

12

Molinism, Covid-19 and Human Responsibility

JOHNNY M SAKR*

ABSTRACT

Coined after Roman Catholic Jesuit Luis de Molina,¹ Molinism is a philosophical tool that attempts to explain how a provident God can exercise sovereign control over his world while honouring the genuine freedom He has bestowed upon His creatures.² While Molinism holds that all things that happen in the actual world are part of God's decree,³ it does not remove human responsibility. This chapter will show how the Christian-Molinist perspective promotes human efforts to prevent epidemics, cope with them, and change the way of life to lower their impact.

I INTRODUCTION

With the current COVID-19 epidemic, it's only natural for detractors of religious ideology to argue for the irreconcilability of 'evil' (be it man-made or natural evil) with the existence of God(s), and how theological convictions interact with practical applications.

* LLB, Grad Dip. Leg Prac, LL.M. (Commercial Transactions), MPhil. (Law), PhD (Law) (candidate). Adjunct Lecturer in Law at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Sydney.

¹ Alexander Aichele and Matthias Kaufmann, 'Introduction' in Alexander Aichele and Matthias Kaufmann (eds), *A Companion to Luis de Molina* (Brill, 2014) xiv.

² Thomas P Flint, 'Molinsm' (2015) *Oxford University Press* 1 <<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935314.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935314-e-29>>.

³ Luis De Molina, *Foreknowledge*, 4.14.15.53.3.17. See also; Kirk MacGregor, *Luis de Molina: The Life and Theology of the Founder of Middle Knowledge* (Zondervan Academic, 2015) 115-121.

While there is a myriad of views on this issue, this chapter will present the Molinist-Christian attitude regarding epidemics, particularly COVID-19. The first section of this chapter will briefly explain what Molinism is and the elements within this belief system. Given Molinism is a system of theological thought concerning God's omniscience and its attempt to reconcile this with human freedom, the second section will address the inevitable question 'but, if God is omniscient and thus, knows all our decisions, how do we possess free will?' The last section will illustrate how Molinism can be applied to this epidemic. In particular, how Molinism, taking into consideration its theological roots, can be used to promote humanitarian efforts to prevent outbreaks, cope with them, and change the way of life to lower their impact.

II MOLINISM

Molinism is named after Luis de Molina,⁴ a Spanish Jesuit theologian⁵ who has become well-known among philosophers of religion for his doctrine of middle knowledge (Latin: *scientia media*).⁶ *Scientia media* is knowledge of all true counterfactual propositions, including counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. That is to say; God knows what contingent states of affairs would obtain if certain antecedent states of affairs were to obtain. God knows what any free creature would freely do in any set of freedom permitting circumstances.⁷

Molinism is a philosophical theory that seeks to reconcile God's divine foreknowledge, sovereignty, and human freedom.⁸ On Molin-

⁴ Aichele and Kaufmann (n 1) xiv. See also; Edward Craig, *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Psychology Press, 2000) 588.

⁵ Thomas P Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Cornell University, 1998) 2.

⁶ MacGregor (n 3) 9. See also; Tim Stratton and Jacobus Erasmus, 'Mere Molinism: A Defense of Two Essential Pillars' (2018) 16(2) *Perichoresis* 18.

⁷ William Lane Craig, "'No Other Name": A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ' (1989) 6(2) *Faith and Philosophy* 177.

⁸ Edward Craig, *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Taylor & Francis, 1998) 465. See also; Jerry L Walls and Joseph Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (InterVarsity Press, 2004) 134.

ism, ‘human freedom’ is freedom in the libertarian sense, otherwise known as contra-causal freedom.⁹ Quoting Hasker, Hamilton explains, a human agent contains contra-causal or libertarian freedom with respect to a particular action if at the time the choice is made ‘it is within the agent’s power to perform the action and also in the agent’s power to refrain from the action’.¹⁰

The action performed by the agent is free from all causally determining external and internal factors, ‘no antecedent conditions and/or causal laws determine that he will perform the action or that he won’t’.¹¹

In his book, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism*, J P Moreland offered four essentials of libertarian free will:

1. P is a substance that has the active power to bring about e;
2. P exerted power as a first mover (an ‘originator’) to bring about e;
3. P had the categorical ability to refrain from exerting power to bring about e; and
4. P acted for the sake of reasons, which serve as the final cause or teleological goal for which P acted.¹²

It is this libertarian sense of freedom that allows human beings to be responsible for their actions.¹³ It is not within the scope of this chapter to argue that moral responsibility requires libertarianism.

⁹ Kenneth Perszyk, *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate* (Oxford University Press, 2011) 262. See also; Kenneth Perszyk, ‘Molinism and Compatibilism’ (2000) 48(1) *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11; Stratton and Erasmus (n 6)18; Jonathan Glover, *Responsibility* (Humanities Press, 1970) 34.

¹⁰ Robert L Hamilton, *Philosophical Reflections on Free Will* (2000) 2, citing William Hasker, ‘A Philosophical Perspective’ in *The Openness of God*, Pinnock (ed), (Downers Grove, 1994) 137.

¹¹ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, 1977) 29.

¹² James Porter Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism* (Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd, 2009) 44.

¹³ William O’Donohue and Kyle E Ferguson, *The Psychology of B F Skinner* (SAGE, 2001) 165. See also; George Berkeley and Jonathan Dancy (ed), *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, 1998); Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* (MIT Press, 1969).

Molinism describes God's knowledge in three logical moments – God's natural knowledge, middle knowledge, and free knowledge.¹⁴ As William Lane Craig explains:

Although whatever God knows, He has known from eternity, so that there is no temporal succession in God's knowledge, nonetheless there does exist a sort of logical succession in God's knowledge in that His knowledge of certain propositions is conditionally or explanatorily prior to His knowledge of certain other propositions. That is to say, God's knowledge of a particular set of propositions depends asymmetrically on His knowledge of a certain other set of propositions and is in this sense posterior to it.¹⁵

The term logically should not be understood in the sense of chronological progression. For example, the axioms of a mathematical theory are logically, not chronologically, prior to the theorems derived from them.¹⁶ Therefore, there was no point in time where God contained middle knowledge and lacked natural and free knowledge.¹⁷

The following section will discuss God's natural knowledge, the first logical moment in God's knowledge.¹⁸

¹⁴ For Molina's doctrine, see Ludovici Molina, *De liberi arbitrii cum gratia donis, divina praescientia, providentia, praedestinationae et reprobatione Concordia* 4. This section has been translated by Alfred J Freddoso, 'Introduction', in Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, tr Alfred J Freddoso (Cornell University Press, 1988). See also; William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000) 131; John David Laing, 'Molinism and Supercomprehension: Grounding Counterfactual Truth' (PhD Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000) 154; Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (B&H Publishing Group, 2010) 16-17.

¹⁵ William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience* (Brill, 1990) 237.

¹⁶ Douglas Amedeo and Reginald G Golledge, *An Introduction to Scientific Reasoning in Geography* (Wiley, 1975) 34. See also; William Richard Connolly, *The Given and the a Priori: Some Issues in the Epistemology of C. I. Lewis* (Michigan State University, 1973) 145; Arthur Newell Strahler, *Understanding Science: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues* (Prometheus Books, 1992) 243.

¹⁷ Keathley (n 14) 40.

¹⁸ William Lane Craig, 'God Directs All Things: On Behalf of a Molinist View of

A Natural Knowledge

Molina called God's pre-volitional knowledge of necessary truths as natural knowledge.¹⁹ That is, 'every logical possibility is an object of God's knowledge, which depends only on his intellect'.²⁰

These truths are metaphysically necessary because they could not have been false²¹ and are true in all possible worlds.²² For example, the laws of logic and the laws of mathematics.²³ As John Laing notes, 'God has no control over the truth of the[se] propositions'; they are independent of His will.²⁴ Molina explained:

Through this type of knowledge He knew all the things to which the divine power extended either immediately or by the mediation of secondary causes, including not only the natures of individuals and the necessary states of affairs composed of them, but also the contingent states of affairs-through this knowledge He knew, to be sure, not that the latter were or were not going to obtain determinately, but rather that they were indifferently able to obtain and able not to obtain, a fea-

Providence' in Dennis Jowers and Stanley N Gundry (eds), *Four Views on Divine Providence* (Zondervan, 2011) 82-83. See also; Kevin Timpe, *Arguing About Religion* (Routledge, 2009) 335.

¹⁹ Luis de Molina, *Concordia: Disputations* 52 sec 9. See Flint (n 5) 38.

²⁰ Jean-Pascal Anfray, 'Molina and John Duns Scotus' in Alexander Aichele and Matthias Kaufmann (eds), *A Companion to Luis de Molina* (Brill, 2014) 336.

²¹ Thomas P Flint, 'Two Accounts of Providence' in Michael C Rea (ed), *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology: Providence, Scripture, and Resurrection* (Oxford University Press, 2009) 25. See also; Molina (n 14) 11.

²² Richard A Fumerton, *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002) 51. See also; Robert Nozick, *Invariances: The Structure of the Objective World* (Harvard University Press, 2001) 129.

²³ Geoffrey Scarre, *Logic and Reality in the Philosophy of John Stuart Mill* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2012) 141. See also; Mark A Olson, 'Descartes' First Meditation: Mathematics and the Laws of Logic' (1988) 26(3) *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 408.

²⁴ Laing (n 14) 125 (emphasis mine). See also; Michael J Murray and Michael C Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) 59; Michael V Griffin, *Leibniz, God and Necessity* (Cambridge University Press, 2013) 114.

ture that belongs to them necessarily and thus also falls under God's natural knowledge.²⁵

The truths known in His natural knowledge are necessary and independent of God's free will.²⁶

Although God's natural knowledge is knowledge of all possible worlds, not all possible worlds are actualisable. Before further elaboration on God's knowledge is discussed, it is important to briefly discuss three concepts – actualisation, creaturely world-types, and possible world semantics.

B Actualisation

It is semantically improper to assert that God created the 'world' because the term world (as used in this chapter), is not an thing that was established at a point in time, but rather one of numerous complete sets of attuned states of affairs which have subsisted in the mind of God for all eternity.²⁷ Plantinga explains:

²⁵ Luis de Molina, *Concordia* 4.52.9 in Molina (n 14) 168.

²⁶ Thomas P Flint, 'Two Accounts of Providence' in Thomas V Morris (ed), *Divine and Stanley N Gundry (eds), Four Views on Divine Providence* (Zondervan, 2011) 82-83. See also; Kevin Timpe, *Arguing About Religion* (Routledge, 2009) 335.

Luis de Molina, *Concordia: Disputations* 52 sec 9. See Flint (n 5) 38.

Jean-Pascal Anfray, 'Molina and John Duns Scotus' in Alexander Aichele and Matthias Kaufmann (eds), *A Companion to Luis de Molina* (Brill, 2014) 336.

Thomas P Flint, 'Two Accounts of Providence' in Michael C Rea (ed), *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology: Providence, Scripture, and Resurrection* (Oxford University Press, 2009) 25. See also; Molina (n 14) 11.

Richard A Fumerton, *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002) 51. See also; Robert Nozick, *Invariances: The Structure of the Objective World* (Harvard University Press, 2001) 129.

Geoffrey Scarre, *Logic and Reality in the Philosophy of John Stuart Mill* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2012) 141. See also; Mark A Olson, 'Descartes' First Meditation: Mathematics and the Laws of Logic' (1988) 26(3) *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 408.

Laing (n 14) 125 (emphasis mine). See also; Michael J Murray and Michael C Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) 59; Michael V Griffin, *Leibniz, God and Necessity* (Cambridge University Press, 2013) 114. Luis de Molina, *Concordia* 4.52.9 in Molina (n 14) 168 and *Human Action* (Cornell University Press, 1988) 157.

²⁷ Laing (n 14) 147.

We speak of God as creating the world; yet if it is α [the actual world] of which we speak, what we say is false. For a thing is created only if there is a time before which it does not exist; and this is patently false of α , as it is of any state of affairs. What God has created are the heavens and the earth and all that they contain; he has not created himself, or numbers, propositions, properties, or states of affairs: these have no beginnings. We can say, however, that God actualises states of affairs; his creative activity results in their being or becoming actual.²⁸

James Baillie put it more succinctly, ‘the actual world is made up of the facts corresponding to the set of true propositions’,²⁹ or as Van Inwagen wrote, ‘for the Abstractionist (if he thinks of worlds as states of affairs), actuality is just obtaining: the actual world is the one world – the one among possible states of affairs maximal with respect to the inclusion of other state of affairs – that obtains’.³⁰

Philosophers have distinguished between two kinds of actualising activity to aid in discussing how God can actualise a world while preserving a strong view of freedom.³¹

C Strong Actualisation

The first kind of actualisation is called *strong actualisation*. Strong actualisation refers to ‘the efforts of a being when it causally determines an event’s obtaining’.³² Flint and Freddoso write, ‘an agent S strongly actualises a state of affairs p just when S causally determines

²⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Clarendon Press, 1974) 168 (emphasis mine).

²⁹ James Baillie, *Contemporary Analytic Philosophy* (Prentice Hall, 2003) 25. See also; David Sanford, *If P, Then Q: Conditionals and the Foundations of Reasoning* (Routledge, 2011) 156; Alexander R Pruss, ‘The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument’ in William Lane Craig and J P Moreland (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009) 37.

³⁰ Peter van Inwagen, ‘Two Concepts of Possible Worlds’ in Peter van Inwagen, *Ontology, Identity, and Modality: Essays in Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) 211.

³¹ See Plantinga (n 28) 172-173; Roderick Chisolm, *Person and Object* (Open Court, 1976) 67-69.

³² Laing (n 14) 148.

p's obtaining'³³ or as Morrision wrote, 'a person P strongly actualises a state of affairs S if, without relying on help from any indeterministic processes, P causes S to obtain'.³⁴

An example of strong actualisation is that of a potter making a vessel.

D Weak Actualisation

The second kind of actualisation has been coined *weak actualisation*. Weak actualisation refers to a being's contribution to an event's obtaining by placing a creature in circumstances in which the creature will freely cause the event. Flint and Freddoso explain, 'in such cases the agent in question, by his actions or omissions, strongly brings it about that another agent S is in situation C, where it is true that if S were in C, then S would freely act in a specified way',³⁵ or as Morrision wrote, 'P weakly actualises S if P strongly actualises some other state of affairs S*, such that if P were to actualise S*, some indeterministic process would bring about the actualisation of S'.³⁶

For example, God could weakly actualise an event by placing person P in circumstances C knowing P would do action A in C.

The distinction between strong and weak actualisation assist in understanding the relationship between human freedom and divine providence. However, in Molinism, there are limitations on the possible worlds that God can actualise. For example, as Laing notes, 'God cannot strongly actualise counterfactuals of freedom because that would involve a contradiction [because counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are not causally determined by God (thus forming a creaturely world-type) and strong actualisation involves God causally determin-

³³ Thomas P Flint and Alfred J Freddoso, 'Maximal Power' in Alfred J Freddoso (ed), *The Existence and Nature of God* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) 139.

³⁴ Wes Morrision, 'Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are They Compatible?' (2001) 37(2) *Religious Studies* 145.

³⁵ Flint and Freddoso (n 33) 140.

³⁶ Morrision (n 34) 145.

ing a state of affairs]. God is also limited in the states of affairs He can weakly actualise'.³⁷

In summary, strong actualisation occurs when God causally brings about some effect directly by His action whilst weak actualisation arises when God places agents in a set of circumstances knowing that the person would freely choose to produce an effect.

Creaturely-world types and their relationship to feasible worlds will be discussed in the following section.

E Creaturely World-Type

If God has middle knowledge, a concept that will be further elaborated, then God knows all true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (if P was in C, P would do A), and knows them logically prior to the divine decree.³⁸ Thus, limiting the type of God can bring into existence. Flint explains as follows:

For example, if God knows a counterfactual of creaturely freedom which we might symbolize as $(C \rightarrow A)$, then he knows that he cannot make a world in which circumstances C are actual but action A is not performed. For to make such a world, he would have to bring it about that C is actual; but, since $(C \rightarrow A)$ is prevolitionally true, God knows that his bringing about C would as a matter of fact lead to A's being performed. Hence, since any complete set of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom which God might know to be true would restrict God to making a certain type of world, let us refer to such a set as a *creaturely world-type*.³⁹

³⁷ Laing (n 14) 149 (emphasis mine).

³⁸ Craig (n 15) 267. See also; Timpe (n 18) 335; Kirk R MacGregor, *A Molinist-Anabaptist Systematic Theology* (University Press of America, 2007) 39; William Lane Craig, 'Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the "Grounding Objection"' (2001) 18 *Faith and Philosophy* 338-339.

³⁹ Flint (n 5) 48. World-type terminology was first introduced in Flint's dissertation, 'Divine Freedom' (PhD Thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1980); Thomas P Flint, 'The Problem of Divine Freedom' (1983) 20(3) *American Philosophical Quarterly* 255-264.

In other words, ‘a creaturely world-type is a complete set of counterfactuals’.⁴⁰ Otherwise, a more complicated explanation:

- T is a creaturely world-type iff⁴¹ T is a set such that, for any proposition s ,
- (i) s is a member of T only if either s or $\sim s$ is a counterfactual of creaturely freedom, and
 - (ii) if s is a counterfactual of creaturely freedom, then either s or $\sim s$ (but not both) is a member of T , and
 - (iii) if s is a counterfactual of creaturely freedom and s is not a member of T , then there exists a counterfactual of creaturely freedom s^* such that
 - (a) s^* has the same antecedent as s , and
 - (b) s^* is a member of T .⁴²

There are three important characteristics of creaturely world-types that should be noted.

Firstly, ‘whichever creaturely world-type is true is only contingently true’.⁴³ Given a creaturely world-type takes into consideration freedom in the libertarian sense, and since this type of freedom is not compatible with necessitarianism, creaturely world-types are only contingently true.

Secondly, ‘God cannot cause a particular creaturely world-type to be true’.⁴⁴ A creaturely world-type highlights how an agent would freely act in any given circumstance; so God is only able to decide

⁴⁰ Laing (n 14) 150.

⁴¹ ‘if and only if’.

⁴² Flint (n 5) 49. Flint also proposed two other possible descriptions:
 (CWT3) T is a creaturely world-type iff for any counterfactual of creaturely freedom $(C \rightarrow A)$, either $(C \rightarrow A)$ or $(C \rightarrow \sim A)$ is a member of T ; and
 (CWT4) T is a creaturely world-type iff for any counterfactual of creaturely freedom $(C \rightarrow A)$, either $(C \rightarrow A)$ is a member of T or there exists a proposition A^* such that $(C \rightarrow A^*)$ is a counterfactual of creaturely freedom and $(C \rightarrow A^*)$ is a member of T .

See Flint (n 51) 49-50.

⁴³ Flint (n 39) 257.

⁴⁴ Flint (n 39) 257.

which creaturely world-type is true if He determines the truth value of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. However, given the truth of libertarianism, God cannot do this as it's logically impossible to make someone do something freely.⁴⁵ Therefore, 'which creaturely world-type is true is a contingent fact not determined by God'.⁴⁶

Thirdly, 'every creaturely world-type determines a unique galaxy'.⁴⁷ A galaxy is a group of possible worlds in which a specific creaturely world-type holds.⁴⁸ Understanding creaturely world-types aids in our understanding of what it is logically possible for God to do and what God has the power to do.⁴⁹

Since creaturely world-types determine a galaxy, those being worlds consisting of counterfactuals that God did not determine; God is only able to actualise worlds which are members of this galaxy. These are called feasible worlds.⁵⁰

With these concepts covered, the next concept to understand is possible world semantics.

F Possible World Semantics

The phrase 'possible world' is used by philosophers as 'a maximal description of reality, or a way reality might be'⁵¹ that are governed, in general, by broad logical possibility.⁵²

⁴⁵ Timothy R Phillips and Dennis L Okholm, *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (InterVarsity Press, 2009) 92. See also; Alvin Plantinga, 'Against Naturalism' in Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, *Knowledge of God* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009) 3; John S Feinberg, *Theologies and Evil* (University Press of America, 1979) 71.

⁴⁶ Flint (n 39) 257.

⁴⁷ Flint (n 39) 257.

⁴⁸ Laing (n 14) 152.

⁴⁹ Plantinga (n 28_ 172-173, 180-184. See Flint (n 39) 257.

⁵⁰ Flint (n 39) 257. See also; Justin Mooney, 'Best Feasible Worlds: Divine Freedom and Leibniz's Lapse' (2015) 77(3) *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 225; Wierenga, 'Perfect Goodness and Divine Freedom' (2007) 48(3) *Philosophical Books* 208.

⁵¹ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Crossway, 3rd ed, 2008) 183.

⁵² Bob Hale, 'Absolute Necessities' (1996) 30(10) *Philosophical Perspectives* 93-117.

A possible world can either be ‘feasible’ or ‘infeasible’, depending on the truth value of counterfactuals.

As mentioned earlier, a feasible world is a description of those worlds which God has the power to actualise, while infeasible worlds are worlds that God cannot actualise. Craig explains:

For although it is logically possible that God actualise any possible world (assuming that God exists in every possible world), it does not follow therefrom that it is feasible for God to actualise any possible world. For God’s ability to actualise worlds containing free creatures will be limited by which counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true in the moment logically prior to the divine decree.⁵³

Although there may be an infinite number of possible worlds known by God by His natural knowledge, there is also an endless number of possible worlds that are not actualisable ‘because the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom which must be true in order for Him to weakly actualise such worlds are in fact false’.⁵⁴ For example, there may be a possible world in God’s natural knowledge where Peter does not deny Christ in the exact same circumstances (‘C’) in which he did.⁵⁵ Though this is logically possible, because there is no positive truth value for the counterfactual ‘if Peter were in C, he would not deny Christ’, God cannot use His middle knowledge to weakly actualise a world where Peter does not deny Christ in C, for the truth value of this proposition is false and thus, God cannot actualise a world where Peter does not deny Christ in C. As Craig remarks, ‘this [delimitation] might be thought to impugn divine omnipotence, but in fact such a restriction poses no non-logical limit to God’s power’.⁵⁶

⁵³ Craig (n 7) 180, citing Flint (n 39) 257.

⁵⁴ Craig (n 7) 181, citing Alvin Plantinga, ‘Self-Profile’ in James Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen (eds), *Alvin Plantinga* (D Reidel, 1985) 50-52.

⁵⁵ See Matthew 26:31-75; Mark 14:29-72; Luke 22:33-66; John 18:15-27. See also; Roger David Aus, *Simon Peter’s Denial and Jesus’ Commissioning Him as His Successor in John 21:15-19: Studies in Their Judaic Background* (University Press of America, 2013) 170.

⁵⁶ Craig (n 7) 181, citing Flint and Freddoso (n 33) 93-98.

As Flint and Freddoso maintain:

[t]here will be some state of affairs ... which even an omnipotent agent is incapable of actualising. And since this inability results solely from the logically necessary truth that one being cannot causally determine how another will freely act, it should not be viewed ... as a kind of inability which disqualifies an agent from ranking as omnipotent.⁵⁷

In other words, actualising an infeasible world is logically impossible because it is a logically impossible act. But the infeasible world in and of itself is logically consistent and logically possible.⁵⁸

On Molina's view, 'it could be said that it is up to God whether we find ourselves in a world which we are predestined' that is, God chooses which world to actualise, 'but that it is up to us whether we are predestined in the world in which we find ourselves', for the agent determined the truth value of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.⁵⁹

Logically posterior to natural knowledge is middle knowledge, the second logical moment.⁶⁰

G Middle Knowledge

Middle knowledge is 'God's knowledge of what every possible free creature would do under any possible set of circumstances'.⁶¹ As Laing explained, 'middle knowledge also proposes that God has knowl-

⁵⁷ Flint and Freddoso (n 33) 95.

⁵⁸ 'Molinism and Infallibility', *Religion & Spirituality Podcast* (Reasonable Faith, 2016).

⁵⁹ William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (BRILL, 1988) 204, citing Theodore Regnon, *Ban-nesianisme et Molinisme* (Retaux-Bray, 1890) 48. See also; Edmond Vansteenbergh, *Le Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, sv, "Molinisme" 10.2 cols 1028-9; Craig (n 59) 204.

⁶⁰ MacGregor (n 38) 71. See also; William Lane Craig, 'Men Moved By the Holy Spirit Spoke From God' (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration' in Michael C Rea (ed), *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology: Providence, Scripture, and Resurrection* (Oxford University Press, 2009) 180.

⁶¹ Craig (n 14) 130.

edge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom'.⁶² Counterfactuals take the form, 'placed in situation C, A would do B'.⁶³

Finally, Molina explained middle knowledge as follows: 'before any free determination of His will, by virtue of the depth of His natural knowledge . . . He discerns what the free choice of any creature would do by its own innate freedom'.⁶⁴

William Hasker notes the following regarding Molinism and its use of middle knowledge:

If you are committed to a 'strong' view of providence, according to which, down to the smallest detail, 'things are as they are because God knowingly decided to create such a world,' and yet you also wish to maintain a libertarian conception of free will – if this is what you want, then Molinism is the only game in town.⁶⁵

Zagzebski sings similar praise, middle knowledge is '[p]erhaps the most ingenious solution to the dilemma of foreknowledge and freedom'.⁶⁶ Although some reject the doctrine of middle knowledge based on the grounding objection,⁶⁷ it is not within the scope of this

⁶² Laing (n 14) 128.

⁶³ Francesco Piro, 'The Philosophical Impact of Molinism in the 17th Century' in Matthias Kaufmann and Alexander Aichele (eds), *A Companion to Luis de Molina* (BRILL, 2014) 372.

⁶⁴ Luis de Molina, *Concordia: Disputations* 49 (n 11). See Molina (n 14) 119. Cf Anfray (n 20) 358.

⁶⁵ William Hasker, 'Response to Thomas Flint' (1990) 60(1/2) *Philosophical Studies* 117-18.

⁶⁶ Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (Oxford University Press, 1996) 125.

⁶⁷ Steven B Cowan, 'The Grounding Objection to Middle Knowledge Revisited' (2003) 39(1) *Religious Studies* 93-102; Alexander Zambrano, 'Truthmaker and the Grounding Objection to Middle Knowledge' (2001) 21(1) *Aporia* 19-34; Robert Adams, 'An Anti-Molinist Argument' (1991) 5 *Philosophical Perspectives* 343-353.

William Lane Craig explains the grounding objection as follows: 'It is the claim that there are no true counterfactuals concerning what creatures would freely do under certain specified circumstances—the propositions expressed by such counterfactual sentences are said either to have no truth value or to be uniformly false—, since there is nothing to make these counterfactuals true. Because they are contrary-to-fact conditionals and

chapter to address this objection.⁶⁸

Like natural knowledge, middle knowledge is pre-volitional and therefore its truth value is independent of God's will.⁶⁹ Likewise, middle knowledge is similar to free knowledge in that the truths known are contingent; they depend on creaturely will.⁷⁰

Molina wrote:

The third type is middle knowledge, by which in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice, He saw in His own essence what each such faculty would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things--even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite.⁷¹

Thus, the substance of God's middle knowledge can be understood as a nearly infinite number of propositions of the form,

If person, *P*, were in circumstance, *C*, then *P* would freely perform action, *A*.

It is important to highlight that the actual existence of *P* or *C* is not a necessary condition for God possessing this knowledge. Molina maintained that God not only knew of state of affairs that would obtain but also that would not obtain. Furthermore, Molina argued that God knew how free creatures would act if placed in non-actual state of affairs, '[i]t is clear from Sacred Scripture that the supreme God has

are supposed to be true logically prior to God's creative decree, there is no ground of the truth of such counterfactual propositions. Thus, they cannot be known by God.' [Citation from Craig (n 38) 338.]

⁶⁸ See responses by John Laing, *Middle Knowledge: Human Freedom in Divine Sovereignty* (Kregel Academic, 2012) ch 2; Craig (n 38) 337-352; Tyler Crown, 'Truth-Makers and the "Grounding Objection" to Molinism' (2018) 4(1) *The Liberty Undergraduate Journal for Philosophy of Religion* art. 2; Alvin Plantinga, 'Reply to Robert Adams' in James E Tomberlin et al (eds), *Alvin Plantinga* (D Reidel Publishing Company, 1985) vol 5 371-382.

⁶⁹ Laing (n 14) 127.

⁷⁰ Laing (n 14) 127. See also; Flint (n 26) 158.

⁷¹ Luis de Molina, *Concordia* 4.52.9 in Molina (n 14) 168.

certain cognition of some future contingents that depend on human free choice, but that neither have existed nor ever will exist in reality and that hence do not exist in eternity either'.⁷²

Molina's biblical support for God possessing counterfactual knowledge will not be discussed in this chapter,⁷³ nor will a philosophical defence of whether God has middle knowledge will be provided in this chapter.⁷⁴

The third logical moment in God's knowledge is free knowledge.⁷⁵

H Free Knowledge

Free knowledge refers to the part of God's knowledge which He knows by His decision to actualise the world. The content of this knowledge is of what actually exists (or will exist).⁷⁶ This knowledge is contingent, and contains 'only metaphysically contingent truths, or truths that could have been prevented by God if He had chosen to create different situations, different creatures, or to not create at all'.⁷⁷ Molina stated that, in His free knowledge, God knows 'absolutely and determinately, without any condition or hypothesis, which ones from among all the contingent states of affairs were in fact going to obtain and, likewise, which ones were not going to obtain'.⁷⁸

The truths known in His free knowledge are contingent and dependent on God's free will.⁷⁹

The diagram opposite illustrates the three logical moments in God's knowledge.

⁷² Luis de Molina, *Concordia* 4.49.9 in Molina (n 14) 116. See also; Laing (n 14) 128.

⁷³ See Laing (n 14) 130-140; MacGregor (n 3) ch 3.

⁷⁴ See Craig (n 18) 95-100; Craig (n 15) 237-278; Daniel J Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness* (Psychology Press, 2005) 111-125; Stratton and Erasmus (n 6) 17-29.

⁷⁵ Craig (n 18) 82-83. See also Timpe (n 18) 335.

⁷⁶ Laing (n 14) 125.

⁷⁷ Laing (n 14) 126. See also Keith E Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1994) 112; Michael J Loux and Dean W Zimmerman, *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics* (Oxford University Press, 2005) 180.

⁷⁸ Luis de Molina, *Concordia* 4.52.9 in Molina (n 14) 168.

⁷⁹ Flint (n 26) 157.

MOLINISM, COVID-19 AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

Diagram 1.0:

MOMENT ONE:

... ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ...

NATURAL KNOWLEDGE: *God knows the range of possible worlds*

MOMENT TWO:

... ○ ○ ○ ...

MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE: *God knows the range of feasible worlds*

DIVINE CREATIVE DECREE

MOMENT THREE:

... ○ ...

FREE KNOWLEDGE: *God knows the actual world*

III BUT, IF GOD IS OMNISCIENT

‘But, if God is omniscient and thus, knows all our decisions, how do we possess free will?’ In response, some people have adopted a view called theological fatalism which holds that if God foreknows what you’re going to do, then you are fated to do it and therefore, everything happens necessarily.⁸⁰ The argument can be put in syllogistic form:

1. Necessarily if God foreknows *x*, then *x* will happen.
2. God foreknows *x*.

3. Therefore, *x* will necessarily happen.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Nelson Pike, ‘Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action’ (1965) 74 *Philosophical Review* 27-46. See also the revised version in Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness, Studies in Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion* (Routledge & Kegan Paul; Schocken, 1970) ch 4; Bernard B Poggi, ‘Towards a Renewed Theology of Personal Agency: Origen’s Theological Vision and the Challenges of Fatalism and Determinism’ (2018) *Jesuit School of Theology Dissertation* i fn 1; Linda Zagzebski, ‘Recent work on Divine Foreknowledge and Freewill’ in Robert Kane (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (Oxford University Press, 2002) 45.

⁸¹ Craig (n 14) 72.

This has the logical form:

1. $\Box P \rightarrow Q$
 2. P
-
3. $\Box Q$ ⁸²

This however, commits an elementary logical fallacy because the conclusion – (3) – does not follow from the premises (1) – (2).⁸³ From (1) – (2), it only follows that x will happen, not that x will necessarily happen. Thus the necessity of God’s knowledge being accurate and His knowledge of x happening do not necessitate x happening. Medieval philosophers identified this fallacy and coined it confusing the *necessitas consequentiae* (necessity of the consequences) with the *necessitas consequentis* (necessity of the consequent).⁸⁴ That is to say, the deduction of Q from the premises $\Box(P \rightarrow Q)$ and P is necessary in respect with *modus ponens*; but the consequent of the conditional $\Box(P \rightarrow Q)$, Q itself, is not itself necessary.⁸⁵

In other words, although (2) ‘God foreknows x ’ follows necessarily from (1) – ‘necessarily if God foreknows x , then x will happen’, the conclusion – (3) ‘therefore, x will necessarily happen’ – does not necessarily follow from (1).

A valid form of the argument is:

1. Necessarily if God foreknows x , then x will happen.
 2. God foreknows x .
-
3. Therefore, x will happen.

⁸² The letters ‘P’ and ‘Q’ are being used to represent propositions.

⁸³ J P Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (InterVarsity Press, 2009) 71-2; Craig (n 14) 69-74.

⁸⁴ Moreland and Craig (n 83) 72. See also; Norman Kretzmann and Susan Linn Sage, *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas’s Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles II* (Oxford University Press, 1999) 158; Parmenides and David Gallop (ed), *Parmenides of Elea: Fragments: A Text and Translation with an Introduction* (University of Toronto Press, 1991) 38 fn 70; Simo Knuuttila, *Reforging the Great Chain of Being: Studies of the History of Modal Theories* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2013) 174.

⁸⁵ Moreland and Craig (n 83) 72.

This has the logical form:

1. $\Box P \rightarrow Q$

2. P

3. Q

This form of the argument does not preclude that x cannot be $\neg x$. It is entirely possible for x to fail to happen ($\neg x$). However, if $\neg x$ was true, then God would have not foreknown x . From the fact that God knows x will happen, we know with absolute certainty that x will happen. But x will not necessarily happen, $\neg x$ could be true.

What is impossible is that both God foreknows x and x fails to happen, for this is a logical contradiction. We cannot, however, construe that because both God knowing x will happen and x not happening cannot both be true, that this is a limitation on human freedom. Freedom, in this case, is the ability of either one being true. Although x can fail, x will not fail.

x will not happen because God foreknows x will happen; God knows x will happen because x will happen. This does not mean that x happening causes God's foreknowledge. The word 'because' here indicates a logical, not a causal relation. Similar to that articulated in the phrase 'four is an even number because it is divisible by two'. The word 'because' communicates a logical relation of ground and consequent.⁸⁶

God's foreknowledge is chronologically prior to x happening, but x is logically prior to God's foreknowledge. x happening is the ground; God's foreknowledge is its logical consequent. x happening is the reason why God foreknows x : $\neg x$ is possible, and if that were the case, God would have foreknown $\neg x$.⁸⁷

Contemporary theological fatalists identify the modal fallacy presented in the previous argument, so an attempt has been made to make

⁸⁶ Craig (n 14) 73-74.

⁸⁷ Craig (n 14) 74. See also; Paul Copan, *That's Just Your Interpretation: Responding to Skeptics Who Challenge Your Faith* (Baker Books, 2001) 82; MacGregor (n 38) 90.

the second premise as necessary to form a valid argument.⁸⁸ The argument is reformulated as follows:

1. Necessarily if God foreknows x, then x will happen.
 2. Necessarily, God foreknows x.
-
3. Therefore, x will necessarily happen.⁸⁹

This has the logical form:

1. $\Box P \rightarrow Q$
 2. $\Box P$
-
3. $\Box Q$

Because premises (1) and (2) are necessary, a necessary conclusion – (3) – follows.⁹⁰ However, this does not mean that this is a sound argument. If (2) can be demonstrated to be false, then the conclusion is also false.

The content of God's foreknowledge isn't necessary. For God could have actualised a different world, and thus, the content of His foreknowledge would be different. Although it is necessary that whatever God foreknows is true, it does not logically follow that what God knows is necessary. To argue otherwise is to say that this is the only world God could create and that He created it necessarily.⁹¹

However, a different sort of necessity is often argued called the 'necessity of the past'. According to theological fatalists, unlike the future, the past is necessary. This is expressed as stating that the past is unalterable or unpreventable. And since God's foreknowledge is in the

⁸⁸ William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Crossway, 2001) 258. See also Calvin Pinchin, *Issues in Philosophy: An Introduction* (Springer, 2014) 169; J R Lucas, *The Freedom of the Will* (Oxford University Press, 1970) ch 14; Timpe (n 18) 337.

⁸⁹ Craig (n 14) 72.

⁹⁰ Moreland and Craig (n 83) 71.

⁹¹ Craig (n 14) 75.

past (since He has always foreknown what He foreknows), the future likewise is necessary. Therefore, divine foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom.

Craig offers a solution to this proposition – ‘it is important to distinguish between changing the past or future and causing the past or future’.⁹²

To alter the past would be to bring it about that an event that transpired did not transpire. To alter the future is to prevent a future act that will occur, from occurring. It is self-refuting to maintain that an event that occurred has not occurred; thus altering the past is impossible. Likewise, claiming to prevent an event that will occur from occurring is also logically impossible.⁹³

As the British philosopher A J Ayer explained:

The past is closed in the sense that what has been has been: if an event has taken place there is no way of bringing it about that it has not taken place; what is done cannot be undone. But it is equally true, and indeed [definitional], that what will be will be; if an event will take place there is no way of bringing it about that it will not take place; . . . for if it were prevented it would not be something that will be done.⁹⁴

However, to cause (‘C’) the past, an event must be produced in the past so that the effect (‘E’) occurs before the cause. Thus, causing the past requires $E \rightarrow C$, while causing the future requires $C \rightarrow E$. That is, causing the future requires the cause to precede the effect. Therefore, causing the past or future is not synonymous with altering the past or future. Because in the case of causation, the effect remains unchanged

⁹² Craig (n 14) 76.

⁹³ Moreland and Craig (n 83) 520. See also; Margarita Vázquez Campos and Antonio Manuel Liz Gutiérrez, *Temporal Points of View: Subjective and Objective Aspects* (Springer, 2015) 297; John Roy Burr and Milton Goldinger, *Philosophy and Contemporary Issues* (Pearson, 2004) 446; Peter Streveler, ‘The Problem of Future Contingents: A Medieval Discussion’ (1973) 47 *The New Scholasticism* 241; Brian Garrett, ‘Fatalism: A Dialogue’ (2018) 17(49) *Think* 77; John Martin Fischer and Patrick Todd, *Freedom, Fatalism, and Foreknowledge* (Oxford University Press, 2015) 264 fn 39.

⁹⁴ A J Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge* (Macmillan; 1956) 189.

However, if the future cannot be changed, doesn't this entail fatalism? By no means, what has been has been and what will be will be necessarily. However, 'fatalism holds that what has been has necessarily been and that what will be will necessarily be'.⁹⁵

Unalterability does not imply fatalism. According to Ayer, 'if [the fatalist's] only ground for saying that an event is fated to occur is just that it will occur, or even that someone knows that it will, there is nothing more to his fate than the triviality that what happens at any time happens at that time, or that if a statement is true it is true'.⁹⁶ Even fatalist's like Taylor admit, 'all these seemingly grave observations are really utterly trivial, expressing only what is definitionally true'.⁹⁷

So while both the past and future are unalterable, this does not imply fatalism.

Although we cannot change the future, we can cause the future, freely. Our present actions aid in determining future outcomes. It is our ability to cause the future that provides us with freedom, and the idea that the future is open. Can we, however, cause the past? Whilst this is certainly an interesting question, it falls outside the scope of this chapter.⁹⁸

So then, how can we cause the future?

When God chose to actualise a world, through His middle knowledge, He took into consideration the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. That is, if P were in C, P would do A.

⁹⁵ Craig (n 14) 78.

⁹⁶ Ayer (n 94) 191.

⁹⁷ Richard Taylor, 'Prevention, Postvention, and the Will' in Keith Lehrer (ed), *Freedom and Determinism* (Humanities, 1976) 73.

⁹⁸ For papers on backward causation see Craig (n 14) 78-82, ch 7; Craig (n 15), ch 6; Jan Faye, 'Backward Causation' in Edward N Zalta (ed), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2018) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/causation-backwards>>; Michael Dummett and Antony Flew, 'Symposium: "Can An Effect Precede Its Cause?"' (1954) 28(1) *Aristotelian Society Supplementary* 27-62; Max Black, 'Why Cannot an Effect Precede Its Cause?' (1956) 16(3) *Analysis* 49-58.

MOLINISM, COVID-19 AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

This pre-volitional knowledge occurs logically prior to the divine decree. Once God chooses to actualise a world, then future-tense truth makers become actual. That is, there is a transition from the hypothetical, ‘P would do X in C’ to ‘P will do X in C’.

So the truth value of the counterfactual – if P were in C, P would do X – has a catalyst effect of future consequences. For example, God knew Judas would betray Christ in a specific state of affairs, which would have the result of Judas leading the soldiers to arrest him.⁹⁹

The truth-value of what Judas would do caused the future event – the arrest of Christ. Under Molinism, God knows all the outcomes of the free actions of creatures, including the free responses of other creatures to those actions. So, in this sense, what creatures would freely do in any given circumstance, in conjunction with the chains of causation and creaturely responses throughout history, is how we *cause* the future. In summary, our actions have consequences, and those consequences shape the future.

The final section will apply Molinism to the spread of COVID-19 and how human beings can be held responsible for their actions, albeit the event being foreknown and decreed by God.

IV MOLINISM AND COVID-19: A PRACTICAL APPLICATION

With Molinism explained, this section will demonstrate how the Molinist perspective promotes human efforts to prevent epidemics, cope with them, and change the way of life to lower their impact.

Molinism has been applied to various theological and non-theological issues such as scriptural inspiration,¹⁰⁰ salvation,¹⁰¹ the perse-

⁹⁹ John 18:1-13; Luke 22:47-54; Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-50.

¹⁰⁰ See Craig (n 60) 45-52.

¹⁰¹ See Craig (n 7) 172-188; Keathley (n 14); Ken Keathley, ‘A Molinist View of Election, or How to Be a Consistent Infralapsarian’ in Brad J Waggoner (ed), *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue* (B&H Publishing Group, 2008) 195-215.

verance of the saints,¹⁰² papal infallibility,¹⁰³ evolutionary theory,¹⁰⁴ Christology,¹⁰⁵ and the problem of evil.¹⁰⁶ The latter applies to the COVID pandemic.

A question understandably posed in this troubled time is, ‘why does God allow something like COVID-19 to change everything? Why has God allowed a world in which a virus can run rampant in this kind of way?’ This is the classic problem of suffering; however, it’s a particular type of suffering. It’s an event which could be argued that it’s not necessarily because of human freedom that we see this virus having its impact, it’s part of nature if you will.

I think in this pandemic, we probably have some suffering that is the fusion of both natural and moral evil because, although the epidemic is caused by a virus, it seems that human factors could have been, although disputed, involved in its initial careless handling in the laboratory in Wuhan, China.¹⁰⁷ The mishandling in the laboratory may have resulted in it being unintentionally released into the world. So there may have been both the human factor and the natural factor involved. At a minimum, human involvement has led to the spread of

¹⁰² William Lane Craig, ‘Lest Anyone Should Fall’: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Perseverance and Apostolic Warnings’ (1991) 29 *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 65-74.

¹⁰³ Thomas P Flint, ‘Middle Knowledge and the Doctrine of Infallibility’ in James E Tomberlin (ed) *Philosophy of Religion* (Ridgeway, 1991) vol 5 373-93.

¹⁰⁴ Del Ratzsch, ‘Design, Chance and Theistic Evolution’ in William Dembski (ed), *Mere Creation* (InterVarsity Press, 1998) 289-312.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas P Flint, ‘A Death He Freely Accepted’: Molinist Reflections on the Incarnation’ (2001) 18(1) *Faith and Philosophy* 3-20.

¹⁰⁶ See Kenneth J Perszyk, ‘Molinism and Theodicy’ (1998) 44(3) *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 163-184; Kenneth J Perszyk, ‘Free Will Defence with and without Molinism’ (1998) 43(1) *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 29-64; Plantinga (n 54) 36-55; Plantinga (n 11); William Dembski, *The End of Christianity* (Broadman & Holman, 2009).

¹⁰⁷ Although disputed. See Anthony Galloway and Eryk Bagshaw, ‘Australian Concern over US spreading Unfounded Claims about Wuhan Lab’, *The Sydney Morning Herald* (online, 7 May 2020) <<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/australian-concern-over-us-spreading-unfounded-claims-about-wuhan-lab-20200506-p54qhp.html>>; Peter Daszak, ‘Ignore the Conspiracy Theories: Scientists Know COVID-19 Wasn’t Created in a Lab’, *The Guardian* (online, 9 June 2020) <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/09/conspiracies-covid-19-lab-false-pandemic>>.

the virus, either due to negligence, recklessness, or sheer ignorance.

One of the things that we might take away from this event is that it illustrates that, due to our cognitive limitations, we are simply not in a position to judge, with any sort of confidence, the probability for God having morally sufficient reasons for permitting the suffering to occur.¹⁰⁸ Seemingly trivial events in history can be amplified to have worldwide repercussions so that we have no idea whatsoever why a certain event might have been permitted by God to occur. And if indeed it's correct that this virus was unleashed on the world through the careless handling of a laboratory technician in Wuhan, this illustrates so well that a seemingly, isolated, inconsequential event can have truly worldwide repercussions as it's amplified. Irrespective of the genesis of this virus, we can see from this pandemic that seemingly insignificant events can have global ramifications. This ought to make us very cautious about saying of any particular evil or suffering that God cannot have, or that it is improbable that He has, morally sufficient reasons for allowing it to occur.

But, if God exists, then why are believers taking precautions? Don't they trust in God? Likewise, if the world has been decreed in such a way that everything that will happen, will happen, then why are precautions taken?

God does not exempt Christians from suffering in this world, we in fact ought to know that as we follow a crucified saviour who was innocently tortured and executed.¹⁰⁹ So, the idea that no precautions

¹⁰⁸ Moreland and Craig (n 83) 504. See also; James A Keller, 'The Problem of Evil and the Attributes of God' (1989) 26(3) *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 155-171; Henry J Schuurman, 'Two Concepts of Theodicy' (1993) 30(3) *American Philosophical Quarterly* 209-221; Nelson Pike, 'Hume and Evil' in Robert Merrihew Adams and Marilyn McCord Adams (eds), *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press, 1990) 41; William Hasker, 'Defining 'Gratuitous Evil': A Response to Alan R. Rhoda' (2010) 46(3) *Religious Studies* 303-309.

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 27:1-54; Mark 15:1-40; Luke 23:1-48; John 19:1-30. See also; Ernest De Witt Burton, 'Sources of the Life of Jesus outside the Gospels' (1900) 15(1) *The Biblical World* 26-35; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; Lucian, 'The Death of Peregrine' in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, tr H W Fowler and F G Fowler (Clarendon Press, 1949) vol 4 11-13; Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (College Press Publishing Company, 1996) 206 and Michael Licona's monumental book *The Resurrection of Jesus*:

should be taken but trust in God is quite naïve. We take precautions because we know God has established a world that operates according to natural laws and that He is not going to preferentially exempt Christians from the consequences of those laws.

According to the Bible, God's overall purpose for the human race is to lovingly and freely bring them into an eternal saving relationship with Himself (1 Tim. 2:4, 2 Pet. 3:9).¹¹⁰ This life is not all there is, and therefore, the purpose of life is not happiness in this life. Instead, God's purpose in history is to freely bring men and women into an eternal loving relationship with Himself, and that is an incommensurable good.¹¹¹ Not merely because it's eternal and everlasting, but because God is Himself infinite goodness and love. And so to be in a personal relationship with the infinite good is incomparable. So, when God permits horrible suffering in this life, it is only to accomplish His ultimate purposes, which is to bring people freely into a relationship with an incommensurable good, which far outweighs the shortcomings of this finite existence.

Although under the Molinism everything that happens in the world has been decreed by God,¹¹² human beings are still responsible for taking precautions because God took into consideration the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom to accomplish His will. Just as this chapter has established that foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom, likewise human freedom and responsibility are compatible with God's decree in the same manner.

God's decision to actualise this world took into consideration the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. That is, what human beings would do in freedom permitting circumstances.

A New Historiographical Approach (IVP Academic, 2010).

¹¹⁰ 1 Timothy 2:3-4 '3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.'; 2 Peter 3:9 '9 The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.'

¹¹¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew 23:34*. See John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke*, tr Rev William Pringle (The Edinburgh Printing Company, 1846) vol 3 101.

¹¹² Luis De Molina, *Foreknowledge*, 4.14.15.53.3.17. See also; MacGregor (n 3) 115-121.

Given that the truth value of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are not determined by God,¹¹³ and given this libertarian conception of freedom, the agent determines which counterfactuals are true;¹¹⁴ though it's presumably up to God which (if any) antecedents to actualise.¹¹⁵ Therefore, agents are held morally responsible.

On this basis, it can be argued that under Molinism, if a counterfactual represents an evil act, God merely *permits* evil to occur since He does not determine the truth value of counterfactuals.¹¹⁶

While God's sovereignty extends to everything that comes to pass, it does not follow that God wills everything that comes to pass. God wills the good, but does not will evil decisions, but merely permits. Molina explained,

All *good* things, whether produced by causes acting from a necessity of nature or by free causes, depend upon divine predetermination . . . and providence in such a way that each is *specifically intended* by God through His predetermination and providence, whereas the *evil* acts of the created will are subject as well to divine predetermination and providence to the extent that the causes from which they emanate and the general concurrence on God's part required to elicit them are granted through divine predetermination and providence – though not in order that *these particular acts* should emanate from them, but rather in order that *other, far different*, acts might come to be, and in order that the innate freedom of the things endowed with a will might be preserved for their maximum benefit; in addition evil acts are subject to that same divine predetermination and providence to the extent that they cannot exist in particular unless God by His providence *permits them in particular* in the service of some greater good. It clearly follows from the above that all things

¹¹³ See William J Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion, Wadsworth Basic Issues in Philosophy Series* (Wadsworth Publishing Corporation, 1988) 28; Craig (n 15) 272.

¹¹⁴ Craig (n 15) 273, 276.

¹¹⁵ Perszyk (n 105) 170.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

without exception are *individually* subject to God's will and providence, which intend certain of them *as particulars* and permit the rest *as particulars*.¹¹⁷

Therefore, everything that happens occurs either by God's permission or His will.¹¹⁸

As previously discussed, although we can't *change* the future, we can cause the future. This *causation* occurred when God took into consideration the counterfactuals of human freedom when actualising the world. This is accomplished by Molinism's functional equivalence of backward causation; however, it does not possess the problems associated with backward causation.

Molinism's functional equivalence of backward causation works as follows, 'agent A can do non-B, even if God has fore[known or decreed] that A will do B, but at the moment in which he will have done non-B, it will have been true from eternity that God has fore[known] non-B'.¹¹⁹

It is worth quoting MacGregor at length, however, amending his words accordingly to fit into the pandemic narrative:

To illustrate, suppose there was a [worldwide viral pandemic]. In his middle knowledge, God knows that if he were to permit this evil event (because he knows he could work through it to bring about a greater good), then when the [virus is] reported on the news ... a mother would freely pray that her son wasn't [infected]. Consequently, in his creative decree God decides to actualize a feasible world where God permits the [pandemic] but protects the son from [being infected]. But had God instead middle-known that if he were to permit the [pandemic], then when the [pandemic

¹¹⁷ Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge* 4.53.3.17. Cf. Moreland and Craig (n 83) 563 (emphasis from source).

¹¹⁸ Moreland and Craig (n 83) 563.

¹¹⁹ Piro (n 63) 394 citing Bernardo de Aldrete, *SI, Commentariorum et Disputationum in Primam Partem D. Thomae, de Visione et Scientia Dei*, 2 vols. (Lyon, 1662) vol 1 disp 23 305-15, disp. 27 389-406.

is] reported on the news the mother would not freely pray for her son, God in his creative decree may well decide to actualize a different feasible world with exactly the same history as the aforementioned world up to the moment of the [pandemic] but where the son is [infected]. Hence even though I cannot change the past, through prayer I can affect the past. I can pray in such a way that had I not prayed, the past would have been different than it in fact is. Even though this is not backward causation (making the past no longer the past), it is what I have called in another place a ‘functional equivalent to backward causation’.¹²⁰ For it accomplishes, in a non-contradictory way, the aim of causally impacting the past without altering the past. The past cannot be altered, but the reason the past is the way it is consists in my divinely middle-known prayer in the present or future. Consequently, on Molinism, the past is not counterfactually closed, an observation Molina implied in reflecting on the scriptural truth that God knows the end from the beginning (Isa 46:10).¹²¹ Through prayer, then, we do have some degree of counterfactual power over the past.¹²²

Under the Molinist schema, we can have confidence that our actions, whether be past, present, or future, have been taken into consideration in God’s decree. We can, therefore, be assured that our actions to prevent the spread of the virus are not done in vain, and they do cause the future.

Aquinas also echoed this principle:

When considering the problem of the usefulness of prayer, one must remember that divine providence not only disposes what effects will take place, but also the manner in which they will take place, and which actions will cause them.... [W]e do not pray in order to change the decree of divine providence, rather we pray in order to impetrate those things

¹²⁰ MacGregor (n 38) 89.

¹²¹ Molina, *Concordia*, 5.19.6.2.1.

¹²² MacGregor (n 3) 126-127, citing Flint (n 5) 243.

which God has determined would be obtained only through our prayers.¹²³

Following Augustine and other Christian writers, Molina claimed that God would not permit an instance of evil if He couldn't (or wouldn't) bring about a greater good, 'though the evil may not itself be a necessary condition for that good'.¹²⁴

Therefore, God's decree and plan for the world takes into consideration the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. This includes evil that occurs as a consequence of human actions to bring about His purpose, the greater good.

It is through the Molinist's view of foreknowledge, divine providence, and human freedom that best promotes human efforts to prevent epidemics, cope with them, and change the way of life to lower their impact.

V CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated how the Christian-Molinist perspective promotes human efforts to prevent epidemics, cope with them, and change the way of life to lower their impact. Furthermore, this philosophical system also provides a reconciliation between God's sovereignty, foreknowledge and human freedom.

The first section of this chapter explained Molinism and the different elements within this belief system. Molinism holds to the presupposition that man has freedom in the libertarian sense and that God's knowledge can be understood in three logical moments – natural knowledge, middle knowledge, and free knowledge.

Natural knowledge is God's knowledge of all necessary truths – these truths are independent of His will; while the truths known in His free knowledge are contingent and dependant on His will. Middle knowledge is God's knowledge of counterfactuals, these truths are

¹²³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 83, 2. Cf Flint (n 5) 212.

¹²⁴ Perszyk (n 105) 170. See Luis de Molina, *Concordia*, disputation 53, part 3, ss 9 and 17.

contingent and, like the truths possessed in His natural knowledge, independent of His will.

Using God's middle knowledge, God can actualise any feasible world, also known as a creaturely world-type, He so desires to fulfil His will. The actual world possesses state of affairs that are both strongly and weakly actualised. The former being when God causally determines an event's obtaining whilst the latter involves God allowing an event to obtain.

Although God is omniscient, section II demonstrated how man still has free will and is responsible for his actions. Though the future is known from eternity past, the future is not fated to occur. While we can't *change* the future or past, we can cause the future, and as explained, the mechanics of Molinism allows a functional equivalence of backward causation; however, it does not possess the problems associated with backward causation.

The final section argued that Molinism promotes human efforts to prevent epidemics, cope with them, and change the way of life to lower their impact. This was done by revealing that, according to Molinism, God takes into consideration the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom to accomplish His purpose. God works *with* the will of man, not *on* the will of man.¹²⁵ In this way, our actions – past, present, and future – have a *real* impact in this world, and thus, our efforts to prevent, cope and change our way of life amid a pandemic are not without warrant, albeit being foreknown and decreed.

¹²⁵ This is also known as divine (or simultaneous) concurrence. For more information see Anfray (n 20) 348-352; Piro (n 63) 374-375, 398-403; Friedrich Stegmüller, *Geschichte des Molinismus. I: Neue Molinaschriften* (Aschendorff, 1935) 194-201; Moreland and Craig (n 83) 563-564.