that priority and posteriority could be considered logical as long as they are not the results of God's will. For example, this kind of order (logical priority and posteriority) can be applied to the relation between natural knowledge and middle knowledge because both moments are prevolitional, and can be simultaneous for God; that is, God has both types of knowledge at once. But we cannot make such a claim about the order between middle knowledge and free knowledge, whose priority and posteriority are based on divine will. For, on the Molinist understanding, divine will is a bidirectional attribute that requires moving from possibility (counterfactuals of freedom) to actuality (actual future contingents).¹⁰ It seems, therefore, by

otherwise, a contradiction would arise. The reason is that God cannot simultaneously have an attribute and not have it. Thus, changeability demands temporality, and so a changeable God is temporal [We have taken this argument from Creel's essay "Immutability and Impassibility" (Creel 2010)]. On the other hand, God's temporality—whether in a physical or metaphysical sense—requires His passibility, since His existence in the context of time makes the past, future, and present relevant to Him, and this fact causes Him to experience events sequentially instead of simultaneously. In other words, temporal beings, through their changes, affect God's knowledge and hence actions. This affection can have no meaning other than His passibility. Accordingly, contra Leftow's claim, God cannot undergo change without being affected. Therefore, there is an intimate link between divine impassibility and immutability. We can make the interim conclusion, therefore, that Molinism holds and ought to hold the thesis of divine immutability in the strong sense.

¹⁰ Cf. this quote from Molina, "The second type is *purely free knowledge*, by which, after the free act of His will, God knew absolutely and determinately, without any condition or hypothesis, which ones from among all the contingent states of affairs were in fact going to obtain and, likewise, which ones were not going to obtain". So "Such knowledge depends on the free determination of His will, a determination by which He decides to create such-and-such a faculty of free choice in such-and such an order of things"

acknowledging such a sense of divine will, one ought to accept an intrinsic change in God.

A Molinist might reply: the will in this sense does not require change because it is possible that God knows both possibles and actuals simultaneously; in other words, he would claim that God has never experienced a lack of knowledge of actuals, because besides knowing the possible, He has always been knowing the actual. It follows from this claim that divine will plays no role in the process since according to the claim, God could be aware of both possibles and actuals without using His will. That conflicts with the Molinist view which gives the will a central role in divine providence, and describes it as an essential attribute of God. Moreover, the inefficaciousness of God's will in His providence downgrades His dignity compared to creatures, for the reason that creatures' wills are effective in realizing events, whereas the claim mentioned above leads to God's will being ineffective. In other words, would God have a useless ability through which He cannot effectively play any roles in fulfilling His purposes. Consequently, that implies a defect in His essence, which contradicts the Molinist assumption that God is perfect.

Further, claiming that there is a simultaneity between middle knowledge and free knowledge implies an incoherency, since God in His middle knowledge lacks knowledge of actual future contingents, whereas He knows them in free knowledge; that is, God is simultaneously aware and unaware of actual future contingents. That claim therefore affirms an incoherent position and so has no meaning. Therefore, divine will in the sense assumed by Molinism (i.e., moving from possibility to actuality) does entail a change in God. So, by giving rise to free knowledge via divine will, God's knowledge undergoes a change. As knowledge is considered an intrinsic attribute of God, any changes to it entail an intrinsic change in God, which would negate divine immutability in the strong sense. Consequently, assuming God has knowledge of counterfactuals is not compatible with divine immutability in the strong sense.¹¹

We continue to push our case against the coherence of Molinism by showing that a Molinist has to accept that a change in God's knowledge also requires a change in His essence. For, according to Molinism, (a) omniscience is an essential attribute of God, and (b) that attribute means that He knows exhaustively all future contingents, especially creaturely free actions (Flint, 1998: 38 & 149). Therefore, according to this view, it is impossible to imagine a world where God has no knowledge of actual future contingents, even for a moment. In other words, like other traditional theistic views, Molinism considers the knowledge of actual future contingents for God to

(Molina, 1988: Disputation 52, Sects. 9–10). Also, on the moments of God's knowledge, Flint says: "God can be thought of as moving from knowledge of which worlds are possible to knowledge of which world is actual, and this movement is mediated by his free creative act of will" (1998: 38).

¹¹ According to Molinism, God has knowledge of things in His own essence and does not acquire His knowledge from things (Molina 1988: Disputation 52, Sect. 19; Flint, 1998, 44–45). It follows that the simultaneity between the moments of God's knowledge and Himself is an Eternal simultaneity, not an Eternal Temporal simultaneity, because the former is a simultaneity between eternal things, whereas the latter is a simultaneity between eternal and temporal things (Deng, 2019, 20). Therefore, the movement from middle knowledge to free knowledge by divine will cannot be compatible with the strong immutability of God.

be essential.¹² Therefore, if God lacked knowledge of actual future contingents in a moment, then His essence would consist of ignorance, and if this ignorance changed into knowledge, His essence would need to change as well.¹³ Hence, presupposing counterfactuals of freedom in God's knowledge contradicts not only immutability in the strong sense, but in the weak sense as well.

To get out of this incoherency, Molinism has only one way ahead: revising the picture of divine will so that it is no longer seen as a bidirectional attribute that involves moving from possibility to actuality. In other words, it requires Molinists to suggest a definition for will which is not based on a dichotomy between possibility and actuality, because, as we have seen, the will in that bidirectional sense requires a change in God. But even if they appeal to this solution, Molinists still cannot solve the problem, since this understanding of divine will requires that counterfactuals of freedom never become actual and always remain in a conditional state. That means God never has knowledge of actual future contingents, and it is evident this result cannot be consistent with the Molinist assumption of God's exhaustive foreknowledge. Therefore, it seems the assumption of middle knowledge, a knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom, leads Molinism into an impasse.¹⁴

Concluding remarks

In this paper, we began by discussing two types of immutability. The weak sense merely denies all changes in God's essence, whereas the strong sense denies any intrinsic changes. We then presented some arguments drawn from Molina and Flint

¹² To emphasize that divine knowledge is an essential attribute, Molina says "God acquires no knowledge from things but instead knows and comprehends everything He knows in His own essence and in the free determination of His own will" (Molina, 1988: Disputation 52, Sect. 19). Also see note 2, above.

¹³ Open theism also considers omniscience to be an essential attribute of God. However, according to this view, God cannot know exhaustively in advance what creatures will do freely in the future (see Boyd, 2001), so this knowledge is not considered an essential attribute of God. Therefore, in contrast to classical theism, a change in God's knowledge will not lead to an essential change in Him, and He remains omniscient.

¹⁴ In this paper, the authors do not claim that free creation entails God is neither strongly immutable nor timeless; rather, they claim that it requires a change in God if we understand free creation as moving from possibility to actuality. This critique is applied just to Molinism, we believe, because the way out from possibility to actuality with the assumption of a God who exhaustively knows the future contingents seems to be only possible through the middle knowledge of the counterfactual of freedom. As Flint argues, God knows all possibilities in the moment of natural knowledge. From this, it follows that natural knowledge provides God with knowledge of which worlds are possible. Accordingly, God knows that if Cuthbert were placed in situation C, where he is free to buy an iguana, he would buy it in the set of B-possible worlds, but he would refrain from doing so in the set of R-possible worlds. In other words, God, by his natural knowledge, knows that if Cuthbert were placed in situation C, he might either buy it or refrain from buying it; however, he does not know which possible world would become actual if Cuthbert were placed in situation C. Therefore, it raises the question of how God can have free knowledge (of actual future contingents) and how can He exercise his providence? According to him, the answer to this question is evident: "Providence can be exercised, free knowledge can be present, only if God knows how his creatures would act if placed in various non-determining circumstances" (39–40). It means to be aware of counterfactuals of freedom. For example, suppose God knew that if he placed Cuthbert in C, Cuthbert would freely buy the iguana. Given his knowledge of the counterfactual, He would know that, should he bring about C, a B-world would result.

that demonstrate Molinism's adherence to the strong sense of immutability. We sought to show that there is an inconsistency between two basic principles of Molinism, namely, divine middle knowledge and divine immutability. The inconsistency arises because some counterfactuals of freedom need to be actualized by divine will: in one moment of His knowledge, God did not know actual futures contingents, and in another moment, He did. That means He undergoes an intrinsic change. We have also shown that this change in God's knowledge leads to change in His essence because the knowledge of actual future contingents is essential for God, whereas according to Molinism, He lacks knowledge of these actual objects in the middle moment of His knowledge. Therefore, assuming that God knows counterfactuals of freedom denies not only divine immutability in the strong sense, but also in the weak sense. Consequently, Molinism is an incoherent position.

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Declarations

Ethical responsibilities of authors Some parts of the idea related to section 4 of this article have already appeared in our work (doi:<https://doi.org/10.30497/PRR.2021.241053.1684>) which is published in the Persian language in 2021. This submitted article is a far more expanded and developed version of the earlier idea.

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