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IS MOLINISM AS BAD AS CALVINISM?

Jerry L. Walls

This paper compares the theories of providence and predestination in Molinism and Calvinism. My particular concern is with whether Molinism is beset with the same sort of disturbing moral implications which plague Calvinism. I conclude that Molinism is better off than Calvinism in this regard, but still fails to give us a satisfactory account of God's goodness and will to save all persons. I suggest an amended version of Molinism to repair this difficulty, according to which God gives all persons an optimal amount of grace and equal opportunity to respond to it.

I

In his little book *The Natural History of Religion*, David Hume has an interesting account of why men profess belief in divine goodness. At its roots, this profession is largely motivated by fear. That is to say, men ascribe goodness to God because they are afraid of what He might do to them if they were to say or think anything negative about Him.

In spite of this, men often detest God in their hearts. For God is depicted as acting toward us in ways which we would find highly blameworthy in other persons. There is, Hume says, a strong contradiction between religious representations of God and "our natural ideas of generosity, lenity, impartiality, and justice."¹

To illustrate his point, Hume cites the doctrines of predestination and reprobation. In a footnote, he quotes at length a passage from Chevalier Ramsay, a writer who rejected these doctrines in favor of a doctrine of universal salvation. Ramsay depicts predestination as a doctrine surrounded by a thick cloud of mystery. It is utterly baffling to us why God would choose to elect the vast majority of mankind to eternal reprobation. The predestinarian Doctors would insist, however, that we must not question God: "He has secret reasons for his conduct, that are impenetrable; and though he appears unjust and barbarous, yet we must believe the contrary, because what is injustice, crime, cruelty, and the blackest malice in us, is in him justice, mercy, and sovereign goodness."²

Hume goes on to tell us that Ramsay further asserts, in other places, "that the *Arminian* and *Molinist* schemes serve very little to mend the matter." This is the claim I wish to explore in this paper. Is Molinism really as bad as Calvinism?³



Before proceeding farther, I wish to spell out in a bit more detail the key terms of this question. By Molinism, I mean the theory of providence and predestination proposed by Luis de Molina during a sixteenth century controversy over the relation between divine grace and human free will. Molina, a Jesuit, developed his theory as an alternative to the view which he attributed to his Dominican opponents. He summarized what he took to be their position in four propositions, which I paraphrase as follows: 1) before predestination, some were elected to salvation through an absolute choice on God's part, prior to any foreknowledge of the circumstances and use of free choice on the part of men; 2) likewise, others were rejected by an absolute choice on God's part; 3) the predestination of those elected for salvation was fixed in a predetermination to confer on them the efficacious aids by which their wills would be so determined that they would certainly perform those works which lead to eternal life; 4) the others are excluded from salvation by virtue of the fact that God did not decide to confer on them similar aids.⁴

The view thus summed up by Molina is what I shall call Calvinism. While this view is prominently associated with John Calvin, the great reformer, it has been held by a number of significant thinkers, both Roman and Protestant. So I am using the term "Calvinism" generically to refer to this broad account of predestination.

This conception of predestination is problematic for a number of reasons. These reasons are clearly expressed by Molina in the following significant passage:

In fact, if the method of predestining some adults and not others was the one which has been gleaned from the theory of these authors with their predeterminations, then I do not see in what sense it is true that God wills that all human beings be saved if they themselves do not prevent it, or in what sense it is true and not fictitious that all human beings without exception have been created by God for eternal life. Nor do I see how God could justifiably reproach the nonpredestinate for not living in a pious and holy manner and for not attaining eternal life; indeed I do not see how it is true that God has placed human beings in the hand of their own counsel, so that they might direct their actions as they will. To the contrary, given this method of predestination and predeterminations, the freedom of the created faculty of choice perishes, and the justice and goodness of God with respect to the reprobate are greatly obfuscated and obscured. Thus, this theory is neither pious nor in any way safe from the point of view of the faith.⁵

The difficulties cited by Molina are obviously interrelated. What is most unacceptable about the view in question is that it undermines any substantial

view of God's goodness and justice. God's goodness is closely connected with His desire to save all persons. An essential component of goodness is a desire for the happiness of others. God's goodness is evident in His wish that all persons enjoy the happiness of eternal life. An essential aspect of justice is demanding no more of others than they are able to perform. God's demand that we live holy lives is just only if we are able to do so, or are enabled by grace to do so. As Molina saw it, his opponents' view of predestination entailed that those who are lost are never really able to live holy lives.

This brings us to what is perhaps the fundamental difficulty with this account of predestination, namely, that it eliminates the freedom of created wills. In the pages which precede and follow the passage above, Molina expends considerable energy arguing this point. He maintains that his opponents' theory of intrinsically efficacious grace entails that those who are deprived of such grace are not able to dissent from the sins they commit; nor are they able to perform any of the good acts which they fail to perform. Those who receive such grace, on the other hand, cannot but perform the good acts which they perform.

For Molina, it is essential to maintain an account of freedom such that created wills are able either to cooperate with or to resist God's grace. Freedom is not compatible with the sort of determinism he perceived in his opponents.⁶

Now then, let us come back to the problems which Calvinism poses with respect to God's justice and mercy. The notion that God predestines some persons for damnation by withholding from them the grace with which they would live holy lives and attain salvation seems to make nonsense of both of these divine attributes. For what sense would it make to say God desired the salvation of persons from whom He deliberately chose to withhold efficacious grace? And in what sense could God be just if He demanded persons to live righteously who were never able to do so? It is hard to imagine how God could be just in punishing such persons with eternal damnation. For such punishment seems arbitrary and wicked. Indeed, it is little wonder that John Wesley said Calvinism made God worse than the devil.⁷

However, it is worth stressing that even defenders of Calvinism struggle with the moral implications of their theory. The typical way out is to make an appeal to mystery. While Ramsay's depiction of Calvinism—cited above—is perhaps a bit of a caricature, it is not far off the mark. Calvinists often revel in mystery to the point of making it a virtue. They see it as an expression of true piety to quell all moral doubts and objections in the face of God's impenetrable decrees. Molina of course, had a very different notion of piety: for him it would be "neither pious nor safe" to subscribe to the Calvinistic theory of predestination.

Now then, it should be clear what I mean when I ask whether Molinism is as *bad* as Calvinism. This is shorthand for the question of whether Molinism is equally beset by the sort of disturbing moral implications which plague Calvinism.

It is my impression that Calvinists often find comfort in the thought that Molinism is just as bad. On a superficial level, they may say, it appears that Molinism can avoid the problems which embarrass Calvinists. However, when the logic of Molinism is spelled out, it becomes obvious that Molinists are no better off than Calvinists.

II

In order to see why some think Molinism is as bad as Calvinism, we need to know a little more about the Molinist theory of predestination and providence. The key to his view on these matters is his idea of God's 'middle knowledge.' Molina concisely characterizes God's middle knowledge as that

by which, in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice, 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—even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite.⁸

By way of analysis, let us single out the crucial aspects of this definition. First of all, middle knowledge is so called because it is 'between' God's natural knowledge and His free knowledge. God's natural knowledge is of metaphysically necessary truths and is known by Him prior to His decision to create. His free knowledge is of metaphysically contingent truths which are known by God consequent upon His decision to create. That is, it is God's knowledge of which contingent states of affairs will obtain and which will not. God's free choice is what determines which contingent states of affairs will obtain.

Middle knowledge is between these two in the sense that it shares a characteristic of each. It is like natural knowledge in that it is known by God prior to His decision to create. It is like free knowledge in that it pertains to metaphysically contingent truths. For the object of middle knowledge is what free wills—or, we might say, persons with free will—*would do* in given circumstances or states of affairs.

The range of this knowledge is infinite. Indeed, it is staggering even to begin to try to realize what such knowledge involves. It involves knowledge of what all creatable persons would do in all possible states of affairs. It includes knowledge of all eventualities which would result from all possible free choices. This means God knows an infinite number of things which *would have* happened if the appropriate circumstances were actualized but which will in fact never happen. For instance, consider Jones who is killed at an early age. God knows what Jones would do in all possible circumstances, and thus, He knows what Jones would have done if he had lived longer and faced such and such situations. God

knows whether he would have married, had children—and if he would have—what his children would have done, and so on.⁹

It is important to stress that this knowledge is of choices which are free in a very strong sense. The free wills are such that they could make very different choices from the ones God knows they would make. This means that God has no control over what He knows through middle knowledge. What He knows depends on what choices free wills would actually make.

Next, let us consider how it is that God has such middle knowledge according to Molina. In his view, God comprehends each free will by seeing in His own essence what each such will would do with its freedom. This is the least satisfactory aspect of Molina's theory. He seems to take it as obvious that God's perfect knowledge of His own essence involves knowledge of what choices free wills would make. However, it is far from obvious that this is the case. The basic idea that God knows what is possible through knowledge of His essence is sensible enough as is the claim that the created order in some sense mirrors the divine essence. But *the manner* in which God can know what choices would actually be made by free creatures remains quite mysterious.

There are other problems with middle knowledge which I will not discuss here.¹⁰ My purpose at present is not to defend the notion, but only to explore some of its implications. So I will assume in what follows that the idea of middle knowledge is both coherent and plausible.

Given this assumption, let us now state briefly Molina's concept of predestination and providence. The essence of his view of providence is that God arranges the world as He will, in light of what He knows by middle knowledge. God's providence covers free choices in the sense that He brings it about that free wills are placed in such and such circumstances knowing they will make such and such free choices. God's concurrence, of course, underlies all aspects of providence, including free choice. All good actions are specifically *intended* by God while evil actions are *permitted* by God's providence for the sake of some greater good.¹¹

Predestination should be understood as one aspect of God's overall providence. That is to say, God predestines specific persons to salvation and damnation only in the sense that He brings about or permits the circumstances in which He knows those persons will freely choose either salvation or damnation.

It is important to recognize that Molina had a number of connected motives for developing his view of middle knowledge. In the first place, he was concerned to maintain that God's knowledge of the future is both detailed and absolutely certain. In a similar way, he wanted to insist that God exercises particular, not merely a general, providence over all of creation. To think otherwise would detract from God's glory. Molina is also interested to defend middle knowledge for the simple reason that he thinks it is clearly implied in certain passages of

scripture, including words of Christ.¹² But there is another fundamental motivation at work, namely, Molina's desire to preserve libertarian freedom. This is necessary in order to make sense of the notion that God justly rewards or punishes us for our actions. Without libertarian freedom, it is difficult if not impossible to make sense of the claim that some are damned even though God wishes to save all persons. For if persons are not free in the libertarian sense, it would seem to follow that if God wishes to save all of them, then all in fact will be saved. For if freedom is compatible with determinism, then God could save all persons, and do it in such a way that all would freely choose salvation.

In Molina's view, it is not possible to maintain both human freedom and a strong view of providence without resorting to middle knowledge. If we want to hold an adequate view of divine foreknowledge and providence, we have a choice: we must either accept middle knowledge or a conception of absolute predestination which totally destroys human freedom. For Molina the choice is obvious. If we accept middle knowledge we can maintain that God's knowledge of the future is absolutely certain *and* that our choices are altogether free—just as if there were no foreknowledge.¹³

Now then, is Molina's view as triumphant as he imagines? Or is Calvinism, or something as bad, lurking beneath the surface, as some critics think?

Let us try to state what the critics have in mind. It seems to be something like this: Molinism is just as bad as Calvinism because according to it, God puts people, or allows them to be put, in circumstances in which He knows they will choose evil and be damned. If this is so, the Calvinist may urge, the seeming moral superiority of Molinism is really an illusion.

III

To evaluate the critics' claim, let us compare two possible worlds. First, we have the Calvinist world.¹⁴ In this world God predestines a specific number of persons to be saved by deciding to confer on them whatever amount of grace is necessary to *assure* their salvation. Let us describe this grace as efficacious. God rejects the rest of the persons in this world by withholding from them the grace without which they cannot be saved.¹⁵

Next, let us consider the Molinist world. For the sake of comparison, let us make it as much like the Calvinist world as we can. Let us say the same persons are saved and damned in this world as in the Calvinist world. Furthermore, let us say the states of affairs in this world are as much as possible like the states of affairs in the Calvinist world. The difference is that in the Molinist world, God predestines who will be saved and who damned by bringing about the circumstances in which He knows the persons involved will freely choose either salvation or damnation. All persons are given sufficient grace to enable them to

have faith, do good works, and be saved; but none are given so much grace that their freedom is overridden. Whether or not God's grace is efficacious depends on the response of the persons who receive it. If they respond positively, it will be efficacious. If they reject it, it will not be efficacious.

At first glance, it might seem as if the Molinist world is as bad as the Calvinist world. However, there is an important difference between them which weighs against this conclusion. In the Molinist world, since all are given sufficient grace to make their salvation possible, there are grounds for the claim that God's punishment of the damned is just. For such persons could have been saved and are damned due to the fact that they refused the grace which God offered. In the Calvinist world, on the other hand, the damnation of such persons is ultimately traceable to the fact that God did not decide to confer on them efficacious grace. The grounds for God's punishment of these persons totally escapes us. It is incomprehensible how God could be thought just in the Calvinist world. So there seems to be no warrant thus far for the claim that Molinism is as bad as Calvinism.

However, this does not settle the issue entirely for there are still important questions to be asked about the Molinist world. Let us consider some of them.

First, what if God knows it is the case that many of the persons in the Molinist world who are damned would have been saved if He had arranged the world in a different way by putting them in different circumstances?¹⁶ What if God knows some of the damned persons would have been saved if He had allowed them to live longer, or perhaps not have allowed them to live as long?

Let us reflect on the case of two persons who are raised in very different circumstances. One is born into a home in which he is deprived of both physical and emotional needs. He is never loved and receives virtually no religious instruction. He eventually becomes a criminal and dies a violent death. The other is born into a loving family which provides for all his needs, including his spiritual needs. He is faithfully taught the Christian faith and becomes himself a devout believer. Now then, suppose God knows the first would also have become a devout believer if he had been raised in the second person's circumstances.

Or consider the case of two profligate men, both of whom are familiar with Christianity but have up until time *T* rejected the gospel. At time *T* they are involved in an automobile accident, in which one dies while the other lives. Let us say the second eventually becomes a saint and is saved while the first is damned. Suppose God knows the first would also have become a saint if he had lived.

Or let us think about an interesting passage from John Wesley's *Journal*. He tells us about an earnest young convert who was full of the love of God. He had set out ahead of Wesley on his horse, but was thrown and broke his neck. Someone came along just in time to set his neck back in place and save his life.

Now what is somewhat surprising is Wesley's response to the incident: "O mystery of providence—Why did not this man die, when he was full of humble, holy love?"¹⁷ Wesley's fear, apparently, was that the young man would turn away from the love of God and be lost.

Finally, in the same vein, let us consider Bertrand Russell's remarks on the notion that salvation and damnation may depend on fortuitous circumstances. This belief, Russell noted, motivated at least one very dubious practice:

The Spaniards in Mexico and Peru used to baptize Indian infants and then immediately dash their brains out: by this means, they secured that these infants went to Heaven. No orthodox Christian can find any logical reason for condemning their actions, although all nowadays do.¹⁸

Leaving aside Russell's claim that a Christian has no good reason to condemn this practice, let us reflect on the larger implications of the case. What if God knows many of the slaughtered infants would have become wicked persons had they lived? Is their salvation really in some way secured by the fact that they were murdered before they had the chance to go astray?

What all these cases suggest is that it is very odd, to say the least, to think that salvation and damnation might ultimately hinge on such factors as the circumstances of one's birth or the time of his death. Indeed, it does not seem just.

But the real issue is deeper. To see this, let us reflect on such cases in view of the claim that God, in His perfect love, desires to save all persons. If this is so, it does not seem God would allow anyone to be damned through unfavorable circumstances. To the contrary, it may seem God is such that He would, if possible, somehow eliminate the disadvantages some have because of unfavorable circumstances and give all an equal opportunity to be saved. That is to say, it may be that God will ultimately distribute His grace equally among all persons. And this notion, I want to suggest, may provide a solution to the difficulties in Molinism we have just encountered.

However, it is by no means a simple task to say in detail what may be involved in God's distributing his grace equally to all persons. As a rough approximation, let us consider the following. Suppose there is some measure of grace N which represents the optimal amount of influence toward good which God can exercise on someone's will without destroying his freedom.¹⁹ What I am suggesting is that if God desires to save all persons, He will give to all this measure of grace. This measure of grace will, however, differ in some respects from one person to another. What represents measure N for Jones may completely overwhelm Smith in such a way that his freedom is destroyed. Moreover, what is effective in influencing Smith toward good may only make Jones more resistant. So the giving of equal grace does not in any way entail treating all persons in just the same way. It means doing what is best for each individual to elicit a positive

response from him.

I would say grace is distributed equally if grace of measure *N* is given to all persons to the extent that each makes a decisive response to it, either positively or negatively. What is crucial here is the idea of a decisive response, but it is important to recognize that this is closely connected to the idea of an optimal measure of grace.

First, let us consider what a decisive response amounts to. I would propose that it is a settled response which is made with full understanding. Such a response would not be haphazard, superficial, or prone to change in shifting circumstances or with reflection on new information. Such a response could be described as a rooted disposition. As such, it normally would not be achieved in a moment, but rather only through a longer series of choices. Thus, one's initial choices might be against God and the good, but in the long run one might come to love God in a settled way. What is decisive is not one's initial choices, but the settled disposition one ultimately acquires.

Given God's desire to save all persons, a decisive negative response only makes sense in light of optimal grace. That is to say, a negative response to God is decisive only if one persists in rejecting God in the most favorable circumstances. Only then is it clear that one has rejected God in a settled way with full understanding.

Thus, in our case above of the two profligate men, I am inclined to say the one killed had not decisively rejected God. Although his initial response to grace was negative, he would have become a saintly person had he lived longer. This suggests that his initial negative reaction to God was not really a settled response. If God knows this, it may be the case that God will give him the grace at the moment of death to begin to become what he would have become if he had not died. Further spiritual growth could occur after death. The same is true of our person born into a life of deprivation. His life of crime does not constitute a decisive rejection of God since he has not rejected God in the most favorable circumstances, and would, moreover, have become a devout believer in different circumstances. God, we may assume, could bring about the appropriate favorable circumstances during the passage of death, thereby making up for his previous deprivation. Then he could make a fully deliberate response to God. Something like this, I think, would represent grace of measure *N* for this person.

Now let us come back to Molina himself. How would he respond to my suggestions? Unfortunately, it is his view that: "God does not provide for all human beings and angels equally or in the same way, with regard to either supernatural or natural gifts, but rather decides to distribute the gifts of His mercy as He pleases, though no one is ever deprived of what is necessary."²⁰

Moreover, Molina does not believe God always does as much as possible, short of destroying our freedom, in order to save us. This is reflected in his

remarks on how God hardens some sinners:

Now there are two ways in which one is said to harden a sinner: First, if one *does not grant* greater or different aids with which he foresees that the sinner will be softened and cured Second, if he *removes* certain aids and permits greater temptation and occasions of sinning by which the sinner's own hardness assumes more strength and conversion is rendered more difficult—this usually occurs as an absolutely just punishment for previous sins.²¹

Translated into my terminology, this means God bestows on some persons a measure of grace less than N , say $N-2$, knowing these persons will not respond positively to that measure of grace, but would respond positively to grace of measure N .

While it would be true that such persons did indeed have a genuine opportunity to be saved, and freely rejected it, I do not see how it could be maintained that God desired their salvation. For He could bring it about that they would freely accept salvation merely by bestowing more grace upon them.

Moreover, Molina believes that while God hardens some by permitting them to fall into greater temptation, He spares others by removing them by premature death before they fall into mortal sin. This is the point of Wisdom 4:11, which Molina cites as Scriptural evidence for this theory of middle knowledge.²² So some are spared who would have fallen into mortal sin had they lived longer, while others are subjected to greater temptation or denied the grace with which they would have been converted. On these points, Molina seems perilously close to Calvinism. For God is depicted as bestowing or withholding extra grace as He will, and this undermines the claim that He desires to save all persons.

As we noted above, an essential aspect of God's perfect goodness (in worlds which contain creatures) is a desire for the happiness of others. If our true happiness is found in salvation, it follows that God desires our salvation. If there are any persons whose salvation God does not desire, then He does not desire the happiness of those persons. And if there are some whose happiness God does not desire, His perfect goodness is compromised. So God's perfect goodness seems to entail that He desires the salvation of all persons, and will accordingly give all an optimal measure of grace.

In rejecting this, Molina seems to be caught in the middle—between Calvinism and the view I have proposed, according to which God gives all an equal opportunity to be saved. While Molinism is not as bad as Calvinism, it is not as good as it could be. The main reason for this is that it does not provide an adequate account of God's desire to save all persons. It only partially avoids the notion that God arbitrarily saves some while allowing others to be damned, which is, no doubt, the most troublesome aspect of Calvinism.

IV

Now then, I would like to respond to some objections which are likely to be raised to what I have argued thus far.

First, the question may be asked why anyone should endeavor now to love God and do good if there may be further opportunity at death to receive salvation. If God's perfect goodness entails that all receive an equal chance to be saved, doesn't this undercut the sense of urgency normally associated with seeking salvation? Doesn't it encourage presumption to think there may be a second chance to be saved at the time of death?

In reply to this, I would emphasize that I am not saying anyone has a *second* chance, but rather, that everyone is given the opportunity to make a *decisive* choice either to accept or reject God's will. For some persons, the decisive level of choice may not come in this life due to the fact that they never really understood the Christian message or were otherwise deprived in ways which prevented them from making a deliberate choice on the matter.

This does not, however, provide any ground for anyone to presume his present choices do not count. Anyone who understands the argument I have presented is probably at least fairly well informed on religious matters. Such a person would not likely be among those who don't really understand the Christian message. If such persons continue to reject salvation on the presumption that they can repent later, it may well be that they are forming, by that very attitude, a settled disposition to prefer their will to God's will.

Another objection to the account I have defended goes like this: if God's perfect goodness entails that He will give all persons an optimal measure of His grace, then in reality, the concept of grace has been eliminated. For if God is necessarily perfectly good (which I accept) then it is a matter of necessity that He grant such grace to all. And if it is a matter of necessity, it is not truly grace, for grace is by definition something which God freely bestows.

It is certainly true that an emphasis on divine freedom has been central in many traditional accounts of grace. Calvinism, of course, is the clearest example of this with its doctrine that God bestows or withholds grace as He will. The freedom of grace is thus bound up with its unequal distribution. As Calvin put it: "the very inequality of [God's] grace proves that it is free."²³

I want to argue, however, that what is essential to the notion of grace is not that it is bestowed or withheld at will, but that it is undeserved. The idea that grace is freely bestowed is easily run together with the idea that it is undeserved. That is to say, it is easy to think that because none of us deserves grace, God can give it to whomever He will, overlooking the rest.

However, I think it is possible to maintain the lack of human desert without

holding that God is free to withhold grace from anyone He will. To see this, let us consider a parental analogy. Suppose a father has two children, both of whom go against his wishes by living reckless lives. Eventually both become addicted to drugs and require rehabilitation. The father has ample means and gladly pays for their rehabilitation. Later, however, both revert to their old lifestyle and again become addicted and need rehabilitation. This happens several times. Suppose the father knows somehow that if he rehabilitates them one more time, they will get their lives in order and become responsible persons. But suppose he decides to rehabilitate only one of his children, leaving the other in a state of lifelong drug addiction and misery.

How would we judge this case? I think we would say that neither of the children deserved their father's help. He did not owe it to them to rehabilitate them over and over. However, if the father knows his children would go right if he were to rehabilitate them one more time, then I think we would doubt his love for his children if he declined to do so, especially if he has ample means. Moreover, we would think him a better person if he were to rehabilitate both, rather than only one. He would not be a perfectly good father if he left one of his children in a state of misery if he could help it.

In the same way, I do not think God's perfect goodness can be maintained if it is held that God withholds grace from some, or distributes His grace unevenly, in such a way that some are damned who would otherwise be saved. God's nature as a perfectly good being is such that He necessarily gives all persons an equal opportunity to be saved. This does not destroy the notion of grace, however, for it remains true that we do not deserve salvation. It is still true that the ultimate ground of salvation lies in what God is, not in what we are.

There is, moreover, still an important element of freedom in grace. For God did not create necessarily, but freely. Praise and gratitude are due to God since His choice to create is what makes our salvation and eternal happiness possible.

A third objection can be put as follows: if God knows some persons will not respond positively to His grace, even when bestowed in an optimal way, then why does He create those persons? If God creates such persons, you still have a problem analogous to the problem in Molina's position. It is not enough for God to give an equal portion of His grace to those persons. The problem lies precisely in the claim that God knowingly creates such persons.

This is a weighty objection which I must admit is not resolved by my revision of Molinism. A fundamental question persists concerning God's goodness if He creates persons knowing they will resist His grace and be damned.

I want to insist, however, that the problem here is not as great as that in Molina's position. In the account I have sketched, God's perfect goodness is evident in the fact that He saves as many persons as possible without destroying their freedom. In Molina's scheme, however, God's perfect goodness is com-

promised, as I argued above. Like the father in our analogy who decides not to rehabilitate one of his children, Molina's God is depicted as withholding grace from persons He knows would respond positively to it. Thus, He does not save as many persons as possible.

But is not God's goodness likewise compromised in creating persons He knows will be damned? If it is assumed that God could create a world of free creatures in which none are damned, perhaps the answer is yes. But this assumption is open to question. Perhaps God cannot create a world of free creatures in which all respond positively to His grace. Perhaps the best creatable world with free creatures includes some who will not respond to even an optimal measure of grace. It may be that all God can do in this regard is create as few such persons as possible.

Of course, it would require further work to suggest why God could not altogether avoid creating persons who would decisively reject His grace. No doubt the best we could do in this respect is speculate what those reasons might be, and for the purposes of this paper I do think this is necessary. But if it is plausible to think there are such reasons, it seems to me the difficulty in God's creating persons He knows will be damned is largely mitigated. It could still be argued, of course, that God should not create a world with free creatures at all if He knows some will be damned. But this judgment is far from evident.

I conclude then, that the amended version of Molinism is indeed morally preferable to Molina's position, just as Molinism represents a distinct, albeit slight, moral advance over Calvinism.²⁴

Asbury Theological Seminary

NOTES

1. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1956, pp. 67-68.

2. P. 69n.

3. It is no doubt the case that neither Molinism nor Calvinism are as bad as Ramsay construes them to be. This should not distract us from the effective way he raised the question about the relative merits of the two positions.

4. *On Divine Foreknowledge* (Part IV of the *Concordia*), [Hereafter *Concordia*], trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), qu. 14, art. 13, disp. 53, Part 2, no. 24.

5. *Concordia*, qu. 14, art. 13, disp. 53, part 2, no. 29.

6. Molina reports that when his opponents are pressed to see the incompatibility between their view of predestination and freedom, they flee toward the "'anchor of ignorance,' claiming that, instead of rejecting predeterminations, it is better to join Cajetan in confessing that we are ignorant of the

way in which freedom of choice fits together with foreknowledge, providence, predestination and reprobation." *Concordia*, qu. 14, art. 13, disp. 53, part 2, no. 20.

7. *Works*, London, 1872, 7:382.

8. *Concordia*, qu. 14, art. 13, disp. 52, no. 9.

9. For a fascinating discussion of this point, see *Concordia*, qu. 14, art. 13, disp. 53, part 2, no. 15.

10. See Robert M. Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 109-17; Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979, pp. 61-71; William Hasker, "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge," *Nous* (December, 1986), pp. 545-57.

11. *Concordia*, qu. 14, art. 13, disp. 53, part 3, nos. 13-18.

12. The Scripture passages cited by Molina are the following: I Samuel 23:10-12; Wisdom 4:11; Matthew 11:20-24.

13. *Concordia*, qu. 14, art. 13, disp. 51, no. 18; disp. 52, no. 29.

14. I do not really believe such a world is possible, although it is describable. For the difference between a world's being possible as opposed to being describable or conceivable, see Thomas V. Morris, "The Necessity of God's Goodness," *The New Scholasticism*, Vol. 59, pp. 429ff.

15. Calvinists tend to be inconsistent and ambivalent on this latter point. Sometimes they talk as if the damned are given a genuine opportunity to be saved. I have analyzed instances of this elsewhere. See "Can God Save Anyone He Will?" *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 38; esp. pp. 163-71; "The Free Will Defense, Calvinism, Wesley, and the Goodness of God," *Christian Scholar's Review*, Vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 19-33.

16. Let us assume God could do this without bringing it about that any of the persons who are saved in this world would then be damned. I do not see any way to either prove or disprove this assumption. It does, however, seem plausible.

17. *Works*, 2:289; cf. 478.

18. *Why I Am Not a Christian* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1957), p. 35.

19. Compare John Wesley's account of how God's mercy is displayed: ". . . in offering salvation to every creature, actually saving all that consent thereto, and doing for the rest all that infinite wisdom, almighty power, and boundless love can do, without forcing them to be saved, which would be to destroy the very nature that he had given them." *Works*, 10:235.

20. *Concordia*, qu. 14, art. 13, disp. 53, part 3, no. 16.

21. *Concordia*, qu. 23, art. 4 & 5, disp. 4, no. 6.

22. *Concordia*, qu. 14, art. 13, disp. 53, part 1, no. 5.

23. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Westminster, Philadelphia, 1961), 3.21.6.

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