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ANTI-MOLINISM IS UNDEFEATED!

William Hasker

William Craig has recently objected to my defense of Robert Adams' anti-Molinist argument. I argue that all of Craig's objections fail, and anti-Molinism stands undefeated.

In 1994, William Craig published a critique of Robert Adams' anti-Molinist argument.¹ In 1997 I replied,² defending Adams' argument against some of Craig's charges, and Craig has now replied to my defense, as well as to another recent article of mine.³ One might be inclined to think the exchange has gone on long enough, but Craig's response contains a number of misleading statements, and it seems necessary to set the record straight.

Craig states the argument I defend as follows:

1. According to Molinism, the truth of all true counterfactuals of freedom about us is explanatorily prior to God's decision to create us.
2. God's decision to create us is explanatorily prior to our existence.
3. Our existence is explanatorily prior to all of our choices and actions.
4. The relation of explanatory priority is transitive.
5. Therefore it follows from Molinism (by 1-4) that the truth of all true counterfactuals of freedom about us is explanatorily prior to all of our choices and actions.
10. It follows also from Molinism that if I freely do action A in circumstances C, then there is a true counterfactual of freedom F*, which says that if I were in C, then I would (freely) do A.
11. Therefore, it follows from Molinism that if I freely do A in C, the truth of F* is explanatorily prior to my choosing and acting as I do in C.
12. If I freely do A in C, no truth that is strictly inconsistent with my refraining from A in C is explanatorily prior to my choosing and acting as I do in C.
13. The truth of F* (which says that if I were in C, then I would do A) is strictly inconsistent with my refraining from A in C.
14. If Molinism is true, then if I freely do A in C, F* both is (by 11) and is not (by 12-13) explanatorily prior to my choosing and acting as I do in C.
15. Therefore, (by 14) if Molinism is true, then I do not freely do A in C (H236-7).



Craig is mistaken in thinking that this is the argument I defend in my two articles. Specifically, I have not defended (12) against Craig's criticisms of it (see E389, n3); instead, I incorporated elements of Adams' argument into a revised argument of my own (see R226-29).⁴ But while I have not previously defended Adams' argument in its entirety, I am willing to do so now. So we proceed to examine Craig's objections, which comprise three main points.⁵

I

Craig's central criticism of Adams is that the notion of "explanatory priority" is equivocal. To show this, he presents a parallel argument to points 1-5:

For example, suppose my wife and I are considering starting a family and that we come to believe, perhaps on the basis of a Scripture like Proverbs 22.6, that

A*. If children were born to us, they would come to love God. Since this is important to us, we decide to start a family.

Accordingly,

1*. The truth of (A*) is explanatorily prior to our decision to have children.

It is also undeniably true that

2*. Our decision to have children is explanatorily prior to the existence of our children.

3*. Our children's existence is explanatorily prior to their coming to love God.

So if (4) is true [i.e., if explanatory priority is transitive], we must conclude that

5*. The truth of (A*) is explanatorily prior to our children's coming to love God.

But I do not even understand the sense of explanatory priority in (5*) (A859-60).

As I pointed out, "the counterexample is transparently fallacious. What is explanatorily prior to the Craigs' decision to have children is not the *truth* of (A*), but only their *belief* that (A*) is true. . . . The only conclusion that can be validly derived is

5**. The Craigs' belief in the truth of (A*) is explanatorily prior to their children's coming to love God" (E392-3).

To this Craig replies that "the disanalogy noted by Hasker is not an essential part of the illustration. . . . It is incidental to the issue of the transitivity and equivocity of explanatory priority whether our belief that (A*) is knowledge or infallible" (H238). Craig, however, seems to have missed the point of my objection. The only thing that made the counterexample even seem convincing is the oddity of the conclusion (5*). But the correct conclusion, namely (5**), is in no way odd or paradoxical; thus the corrected example casts no doubt whatsoever on Adams' use of explanatory priority.

Craig also suggests that we could modify the example so that the Craigs' belief *is* infallible, for instance by stipulating "that we acquired such knowledge via . . . a prophetic word from God" (H238). To be sure, the idea that God has imparted to the Craigs the knowledge that (A*) is true would, if correct, create difficulties for Adams' argument. But this move renders Craig's argument fallacious in yet another way. The entire point of the present discussion is the coherence of the Molinist account of divine knowledge and providence. But the example involving a divine revelation to the Craigs is precisely an *example* of divine middle knowledge in action. To use a Molinist example in this way to refute an anti-Molinist argument is a classic example of reasoning that is circular and question-begging, a fallacy in anyone's book.

II

As we have seen, Craig's central objection to Adams' argument is that the notion of explanatory priority is equivocal. Still, he notes the possibility that a univocal sense can be specified, but he suspects that "any such notion would be so generic and so weak that in order to avoid conclusions like (5*) we should have to deny its transitivity" (A60). In response, I proposed the following definition, where p and q are contingent states of affairs:

EP. p is explanatorily prior to q iff p must be included in a complete explanation of why q obtains (E390).

In reply, Craig argues that explanatory priority as defined by (EP) cannot be both transitive and irreflexive, as it must be for Adams' argument to succeed:

My wife and I not infrequently find ourselves in the situation that I want to do something if she wants to do it, and she wants to do it if I want to do it. Suppose, then, that John is going to the party because Mary is going, and Mary is going to the party because John is going. It follows that if the (EP) relation is transitive, John is going to the party because John is going to the party, which conclusion is obviously wrong (H 238).

To see why this is a mistake, consider what actually happens between John and Mary in such a situation. There is a party tonight, and one of them (we'll assume it's Mary) gives some signal — either verbal or non-verbal, and perhaps extremely subtle — that she would like to attend. John picks this up and responds with a signal of his own. Perhaps he asks, "What do you think about going to the party tonight?" After a few such exchanges, they both realize that they both would like to go, and they end up by acting on their mutual desire. Mary's initial signal is followed by John's response, which leads in turn to a response from Mary, and so on. At each stage, one person's signal precedes, if only by seconds, the response of the other to that signal. The process may be subtle and complex, but from a causal standpoint it is perfectly straightforward, and there is no violation of asymmetry, as there is in Craig's description. He really ought to have

taken note of my remark that “Apparent counterexamples to asymmetry, where parts of a complex system evolve in mutual dependence on each other, can be avoided by attending to successive stages” (E391).

Craig, however, anticipates the possibility of a reply that would interpret the example so that asymmetry is not violated. Nevertheless, he maintains that “we are free simply to stipulate as a part of our thought experiment that John would not go to the party if Mary were not to go” (H240, n6). But of course, stipulating *that* would not give Craig his counterexample. What he needs to stipulate is that John goes *because* Mary goes, and also that Mary goes because John goes, thus violating asymmetry. But why should we accept such a stipulation? Stipulating an explanatory relation that violates asymmetry does not make such a relation possible, and a counterexample that depends on such an arbitrary stipulation has little force.

III

There remain Craig’s objections to Adams’ (12), objections which I have not previously undertaken to answer. The intuitive idea behind (12) may be summarized as follows: If a proposition is explanatorily prior to a choice I make, so that a full explanation of my being in position to make such a choice must include the truth of that proposition, then it cannot be an open question, at the time when I make the choice, whether that proposition is true or not. Furthermore, if the proposition entails that I will *not*, in the given situation, act in a certain way, it cannot be an open question whether or not I will act that way in that situation. But in order for me to act freely, it must indeed be an open question how I will act in the situation in question. If this much is granted, the truth of (12) is obvious.⁶

Craig has two main objections to (12). First, he says, “it represents the fallacious reasoning of fatalism” (A860). By saying this he means to equate the reasoning behind (12) with the arguments for logical fatalism, which are generally conceded to be fallacious. Logical fatalism argues the inevitability of the events of the future from the simple fact that future-tense propositions describing those events are accepted as being true. The reasoning that lies behind (12), on the other hand, involves the fact that a certain state of affairs is integral to the causal process that leads to a later situation, and thus the obtaining of that state of affairs cannot still be an open question at the time when that situation arises. The two arguments are quite different, and Craig’s attempt to equate them in order to discredit (12) is wide of the mark.

Craig’s other objection is phrased as follows:

Second, my being able to refrain from doing A in C is not a necessary condition of my freely doing A in C. For perhaps I do A in C without any causal constraint, but it is also the case that God would not permit me to refrain from A in C. Flint’s essay on papal infallibility . . . provides a good illustration (A860).

This appears to be an endorsement of the strategy of using the Frankfurt

Counterexamples to negate the requirement (usually taken to be essential to libertarianism) of "alternative possibilities" as a prerequisite for the exercise of free will. There isn't space here to discuss these counterexamples in detail⁷; suffice it to say that libertarians who go to dinner with Frankfurt should bring a long spoon! The appeal to Flint's article, on the other hand, is viciously circular. Flint's account of papal infallibility explicitly presupposes a Molinist theory of providence, so to appeal to that account in an argument designed to support the coherence of Molinism is question-begging pure and simple.⁸

I conclude, therefore, that (12) nicely survives Craig's assault. Nevertheless, (12) does suffer from a certain disability. Once the relevant sense of 'explanatorily prior' has been grasped, (12) is so obviously incompatible with Molinism that, lacking a knock-down proof, a convinced Molinist will understandably refuse to accept it. This does not, as I see it, render the argument circular or question-begging,⁹ but it does limit its usefulness in discussions with Molinists. It's for this reason that I have preferred not to rely on (12) in my own version of the anti-Molinist argument.

Summing up: None of Craig's objections inflict any serious damage on Adams' argument, even though it employs one assumption (viz., (12)) that a Molinist is almost certain to reject. *A fortiori*, Craig has not refuted my version of the argument, which does not employ (12) as a premise. Taking all of Craig's objections into account, anti-Molinism stands undefeated.

NOTES

1. Robert M. Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," in *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), pp. 343-53; William Lane Craig, "Robert Adams's New Anti-Molinist Argument," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54:4 (December 1994), pp. 857-61 (cited hereafter as A).

2. "Explanatory Priority: Transitive and Unequivocal, A Reply to William Craig," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57:2 (June 1997), pp. 389-93 (cited hereafter as E).

3. William Lane Craig, "On Hasker's Defense of Anti-Molinism," *Faith and Philosophy* 15:2 (April 1998), pp. 236-40 (cited hereafter as H); William Hasker, "Middle Knowledge: A Refutation Revisited," *Faith and Philosophy* 12:2 (April 1995), pp. 223-36 (cited hereafter as R).

4. Later on, Craig recognizes that I have presented an argument that is different from Adams' (H239, 240 n6). But he states, erroneously, that this is the same as the argument I had given previously (e.g., in my *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 39-52). In fact, the arguments are significantly different.

5. In addition to his criticisms of Adams' argument, Craig also objects to the power entailment principle

(PEP) If it is in A's power to bring it about that P, and 'P' entails 'Q' and 'Q' is false, then it is in A's power to bring it about that Q,

which is utilized in my version of the argument. In particular, Craig complains that I have not responded to his counterexample to this principle. But when we consult the text to which he refers (William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), pp. 89-90), we discover that the principle against which his counterexample is directed is not

(PEP) but rather Alfred J. Freddoso's principle

- . If (i) p is logically equivalent to q , and (ii) S has the power to make p true at t , then S has the power to make q true at t .

Craig's counterexample is based on Newcomb's Paradox, in which an infallible predictor guesses which of two boxes, B_1 or B_2 , I will choose. According to Craig, I have the power to make the choice, but no power to control his prediction, and so (K) is false.

This counterexample is a failure because, contrary to Craig's assertion, 'I choose B_1 ' and 'The being predicts that I choose B_1 ' are not logically equivalent, nor does the first proposition entail the second. Logically speaking, it is entirely possible that I choose B_1 but the being in question makes no prediction at all.

6. Let me emphasize that I do not put this reasoning forward as a *proof* of (12), but only as a summary of the intuitive thinking that might lead someone to accept (12).

7. For argument, see Ch. 4 of my *Emergent Dualism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

8. These charges of circularity and begging the question do not apply to Flint's article, "Middle Knowledge and the Doctrine of Infallibility," which appeared in *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991). The purpose of that article is not to demonstrate the coherence of Molinism, but rather to illustrate the application of Molinism to a particular issue involved in divine providence, namely papal infallibility.

9. I am following the analysis of begging the question given by Victor Reppert, according to which an argument should be adjudged question-begging only if "no reasonably well-informed person would accept the premise who does not already accept the conclusion" (Victor Reppert, "Eliminative Materialism, Cognitive Suicide, and Begging the Question," *Metaphilosophy* 23 (1992), pp. 378-92; quotation is from p. 389). This clearly is not true of (12) which for many of us enjoys powerful intuitive support quite apart from any issues concerning Molinism. In the instances of begging the question I have identified in Craig's article, on the other hand, the circularity is obvious and undeniable.