

1-1-2003

The Multiple Muddles Of Maverick Molinism

Thomas Flint

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Flint, Thomas (2003) "The Multiple Muddles Of Maverick Molinism," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 20 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol20/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

THE MULTIPLE MUDDLES OF MAVERICK MOLINISM

Thomas P. Flint

In a recent article in this journal, Jonathan Kvanvig maintains that it is plausible (and even preferable) for a Molinist to think of God as having control over which counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true. This position is closely related to one I once labeled *Maverick Molinism*, a position that I argued was incoherent. In this response to Kvanvig, I attempt to show that his defense of *Maverick Molinism* is misguided in several ways.

According to the Molinist picture of providence, God's governance of his world is guided by his knowledge of counterfactuals that tell him what any of his creatures blessed with libertarian freedom would freely do in any non-determining situation in which that creature might be placed. But what status vis-a-vis divine power are we to ascribe to such *counterfactuals of creaturely freedom*, as they have come to be called? Is any such conditional one that God simply has to "put up with", or one over which he has at least counterfactual power – power to do something such that, were he so to act, the conditional in question would have been false?

Such questions are brought to the fore in a recent discussion by Jonathan Kvanvig of a view that I earlier labeled *Maverick Molinism*.¹ Kvanvig argues that my anathematization of the *Mavericks* was out of order, and that *Maverick Molinism* actually offers a more plausible position than that championed by more traditional Molinists — i.e., than what I shall call *Mainline Molinism*.

In this response, I will first summarize (briefly) what *Maverick Molinism* is and (very briefly) my reasons for rejecting it. I will then present Kvanvig's defense of the *Mavericks* and explain why I see Kvanvig's position as mired irremediably in a multitude of muddles.

I

In *Divine Providence*, a *Maverick Molinist* was defined as one who says that God has control over what are known as *counterfactuals of world actualization* – conditionals specifying, for any complete creative act of will God might perform, what world would become actual in the wake of that act of will.² Suppose we let *V* stand for a particular creative act of will within God's power. The *Maverick Molinist*, like all Molinists, agrees that there



is a fact of the matter about what world would be actual were God so to will – a truth such as

$$(1) V \rightarrow W,$$

where W stands for a possible world and our symbolization is taken as shorthand for *If God were to perform creative act of will V , possible world W would be actual*. What makes the Maverick a Maverick, I suggested, was her contention that conditionals such as (1) are *postvolitional* – i.e., dependent upon God's free will. Whatever truth-value (1) has, the Maverick argues, there is something God could do such that, were he to do it, (1) would have the opposite truth-value. Counterfactuals of world-actualization, then, are one and all under divine control.

On the other hand, I claimed, Mainline Molinists would initially be inclined to think of such counterfactuals as *prevolitional* – that is, as true or false independent of God's will. Most Molinists, I speculated, would be drawn to this position because of their belief that garden-variety counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true or false prevolitionally. For if these ordinary counterfactuals are immune from divine control, it's hard to see how the more global counterfactuals of world-actualization could be dependent upon God's will.

In *Divine Providence*, I offered a rather complicated argument to show that Maverick Molinism would not only seem *prima facie* implausible to most Molinists, but is in fact an incoherent view. Even the Maverick, I suggested, would have to agree that any complete creative act of God's will would either render (1) true or render it false. To avoid a vicious regress, she would also need to concede that the fact that a certain act of divine will would render (1) true (or false) would not *itself* be a fact over which God had any control. Hence, since V itself represents a complete creative act of will, either V *implies* (1) is true prevolitionally or V *implies* $\sim(1)$ is. Either way, though, incoherence ensues for the Maverick. For if V *implies* (1) is true prevolitionally, then so is (1). On the other hand, if it's V *implies* $\sim(1)$ that's prevolitionally true, then $\sim(1)$ turns out to be prevolitional as well. So, necessarily, either (1) or $\sim(1)$ is prevolitional. And that means that, necessarily, the Maverick is mistaken: counterfactuals of world-actualization are *not* under God's control.

II

In his brief on behalf of Maverick Molinism, Kvanvig curiously spends much of his time taking potshots at elements (or alleged elements) of this argument only to concede in the end that such means of defending the Maverick are fairly limp. If we ignore the red herrings and dead ends that Kvanvig introduces, though, his defense of Maverick Molinism can be seen to revolve around three contentions. First, he suggests, in speaking of truths as prevolitional, Molinists have typically conflated two separate notions. Second, there is no reason to think that counterfactuals of world-actualization would differ from counterfactuals of creaturely freedom with respect to either of the two notions. And third, Molinists would be well-

advised to maintain that counterfactuals of both types are under God's control. Let me expand on each of these three points in turn.

First, then, what are the two notions that Mainline Molinists have often conflated with their references to the prevolitional? According to Kvanvig, to say that a proposition is prevolitional is simply to say that its truth value "does not obtain in virtue of any act of God's will".³ Molinists have often confused this notion with that of a proposition's being outside God's control. Kvanvig maintains, though, that the two ideas are separate, not just in the case of God but in general.

There are lots of truths that are true independently of our wills, and yet we have or had the power to act in such a way that those truths would not have been true. For example, snow is found at certain precise spatiotemporal points north of where I live, but no act of will on my part caused the snow to be there. Yet, there are things I could do or could have done [e.g., lay a snow-shovel on the ground] which would have prevented the presence of snow at some such particular spot.⁴

Following Kvanvig's lead, let us say that a truth *T* is *prevolitional* for a person *S* if and only if it's not the case that *T* is true in virtue of some act of *S*'s will. And, introducing a new term, let us say that a truth *T* is *resilient* for a person *S* if and only if *S* lacks counterfactual power over *T* – i.e., if and only if it's not the case that *S* has or had the power to act in such a way that *T* would not have been true. Kvanvig's contention amounts to the claim that something can be prevolitional for a person without being resilient for them. Molinists have generally used "prevolitional" to cover both of these notions. By doing so, he charges, they have obscured an important conceptual distinction and vitiated the Maverick Molinist's best line of defense.

Part of that defense, Kvanvig suggests, is for the Maverick to deny that there is anything special about counterfactuals of world-actualization vis-à-vis these two notions. Kvanvig agrees that there is solid reason for thinking that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom would have to be prevolitional:⁵

if God makes it true that Joe would kick his dog in certain circumstances, then Joe does not have the power to do other than to kick his dog in those circumstances. And if he does not have this power, then the counterfactual in question is not a counterfactual of libertarian freedom. If this argument is sound, as I will grant here, it is a further commitment of Molinism to hold that counterfactuals of libertarian freedom are divinely prevolitional⁶

Notice, though, that this is an argument *only* for prevolitionality, not for resilience. Now, the argument for prevolitionality, one would think, would apply just as much to counterfactuals of world-actualization as it does to counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. So the two types of counterfactuals do not seem interestingly different. In each case, it seems, the Molinist has strong reasons for thinking that counterfactuals of that type are prevolitional, but (at least at this point) no reason for concluding that those counterfactuals are also resilient.

And this takes us to the third element of Kvanvig's defense of Maverick Molinism: we actually have good reason for thinking that counterfactuals of either type are *not* resilient. Kvanvig presents his argument for this contention by means of an example:

. . . it is contingently true that if I were offered a choice between asparagus and beans for dinner, I'd not choose beans. Things could have happened to alter my preferences, however. The proliferation of special pests that blunted the growth of beans but allowed asparagus to flourish would have led to much more asparagus consumption in my youth, and to a preference for the unusual taste of beans over that of asparagus (I'm assuming here that the core of the explanation of my preference for asparagus over green beans is the rarity of the former over the latter in my diet). So, suppose that this is an example in which $C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)$ is true, even though the counterfactual embedded in the consequent is false. For that embedded counterfactual to be within God's control, we need only assume that God could make C true (could strongly actualize that state of affairs), and it would be perplexing indeed to find someone denying that claim. So, if God could actualize C , then God has power over the truth value of $A \rightarrow B$, even if we assume with Molinism that the truth value of $A \rightarrow B$ is pre-volitional.⁷

Kvanvig implies that the conclusion of this argument applies both to counterfactuals of creaturely freedom and to counterfactuals of world-actualization, and thus demonstrates the preferability of Maverick Molinism to its Mainline alternative. This preferability is intensified, he suggests, when we recognize that the Maverick, unlike the Mainline Molinist, need not view counterfactuals as putting limitations upon what worlds God can actualize. Hence, Maverick Molinism fits in more neatly with a strong affirmation of divine omnipotence. Finally, he maintains, we can also now isolate precisely where the argument of *Divine Providence* goes wrong. Because of the typical Mainline conflation of the pre-volitional with the resilient, that argument assumed that, to avoid a vicious regress, even the Maverick would have to concede the resilience of a counterfactual such as V implies $\sim(1)$. Once we recognize the Mainline confusion here, though, we realize that it is only the pre-volitional status, not the resilience, of such counterfactuals that the Maverick needs to affirm. The Maverick, in other words, can say that

$$(1) V \rightarrow W$$

is under divine control, because for some X under God's control,

$$(2) X \rightarrow \sim(V \rightarrow W);$$

that (2) is under divine control because for some Y under God's control,

(3) $Y \rightarrow \sim[X \rightarrow \sim(V \rightarrow W)]$;

that (3) is under divine control for similar reasons, and so on. So long as the Maverick also insists that each member of the regress of non-resilient truths thus generated is prevolitional (i.e., that none of these truths is true in virtue of any act of God's will), we have no regress of divine actions, and hence no cause for concern.

III

It seems to me that Kvanvig is misguided in two of the three major points he makes in defending Maverick Molinism. This implies, of course, that I think he is correct on one of the three. Where does he manage to get things right? On the second of his three points. It is, as Kvanvig implies, hard to see how the Maverick could discern any substantial difference (with respect to either prevolitionality or resiliency) between counterfactuals of world-actualization and regular counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Let me note, though, that, although I am inclined to agree with Kvanvig here, I am not convinced that compelling arguments can be marshaled to undergird his point. As far as I can see, the Maverick who maintained that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom were resilient, while counterfactuals of world actualization were not, would be guilty of no demonstrable logical inconsistency.⁸ Still, it is monumentally hard to see what would motivate such a position. So Kvanvig's suggestion here seems reasonable to me; there is no good reason not to place both types of counterfactuals in the same boats.

Kvanvig, of course, thinks that the two boats available – the prevolitional and the resilient – are dramatically different. There is, to be sure, a kernel of truth in this, the first of the three main points Kvanvig makes. For many of us human agents, there are truths that would have been false had we acted in a certain way, even though no act of will on our part played a role in their becoming true. His example of the snow shovel makes this point effectively. The presence of snow in a certain location may well be counterfactually dependent on my not having acted in a certain way. But if I never so much as considered shielding that patch of earth with the shovel, if no decision or act of will on my part took place regarding the shovel and the snow, then we can indeed make sense of the suggestion that the presence of the snow is prevolitional. So states of affairs can, in a sense, be prevolitional but non-resilient with respect to us humans.

But only in a sense. In a deeper sense, it seems to me, such states are not fully or sheerly prevolitional. Suppose we were endeavoring to explain why that bit of ground is snow-covered. Since I thought nothing and willed nothing with respect to that bit of ground, it's clear that no such act of will or thought should play a part in our explanation. But if (as we're assuming) I was able to prevent the presence of the snow, then a full explanation needs to acknowledge that I refrained from performing the preventive act that was within my power. Even if I never *decided* not to perform this act, the fact is that, in the circumstances that were actually in place, my refraining was a non-determined necessary condition of that patch of

ground becoming snow-covered. The fate of the earth (in the relevant location) was *not* independent of what was going on in my mind and will at the relevant time. In that sense, it was neither prevolitional nor resilient.

Suppose, though, that the thought of keeping that patch of ground snow-free *had* entered my mind. Suppose I knew that doing so was in my power; I knew precisely how to act so as to keep that location dry. Suppose I thought it over, weighed the various alternatives, and ultimately decided not to use the shovel. In such a case, it seems even more clear that the presence of the snow was not, in any meaningful sense, independent of my will. Here, a full explanation of why the snow is there would have to take account of the various acts and processes going on in my mind. So the ground's being snow-covered would obviously be both post-volitional and non-resilient. Here too, the distinction upon which Kvanvig relies seems to have no place.

When we try to apply these notions to God, though, it is even harder to see how a wedge could *ever* be driven between them. For God could never be ignorant of any creative option open to him. If he knows via middle knowledge that $(A \rightarrow B)$ is false, but also knows that, for some C that was open to him, $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$, then it follows that, at some logically prior moment, he faced a choice: should he create a world in which $(A \rightarrow B)$ is true or a world in which it is false? True, his course of action in the two types of worlds will be slightly different. Should he decide to make a $\sim(A \rightarrow B)$ -world, he'll do things as he in fact did them in the actual world, where he decided not to actualize C . On the other hand, should he opt for a $(A \rightarrow B)$ -world, he'll need to actualize C . But in either case, the counterfactual has the truth value it ends up with simply because God decided to make it have that truth value.⁹ No such counterfactual could meaningfully be considered true or false independent of God's will. And that means that, on the Maverick's scenario, no such counterfactual would be prevolitional; each would be postvolitional and non-resilient.

Now, the contention that there are true but postvolitional contingent counterfactuals of creaturely freedom is not unknown. It is the position that, following tradition, I labeled Thomism in *Divine Providence*. It is an honorable position, one that many admirable philosophers have adopted. But it just isn't Molinism, and only confusion can ensue if we label it a Molinist stance. Maverick Molinism, as developed by Kvanvig, isn't a Molinist view at all. It's simply a rather odd version of Thomism.

To see more clearly the differences between Molinism and the Thomism of the Kvanvigian Maverick, consider the divine "moments" sometimes alluded to by Molinists in trying to picture, in the least-misleading way available to us humans, the "procession" in God's knowledge. God's natural knowledge (i.e., his knowledge of necessary truths) is prior to (i.e., independent of) his middle knowledge, which is prior to his creative decision as to which creatures to create in which situations, which in turn is prior to his free knowledge (i.e., knowledge of contingent truths dependent upon his action). So we can think of four logical moments, with natural knowledge present at the first, middle knowledge at the second, God's creative act of will at the third, and free knowledge at the fourth.¹⁰

With the Maverick, though, this picture becomes much more convoluted. We begin, as usual, with natural knowledge. In the second moment, God

knows the entire ascending hierarchy of more and more complicated counterfactuals specifying what actions he would need to take to effect various counterfactuals' being true. So, at the second moment, he knows that if he makes one decision (call it C), $(A \rightarrow B)$ will be true, while if he acts in another way (say, D), $(A \rightarrow \sim B)$ will be true. He also knows that the truth of $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$ is itself up to him; should he will one way (E , say), then $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$ will be true, while another divine decision (for example, F) will make $[C \rightarrow \sim(A \rightarrow B)]$ true. And so on, for more and more complex counterfactuals incorporating multiply embedded counterfactuals. At the third moment, God decides which way things will in fact be with regard to all these counterfactuals. Perhaps he decides that he would like to have $(A \rightarrow B)$ and $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$ be true. If so, he decides, in the third moment, to bring about C and E (and so on). In the fourth moment, C and E (and so on) have their fore-known effects; the former brings it about that $(A \rightarrow B)$, the latter that $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$, and so on. In the fifth moment, God decides which creatures to create in which situations. Finally, in the sixth moment, God has free knowledge.

Of course, one is tempted to respond, there *is* no real, genuine creaturely freedom of the libertarian sort left in this picture. For everything that matters is solely up to God. *He* makes certain counterfactuals of creaturely freedom true, and *he* makes the antecedents of some of them true. If $(A \rightarrow B)$ is true, that's simply because God, on his own, decided that it would be true. If A is also true, that's also simply because God, on his own, decided that it would be true. But it surely seems to follow from this that, if B is true, that too is simply because God, on his own, decided that it would be true. If one shares the semi-compatibilist picture of freedom common among Thomists, this might not seem deleterious to the agent's freedom. But Molinists, of course, are not semi-compatibilists.

There is much more one might say about Kvanvig's position here. For example, since the distinction between the prevolitional and the resilient falls apart in the divine case, the vicious regress of divine actions, a regress that Kvanvig thought he had eliminated, returns with full force;¹¹ hence, his attempt to neutralize my argument from *Divine Providence* collapses. But perhaps enough has been said at this point to show that Kvanvig's first major point – that something can be prevolitional for God without being resilient – is mistaken.

What, though, of his third major point? Doesn't his example of the beans and asparagus show that there are actual cases of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom that are true, yet such that God could have made them false? I think not. First, note the method of reasoning that seems implicit in Kvanvig's example. We begin by supposing that in fact I'd not choose beans if I were offered beans or asparagus — i.e., we suppose that $(A \rightarrow \sim B)$. We then consider what I would have done in a world where pests made beans rare in my youth — i.e., where C is true. What we seem to be asking ourselves here is: If I had to make the choice between beans and asparagus in a world where the pests had been mean to beans, would I still choose the asparagus? I.e., is $[(C \& A) \rightarrow \sim B]$ also true? We answer, quite reasonably, that it probably isn't; rather, $[(C \& A) \rightarrow B]$ seems to be correct. And from $[(C \& A) \rightarrow B]$, we conclude that $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$.

There are two things to note about this argument. First, the Mainline

Molinist needn't necessarily be troubled by it. For such Molinists traditionally have maintained that a conditional is a counterfactual of creaturely freedom only if its antecedent is complete – i.e., only if the antecedent specifies the complete set of non-determining circumstances in which the creature in question is placed. Such a stipulation has seemed reasonable both to proponents and opponents of Molinism; if God *does* make his providential decisions based on his knowledge of what his creatures would do, that knowledge must be of the *all-things-considered* sort — knowledge of what his creatures would do given *all* of the circumstances influencing their activity. These are the counterfactuals over which Mainline Molinists deny divine control; they needn't deny that God might have control over counterfactuals with *less* than complete antecedents. So, if *A* is not complete, Kvanvig's example is simply of no relevance, since it wouldn't point to an issue over which Mainline Molinists and Mavericks diverge.

The second point to note about the argument is that the final step — from $[(C \ \& \ A) \rightarrow B]$ to $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$ — is not, as it stands, valid. Suppose $[(C \ \& \ A) \rightarrow B]$, but $C \rightarrow \sim A$. Then it could be that, in the nearest *C*-world, it's true that, had *A* been the case, it would have been the case that $\sim B$. In other words, if $(C \rightarrow \sim A)$, then it could be that $[(C \ \& \ A) \rightarrow B]$ is true, but $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$ is false. So the final step of the chain of reasoning upon which Kvanvig seems to be relying appears faulty.

Now one might think that neither of these objections need prove fatal to Kvanvig's argument. Why not stipulate that the antecedent of the relevant counterfactual – i.e., *A* – is complete, and hence that with $(A \rightarrow B)$ we have a counterfactual over which Mainline Molinists and Mavericks really differ? And why not secure the final step of the argument by simply maintaining that $(C \rightarrow A)$ – that had the pests in fact infested the beans during my youth, I still would have been in exactly the same beans-or-asparagus-choosing situation we were considering? By making both of these stipulations, would we not have an argument that was both clearly valid and injurious to the Mainline Molinist stance?

In a word: No. For the two stipulations are simply inconsistent with Kvanvig's claim that $(A \rightarrow \sim B)$ and $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$ are both true. Suppose that we stipulate that *A* is complete. Then it must either include or preclude the presence in the past of those beans-destroying pests. That is, either $(A \Rightarrow C)$ or $(A \Rightarrow \sim C)$.¹² Whichever one is true, though, $(C \rightarrow A)$ is false.

Suppose first that $(A \Rightarrow C)$. Were it also the case that $(C \rightarrow A)$, then *C* would counterfactually imply whatever *A* counterfactually implies. But we are assuming that $(A \rightarrow \sim B)$. Hence, $(C \rightarrow \sim B)$ would also be true. Since Kvanvig is claiming that $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$ is also true, it would then follow that $\{C \rightarrow [(A \rightarrow B) \ \& \ \sim B]\}$. But $[(A \rightarrow B) \ \& \ \sim B]$ entails $\sim A$. Hence, it would follow that $(C \rightarrow \sim A)$. But this, of course, is inconsistent with our assumption that $(C \rightarrow A)$.¹³ So if $(A \Rightarrow C)$, then it's not the case that $(C \rightarrow A)$. Suppose, on the other hand, that $(A \Rightarrow \sim C)$. In that case, *C* entails $\sim A$. And if *C* entails $\sim A$, it's clearly not the case that *C* counterfactually implies *A*. So if $(A \Rightarrow \sim C)$, then $\sim(C \rightarrow A)$.

So, whether $(A \Rightarrow C)$ or $(A \Rightarrow \sim C)$, it's not the case that $(C \rightarrow A)$. But, as we've seen, without $(C \rightarrow A)$, there's no evident way for Kvanvig to get

from $[(C \ \& \ A) \rightarrow B]$ to $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$. So Kvanvig faces a choice less savory than that between beans and asparagus: he can make his argument irrelevant or make it invalid. Whichever his choice, Mainline Molinism escapes unscathed.

Note, by the way, that our examination of his arguments reveals that another of Kvanvig's claims – that the Maverick places fewer restrictions on God's omnipotence than does the Mainline Molinist – is also bogus. Kvanvig's idea seems to be that, if $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$ is true, then God isn't precluded by the truth of $(A \rightarrow \sim B)$ from making a world in which both A and B are true. But if the counterfactuals in question are complete, then (as we have seen) $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$ and $(A \rightarrow \sim B)$ could both be true only if $(C \rightarrow \sim A)$. And if the very act that would render $(A \rightarrow B)$ true would also render A false, then even Kvanvig's Maverick offers us no course of action God can follow to secure a world in which both A and B are true.

IV

I conclude, then, that Kvanvig has offered us no reason to doubt the stance defended in *Divine Providence*. Maverick Molinism is a confused and contradictory position. There are, to be sure, alternatives to Molinism that are worthy of serious consideration. Maverick Molinism, though, is not one of them.¹⁵

University of Notre Dame

NOTES

1. Jonathan Kvanvig, "On Behalf of Maverick Molinism," *Faith and Philosophy* 19 (2002), pp. 348-357. For my earlier discussion of Maverick Molinism, see Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 65-70.

2. By a complete creative act of will, I mean a divine decision concerning which creatures are to be created in which circumstances. See *Divine Providence*, 36-37.

3. Kvanvig, "On Behalf of Maverick Molinism," p. 348.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 354.

5. Here and throughout the ensuing discussion, I will generally use "pre-volitional" and "resilient" as shorthand for "prevolitional for God" and "resilient for God" respectively.

6. Kvanvig, "On Behalf of Maverick Molinism," p. 348.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 354-355.

8. Were the Maverick to view true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom as resilient in *every* world in which they are true, logical inconsistency would be demonstrable. And it would be exceedingly odd if such resiliency were to prove contingent. But, of course, a philosophical stance can be odd without being incoherent.

9. Kvanvig himself could hardly object to the "make" language here, since he uses it himself: "If there is a world God could actualize such that the ' $A \rightarrow B$ '-worlds are farther away from the world thus actualized than some ' $\sim(A \rightarrow B)$ '-worlds, then there is something God could do that would have made that

counterfactual false.”

10. See *Divine Providence*, pp. 36-43.

11. To make $(A \rightarrow B)$ true by doing C , God first has to make it true that $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$. But the “first” is misleading. For if D is the divine action that makes $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$ true, then God has to make it true that $\{D \rightarrow [C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]\}$ before he can make it true that $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$. And if E is the divine action that makes $\{D \rightarrow [C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]\}$ true, then God has to And so it goes. *Every* action that God is to perform on this picture requires that a logically *prior* action already have been performed. But then there’s no way even for God to get the whole process started.

12. The double-line arrow represents entailment (i.e., strict implication).

13. I am assuming here and throughout that C is not itself impossible. Of course, if C were impossible, things would be even worse for Kvanvig. So the assumption is one that Kvanvig could hardly call into question.

14. Could Kvanvig retort that he has no need to move to $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$ via $[(C \& A) \rightarrow B]$? Could he say that the beans-or-asparagus example warrants the move *directly* to $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$? If A were *incomplete*, such a response might have force. But, as already noted, an incomplete A makes the example irrelevant to the question of whether God might have control over genuine counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. On the other hand, if we limit ourselves to counterfactuals of freedom with *complete* antecedents, why in the world would anyone think, without argument, that $(A \rightarrow \sim B)$ would have a different truth value in a pestilential world? After all, A already says all that *can* be said about the presence or absence of the relevant pests. To see the point here more clearly, suppose we let S stand for the actual pestless past in our world and O stand for my having the choice between beans and asparagus. $(A \rightarrow \sim B)$ could then be equivalently represented as $[(S \& O) \rightarrow \sim B]$. Now, Kvanvig’s example gives us good reason to think my choice would have been different in a world with a different (i.e., a pestiferous) past. That is, if we let T stand for such a past, the example warrants our thinking that $[(T \& O) \rightarrow B]$, and perhaps even that $[T \rightarrow (O \rightarrow B)]$. But the example offers no evident support whatsoever to the suggestion that $(T \& O)$, or any of $(T \& O)$ ’s entailments (such as C) implies $[(S \& O) \rightarrow B]$. So the claim that the example offers direct support to $[C \rightarrow (A \rightarrow B)]$ is either irrelevant or false.

15. I am grateful to Chris Blauwkamp, Cristian Mihut, Christian Miller and especially Thad Botham for discussion of Kvanvig’s paper. Thanks are also due to William Hasker for his comments on an earlier draft of this essay.