

ON INCORPORATING MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE INTO CALVINISM: A THEOLOGICAL/METAPHYSICAL MUDDLE?

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As is well known, over the last thirty years or so there has been a revival of interest in the late medieval doctrine of divine *scientia media*, or middle knowledge, amongst philosophers of religion and theologians.¹ Surprisingly, among theologians some of the more enthusiastic proponents of this doctrine are theological determinists. This has led to some controversy over whether or not theological determinism (hereafter TD) is consistent with middle knowledge (hereafter MK). As a result of this controversy, some former theological determinist proponents of MK are now renouncing the doctrine. In this paper, I will argue that both sides to this controversy are correct. More exactly, I will attempt to establish two theses: (1) if one assumes traditional Calvinism and the standard account of the truth conditions for counterfactuals, TD is inconsistent with MK; (2) nevertheless, there are at least *prima facie* ways of coherently combining Calvinism with MK. The former claim is not original, as several recent authors have also argued for it. However, in my opinion, these arguments need to be made more clearly. The way in which I advance the latter claim, on the other hand, is original. I shall not pretend to be comprehensive, but rather, will broadly sketch two such ways one might try to effect the harmonization.

I. PRELIMINARIES

Before discussing these issues, it will be helpful to define certain key terms that will figure prominently in what follows. This is crucial, as many theologians use these terms in quite different ways than philosophers, often leading to confusion.

- Incompatibilism: free will is incompatible with causal determinism (hereafter determinism)
- Compatibilism: free will is compatible with determinism
- Libertarianism: the conjunction of incompatibilism with the thesis that at least sometimes we act freely²

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¹ As evidence of this recent interest amongst theologians, see, in addition to the Calvinist literature cited below, the recent books by Kirk R. MacGregor, *A Molinist-Anabaptist Systematic Theology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007); and Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H, 2010).

² The above three definitions are taken from Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983) 13–14.

- Determinism: every exercise of causal power E (or action, or event, if one prefers³) is caused by a (either temporally or logically) previous exercise of causal power E^* , and E^* is causally sufficient for E
- Theological determinism (TD): every non-divine exercise of causal power (or action, or event) E is caused by a (either temporally or logically) previous exercise of divine causal power D , and D is causally sufficient for E

A number of comments on these definitions is appropriate. First, notice that compatibilism and incompatibilism are theses about free will and determinism. My usage therefore differs from those theologians who (mis)use them to express theses about free will and *divine sovereignty*.⁴ In the context of debates over human freedom, sovereignty, providence, and the like, the theological usage can be unhelpful and potentially confusing. For example, the theological usage entails that such ardent libertarians as Molina and Arminius were compatibilists, whereas they are usually classified (using the philosophical definitions) as incompatibilists.⁵ Second, notice that I leave the term “free will” undefined. I do this simply because there is disagreement about what the term means. Some use it to mean “the ability to do otherwise.” Others use it to mean “the ability to do what you want without constraint.”⁶ There are still other usages. I will not try to sort these out here, as nothing that follows should be affected by how “free will” is used.

Third, notice that determinism in my usage is an explicitly *causal* thesis (and not a thesis about predictability, logical relations between times, etc.).⁷ I claim that, for determinism to be true, E^* must be *causally sufficient* for E . I say this in order to rule out two possible misunderstandings: (1) E^* causes E in an indeterministic fashion (as in some interpretations of quantum physics); (2) E^* is sufficient for E

³ I am trying to leave my definitions as ontologically non-committal as possible in order to accommodate various analyses of causation, such as those which omit any commitment to events.

⁴ James White, for example, says, “The biblical relationship of God’s sovereign decree to the creaturely will of man has been aptly called ‘compatibilism,’ the belief that these two things are not contradictory but compatible with one another, when viewed properly.” Dave Hunt and James White, *Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004) 25. Cf. Bruce A. Ware, “Robots, Royalty and Relationships? Toward a Clarified Understanding of Real Human Relations with the God Who Knows and Decrees All That Is,” *Criswell Theological Review* 1/2 (Spring 2004) 198.

⁵ Many Calvinists may dispute the claim that Molinists are (theological) compatibilists, since Calvinists often insist that divine sovereignty entails TD. That may or may not be true (Molinists will of course reject that alleged entailment), but this simply reinforces the fact that the theological usage of the terms “compatibilism” and “incompatibilism” is unhelpful and confusing, since one must first settle the age-old issue of how to properly understand sovereignty before one can correctly use the terms. My definitions of these terms are neutral and should thus be acceptable to anyone interested in the issues discussed in this paper.

⁶ These two usages roughly correspond to the older (misleading) terms “liberty of indifference” and “liberty of spontaneity.”

⁷ I thus disagree with many philosophers who claim that determinism is a thesis about the relation between natural laws and states of the world. For an example of this alternative view, see Kadri Vihvelin, “Arguments for Incompatibilism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/incompatibilism-arguments>.

in a non-causal sense (e.g. E^* merely logically or materially implies E). Worlds in which these claims are true would not be deterministic in my sense.⁸

Fourth, my definition of TD is simply a formal statement of the idea of God's all-encompassing causal activity that is common to several theological traditions.⁹ TD includes occasionalism, as well as views that affirm the reality of secondary causes but claim that God's decree (or perhaps his desire) to create this world is causally sufficient (or is necessary and, with his concurrence, sufficient) for everything that happens in the creation's history. Note that since causation is a transitive relation, even a deist position that held that God simply created the universe and then did nothing else could count as a version of TD if the created secondary causes are causally sufficient for their effects.

Fifth, determinism (conjoined with theism) entails, but is not entailed by, TD. It is possible to hold that TD is true but that God's own actions are not effects of prior causes.¹⁰ Nevertheless, many theological determinists embrace determinism *simpliciter*, since they claim that free actions require the truth of determinism. An awkward consequence of this claim is that they seem to be committed to the position that even God's exercises of causal power are caused, entailing either an infinite regress of exercises of divine power or a first exercise of divine power which is itself caused by something distinct from God (e.g. God's mental states).¹¹

Two disclaimers: In this paper, I focus solely on Calvinism, ignoring other forms of TD (e.g. certain versions of Thomism and Augustinianism).¹² I do this for two reasons: (1) I am not aware of any other theological determinists claiming that God has middle knowledge; (2) I know far less about these other traditions. Never-

⁸ I shall leave causal sufficiency unanalyzed, for that would require a paper of its own (and I am not sure I am up to the task). Hopefully the idea is intuitively clear enough. Throughout this paper, I assume that causation requires much more than mere counterfactual dependence, or, in other words, I assume the partially tongue-in-cheek claim that causation requires some kind of "oomph."

⁹ "[By theological determinist] I mean to denote one who believes that every aspect of everything that occurs in the whole of reality is ultimately caused and determined by God." J. A. Crabtree, "Does Middle Knowledge Solve the Problem of Divine Sovereignty?" in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, vol. 2: *Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism* (ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 429. Similarly, "Theological determinism is the position that God is the sufficient active cause of everything in creation, whether directly or by way of secondary causes such as human agents," in Derk Pereboom, "Theological Determinism and Divine Providence," in *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate* (ed. Ken Perszyk; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 262.

¹⁰ Since determinism is the broader thesis, compatibilism and incompatibilism are not defined in terms of TD. Nevertheless, incompatibilists insist that there would be no creaturely free will in a world in which determinism was false but TD was true.

¹¹ See the discussion in David Werther, "Calvinism and Middle Knowledge," *Ars Disputandi* 3/3 (2003), <http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000122/article.pdf>.

¹² Paul Helm has argued that Calvinists do not have to endorse TD in his "Classical Calvinist Doctrine of God," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views* (ed. Bruce A. Ware; Nashville: B&H, 2008) 27. Nevertheless, as far as I can tell, TD has always been the mainstream Calvinist view. Calvin, for example, taught that "it must be observed that the will of God is the cause of all things that happen in the world; and yet God is not the author of evil." John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (trans. J. K. S. Reid; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 169. As I shall point out below, TD follows straightforwardly from the typical Calvinist endorsements of a preemption analysis of concurrence and of the *Mind* argument.

theless, much of what follows applies to TD *simpliciter* and not merely to Calvinism.¹³ Finally, I presuppose that universal possibilism (the thesis that there are no necessary truths¹⁴) is false. One might think this is not worth pointing out, as one commonly hears that only Descartes was crazy enough to endorse universal possibilism (and some Cartesian scholars argue that even he did not really endorse it). However, it has recently been brought to my attention that there are some Calvinist theologians who have embraced, or at least flirted with, this view.¹⁵ Nevertheless, I shall ignore this position in what follows, since Richard Muller has demonstrated that the majority view amongst Calvinists has always been that there are necessary truths, truths beyond even God's power to make false.¹⁶

II. MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE

The doctrine of MK was first systematically articulated by the sixteenth-century Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535–1600).¹⁷ As one of the major players in the dispute at that time over the reconciliation of free will with divine sovereignty, foreknowledge, grace, and such, he argued that “Unless we want to wander about precariously in reconciling our freedom of choice and the contingency of things with divine foreknowledge, it is necessary for us to distinguish *three* types of knowledge in God.”¹⁸ Molina called these three types *natural*, *middle*, and *free* knowledge, and since God is essentially omniscient, every true proposition falls under one of these categories of divine knowledge.

Natural knowledge is God's knowledge of all logically and metaphysically necessary truths.¹⁹ Since these truths cannot even possibly be false, God cannot possibly fail to know them, and, as such, this knowledge is essential to him (or, in other words, such knowledge is part of God's *nature*, hence the name).²⁰ Since these propositions are necessarily true, God must know them independently of anything

¹³ In this paper, I understand Calvinism to be a theological tradition that not only includes the familiar TULIP, but also includes commitment to compatibilism. It is my understanding that self-identified Calvinists have typically affirmed compatibilism, but I am happy to be corrected on this point by an historian of theology if I am in error.

¹⁴ A necessary truth is a proposition the falsehood of which is impossible.

¹⁵ For what seems to me to be a fairly clear example, see K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006) 206 and 320.

¹⁶ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, ca. 1520–1725, vol. 3: *The Divine Essence and Attributes* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 530–36.

¹⁷ For an excellent, detailed exposition of this doctrine, see Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998) 35–71. According to Kirk R. MacGregor, Anabaptist theologian Balthasar Hubmaier discovered MK several decades before Molina, but he did not develop it in any detail. See his “Hubmaier's Concord of Predestination with Free Will,” *Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum* 35/2 (2006) 279–99, <http://www.directionjournal.org/article/?1449>.

¹⁸ Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)* (trans. Alfred J. Freddoso; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988) disp. 52, sec. 9 (168).

¹⁹ Some authors describe natural knowledge as God's knowledge of all possibilities. This is inaccurate, although natural knowledge includes knowledge of all possibilities (since if *p* is possible, then it is a necessary truth that *p* is possible).

²⁰ In “possible worlds semantics,” necessary truths are those propositions that are true in all possible worlds (and hence, God knows them in every possible world).

he might decide to do and, hence, pre-volitionally. Whether he decrees to create this universe, some other, or none at all, his natural knowledge remains the same.

God's free knowledge, on the other hand, is his knowledge of propositions true due to his decision of which world to actualize. The contents of such knowledge are contingent, and therefore not essential to God (although it *is* essential that he have free knowledge). For example, the proposition *Luis de Molina is a Spaniard* is true because God decided to create Molina and have him live in Spain. God, being omniscient, knows this. However, he could have decided not to create Molina and so would not have known this proposition. In Calvinist terminology, we might say that God is sovereign over his free knowledge, since he decides what he will *freely* know, but not sovereign over his natural knowledge, since the truth of necessary propositions is out of his control.²¹

Molina claimed that if God had only natural and free knowledge, he would not be omniscient, for there are true propositions that are contingent, and hence not part of God's natural knowledge, and yet also not true due to his decree, and hence not part of his free knowledge. For example, consider a proposition such as

- (1) "If Peter had been in circumstance C in which he had a slightly more courageous character, he would freely have refrained from denying Christ."

Note that (1) is distinct from the proposition that Peter *could* have freely refrained from denying Christ in those circumstances. Yes, Peter could refrain, but that is included in God's natural knowledge. He also knows that Peter could deny Christ in those circumstances. Rather, (1) is God's knowledge of which of those actions Peter *could* do that he actually *would* do. (1) is not a necessary truth, for a courageous Peter could still freely deny Christ. Neither is it true due to God's decree, for if God decides that Peter refrains in those circumstances, then whatever Peter does in C would be out of his control.²² But if (1) is true (and God is omniscient) then there must be a third category of knowledge. The label Molina chose was "middle knowledge," since this category encompasses propositions that are contingently true, like those in God's free knowledge, yet are also known independently of his decree, like those in his natural knowledge. An especially important portion of God's MK is his knowledge of what have come to be called "counterfactuals of creaturely freedom" (hereafter "CCFs").²³ These are condition-

²¹ While the terms "natural knowledge" and "free knowledge" are Molina's, the distinction between these types of knowledge was a theological commonplace. For Calvinist expressions of this distinction, see Muller, *The Divine Essence and Attributes* 406–8, 411–17.

²² Obviously, this line of reasoning presupposes an incompatibilist understanding of freedom. See Alfred J. Freddoso, introduction to Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge* 24, where he describes Molina as an "unremitting libertarian."

²³ While most of the discussion of MK has focused on counterfactuals of creaturely freedom like (1), MK may include other types of counterfactual propositions as well, e.g. those reporting the actions of indeterministic quantum particles. It must also be pointed out that the term "counterfactual" is somewhat misleading, since CCFs do not have to be contrary to fact. For example, "If Obama were to run for U.S. president in 2008, he would freely vote for himself," is a CCF, but (I assume) it reports what really happened.

al propositions in the subjunctive mood reporting the free actions of creatures in various possible circumstances, such as (1).²⁴

If God does indeed have middle knowledge, then this has important implications for divine providence. Most relevant for the purposes of this paper, if God has MK, then he can consult such knowledge to providentially order history according to his own ends by arranging people in circumstances in which they freely perform the actions that bring about his ends. For example, if God wanted a world in which people freely crucify his incarnate son, he could consult his middle knowledge to know which people, if created, would freely crucify his son, and so not have to resort to causally determining people to perform their sinful actions (which, if incompatibilism is true, would accordingly not be sinful at all). In short, MK promises to allow God to have meticulous providential control over a world of undetermined, free creatures.

III. CALVINIST MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE?

No doubt (at least partially) spurred by the controversy over open theism, many Calvinists have recently devoted much thought to God's knowledge and its relation to divine providence. Surprisingly, some have concluded that God has MK. Terrence Tiessen may be the most prominent of these theologians. After rejecting attempts to base providence upon simple foreknowledge, he claims:

The situation is not improved by positing that God's knowledge of the future is ... the knowledge of his own will, that is, the knowledge of the future that will be what it is because he has decided that it should be so. Without middle knowledge I cannot conceptualize God's decision as either wise or cognizant of the freedom of his creatures. If God simply decided the future in one logical moment without regard to the possible responses of creatures to his own initiatives and the wisest responses that he could make to those creaturely decisions, then any appearance of significance in those human decisions is thoroughly illusory. For these reasons I am convinced that God has middle knowledge, understood as his knowledge of all future counterfactuals. He is able to know this because his moral creatures are voluntarily but not indeterministically free.²⁵

Thus, Tiessen is claiming that God has middle knowledge, but, contrary to Molinism, compatibilism is true.

Tiessen is no lone radical. Other theologians with impeccable Reformed credentials agree. Bruce Ware, for example, claims that God cannot have "libertarian

²⁴ It is inaccurate to say that MK is knowledge of "all counterfactual states-of-affairs," as Travis James Campbell does in his "Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique," *WTJ* 68 (2006) 3. Many counterfactuals are included in either natural or free knowledge. *If God were to create a Martian, it would be a temporal being* is a necessarily true counterfactual (and so known naturally), whereas *If Calvin had been an Israelite, he would have been a member of God's chosen people* is contingently true, since it is true only because God chose the Israelites (and hence is known freely).

²⁵ Terrance Tiessen, *Providence & Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000) 319. For his entire "Middle Knowledge Calvinist" model of providence, see 289–362. See also his article "Why Calvinists Should Believe in Divine Middle Knowledge, Although They Reject Molinism," *WTJ* 69 (2007) 345–66.

middle knowledge,” for there could be no true CCFs if libertarianism were true.²⁶ Nevertheless, God does have “compatibilist middle knowledge.”

What is different about this understanding of middle knowledge is that since freedom means that we always do what we most want, and since what we “most want” is shaped by the set of factors and circumstances that eventually give rise to one desire that stands above all others, therefore God can know the circumstances giving rise to our highest desires, and by knowing these, he can know the choice that we would make, given those particular circumstances. What the Molinist version of middle knowledge lacked—viz., a necessary connection between knowledge of the circumstances within which an agent makes his choice and knowledge of just what choice the agent would make—is here remedied by the replacement of libertarian freedom with compatibilist freedom. So, as a result, middle knowledge is explicable and it “works” when compatibilist freedom is employed, in a way that it does not with libertarian freedom.²⁷

John Feinberg concurs. After endorsing the grounding objection, he explains that “if one holds some form of determinism as I do, there is no reason to deny that God has middle knowledge of what humans would do (compatibilistically) freely.”²⁸

The picture that emerges from these theologians is something like the following. God, prior to creating the universe, had two kinds of knowledge, natural and middle. His middle knowledge consists of his knowledge of how creatures would be causally determined to act freely if placed in various possible circumstances. God knows that if he were to create a deterministic world, then his creatures would be caused to act in certain ways, but this is compatible with their acting freely. Thus, God has middle knowledge of CCFs. Desiring that his creatures act freely most of the time and also that his providential purposes be realized, he made use of this knowledge when he decided which possible world to actualize. Knowing what his creatures would do freely in any circumstance in which he could place them, he chose a world in which he knew his creatures would freely do what he wanted done.

²⁶ His reason for this is the so-called “grounding objection,” one of the standard objections to Molinism. In brief, the objection is that there does not seem to be any “ground” for, anything to make true, CCFs. For a now-classic presentation of this objection, see Robert M. Adams, “Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977) 109–17; repr. in *Middle Knowledge: Theory and Applications* (ed. William Hasker, David Basinger, and Eef Dekker; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000) 35–50. Tiessen endorses this objection in his “Why Calvinists Should Believe in Divine Middle Knowledge” 350. For a thorough evaluation of this objection, see Jennifer Jensen, “The Grounding Objection to Molinism” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2008).

²⁷ Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004) 114–15. For his entire “compatibilist middle knowledge” account of providence, see 110–30. See also his “Robots, Royalty and Relationships?” and his “A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God,” in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views* 76–120.

²⁸ John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001) 752. Cf. Milard J. Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 207, n. 41. Kenneth Perszyk also argues for the consistency of compatibilism and MK, but he presupposes a different notion of determinism than I, Tiessen, Ware, Feinberg, and Erickson do. See Kenneth J. Perszyk, “Molinism and Compatibilism,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 48 (2000) 11–33.

It is worth pointing out just how surprising and odd the claims of these Calvinists are. Historically, middle knowledge has been a fundamental philosophical assumption of Calvinism's theological arch-nemesis, Arminianism. The controversy over MK in the Roman Catholic Church was known by Arminius, and he incorporated many of Molina's views into his own system, bequeathing them to his theological heirs.²⁹

Furthermore, Calvinism has historically been quite emphatic in its rejection of middle knowledge. Francis Turretin, for example, claims that:

No distinction of God's decrees is more frequently urged by the Socinians, Remonstrants and others who contend for the idol of free will, than that of the absolute and conditional. Yet none is attended with greater absurdities or has fewer claims to acceptance. The design of the Socinians and their followers on this subject is to confirm the figment of middle knowledge (*scientia media*), to establish election from foreseen faith and to extol the strength of the human will.³⁰

Herman Bavinck's comments are similarly colorful: "God is seen to derive his knowledge of free human actions not from his own being but from the will of creatures and thus becomes dependent on the world for his own knowledge. Creatures gain independence, and God becomes the chief executive of a world in which he is the slave of his subordinates."³¹ Or consider Richard Muller's response to William Lane Craig's suggestion that if both Calvinists and Arminians were to incorporate middle knowledge into their systems, many of their disagreements would be eliminated or at least reduced in importance:³²

As if the concept had never before been proposed by Arminianism, and as if the concept actually offered a middle ground between the Arminian and Calvinist theologies. For *scientia media* to become the basis for such rapprochement, how-

²⁹ See Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 151–66; Eef Dekker, "Was Arminius a Molinist?" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27/2 (1996) 337–52; Barry E. Bryant, "Molina, Arminius, Plafere, Goad, and Wesley on Human Free-Will, Divine Omniscience, and Middle Knowledge," *Wesley Theological Journal* 27 (1992) 93–103; J. A. Van Ruler, "New Philosophy to Old Standards: Voetius' Vindication of Divine Concurrence and Secondary Causality," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 71 (1991) 71. Note, though, MacGregor's reluctance to label Arminius a Molinist, despite his belief in MK, in chapter 2 of his *A Molinist-Anabaptist Systematic Theology*, titled "*Scientia Media* According to Molina, not Arminius." Unfortunately, the Arminian tradition appears to have forgotten its Molinist roots, exchanging the truth of God (Molinism) for a lie (simple foreknowledge or open theism).

³⁰ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (ed. James T. Dennison Jr.; trans. George Musgrave Giger; 3 vols.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992) 1:IV.iii.1 (316); cf. III.xiii (212–18).

³¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2: *God and Creation* (trans. John Vriend; 4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) 179, cf. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884) 1:398–400; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (4th rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941) 68. It should be pointed out that Bavinck apparently did not understand MK accurately, since he mistakenly charges Molinists with believing that God's MK is derived from the will of creatures. On the contrary, Molinists reject such a misunderstanding, since on their view God has MK prior to creating anything, including any creaturely wills. Campbell makes the same mistake in his "Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique" 16.

³² William Lane Craig, "Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?" in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism* (ed. Clark H. Pinnock; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 141–64.

ever, the Reformed would need to concede virtually all of the issues in debate and adopt an Arminian perspective, because, in terms of the metaphysical foundations of the historical debate between Reformed and Arminian, the idea of a divine *scientia media* or middle knowledge is the heart and soul of the original Arminian position. Middle knowledge is not a middle ground. It was the Arminian, just as it was the Jesuit view, in the controversies over grace and predestination that took place in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.³³

The Calvinist rejection of MK even has confessional status. The Westminster Confession declares, “Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions; yet hath he not decreed any thing because he foresaw it as future, as that which would come to pass, upon such conditions.”³⁴ Thus, Tiessen, Ware, and others, are breaking with their tradition by affirming that God has middle knowledge, a doctrine which has been consistently rejected by Calvinists from the sixteenth century to today.³⁵

Or are they? The above-cited Calvinists claim that God does not have middle knowledge of CCFs, understood in an incompatibilist sense. But of course Tiessen and company deny this as well. Rather, they argue that God has “compatibilist middle knowledge.” Hence, they would claim not to have left the Calvinist fold. Perhaps not. But one wonders whether retaining their Calvinist credentials by affirming compatibilism requires abandoning the claim that God has MK. In other words, is “compatibilist middle knowledge” or “Middle Knowledge Calvinism” a coherent position, or does it reduce to Calvinism *simpliciter*?

IV. THE CONFUSION IN CALVINIST MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE

Middle Knowledge Calvinism appears to be confused. Its adherents claim that God has middle knowledge, and yet also claim that human actions are causally determined, either by God or other secondary causes. Moreover, they appear to believe that determinism is a necessary truth. Conjoined, these claims entail that God’s knowledge of how creatures would freely act in various circumstances is part of either his natural or free knowledge. Recall that MK is not simply God’s

³³ Richard A. Muller, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice: Arminius’s Gambit and the Reformed Response,” in *Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism* 265–66. Cf. James R. White, *The Potter’s Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary, 2000) 34, where he suggests that not only cannot a Calvinist believe that God has middle knowledge, but anyone who does so is not even a genuine Protestant! In other work, Muller has cited a number of Calvinist and Arminian Latin treatises extensively debating MK. See his *The Divine Essence and Attributes* 419–20. Given the current controversy over MK, English translations of these works would no doubt be met with great interest (I, for one, would love to read William Twisse’s anti-Molinist *Dissertatio de scientia media tribus libris absoluta* [1639]).

³⁴ Westminster Confession of Faith, III.2.

³⁵ In addition to Muller and White, contemporary Calvinists who reject middle knowledge include Crabtree, “Problem of Divine Sovereignty”; Paul Helm, “The Augustinian-Calvinist View,” in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001) 175; R. K. McGregor Wright, “The Mystery of Middle Knowledge,” *Journal of Biblical Apologetics* 2/1 (Spring 2001) 37–58; Campbell, “Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique”; Paul Kjosso Helseth, “God Causes All Things,” in *Four Views on Divine Providence* (ed. Dennis W. Jowers; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) 25–52; Ron Highfield, “God Controls by Liberating,” in *Four Views on Divine Providence* 141–64.

knowledge of CCFs. Historically, very few have denied that God has such knowledge. Molina's Thomist opponents, all of whom were theological determinists, agreed that God had such knowledge.³⁶ Classical Calvinists have also held this. Bavinck, for example, explains, "Now with respect to this middle knowledge the question is not whether things ... are not frequently related to each other by some such conditional connection, one that is known and willed by God himself. If this is all it meant, it could be accepted without any difficulty."³⁷ Similarly, Richard Baxter says, "And that God knoweth from Eternity the *truth* of all *conditional propositions that are true*, is past all doubt, If we may suppose that God had eternal propositions. No doubt but he knoweth now that such propositions are true. [*If such causes be put, they will or will not produce this or that as the effect.*]"³⁸

What distinguishes middle knowledge from natural and free knowledge is that its contents are known independently of God's decree, like natural knowledge, but are contingently true, like free knowledge. If God's knowledge of CCFs is to be middle, then they cannot be either necessary or contingently true due to God's decree.

Tiessen and Ware have both attempted to supply reasons for thinking that CCFs are not known through either God's natural or free knowledge. Tiessen has argued that:

In God's natural knowledge, he has the knowledge of logical relations, causal relationships, and so on, that grounds his more particular knowledge in the middle stage. But it is only when God begins to contemplate the creation of a world with various kinds of creatures that he has reason to assess how such world histories might come out, and then he considers what it would take to bring a particular man like Joseph into Egypt in a situation where God would be able to provide a context for the development of the covenant people as a nation.³⁹

The problem with this suggestion is that if determinism is a necessary truth, then God's knowledge of "world histories" *just is* his knowledge of logical and causal relations. Thus, if God comes to know CCFs in contemplating world histories, then CCFs are contained in his natural knowledge. Similarly, Ware claims that:

middle knowledge is grounded on four things that God knows prevolitionally: 1) God's perfect knowledge, in his own mind's eye, of the character of the moral individual ... 2) God's knowledge of every factor present in any given possible setting in which he envisions this individual making a choice; 3) God's knowledge of just how each unique set of factors, in each unique situation,

³⁶ Flint, *Divine Providence* 86. Strictly speaking, Molina's Thomist opponents would have denied being theological determinists, since neither God nor secondary causes determine our sinful actions. Whether their claim is coherent I shall leave to others to decide. See, e.g., Freddoso, "Introduction" 39–42.

³⁷ Bavinck, *God and Creation* 200.

³⁸ Richard Baxter, *Catholic Theologie: Plain, Pure, Peaceable: For Pacification of the Dogmatical Word-Warriors* (London: Robert White, 1675) part I, sec. 12, par. 255 (42), <http://books.google.com/books?id=dbnmAAAAAAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=richard+baxter+catholic+theologie&hl=en&sa=X&ei=OTkjT86pKMrUiAKKwq3ABw&ved=0CEYQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

The strange punctuation is in the original. For a contemporary Calvinist recognition of this point, see Helm, "An Augustinian-Calvinist Response," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* 155.

³⁹ Tiessen, "Why Calvinists Should Believe in Divine Middle Knowledge" 365.

would work, along with the character of the individual, to produce one strongest inclination within the individual, for each unique situation so envisioned; and 4) God's knowledge of just what choice the individual would in fact make, given the nature of his own character, the relevant factors involved in the particular setting in which he would make this choice, and the strongest inclination that would arise within him given this complete set of factors, giving rise in turn to this one (and only one) choice.⁴⁰

The basic idea is that by knowing every possible person's character, every possible situation a person could be placed in, and what those situations would causally determine the person to most desire to do (and hence act on that desire), God can derive his knowledge of CCFs. But if God really can derive which CCFs are true in this way, then once again CCFs are included in his natural knowledge, since they would be necessary truths.

Surprisingly, in the face of criticism (primarily by Paul Helm),⁴¹ both Tiessen and Ware have come to agree with the above reasoning that CCFs are part of God's natural knowledge. In a paper co-authored with Helm, Tiessen explains that "Reflection on Professor Helm's recent comments has finally brought me to the conclusion that he is correct on this point. God's knowledge of counterfactuals is not different from his knowledge of possibilities; it is therefore part of his necessary knowledge."⁴²

Have Tiessen and Ware shifted from error to the truth? Are they correct to now consider CCFs to be included in God's natural knowledge? It all depends. They are definitely right, given their other beliefs, to have abandoned the idea that God has MK of CCFs. However, it is not obvious that CCFs are contained in his natural rather than free knowledge. Depending on how one thinks about the circumstances reported in the antecedents of CCFs, they can be equally well thought to be either natural or free. To see this, I will have to explain more carefully than previous critics why God cannot have MK of CCFs if one assumes classical Calvinism.⁴³

First, consider divine concurrence. According to this doctrine, no secondary cause can cause an effect unless God concurs with the cause's exercise of causal power. Historically, this has been interpreted by theological determinists to mean

⁴⁰ Ware, *God's Greater Glory* 115, n. 10.

⁴¹ But see also Werther, "Calvinism and Middle Knowledge."

⁴² Paul Helm and Terrance L. Tiessen, "Does Calvinism Have Room for Middle Knowledge? A Conversation," *WTJ* 71 (2009) 448. Cf. Paul Helm, "Classical Calvinist Doctrine of God," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views* 41–47 and Bruce A. Ware, "Response by Bruce A. Ware," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views* 74. Ware still wants to hang onto the term "middle knowledge" as a label of a useful subset of natural knowledge, but this is clearly a misuse of the term that will inevitably lead to confusion.

⁴³ See Werther, "Calvinism and Middle Knowledge"; John D. Laing, "The Compatibility of Calvinism and Middle Knowledge," *JETS* 47 (2004) 455–67; Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, vol. 2: *The Problems of Theism and the Love of God* (4 vols.; Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford, 2006) 44–53; Helm, "Classical Calvinist Doctrine of God" 41–47; Helm, "Response by Paul Helm," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views* 126–29; Helm and Tiessen, "Does Calvinism Have Room for Middle Knowledge?" 437–54.

that God causes the secondary cause to cause its effect. In other words, God “pre-moves” secondary causes by acting on them and through them in order to cause their effects. In the case of human actions, God causes the human will to cause actions. This premotion analysis was how Molina’s Thomist opponents understood the doctrine,⁴⁴ and historically Calvinists have also understood it this way.⁴⁵

According to Bavinck,

With his almighty power God makes possible every secondary cause and is present in it with his being at its beginning, progression, and end. It is he who posits it and makes it move into action (praecursus) and who further accompanies it in its working and leads it to its effect (concursum)... But this energizing activity of the primary cause in the secondary causes is so divinely great that precisely by that activity he stirs those secondary causes into an activity of their own In relation to God the secondary causes can be compared to instruments ... in relation to their effects and products they are causes in the true sense.⁴⁶

Louis Berkhof adds that this is how most Calvinists have understood this doctrine: “The vast majority of Reformed theologians ... maintain the concursus in question The divine concursus energizes man and determines him efficaciously to the specific act, but it is man who gives the act its formal quality, and who is therefore responsible for its sinful character.”⁴⁷

But if a premotion view of concurrence is true, then this immediately creates a problem for the claim that God had middle knowledge of CCFs. Consider

(2) “If Peter were in circumstance C, he would freely perform action A.”

Assuming (2) is true, is it necessary or contingent? That will depend on what is included in C. C includes the environment Peter is in, his past history, other secondary causes active in C, and so forth. Should God’s decision to concur with (i.e. pre-move) Peter’s performance of A also be considered to be part of C? Calvinists might disagree about this. If C includes God’s concurrence, then (2) is necessarily true, since if God causes Peter to freely perform A in C, then Peter cannot fail to freely perform A. But if (2) is necessarily true, then it is part of God’s natural rather than middle knowledge.

⁴⁴ Joseph Pohle, “Controversies on Grace,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (vol. 6; New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06710a.htm>; William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988) 201–2; Robert Sleight Jr., Vere Chappell and Michael Della Rocca, “Determinism and Human Freedom,” in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 1201.

⁴⁵ Many Calvinists disagree with Thomists in that they hold that God causes his creatures to perform their sinful acts, which Thomists deny.

⁴⁶ Bavinck, *God and Creation* 614.

⁴⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* 175. Cf. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* 1:VI.iv–vi (501–15); Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 2:156–62; John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 10: *A Display of Arminianism* (16 vols.; ed. William H. Goold; London: Banner of Truth, 1967) 120; and Van Ruler, “New Philosophy to Old Standards” 58–91. Contemporary Calvinists who endorse a premotion analysis of concurrence include Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith* 299, 336, n. 16, and Helseth, “God Causes All Things” 30–38. Highfield also appears to endorse premotion, but he is not very clear on this point. See his “God Controls by Liberating” 162.

However, suppose that C does not include God's decision to concur with Peter's action. If so, then (2) is contingent, since it will only be true if God concurs with Peter's action, and God is free to either concur or not. But then (2) is part of God's free knowledge, since God's decision about whether or not to concur will be part of his decree of which world to actualize. Thus, it appears that if a doctrine of concurrence, interpreted as premotion, is accepted, then God's knowledge of CCFs will be either natural or free.⁴⁸

The same trouble is generated by many Calvinists' claims about free will. They are compatibilists of a special type. They not only believe that freedom is compatible with determinism, but also claim that freedom requires determinism. In other words, they are all endorsing something like what Peter van Inwagen has dubbed "the *Mind* argument."⁴⁹ The basic idea is that if one's beliefs and desires do not cause one to act, then one's actions are arbitrary, random, or in some other way outside of one's control. Further, this randomness is inimical to freedom. Therefore, freedom is incompatible with indeterminism.⁵⁰ It follows that for an action to be free, it must be causally necessitated by a prior cause. But if that is the case, then by knowing all the causes (and their causal powers) operating in a circumstance, one will know what effects will issue from that circumstance.

Consider (2) again. Is it necessary or contingent? This would appear to depend on whether it is possible for objects to have their causal powers contingently. If objects' causal powers are essential, then it is necessarily true that if Peter were in C , he would freely do A (since the objects in C will causally necessitate Peter's freely doing A).⁵¹ In that case, God's knowledge of (2) is natural. If, on the other hand, causal powers are contingent, then we must ask once again what C includes. If it includes God's decree to endow objects with a certain set of causal powers, then Peter's action is necessary and God knows this naturally. If C does not include God's endowment of causal powers, then (2) is contingent. Moreover, it will only be true if God decrees that the world he actualizes will include objects with causal powers that entail that Peter would freely do A in C . And if this is the case, then God's knowledge of (2) is free.

I conclude from this discussion that Calvinist proponents of MK are confused. They affirm that God knows what any creature would freely do in any possible circumstance in which it can be placed. But of course, this has always been af-

⁴⁸ Cf. Perszyk, "Molinism and Compatibilism" 26–27.

⁴⁹ van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* 126–50. He chose this label because the argument has been presented and defended several times in the journal *Mind*.

⁵⁰ Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer* 312–14; Ware, *God's Greater Glory* 85–88; and John S. Feinberg, "God Ordains All Things," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986) 35–37. This type of argument against libertarianism has a long history in the Calvinist tradition, expressed most famously in Jonathan Edwards's *Freedom of the Will* (ed. Paul Ramsey; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957) part 2, section 6, "Liberty of Indifference, Not Only Not Necessary to Virtue, But Utterly Inconsistent with It" 320–27.

⁵¹ C must be understood not to include anything like God's intention to miraculously prevent Peter from performing A . If God did have such an intention, then Peter would not be in C at all but rather a distinct circumstance C^* .

firmed by the majority of Christian theologians and philosophers. What makes these Calvinist claims distinctive is that they appear to think that if God knows this, then he has middle knowledge. But as I have explained, knowledge of CCFs is not sufficient for MK. Furthermore, Tiessen and Ware's recent capitulation is also confused, since it is not necessary to think of CCFs as included in natural knowledge. Rather, even given classical Calvinist views about freedom and concurrence, CCFs could still be considered as part of God's free knowledge.⁵² But while CCFs may be either natural or free, they cannot be middle, given classical Calvinism.

Tiessen has drawn from this the lesson that the doctrine of MK is false: "What I had failed to see, during that time, was that the sole rationale for positing middle knowledge is to give room for libertarian creaturely freedom as a fact of the world God chooses to actualize. I now believe that rejection of the Molinist construction because of its faulty understanding of freedom also entails rejection of the concept of divine middle knowledge."⁵³

Unfortunately, this is yet another error on Tiessen's part. Rejection of libertarianism does not require rejection of MK. I can think of several ways in which Calvinism and MK might both be true. Reconciling the two requires endorsing controversial theological and/or philosophical positions, but when has that stopped anyone concerned with the nature of divine sovereignty, providence, predestination, and so forth? In what follows, I sketch two broad ways one might try to embrace both Calvinism and MK.

V. MODIFYING CALVINISM

One might be tempted to claim that Calvinism and MK are obviously compatible. For example, William Lane Craig has argued that:

The doctrine of middle knowledge as such does not entail a violation of the universal causality of God. One could theoretically maintain that God does cause everything that happens and yet that prior to His decree He knew what creatures would freely do were He to let them. One could go so far as to say that God, knowing via middle knowledge the mess that free creatures would make of any world, decided that such a world was finally not worth it and so created instead a world in which He Himself causally determines everything which occurs.⁵⁴

But this is too quick. If one holds to a doctrine of premotion and/or believes that undetermined free action is impossible, as the Calvinists surveyed above, then Craig's suggestion is incoherent. God would not have any knowledge of what creatures would freely do without being determined, for they would either not be able to do anything at all (without God's prior concurrence) or at least not be able to do anything freely (since freedom requires determinism).

⁵² Campbell makes a similar error as Tiessen and Ware when he insists that CCFs *must* be part of *free* knowledge. See his "Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique" 15.

⁵³ Helm and Tiessen, "Does Calvinism Have Room for Middle Knowledge?" 450.

⁵⁴ William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience* (Leiden: Brill, 1991) 272.

So, more intellectual effort than Craig's simple suggestion is required to reconcile Calvinism and MK. One way this could work is if one modifies or weakens the claims of Calvinism. First, abandon the doctrine of concurrence understood as premotion. This is not at all a radical suggestion. As Alvin Plantinga has noted, "one might suspect that this concurrence doctrine is metaphysical overkill—little more, really, than an attempt to pay God unnecessary (and unwanted) metaphysical compliments."⁵⁵ There is some precedent within the Calvinist tradition for such a rejection. Charles Hodge argued in his *Systematic Theology*:

The objection to the doctrine of *concursum* is not that it intentionally or really destroys the free agency of man; or that it makes God the author of sin, but ... it is founded on an arbitrary and false assumption. It denies that any creature can originate action. This does not admit of proof. It is an inference from the assumed nature of the dependence of the creature upon the creator ... in order to secure the absolute control of God over created beings. It however contradicts the consciousness of men. That we are free agents means that we have the power to act freely; and to act freely implies that we originate our own acts. This does not mean that it is inconsistent with our liberty that we should be moved and induced to exert our ability to act by considerations addressed to our reason or inclinations, or by the grace of God; but it does mean that we have the power to act.⁵⁶

Thus, there is nothing inconsistent with Calvinism *per se* in rejecting premotion, even if it has been the dominant view within the tradition.

There are at least two ways one could reject premotion. One might abandon concurrence entirely, maintain that God creates and sustains everything in being, and insist that creatures are able to cause effects without divine assistance. On the other hand, one might want to retain the doctrine of concurrence, but interpret it as Molina did, as God's action on the effect, rather than the secondary cause, so that both God and the creature cause an effect without the creature being caused by God to exercise its causal power.⁵⁷

I do not know what Feinberg thinks about concurrence, but this suggestion should be acceptable to Ware. In his book *God's Greater Glory*, he explicitly rejects the traditional Calvinist claim that God causes human sinful actions. While he is eager to affirm that God causes good actions and is sovereign over evil, the idea that he causes evil actions is difficult to square with divine goodness.⁵⁸

Perhaps we should think of God's regulating the factors of a situation, then, as "occasioning" a particular choice to be made, rather than as "causing" a particular choice to be made. Because God knows the natures of each person perfectly, he knows how those natures will respond to particular sets of factors presented

⁵⁵ Alvin Plantinga, "Materialism and Christian Belief," in *Persons: Human and Divine* (ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman; Oxford: Clarendon, 2007) 132.

⁵⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 604. Calvinist Paul Helm has also been critical of the doctrine of concurrence. See Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994) 177–82.

⁵⁷ Freddoso, "Introduction" 18.

⁵⁸ To say the least. See Jerry Walls, "Why No Classical Theist, Let Alone Orthodox Christian, Should Ever Be a Compatibilist," *Philosophia Christi* 13/1 (2011) 75–104.

to them. Thus, without causing a person to do evil, he nonetheless controls the evil they do. He controls whether evil is done, what evil is done, and in any and every case he could prevent the evil from being done. But in no case does he cause the evil to be done.⁵⁹

Ware says that God does not “cause” evil actions, so it is possible that he wants to reject TD in general. However, he endorses the *Mind* argument and so thinks that all free actions, both good and evil, are caused by prior factors, and these may result in a causal chain which can be traced back to God. Rather, the context makes clear that he is rejecting the idea that God pre-moves his creatures to sin (although he does not use that term).

If one rejects pre-motion, there is less pressure to endorse TD and accordingly room to embrace the possibility (if not the actuality) of creatures acting on their own without divine prompting or prior causal necessitation. *Free* action may still require such causation, but action *per se* would not. Recall the thinking underlying the *Mind* argument: if an agent is not caused to act as he does, then his action is merely random and unfree. Random actions are not possible if pre-motion is true, since God would determine whatever action is performed. But if one rejects pre-motion, such randomness is possible. Consider, then, a counterfactual of creaturely randomness (CCR).

(3) “If Peter were in genuinely indeterministic circumstances C, he would perform action A.”

If the *Mind* argument is sound, *A* will be random and unfree. If (3) is true, it cannot be in either God’s natural or free knowledge, since it is neither a necessary truth nor something God could decree to be true (since the circumstances are specified to be genuinely indeterministic). But since God is omniscient, he would have to know any true CCRs, if there are such. If so, he would have MK. Thus, it is possible to reconcile Calvinism with MK if one rejects pre-motion.

This is an interesting result, but it does not capture what Calvinist proponents of MK were after. More interesting would be if one could coherently combine Calvinism with MK of CCFs, rather than merely CCRs. To accomplish this the Calvinist must reject, in addition to pre-motion, the *Mind* argument and anything like it. Instead, admit that freedom is compatible with indeterminism. This would not be much of a capitulation to libertarianism, since one could still reject the incompatibilist claim that freedom *requires* indeterminism. There is also Calvinist precedent for this rejection. R. C. Sproul has claimed that Adam had the libertarian ability to freely do otherwise, an ability he lost in the Fall. But if Adam had the ability to freely act without being determined to do so, the *Mind* argument must be unsound.⁶⁰ If one rejects both pre-motion and the *Mind* argument, then something like

⁵⁹ Ware, *God’s Greater Glory* 123–24. Tiessen approvingly quotes this passage in his “Why Calvinists Should Believe in Divine Middle Knowledge” 348, n. 12. Helm sketches a similar view in his “God Does Not Take Risks,” in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion* (ed. Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. VanArragon; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004) 232–34.

⁶⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Chosen By God* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1986) 65. Paul Helm, although not motivated by a desire to endorse MK, also rejects the *Mind* argument in “Response by Paul Helm” 126–27.

Craig's above suggestion seems to make sense. Indeterministic free action would then be admitted as possible, even if there were no such thing in the actual world (or at least no such non-divine thing).

The most straightforward way to incorporate middle knowledge into this kind of contingent determinism would be to adopt a version of compatibilism somewhat like David Lewis's, who was a compatibilist but doubted that determinism is true.⁶¹ On such a view, one could maintain that when God was deciding which world to actualize, he saw that if he were to actualize an indeterministic world his purposes would not be accomplished; instead, he chose to actualize a world in which his creatures are determined to act freely in accordance with God's will. Such a scenario maintains Calvinistic determinism, but also allows for genuine middle knowledge, since those CCFs that report the indeterministically free actions of creatures in counterfactual circumstances would be known prior to God's decree and yet be contingently true. In fact, not only does a model like this allow for God to have MK, but it also allows for such knowledge to be providentially useful, since God consults it in deciding which world to decree to be actual.⁶²

Moving somewhat further from traditional Calvinistic determinism, an alternative way to incorporate MK into Calvinism would be to adopt John Martin Fischer's "semicompatibilism."⁶³ Fischer claims that moral responsibility is compatible with determinism, whether or not incompatibilism about free will is true. As long as one rejects premotion and admits that indeterministic freedom is possible, then one can construct a scenario much like the above compatibilist story. God, prior to creation, sees that those worlds containing creaturely freedom do not achieve his purposes; he therefore chooses to create a world in which his creatures are not free, but are nonetheless still morally responsible for their actions. Once again, this preserves determinism but allows for God to have and use middle knowledge.

The primary drawback to either of these reconciliations is that they require the adoption of views like Lewis's and Fischer's, accounts of free will and moral responsibility which are extremely controversial. It is beyond the scope of this paper to assess the strengths and weaknesses of such views, but it is worth pointing out that they are in good company, for every position on freedom and responsibility is highly controversial.⁶⁴ However, I suspect that many Calvinists would be uneasy adopting either version of contingent determinism. Given the (contentious) analysis of the sovereignty of God in Calvinism, contingent determinism may be unacceptable, since it results in God's being only contingently sovereign. It is fairly

⁶¹ David Lewis, "Are We Free to Break the Laws?" *Theoria* 47 (1981) 112–21; reprinted in *Free Will* (2d ed.; ed. Gary Watson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 122–29.

⁶² I owe this observation to Thomas Flint. Note that there would be strong pressure for anyone who endorses Sproul's claim about Adam to believe in MK, for without MK it is difficult to see how God could providentially plan for Adam's sinful libertarian action.

⁶³ John Martin Fischer, "Frankfurt-Type Examples and Semicompatibilism: New Work," in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (2d ed.; ed. Robert Kane; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 243–65.

⁶⁴ One need only peruse an anthology on free will to see this, e.g., Robert Kane, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Free Will*.

easy to imagine a Calvinist arguing that a being who is essentially sovereign is greater than one who is so only contingently, and hence God, as the greatest possible being, must be essentially sovereign. Nevertheless, for those sympathetic to such reasoning, there may be an alternative reconciliation of Calvinism and middle knowledge.

VI. EMBRACING THE IMPOSSIBLE

I have argued above that if one is willing to weaken or abandon certain claims by Calvinists like Tiessen, Ware, and Feinberg, it may be possible to reconcile middle knowledge with determinism. If Calvinists are hesitant to weaken their views on concurrence and free will, I can think of one other way to effect such a reconciliation. The advantage of this alternative is that it does not weaken Calvinism at all. The main disadvantage is that it requires a maverick treatment of the truth conditions for counterfactuals. If one is willing to embrace a non-standard account of the truth conditions for counterfactuals with impossible antecedents,⁶⁵ then one can be as robust a determinist as one likes, even to the point of accepting pre-motion and the claim that the conjunction of indeterminism and freedom is impossible.

A surprising consequence of the standard account of the truth conditions for counterfactual conditionals is that all counterfactuals with impossible antecedents (counterpossibles) are trivially true.⁶⁶ For example, a counterfactual like

(4) "If Bruce Ware were the number 7, he would be prime."

is true, but only trivially so. Since Bruce Ware could not really be the number 7, the antecedent of the counterfactual is impossible. As such, the counterfactual as a whole is a mere trivial truth due to a technicality of the standard account of the truth conditions for counterfactuals.⁶⁷ Even more surprising,

(5) "If Bruce Ware were the number 7, he would not be prime."

is also trivially true and for the very same reason.

Some Molinists have argued that this standard account for counterfactuals is false, for the very reason that it entails that all counterpossibles are trivially true.⁶⁸ Alfred Freddoso considers the following three propositions.

(6) "If Socrates were a donkey, then some man would have four legs."

⁶⁵ An example: "God told a lie" is the antecedent (and impossible as well) of "If God told a lie, then God doesn't always tell the truth."

⁶⁶ For the standard account, see David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (1973; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001) 13–19. The basic idea of the standard account is that a counterfactual is true in a given possible world W if and only if, for any possible world W_1 in which the antecedent is true but the consequent false, there is another possible world W_2 which is more similar to W than W_1 and in which both the antecedent and consequent are true. According to this account, all counterpossibles are thus trivially true because there are no possible worlds in which their antecedents are true.

⁶⁷ See note 66.

⁶⁸ To be clear, there is nothing I am aware of in Molinism that entails counterpossibles are non-trivially true or false, and so nothing that *requires* a rejection of the standard account on this point.

(7) "If Socrates were a donkey, then some donkey would have two legs."

(8) "If Socrates were a donkey, then some man would have non-denumerably many legs."

He comments, "I can only speak for myself, but while I waver on (6) and (7), I find myself very strongly, almost overwhelmingly, inclined to believe that (8) is false."⁶⁹ Similarly, Craig has argued that the standard account must be rejected, for it entails that both

(9) "If God did not exist, the universe would not exist."

and

(10) "If God did not exist, the universe would still exist."

are true. But (9) is a significant truth of Christian theology while (10) may seem to be obviously false.⁷⁰ Notice that the intuitions that Freddoso and Craig are appealing to in their rejection of the standard account are not peculiar to Molinists. In fact, there is nothing Molinistic about their arguments at all. Any Calvinist (or non-Calvinist) could offer the same arguments, and so they should be just as persuasive to non-Molinists as to Molinists (if they are persuasive at all).⁷¹

Suppose that opponents of the standard account are correct. It is open, then, for the Calvinist to affirm the non-trivial truth of

(11) "If indeterminism were true and Peter were free in circumstance C, he would freely perform action A."

If concurrence is understood as premotion or something like the *Mind* argument is sound, then the antecedent of (11) is impossible, but (11) could still be non-trivially true anyway, while

(12) "If indeterminism were true and Peter were free in C, he would freely refrain from performing A."

could be false.

⁶⁹ Alfred J. Freddoso, "Human Nature, Potency and the Incarnation," *Faith and Philosophy* 3/1 (1986) 44. I have changed the numbering of Freddoso's propositions.

⁷⁰ J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003) 53–54.

⁷¹ Daniel Nolan, a non-Molinist example of this line of thought, has argued that our abilities to reason about what we take to be the consequences of necessarily false theories in logic, mathematics and metaphysics should motivate us to think that the standard account requires alteration. He claims, for instance, that it would be "absurd" to maintain that exactly the same things would be true if Spinoza's metaphysics were correct as if Leibniz's metaphysics were correct (both of which are plausibly considered to be impossible), yet this is precisely what the standard account entails. See Daniel Nolan, "Impossible Worlds: A Modest Approach," *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 38/4 (1997) 535–72. Cf. David Vander Laan, "Counterpossibles and Similarity," in *Levisian Themes: The Philosophy of David K. Lewis* (ed. Frank Jackson and Graham Priest; Oxford: Clarendon, 2004) 258–75. Both Nolan and Vander Laan argue that the standard account should be supplemented with a theory of impossible worlds in order to handle this sort of difficulty.

If (11) is true, then God, being omniscient, knows this. Does God know it naturally, middly, or freely? Without a fully worked out alternative account for counterpossibles of creaturely freedom, one cannot have much confidence about the answer to this question. I shall merely register my intuitions, which seem to be such that any Calvinist could share in them.

It does not seem that God can know (11) freely, for that would require that he decree its truth. But if (11) were true as a result of God's decree, would not Peter's performance of *A* be unfree? Recall that the antecedent of (11) includes the claim that indeterminism is true. If Peter really were undetermined in *C*, then he could either perform *A* or not. Whether he would do so is simply not up to God. Similarly, it does not seem that God could know (11) naturally, for that would require (11) to be a necessary truth. But is (11) necessarily true? How could it be? Again, Peter's undeterminedness in *C* would seem to entail that he could refrain from performing *A*.⁷² But if (11) is true, not necessary, and also not true as a result of God's decree, then it must be known via God's middle knowledge. Middle knowledge, recall, is simply God's knowledge of contingent truths whose truth values he did not decree, and (11) would seem to be such a truth. Therefore, even if the conjunction of indeterminism and freedom is impossible, it seems that God can still have middle knowledge of libertarian agents and their actions.

Now, it should be noted that such middle knowledge is not what Molinists have been concerned with defending, since this knowledge would be of no use to God in deciding which world to actualize. After all, not even an omnipotent being can actualize an impossibility. Nevertheless, if this strategy is sound, God really does have MK, even if he cannot use it, and so Tiessen's recent claim that there is no reason to believe in MK if one rejects libertarianism is mistaken.⁷³

VII. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that while those Calvinists who claim that God has middle knowledge are confused, their claim may be correct. I have offered two ways in which one might attempt to combine Calvinism with a belief in middle knowledge, by modifying Calvinism's claims concerning concurrence and freedom, or by altering/rejecting the standard account of the truth conditions for counterfactual propositions. Either way, Calvinists can appropriate at least some of Molina's genius without having to sacrifice Calvinism.

⁷² For those who think Frankfurt cases show that one does not have to be able to do otherwise in order to be free, we can stipulate that there is nothing in *C* that prevents Peter from refraining from performing *A*.

⁷³ Of course, as pointed out in note 23, there are other reasons having nothing to do with free will for suggesting that God has MK. For example, one might argue that in order for God to providentially govern indeterministic quantum events, he must have MK of counterfactuals of quantum activity (such as "If this uranium atom were in circumstance *C*, it would spontaneously decay at time *t*"). Some philosophers of religion have made mistakes similar to Tiessen's. See, for example, Edwin Mares and Ken Perszyk, "Molinist Conditionals," in *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate* 96.

Of course, nothing I have said requires the Calvinist to believe that God has middle knowledge. Nowhere did I argue that a premotion understanding of concurrence is false, or that the *Mind* argument is unsound (although I believe they are). Similarly, I put forward as options the Fischerian and Lewisian accounts of freedom, but gave no argument for the truth of either. Furthermore, the argument in the last section must be taken with a grain of salt (perhaps a very large grain), since an adequate assessment would require an as yet undeveloped account of the truth conditions for counterpossibles of creaturely freedom. My humble goal has been merely to offer possible defenses of the claim that middle knowledge can be incorporated into a determinist theology without abandoning Calvinism.

Nevertheless, if a Calvinist agrees with my reasoning, then she would need to abandon the objection, presented above by Bavinck, that Molinists are sacrificing the aseity or pure actuality of God.⁷⁴ Moreover, the grounding objection would also have to be abandoned.⁷⁵ If these objections reveal problems for Molinism, then they also do so for any version of TD that incorporates MK. Indeed, if my reasoning in section six is correct, then even if the libertarian understanding of freedom is necessarily false, divine omniscience still entails that God has knowledge of contingent propositions whose truth he did not decree.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Roughly, the doctrine of divine aseity asserts that God does not depend upon anything apart from himself for anything, including his nonessential properties. Also roughly, the doctrine of divine pure actuality asserts that God has no potentiality, that God has no potential to be any different in any respect than he in fact is.

⁷⁵ See note 26.

⁷⁶ I am grateful for helpful discussion and comments on previous drafts to Andrew Bailey, Kenny Boyce, Lesley-Anne Dyer, Thomas Flint, Bryan Pilkington, Josh Rasmussen, Andrea Turpin, and Jerry Walls. I am also indebted to Dallas and Lynne Van Horn, familial proofreaders than which none greater can be conceived.