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Molinists (Still) Cannot Endorse the Consequence Argument

Abstract Ken Perszyk (2003) has argued that Molinists cannot consistently endorse the consequence argument because of a structurally similar argument for the incompatibility of true Molinist counterfactuals of freedom (*CCF*s) and the ability to do otherwise. Edward Wierenga (2011) has argued that on the proper understanding of *CCF*s, there is a relevant difference between the consequence argument and the anti-Molinist argument. I argue that, even on Wierenga's understanding of *CCF*s, there is in fact no relevant difference between the two arguments. Moreover, I strengthen Perszyk's challenge by highlighting further relevant similarities between *CCF*s and facts about the laws.

Keywords Molinism · Middle knowledge · Consequence argument · Libertarianism · Compatibilism · Accidental necessity

Introduction

Molinism is primarily motivated by an attempt to reconcile a robust account of divine providence with libertarianism. Libertarianism is often motivated by an alternative possibilities claim, according to which free will requires the ability to do otherwise (alternative possibilities). Thus, one of the more powerful arguments for libertarianism is the consequence argument for the conclusion that determinism is incompatible with the ability to do otherwise. Ken Perszyk (2003) has argued, however, that the Molinist cannot endorse the consequence argument. This is due to a structurally similar argument for the incompatibility of true Molinist counterfactuals of freedom (*CCF*s) and the ability to do otherwise. If Perszyk is correct, subscribing to Molinism thereby comes at a serious cost.[1] Edward Wierenga (2011) has responded to Perszyk's challenge, claiming that on the proper understanding of *CCF*s, there is a relevant difference between the consequence argument and the anti-Molinist argument. I argue that even on Wierenga's understanding of *CCF*s, there is in fact no relevant difference between the two arguments. Moreover, I strengthen Perszyk's challenge by highlighting further relevant similarities between *CCF*s and facts about the laws. I will not attempt to summarize everything that Perszyk says in defense of his challenge. Rather, I intend to flesh out the core aspects of Perszyk's challenge in a way that bears directly upon Wierenga's reply, as well as subsequent discussion thereof.

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[1] For the purposes of this paper, I set aside Perszyk's (2000) ingenious attempt to merge Molinism with compatibilism.

Perszyk's Challenge

Turning to Peter van Inwagen's familiar, modal version of the consequence argument, consider the following one-place operator:

N*p* *p* and no one[2] has or ever had a choice about whether *p*.

And, consider the following two rules of inference:

Alpha $\Box p \supset Np$
Beta $(Np\ \&\ N(p \supset q)) \supset Nq$[3]

Take 'H' to refer to the complete state of the world at some time in the past, 'L' to refer to the complete list of laws of nature, and 'P' to refer to any truth. With these notions in hand, here is the modal version of the consequence argument:

1.	$\Box((H\ \&\ L) \supset P)$	Determinism
2.	$\Box(H \supset (L \supset P))$	1
3.	$N(H \supset (L \supset P))$	2, Alpha
4.	$N(H)$	Fixity of the Past
5.	$N(L \supset P)$	3,4 Beta
6.	$N(L)$	Fixity of the Laws
7.	$N(P)$	5,6 Beta

Since 'P' may refer to any true proposition, including propositions about how we in fact act, (7) entails that an agent *S* lacks the ability to do other than what she in fact does. Thus, the consequence argument shows us that if determinism is true, then *S* does not have the ability to do otherwise. I follow Perszyk in abbreviating the argument as follows:

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[2] 'No one' is to be read as 'no human being'. Hence, all subsequent discussion of N*p* should be taken to exclude the choices of God, angels, etc.

[3] Although it is widely accepted that McKay and Johnson (1996) have demonstrated that Beta as originally construed by van Inwagen (1983) is invalid, there are many other inference rules that are arguably immune for McKay and Johnson's criticism—including an inference rule advocated by McKay and Johnson (1996, pp. 118–121). For other revisions to Beta as originally proposed by van Inwagen (1983), see Finch and Warfield (1998), van Inwagen (2000), Huemer (2000), and O'Connor (2000, ch. 1). Nothing I wish to argue for below depends upon which revised inference rule the proponent of the consequence argument wishes to accept. As a result, the reader may interpret N (and thus Beta) throughout the paper according to van Inwagen's (2000, p. 8) revised account of N, such that the revised version of Beta is immune from the counterexample proposed by McKay and Johnson. Moreover, van Inwagen's (2000) revised version of N does not in any way alter the dialectic below between Molinists and the consequence argument.

The Consequence Argument

1A.   N((H & L) ⊃ P)
2A.   N(H & L)
3A.   N(P)

In response to the consequence argument, many have argued that either the argument equivocates between two senses abilities or the argument is simply invalid. I'll focus my attention on David Lewis' (1981) response.[4] Lewis (1981, p. 120) distinguishes between a weak and strong thesis regarding having a choice about whether *p* (or, as Lewis puts it, 'rendering a proposition false'), which can be formulated as follows:

> **Weak Thesis** An agent *S* has a **W-choice** about whether *p iff S* was able to *φ* such that, if *S φ*-ed, *p* would have been falsified (though not necessarily by *S*'s *φ*-ing or by any event that was caused by *S*'s *φ*-ing).

> **Strong Thesis** An agent *S* has an **S-choice** about whether *p iff S* was able to *φ* such that, if *S φ*-ed, *p* would have been falsified by *S*'s *φ*-ing or by some event that was caused by *S*'s *φ*-ing.

On the one hand, if the term 'choice' referred to in the N operator is understood to be an S-choice, then compatibilists deny the validity of Beta. For, compatibilists agree that we lack an S-choice about whether the past or the laws obtain. We cannot, for instance, *break* or *violate* the laws of nature. However, we *do* have an S-choice about the truth-value of certain propositions. For instance, I could have thrown a rock at a window, such that this action would have caused an event which in turn would have falsified the true proposition '*The window remains intact*'.[5] But this is inconsistent with Beta according to the S-choice interpretation. So Beta must be invalid if the term 'choice' referred to in the N operator is understood to be an S-choice. On the other hand, if the term 'choice' referred to in the N operator is understood to be a W-choice, then compatibilists deny premise (2A). This is because, under the W-choice interpretation, compatibilists deny either N(H) or N(L). Lewis specifically denies N(L).

Turning now to Molinism, Perszyk claims that an exactly parallel argument can be formulated for the incompatibility of true *CCF*s and the ability to do otherwise. To see how the argument goes, take the following to stand for a true *CCF*: (α → β), such that 'α' refers to a maximally specified description of the circumstances a free creature is in, and 'β' refers to that creature's freely performing an action in those circumstances. The reason the antecedent of a

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[4] See also Gallois (1977), Lehrer (1980), and Fischer (1986). While Lewis does not explicitly discuss rule Beta in his (1981), one remark by Lewis (1981: 120) suggests that he accepts the validity of Beta even under the strong interpretation and that (2A) is false under the strong interpretation (to be discussed below). Even so, my comments below suggest what a compatibilist such as Lewis *should* say in response to the consequence argument as formulated above, given Lewis' distinction between the weak and strong thesis.
[5] Lewis (1981, p. 119).

CCF must be maximally specific is that ordinary counterfactuals don't permit strengthening the antecedent; adding more to the antecedent can change the truth-value of the counterfactual.[6] Consequently, it is only the maximally described *ultima facie* counterfactuals, rather than the non-maximally described *prima facie* counterfactuals, that are *useful* to God for deciding what to do.[7] So, an example of a *CCF* goes as follows:

> **Adam** If Adam were in the garden, he would freely eat the forbidden fruit.

Once again, it is crucial that "the garden" is shorthand for a maximally specified description of certain circumstances. Since the consequent says that Adam would *freely* eat the forbidden fruit, it follows that in those very circumstances Adam can refrain from eating the forbidden fruit. This is because it is an assumption of the Molinist framework that freedom requires the ability to do otherwise, or at least that the kind of freedom specified in *CCF*s entails that an agent has the ability to do otherwise.

   With this preliminary understanding of a *CCF* in place, here is Perszyk's anti-Molinist argument:[8]

> *The Anti-Molinist Argument*
> 1B. $N(((\alpha \rightarrow \beta) \,\&\, \alpha) \supset \beta)$
> 2B. $N((\alpha \rightarrow \beta) \,\&\, \alpha)$
> 3B. $N(\beta)$

Since 'β' refers to a person's *freely* performing an action in certain circumstances, it follows that that person is able to do otherwise in the exact same circumstances. In that case, $N(\beta)$ entails a contradiction, falsifying the Molinist's assumption that there are brute, contingently true counterfactuals with *free* actions in their consequents. Now, Wierenga agrees (as do I) that (1B) is eminently plausible.[9] So, given the truth of (1B), the Molinist must claim that Beta is invalid and/or that (2B) is false. If Beta is valid, then (2B) is false. If (2B) is false and $N(\alpha)$ is true, then it is false that $N(\alpha \rightarrow \beta)$.

   It is easy to see that at least sometimes we have no choice about which circumstances we are placed in, such as the circumstance in which we have our very first (alleged) free choice about what to do. Of course, it doesn't follow from the fact that person *S* has no choice about α that $N(\alpha)$ since some *other* human being may have a choice about whether to place *S* in the circumstances referred to in α. However, we may focus our attention on *CCF*s such that, clearly, *S and no other human being* has a choice about α. When we focus on such a *CCF*, we can establish that $N(\alpha)$. So, assuming that such a *CCF* is the one at issue in *The anti-Molinist*

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[6] Lewis (1973, pp. 31–32).
[7] Zimmerman (2009, pp. 56–59).
[8] Perszyk (2003, p. 135).
[9] Wierenga (1991, p. 428; 2011, p. 134).

Argument, then either Beta is invalid or it is false that N(α □→ β). A Molinist who endorses the consequence argument as formulated above must accept the validity of Beta. So, in order to avoid N(β), the Molinist must deny that N(α □→ β). This is exactly what Molinists have done in print. They have claimed that if β, then some free creature has counterfactual power over the truth of (α □→ β). For example, consider Thomas Flint's (2011, p. 43) remarks on the matter:

> The truth of those counterfactuals…does not interfere with the relevant creatures' freedom to do otherwise. Even though (C □→ Z) is true and [free creature] A is in C, A still is able to do ~ Z. Had she done ~ Z, (C □→ Z) wouldn't have been true. Instead, (C □→ ~ Z) would have been true. So A has the power to do something (~ Z), such that, had she done it, a counterfactual that is true—namely, (C □→ Z)—would have been false.

Flint does not say that if A had done ~Z, then (C □→ Z) would have been falsified by A's ~Z-ing or by some event that was caused by A's ~Z-ing. Rather, Flint is only asserting the weaker claim that if A had done ~Z, then (C □→ Z) would have been false. In other words, Flint is only saying that A has a W-choice about whether (C □→ Z).

Flint is not saying that A has an S-choice about whether (C □→ Z), and for good reason. Within the Molinist framework, *CCF*s are true logically prior to God's decision of which world to actualize. *A fortiori*, *CCF*s are true logically prior to any creature's free choice.[10] Consequently, no *CCF* has its truth-value even partly in virtue of a creature's free choice or even partly in virtue of some event that was caused by a creature's free choice. In other words, within the Molinist framework, N(α □→ β) is true if the term 'choice' referred to in the N operator is understood to be an S-choice, and N(α □→ β) is false if the term 'choice' referred to in the N operator is understood to be a W-choice.[11]

So the Molinist can consistently accept the validity Beta and deny that N(α □→ β) if the term 'choice' referred to in the N operator is understood to be a W-choice. However, the compatibilist also accepts the validity of Beta under the W-choice interpretation. The Molinist must thus affirm both N(H) and N(L) under the W-choice interpretation, contrary to the compatibilist's position. Alas, here is the central tension. Under the W-choice interpretation, the Molinist must affirm both N(H) and N(L), and yet also *deny* N(α □→ β). It is thus incumbent upon the Molinist to provide some relevant difference between (α □→ β) and both H and L. Wierenga attempts to do exactly that.

Wierenga on *CCF*s and Initial Segments of Worlds

Recall that since ordinary counterfactuals do not permit strengthening the antecedent, it is only the *ultima facie* counterfactuals that are useful to God. Thus, in order for *Adam* to be the kind of

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[10] Molinists must assert this, among other reasons, in order to reply to the so-called 'too late' objection. See Adams (1977, pp. 112–113), Kenny (1979, p. 70), Wierenga (1989, pp. 148–150), Mares and Perszyk (2011, pp. 99–101).
[11] Perszyk (2003, p. 136).

CCF that is useful to God, "the garden" must be shorthand for a maximally specified description of certain circumstances at a time. Does that mean that *Adam* itself is true in "the garden"? No. We are stipulating that Adam has the ability to do otherwise in "the garden". But doing otherwise in "the garden" is incompatible with the truth of *Adam*. It is for this reason that Wierenga introduces the notion of an initial segment that is shared by distinct worlds:

> For any world W and time t, there exists a state of affairs, $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$, which is an initial segment of W terminating at t, and which is included in W. (Wierenga 2011, p. 127)

> Worlds W and W' share an initial segment up until a time t if and only if $\Sigma_{(W, t)} = \Sigma_{(W', t)}$. (Wierenga 2011, p. 128)

> A proposition p is true in an initial segment $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$ if and only if it is not possible that $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$ obtain and p be false. (Wierenga 2011, p. 128)

To illustrate the relationship between *CCF*s and initial segments of worlds, we can reformulate *Adam* in a way that incorporates Wierenga's terminology. I'll refer to this *CCF* as *Fruit*:

> ***Fruit*** If Adam were in the circumstances such that $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$ obtained at t, he would freely eat the forbidden fruit at t.

Adam's being in the circumstances such that $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$ obtains at t does not *entail* that Adam eats the forbidden fruit precisely because *Fruit* itself is not true in $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$ at t. Adam's being in the circumstances such that $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$ obtains at t is consistent with Adam's refraining from eating the forbidden fruit. Thus, the following counterfactual is possibly true:

> ***No Fruit*** If Adam were in the circumstances such that $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$ obtained at t, he would freely refrain from eating the forbidden fruit at t.

Suppose that Adam in fact eats the forbidden fruit in $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$ at t, and that W is actual. In that case, *Fruit* is true at t in the actual world (viz. W). Let's also stipulate that the world in which Adam does other than what he in fact does at $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$ at t is world W^*. In that case, *No Fruit* is true at t in W^*. W and W^* share $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$ as an initial segment. Moreover, while *Fruit* is true at t in W and *No Fruit* is true at t in W^*, neither *Fruit* nor *No Fruit* is true at t in $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$. With this understanding of the relationship between *CCF*s and initial segments of worlds, we are now in a position to see how Wierenga responds to Perszyk's challenge.

Wierenga reformulates the consequence argument with the employment of an accidental necessity operator 'AN'. This notion of accidental necessity is defined partly in terms of the notion of an initial segment:

> A proposition p is *accidentally necessary* at a time t in a world W if and only if p is contingent and $\Sigma_{(W, t)}$ includes p. (Wierenga 2011, p. 133)

Wierenga also adopts an analogue rule Beta that employs AN:

Beta*: (AN(p) & $\Box$($p \supset q$) & ~ $\Box$(q)) $\supset$ AN(q). (Wierenga 2011, p. 133)

Here, then, is the version of the consequence argument and the version of the anti-Molinist argument that Wierenga (2011, p. 133–134) discusses:

The Consequence Argument*
1C. $\Box$((H & L) $\supset$ P)
2C.   AN(H & L)
3C.   AN(P)

The Anti-Molinist Argument*
1D. $\Box$(((α $\rightarrow$ β) & α) $\supset$ β)
2D.   AN((α $\rightarrow$ β) & α)
3D.   AN(β)

Wierenga claims that (2D) is false because it's false that AN(α $\rightarrow$ β). Why? Since *CCF*s are not included in initial segments of worlds, it is false by definition that AN(α $\rightarrow$ β). Wierenga (2011, p. 134–135) says the following in support of the claim that the compatibilist cannot employ a similar strategy to reject (2C):

> If we are restricting our attention to worlds in which determinism is *true*, then we are only looking at worlds in which (H & L) is true; we are only looking at worlds that have that history and those laws in their initial segments. So constructing the Consequence Argument and the anti-Molinist argument in terms of accidental necessity allows the Molinist to accept the former while rejecting the latter.

Contrary to Wierenga's claim, I think that Wierenga's strategy for rejecting *The Anti-Molinist Argument** can in fact be adopted by a compatibilist in order to reject *The Consequence Argument**. While I will attempt to show this by focusing on Lewis (1981) who denies the fixity of the laws, I note in passing that what I say on behalf of Lewis could plausibly be said *mutatis mutandis* on behalf of a compatibilist who denies the fixity of the past.[12]

Compatibilism and Accidental Necessity

Before turning to what compatibilists should say in regards to the notion of accidental necessity, recall that Perszyk's challenge, in a nutshell, is this. Molinists claim that we have a W-choice about whether (α $\rightarrow$ β). So (2B) is false since it is false that N(α $\rightarrow$ β). Compatibilists claim either that we have a W-choice about whether H or that we have a W-choice about whether L. So (2A) is false since either it is false that N(H) or it is false that N(L). If the Molinist objects to the

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[12] For a denial of the fixity of the past, see, e.g., Saunders (1968) and Perry (2008).

compatibilist's denial of (2A), it is difficult to see how the Molinist can consistently deny (2B) since there seems to be no relevant difference between the ways in which (2A) and (2B) are rejected by the Molinist and the compatibilist, respectively. Does Wierenga's discussion of accidental necessity help us see how the Molinist can deny (2B) while consistently objecting to the compatibilist's denial of (2A)? This is doubtful. For, as I now intend to show, Wierenga has not shown us how the Molinist can deny (2D) while consistently objecting to the compatibilist's denial of (2C).

Suppose Sadie φ-s at t in the actual world, W_1, and that determinism is true in W_1. A compatibilist such as Lewis holds that if Sadie freely φ-s at t, Sadie could have refrained from φ-ing at t. Suppose that W_2 is the relevant world in which Sadie refrains from φ-ing at t. Lewis holds that Sadie does not have a W-choice about the past, but that Sadie does have a W-choice about whether the actual laws of nature obtain. What, then, is Lewis likely to say about *The Consequence Argument** which employs the notion of accidental necessity? Lewis (1981, p. 114) says that 'If I had raised my hand, the intrinsic state of the world long ago would have been no different…[and] *L* would not have been true'. What I think this comment suggests is that Lewis would (and should) say that facts about which laws of nature obtain are not true in initial segments—just as Wierenga claims that *CCF*s are not true in initial segments.

To illustrate, consider again the actual, deterministic world W_1 in which Sadie φ-s at t, and the merely possible, deterministic world W_2 in which Sadie refrains from φ-ing at t. Suppose that 'L_1' refers to the complete list of deterministic laws of nature that obtain in W_1 (the actual world), and that 'L_2' refers to the complete list of deterministic laws of nature that obtain in W_2. A compatibilist such as Lewis should say that W_1 and W_2 share an initial segment, $\sum_{(W,\, t)}$, up until t. To be sure, L_1 is true at t in W_1 (the actual world), and L_2 is true at t in W_2. However, neither L_1 nor L_2 is included at t in $\sum_{(W,\, t)}$. In other words, while the past (or 'the intrinsic state of the world long ago') is accidentally necessary, facts about the laws are by definition not accidentally necessary given that they are not included in initial segments of worlds. Thus, once the consequence argument is construed in terms of accidental necessity, a compatibilist such as Lewis can employ the exact same strategy to deny (2C) that the Molinist can employ to deny (2D).

In order for Wierenga to claim that the strategy that the Molinist employs to deny (2D) cannot similarly be employed by the compatibilist to deny (2C), Wierenga needs to tell us what the relevant difference is between L and ($\alpha \rightarrow \beta$), such that the former is to be included in initial segments, and the latter is not. And, it is important to see that Wierenga has not done this. In order to reject the *Anti-Molinist Argument**, Wierenga can start with the assumption that there exists true *CCF*s, which in turn rules out *CCF*s from initial segments, which in turn rules out *CCF*s from being accidentally necessary given Wierenga's definition of accidental necessity. But the compatibilist can do the exact same thing. In order to reject the *Consequence Argument**, the Lewisian compatibilist can start with the assumption that we have the ability to do otherwise in deterministic worlds, which in turn rules out facts about the laws from initial segments, which in

turn rules out facts about the laws from being accidentally necessary given Wierenga's definition of accidental necessity.

I have claimed that Wierenga has not shown how the Molinist can deny (2B)/(2D) while consistently objecting to the compatibilist's denial of (2A)/(2C). This is because Wierenga has not shown what the relevant difference is between *CCF*s and facts about the laws; introducing a notion of accidental necessity does not illuminate what the relevant difference is such that it is true that AN(L) and false that AN($\alpha \rightarrow \beta$). Similarly, with regards to Perszyk's challenge as originally formulated, we have not been shown what the relevant difference is between *CCF*s and facts about the laws such that it is true that N(L) and false that N($\alpha \rightarrow \beta$). The burden is thus squarely on the Molinist to provide some relevant difference between these two kinds of facts in order to adequately answer Perszyk's challenge. Until that is done, it is fair to say that the Molinist *still* cannot endorse the consequence argument.[13] In the final section, I intend to strengthen Perszyk's challenge by noting two important similarities between *CCF*s and facts about the laws in order to further motivate the claim that N($\alpha \rightarrow \beta$) *iff* N(L).

CCFs and Facts about the Laws: Strengthening the Similarity

The first similarity between *CCF*s and facts about the laws that I wish to highlight concerns how both kinds of facts play a significant role in ordering the closeness of worlds. To see that there is such a similarity, I must first summarize the anti-Molinist 'tie' argument, according to which there cannot be true *CCF*s given the standard Lewis-Stalnaker semantics for counterfactuals.[14] Here's how the argument goes. According to Lewis-Stalnaker semantics, the counterfactual ($p \rightarrow q$) is non-vacuously true *iff* q is true in all of the closest *p*-worlds. Now, suppose that

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[13] Flint (2012) has recently discussed how the Molinist should respond to a number of anti-Molinist arguments that appeal to different accounts of accidental necessity. One thus might hope that Wierenga's strategy for responding to Perszyk's challenge may be vindicated by adopting some other account of accidental necessity. However, I am skeptical of such hope. Again, what the Molinist needs to do is provide some relevant difference between (L) and ($\alpha \rightarrow \beta$) such that it is true that N(L) and false that N($\alpha \rightarrow \beta$). Until that is done, the compatibilist will be able to maintain the same relation with respect to L and accidental necessity that the Molinist wishes to hold with respect to ($\alpha \rightarrow \beta$) and accidental necessity, no matter which notion of accidental necessity is adopted.

[14] See van Inwagen (1997), Gasket (1998) and McCann (2011, pp. 256–260). Notice that this anti-Molinist argument should not to be conflated with a similar, yet distinct argument that has come to be known as the 'might' argument. This argument also appeals to considerations about Lewis-Stalnaker semantics for counterfactuals, and is also defended in van Inwagen (1997).

Gabriela is in fact never offered a bribe.[15] The Molinist holds that one of the following counterfactuals is true:[16]

> ***Accept*** If Gabriela were offered a $10,000 bribe in circumstances *c*, she would freely accept the bribe.
> ***Reject*** If Gabriela were offered a $10,000 bribe in circumstances *c*, she would freely reject the bribe.

Let's suppose that *Reject* is true. In that case, according to Lewis-Stalnaker semantics, 'Gabriela freely rejects the bribe' is true in every world within the set of closest worlds in which Gabriela is offered a $10,000 bribe in circumstances *c*. But, according to a proponent of the tie argument, this is implausible. The closeness of worlds are ranked by their similarity. And, Gabriela's rejecting rather than accepting the bribe doesn't seem to have what it takes to make a world in which she rejects the bribe in *c* closer to the actual world than a world in which Gabriela accepts the bribe in *c*. And the same goes for Gabriela's accepting rather than rejecting the bribe if we were to suppose that *Accept* is true. So, since within the set of closest worlds in which Gabriela is offered a $10,000 bribe in circumstances *c*, some of those worlds are such that Gabriela freely accepts the bribe and some of those worlds are such that Gabriela freely rejects the bribe (i.e. since there is a *tie*), both *Accept* and *Reject* are false given Lewis-Stalnaker semantics for counterfactuals.

The only response in the literature of which I am aware is Plantinga's (1974, p. 178), according to which 'one feature determining the similarity of worlds is whether they share their counterfactuals'.[17] According to this strategy, the Molinist can maintain that *Reject* is true without abandoning Lewis-Stalnaker semantics for counterfactuals. For, if Plantinga is right, then what makes a world in which Gabriela freely rejects the bribe in *c* closer to the actual world than a world in which Gabriela freely accepts the bribe in *c* is that both the actual world and the world in which Gabriela freely rejects the bribe in *c have the truth of Reject in common*.[18] Thus, given Plantinga's strategy for rejecting the tie argument, we see how facts about the laws and *CCF*s play a significant role in ordering the closeness of worlds.

I will now attempt to explain why I think the fact that both *CCF*s and facts about the laws play a significant role in ordering the closeness of worlds supports the claim that N($\alpha \rightarrow \beta$) *iff* N(L). An agent's abilities are sometimes understood in terms of an accessibility relation between

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[15] Making this assumption helps us to stay focused on distinctively Molinist views about counterfactuals; according to Stalnaker-Lewis semantics, the truth of *p* and *q* in the actual world entails ($p \rightarrow q$), given unweakened (also known as strong) centering. The Molinist, however, thinks that a *CCF* can be true even if the antecedent and consequent of that *CCF* are both false. Moreover, even when we consider a *CCF* in which the antecedent and the consequent of that *CCF* are both true, the Molinist nevertheless holds that that *CCF* is true *logically prior* to the truth of the antecedent and consequent of that *CCF*. The Molinist must hold this in response to the 'too late' or 'not true soon enough' objection raised, e.g., by Adams (1977) and Kenny (1979). For a reply to this objection, see, e.g., Wierenga (1989, pp. 148–150).

[16] Notice that "circumstance *c*" is shorthand for a maximally specified description of certain circumstances.

[17] See, e.g., Flint (1998, pp. 135–136).

[18] See Mares and Perszyk (2011) for further discussion of the tie argument.

the agent and a world.[19] Accordingly, let's say that at *t* an agent *S* can φ at *t** only if there is some world *w* in which *S* φ-*s* at *t**, and *w* is accessible to *S* to at *t*. Libertarians maintain that the only worlds that are accessible to us are those that share the same laws and the same past up until the present moment. In fact, van Inwagen's (1983) second formulation of the consequence argument—what he calls 'The Second Argument'—is formulated in terms of an agent's accessibility to words, whereby the crucial premise is that "no person has access to any world in which the laws of nature are different from what they are in the actual world" (p. 92). In support of this premise, van Inwagen merely reasserts the libertarian line that "no one can render a law of nature false" (p. 92). However, one way the libertarian might further motivate this crucial premise is by claiming that the *distance* between the actual world and worlds with different laws entails that worlds with different laws are not accessible to us.[20] Since facts about the laws play a significant role in ordering the closeness of worlds, there is nothing we can do that would amount to "hopping" over all of the worlds with the same laws (and the same past) to worlds with *different* laws.[21]

If this admittedly rough sketch of some libertarian's intuitions is at all on target, the problem for Molinists is that the very same thing can be said with respect to *CCF*s; worlds with different true *CCF*s are not accessible to us since they are *too far*. Since *CCF*s play a significant role in ordering the closeness of worlds, there is nothing we can do that would amount to "hopping" over all of the worlds with the same true *CCF*s (and the same past and laws) to worlds with *different* true *CCF*s.

To illustrate, suppose that Gabriela is in fact offered a bribe and she (allegedly) freely rejects the bribe, and thus *Reject* is true. If Gabriela could have accepted the bribe, then there is a world in which she accepts the bribe that was accessible to Gabriela. So Gabriela could have done something that would amount to "hopping" over all of the worlds with the same true *CCF*s (and the same past and laws) to a world in which *Reject* is false and *Accept* is true. But if both *CCF*s and facts about the laws play a significant role in ordering the closeness of worlds, then why can't Gabriela *also* "hop" over all of the worlds with the same laws to worlds with different laws? After all, if the distance between worlds with different true *CCF*s doesn't preclude an agent's having access to worlds with different true *CCF*s, then we shouldn't think the distance between worlds with different laws precludes an agent's having access to worlds with different laws.

The second similarity between *CCF*s and facts about the laws which I wish to highlight holds only under the assumption that the laws are non-Humean. The similarity in question is that both kinds of facts hold or obtain independently of any act of a free creature's will. In order to

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[19] See Lehrer (1976, pp. 253–254) and Fischer and Todd (2011, pp. 101–105).

[20] To be clear, I'm not suggesting that the distance of worlds *makes it the case* that certain worlds are not accessible to us. Rather, I'm only suggesting that such distance *entails* that certain worlds are not accessible to us. After all, the distance of worlds is supposed to be arranged in such a way that tracks our intuitions about counterfactual claims given the Stalnaker-Lewis semantics for counterfactuals. Hence, the proper account of the distance of worlds is presumably partly determined by our abilities, and not the other way around.

[21] For a similar claim regarding the relevance of the distance of a world to an agent's abilities, see Spencer (2013, p. 157).

illustrate this similarity, I will compare both kinds of facts with temporally relational (soft) facts. Soft facts are typically taken to be compatible with the ability to do otherwise. This compatibility, I suggest, can be explained by noting a relevant difference between soft facts and facts about non-Humean laws. This difference, however, also obtains between soft facts and *CCF*s. I now proceed to discuss soft facts and their bearing upon Perszyk's challenge.

Roughly 250 million years ago, the supercontinent Pangea existed. The proposition '*Pangea exists*' was thus true 250 million years ago at time *t**. This proposition is a temporally intrinsic (hard) fact. Suppose it was also true 250 million years ago at time *t** that '*Pangea exists 250 million years prior to Jones' sitting at time t*', such that time *t* is five minutes from now. This proposition is a temporally relational (soft) fact. Some libertarians do not view the existence of soft facts to be incompatible with the ability to do otherwise. However, we can construct an argument for the incompatibility of the existence of soft facts and the ability to do otherwise that parallels the consequence argument. Take 'H' to refer to the complete state of the world at *t**, 250 million years ago. Take 'X' to refer to the proposition '*It was true 250 million years ago that Pangea exists 250 million years prior to Jones' sitting at time t*'. Lastly, take 'Y' to refer to the proposition '*Jones sits at t*'. Now, consider the following argument for the incompatibility of the existence of soft facts and the ability to do otherwise:

> *The Anti-Soft Facts Argument*
> 1E.   N((H & X) ⊃ Y)
> 2E.   N(H & X)
> 3E.   N(Y)

Premise (3E) entails that Jones is unable to refrain from sitting at *t*. Generalizing from (3E), it follows that the existence of soft facts are incompatible with the ability to do otherwise. Can the libertarian who endorses the consequence argument consistently accept the existence of soft facts? I think they can. To see this, let's first see how the libertarian who endorses *The Consequence Argument* cannot respond to *The Anti-Soft Facts Argument*.

If the laws are deterministic, then "our acts are the deductive consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past."[22] Similarly, given the existence of soft facts, our acts are the deductive consequences of soft facts and events in the remote past. In other words, it is indisputable that □((H & X) ⊃ Y). Thus, given that the libertarian who endorses *The Consequence Argument* accepts the validity of Alpha, such a libertarian must accept (1E). Since such a libertarian also accepts the validity of Beta, she must accept that *The Anti-Soft Facts Argument* is valid. So the only plausible way for such a libertarian to reject the soundness of *The Anti-Soft Facts Argument* is by denying (2E). Since the libertarian who endorses *The Consequence Argument* obviously cannot consistently deny N(H), she must thereby deny N(X). In other words, she must reject 'the fixity of soft facts'. Is there a relevant difference between X and L that can motivate the claim that N(L) is true but that N(X) is false? I think there is.

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[22] van Inwagen (1983, p. 16).

Patrick Todd (2013) has recently argued for a new (and, to my mind, plausible) way to cash out the soft/hard fact distinction, viz. in terms of ontological dependence. The soft/hard fact distinction has often been drawn in terms of entailment, an example of which by Todd (2013, p. 834) goes as follows:[23]

> **(ENT-S)** A fact *F* at a time *t* is soft if and only if there is some 'basic' fact *F** about the future relative to *t* such that, necessarily, *F* is a fact only if *F** is a fact.

> **(ENT-H)** A fact *F* at a time *t* is hard if and only if it is not the case that there is some 'basic' fact *F** about the future relative to *t* such that, necessarily, *F* is a fact only if *F** is a fact.

Todd (2013, p. 835) offers a counterexample to ENT-S in order to show that entailment is not enough to capture the soft/hard fact distinction:

> If God has decreed that Jones is to sit at t, this entails that Jones sits at *t*—God's decrees infallibly come to pass. Given this fact, it follows that God has decreed that Jones will sit at *t* necessarily only if Jones sits at *t*. Moreover, that Jones sits at *t* is obviously a 'basic' fact about *t*. However, it seems plainly incorrect to say that God's past *decrees* concerning the future *depend* on the future (relative to the time the decrees were made).

Since God's decrees are intuitively not soft facts, Todd (2013, p. 839) offers the following alternative account of a soft fact:

> **(IDT-S)** A fact *F* at a time *t* is soft if and only if *F* specifies an entity *E* as having a property *P* at *t*, and whether *E* counts as having *P* at *t* is at least in part determined by whether there exists an event or events in the future relative to *t*.

By employing the phrase 'determined by', Todd is appealing to the currently prevalent notion of ontological dependence that does not reduce to modal terms.[24] We need not get bogged down in the details of IDT-S or the contemporary debate about ontological dependence. The overall lesson is that if Todd is on the right track, then we should think that X—'*It was true 250 million years ago that Pangea exists 250 million years prior to Jones' sitting at time t*'—is at least partly determined by Jones' sitting at *t*. As a result, the libertarian can plausibly deny that N(X) given the following intuitive principle:

> ***The Choice Principle (Choice)*** For any proposition *p*, agent *S*, and time *t*, *S* has a W-choice at *t* about whether *p* *iff* either (i) *p* is true at least partly in virtue of *S*'s *φ*-ing at *t*, and *S* had the ability to refrain from *φ*-ing at *t,* or (ii) *p* is true at least partly in virtue of

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[23] See the collection of essays in Fischer (1989).
[24] See, e.g., Fine (1995).

some event *e* that was caused by *S*'s *φ*-ing at *t*, and *S* had the ability to refrain from *φ*-ing at *t*, and if *S* had not *φ*-ed at *t*, *e* would not have occurred.

The phrase 'in virtue of' is meant to track the same notion of ontological dependence that Todd is referring to when he employs the phrase 'determined by'. Now, *Choice* entails that it is false that N(X) if Jones was able to refrain from sitting at *t*, despite the fact that X. So the libertarian who adopts *Choice* has a plausible way to deny (2E). Let's now consider the implications of *Choice* for *The Consequence Argument* and *The Anti-Molinist Argument*.

Unless the compatibilist is a Humean about laws, she cannot adopt a similar strategy to deny N(L) and thus to deny (2A). This is because unless Humeanism about laws is true, L is not true even partly in virtue of any act of any person (or even partly in virtue of some event that was caused by some act of some person). So if *Choice* is true and Humeanism about laws is false, then N(L) is true. Now, I am admitting that if Humeanism about laws is true, then *The Consequence Argument* is probably not sound. But I think that Beebee and Mele (2002) have effectively demonstrated this anyway. Moreover, I think that what libertarians had (or, at any rate, *should* have had) in mind all along is that *non*-Humean laws are incompatible with the ability to do otherwise. For, consider what van Inwagen (2004, p. 349) says in defense of the premise (premise (6)) that "J was not able to render L false":

> The ability that premise (6)…says that J does not have is the ability to perform a miracle. And since it's entirely plausible to suppose that ordinary people in ordinary circumstances are not able to perform miracles, it's entirely plausible to suppose that (6) is true.

That we are unable in ordinary circumstances to perform miracles should, if anything, count against the existence of Humean laws, not the compatibility of Humean laws and the ability to do otherwise. For, there seems to be no relevant difference between Humean laws and soft facts. But surely the defender of *The Consequence Argument* does not wish to claim that her argument is sound *iff The Anti-Soft Facts Argument* is sound. Rather, it is better for the libertarian to instead concede that Humean laws are compatible with the ability to do otherwise.[25]

Let's simply grant for the sake of argument that the libertarian who endorses *The Consequence Argument* admits that the argument is not sound if Humeanism about laws is true. We thereby have a reason to think that soft facts are compatible with the ability to do otherwise and that (non-Humean) determinism is incompatible with the ability to do otherwise because only soft facts are true at least partly in virtue of what we freely do. This result only places the Molinist in a more difficult position with respect to Perszyk's challenge.

As we saw earlier, *CCF*s are true logically prior to God's decision of which world to actualize. *A fortiori*, *CCF*s are true logically prior to any creature's free choice. Consequently, just like facts about non-Humean laws, no *CCF* has its truth-value even partly in virtue of

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[25] See Beebee and Mele's (2002, pp. 207–208) discussion of the similarity between soft facts (or facts about the future) and facts about Humean laws.

anyone's (any *creature's*) free choice or even partly in virtue of some event that was caused by anyone's free choice. Hence, while *Choice* renders the intuitively correct verdict that N(X) is false and N(L) is true (if Humeanism is false), *Choice* also renders the verdict that N($\alpha \rightarrow \beta$) is true. In other words, while *Choice* undermines *The Anti-Soft Facts Argument*, *Choice* gives us good reason to think that *The Consequence Argument* and *The Anti-Molinist Argument* are both sound.

Conclusion

I have argued that Wierenga has not succeeded in defusing Perszyk's challenge by appealing to accidental necessity. Whatever the Molinist wishes to say regarding accidental necessity and true *CCF*s, the compatibilist can maintain the same position regarding accidental necessity and, e.g. facts about the laws. In order for the Molinist to consistently endorse the consequence argument, she must say what the relevant difference is between true *CCF*s and facts about the laws (and facts about the past). And, this has not yet been done. Moreover, I have attempted to strengthen Perszyk's challenge by noting two salient similarities between *CCF*s and facts about the laws. According to the first similarity, *CCF*s and facts about the laws both play a significant role in ordering the closeness of worlds. According to the second similarity, *CCF*s and facts about the (non-Humean) laws both hold or obtain independently of any act of a free creature's will. I want to emphasize, however, that even if my attempts to strengthen Perszyk's challenge fail, the burden is still on the Molinist to highlight some relevant difference between the consequence argument and the anti-Molinist argument. Until this is done, it is fair to say that the Molinist still cannot endorse the consequence argument.[26]

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