

A DEFENSE OF DIVINE MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE
AGAINST A CHARGE OF INCOHERENCE

Introduction

In the past few decades there has been a revival of interest in the doctrine of divine middle knowledge. Originally proposed by the Spanish Jesuit theologian, Luis de Molina (1535-1600), as a means of reconciling a strong view of divine sovereignty with a libertarian conception of human freedom, the doctrine has recently become a topic of lively conversation and debate among Anglo-American philosophers and theologians, both evangelical and Roman Catholic.¹ Indeed, according to Dean Zimmerman, contemporary defenders of middle knowledge (or “Molinism,” as it’s often called) “include some of the most prominent . . . Protestant and Catholic philosophical theologians” teaching and writing today.² The contemporary debate over this issue is thus an important part of modern theology.³

¹ A few of the important sources that have contributed to this revival and debate would doubtless include the following: William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom. The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience*, vol. 19, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, ed. A. J. Vanderjagt (New York: E. J. Brill, 1991); Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion, ed. William P. Alston (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Alfred J. Freddoso, “Introduction,” in *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Luis De Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). Craig and Plantinga are both evangelicals; Flint and Freddoso are Roman Catholics.

² Zimmerman’s chapter, “Yet Another Anti-Molinist Argument,” can be found in Samuel Newlands and Larry M. Jorgensen, *Metaphysics and the Good: Themes from the Philosophy of Robert Merrihew Adams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). However, I am relying on a copy of the article (and a response by William Lane Craig) which I received from Craig in a Word document. The citation is, however, from the first paragraph of the article and hence should not be difficult to locate.

³ Readers of David F. Ford and Rachel Muers, eds., *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, 3rd ed., The Great Theologians (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); James

To cite just one example from the realm of evangelical theology, in J. A. Crabtree's article, "Does Middle Knowledge Solve the Problem of Divine Sovereignty?" he argues (contra William Lane Craig) that the doctrine of divine middle knowledge is fundamentally incoherent and ought to be rejected.⁴ However, it seems to me that Crabtree is mistaken. Hence, I will argue (contra Crabtree) that the doctrine of divine middle knowledge is not incoherent and that it ought to be embraced by anyone who desires a rationally consistent way of reconciling a strong view of divine sovereignty with a libertarian view of human freedom. Before beginning, however, it will be helpful to offer a brief description of the doctrine of middle knowledge.

In a nutshell, the doctrine claims that God has a peculiar kind of knowledge (dubbed "middle knowledge" by Molina) that enables Him to know, logically prior to His decision to create a world, what any creature would freely do in any particular set of circumstances in which He might sovereignly choose to place it.⁵ Because this knowledge is prevolitional, or logically prior to God's creative decree, it enables God to meticulously plan every detail of the world "before" ever bringing it into existence.⁶ By knowing what any potential creature would freely

C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); and James C. Livingston et al., *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), will recall the many chapters dealing with Roman Catholic theology, Evangelical theology, and even philosophical theology. Given the impact of Molinism in each of these areas of modern theology, it warrants our careful consideration in a paper of this sort.

⁴ J. A. Crabtree, "Does Middle Knowledge Solve the Problem of Divine Sovereignty?," in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 429-57. Crabtree is specifically responding to the article by William Lane Craig, "Middle Knowledge, a Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995), 141-64.

⁵ Middle knowledge derives its name from the simple fact that it is logically ordered *between* God's natural knowledge and free knowledge. For a brief discussion, by Molina, of these three types of divine knowledge, please see Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, 52.9. Propositions regarding what a person would freely do in a particular set of circumstances are typically referred to as *counterfactuals of creaturely freedom*, although some (like Freddoso) prefer to call such propositions *conditional future contingents*. For more on the terminology, please see William Lane Craig, "The Middle-Knowledge View," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 139-43, and Freddoso, "Introduction," 28-9.

⁶ I have placed "before" in quotation marks because if God is absolutely timeless, or at least timeless without creation, then there is no literal temporal moment "before" God brings the universe into being. However, even in such a case, God would still possess this knowledge logically (if not temporally) prior to creating the world. It would thus afford Him the means of deciding which world, among the infinite number available to Him, He wanted to actualize. Hence, if it is the case (as most theologians would insist) that God could have created a

choose to do in any potential set of circumstances in which God might choose to place it, He can, by choosing which creatures to create and which circumstances to place them in, providentially guide the course of human history to His predetermined ends without violating human freedom along the way.⁷ In this way, the doctrine of middle knowledge allows one to affirm a very strong view of divine sovereignty (in which nothing happens apart from God's will or permission), as well as a libertarian view of human freedom (in which human beings have the ability to do other than what they actually do).⁸

An example might help to clarify these statements. In Acts 4:27-28 we read that Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the Israelites, were gathered together to do whatever the Lord's hand and purpose had "predestined to occur" (NASB). As Craig rightly observes, this passage constitutes "a staggering assertion of divine sovereignty over the affairs of men."⁹ If we

different world, or even no world at all, then one must posit a logical ordering of God's knowledge that enables Him to rationally choose the world He wants from the infinite number of options that were potentially available. Molina comments on this issue with these words: "despite the fact that the divine knowledge, to the extent that it is a prerequisite for the act of the will, is conceived of by us as not yet having adjoined to it a knowledge of the determination of that same act, it does not follow that there is in reality a moment when it exists without that knowledge—as though there were in reality a moment at which God's knowledge is *natural* without simultaneously having the added character of being *free* knowledge" (*On Divine Foreknowledge*, 53.1.20).

⁷ Craig, "The Middle-Knowledge View," 122.

⁸ It's important to observe that the doctrine of middle knowledge is compatible with a variety of views regarding the relationship between God's sovereignty and human salvation. For example, Molina (and Craig) tend toward the view that God gratuitously decides to give grace sufficient for salvation to everyone He chooses to create. By means of His middle knowledge, He knows whether or not a particular person will freely respond to this grace and be saved. If so, then by choosing to create this person, God predestines him to salvation. If not (and God chooses to create this person), then the person is not among the elect and will be lost. In contrast to Molina, Suarez believed that God unconditionally elects some to salvation, while passing over others. Then, by means of His middle knowledge, God chooses those gifts of grace which He knows will freely win the response of His elect unto salvation. The non-elect still receive various gifts of grace, but these are not effective in bringing them to salvation and so they are lost. Finally, Doug Blount holds to the Calvinistic doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace, by which God's elect are brought infallibly to salvation. However, apart from the issue of salvation, he believes that human beings have full libertarian freedom. For a helpful discussion of some of these issues, see Craig, "Middle Knowledge, a Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?," 155-61. Of particular interest to our discussion, given the variety of views just mentioned, is Crabtree's admission that "no less than in the *de fide* doctrine of election, Molina's God elects those particular individuals who will be saved. . . . God created this particular world in which exactly this set of people, and not some other set, will (as a result of their own autonomous choice) choose to believe and be saved. By his choice to create this particular world, God is the one who determines who will be saved and who will not" (see Crabtree, "Does Middle Knowledge Solve the Problem of Divine Sovereignty?," 435.).

⁹ Craig, "The Middle-Knowledge View," 134. Craig discusses this passage, as well as Acts 2:23, on pp. 134-36.

assume that the various agents mentioned in this passage acted with libertarian freedom, then how might the Molinist deal with such an assertion?¹⁰

In the first place, the Molinist would point out that God had prevolitional knowledge of what each of these agents would freely do if placed in just these circumstances. He knew, therefore, that if He *were* to create each of these agents, and place them in just these circumstances, they *would* freely choose to condemn and crucify Jesus. In addition, however, He also knew what any other agent would do in these circumstances. Thus, to speak hypothetically, He might have known that were He to put *Socrates* in Pilate's position, he (i.e. Socrates) would freely choose to acquit and release Jesus. But as this would be contrary to God's plan, He decided against this. Similarly, had God known that *Pilate* would freely release Jesus (instead of handing Him over to be crucified), He could have chosen not to create him (or to alter circumstances in such a way that Pilate would *not* be the Roman governor of Judea, etc.).¹¹

Thus, by means of divine middle knowledge, the Molinist scheme allows one to understand how God can be sovereign over a world of genuinely free creatures. For by knowing how creatures would freely choose, in whatever circumstances God might decide to place them, God can sovereignly determine precisely which creatures to create, and which circumstances to place them in, such that they freely bring about His predetermined plan. It is therefore hardly surprising, in light of the immense difficulty which theologians have traditionally had in reconciling the sovereignty of God with genuine human freedom, that Craig has described the "subtlety and power" of this doctrine as truly "astonishing."¹²

¹⁰ I will later offer some *reasons* for believing that human beings do, in fact, have libertarian freedom.

¹¹ Obviously God had many other options than these. I'm just listing a couple of possibilities by way of example. The point is simply this: By means of His middle knowledge, God knew what Pilate would freely do in such circumstances. And, were this to have been contrary to God's plan, God could sovereignly decide not to place Pilate in such circumstances, but instead, to place just that person who *would* freely do what would further His plan.

¹² Craig, "The Middle-Knowledge View," 125.

Crabtree's Objection to Divine Middle Knowledge and Affirmation of Divine Determinism

Crabtree contends that the doctrine of middle knowledge is ultimately incoherent (and even nonsensical), for it attributes to God a kind of knowledge which it is simply not possible to possess. He asks us to consider Jesus' prediction that Peter would deny Him three times. He rightly observes that if God has middle knowledge, then He would know that by creating Peter, and placing him in the specified circumstances, he would freely deny Christ. But how could God know such a thing? After all, if Peter is truly free, and his actions are not causally determined, then he could have done otherwise. And "if nothing whatsoever necessitated the choices that he made, up to the time that he made them, how could God have known what those choices would be?"¹³ In raising this question, Crabtree has put his finger on a version of the most commonly cited objection to the doctrine of middle knowledge—the so-called "grounding" objection.¹⁴

The grounding objection derives its name from the fact that the truths which God is said to know by means of His middle knowledge appear to be utterly groundless. This is so, it is claimed, because such truths "are supposed to be true logically prior to God's creative decree and even now are usually contrary-to-fact."¹⁵ But if there is nothing to ground these truths, then the proponent of middle knowledge can allegedly offer no grounds for believing them to be true. But in that case, why should anyone believe that there really *are* such truths for God to know? In Crabtree's estimation, "to assert the possibility of such knowledge is problematic."¹⁶ He therefore opts for divine determinism and a compatibilist view of human freedom as the more rational position.

¹³ Crabtree, "Does Middle Knowledge Solve the Problem of Divine Sovereignty?," 436.

¹⁴ The Molinist philosopher Thomas Flint observes that many scholars "see the 'grounding' objection as the principal obstacle to endorsing a Molinist picture." See Flint, *Divine Providence*, 123n3.

¹⁵ Craig, "The Middle-Knowledge View," 140.

¹⁶ Crabtree, "Does Middle Knowledge Solve the Problem of Divine Sovereignty?," 436.

Crabtree defines a “divine determinist” as “one who believes that every aspect of everything that occurs in the whole of reality is ultimately caused and determined by God.”¹⁷ In his estimation, it is “only on the assumption of divine determinism” that “the divine foreknowledge of free-will choices [is] a rationally plausible doctrine.”¹⁸ According to this model, God foreknows what we will “freely” choose because He has predetermined what we will choose *in such a way that we cannot do otherwise*. This, it should be noted, is a very different view of human freedom than that held by a libertarian. For according to the libertarian, *we are free to do other than what we do*—at least, when we are acting with libertarian freedom. Crabtree nicely summarizes this alternative view of divine sovereignty and human freedom in these words:

The divine determinist, by the very nature of his position, must say that at any given time no one can ever choose or act contrary to what God has willed. Clearly, then, the divine determinist does not believe that a human is free to do differently from what he did; he is constrained by the governing will of God. If the divine determinist espouses human freedom, it must be freedom in a qualified and limited sense.¹⁹

As far as I’m aware, the only two approaches that allow one to consistently affirm a strong view of divine sovereignty (including exhaustive divine foreknowledge and a meticulous providence over the affairs of men) are the divine determinist approach (represented by Crabtree) and the divine middle knowledge approach (represented by Craig). Thus, two important questions that need to be addressed before opting for one approach over another are the

¹⁷ Ibid., 429. Interestingly, Crabtree recognizes that the Molinist can endorse a view of divine sovereignty *almost* as strong as that of the divine determinist. He writes, “[U]nder Molina’s views, everything that occurs in our world is ultimately the result of God’s free choice to create this world in particular. Hence, he is the ultimate cause of every aspect of every event in our world. . . . In creating the possible world that he did, he was causing to come into existence every free-will decision that every free-will creature in that world would ever make. So Molina’s God exercises a divine providence that is just as extensive as that which he exercises in the *de fide* view of divine providence” (435). In Crabtree’s view, the *de fide* doctrines of divine foreknowledge, providence and election, are all aspects of the “*de fide doctrines of divine sovereignty*” (431).

¹⁸ Ibid., 447.

¹⁹ Ibid., 449.

following: 1. How persuasive is the evidence for libertarian freedom? and 2. How persuasive is the grounding objection?²⁰

Some Evidence for Libertarian Freedom

Unfortunately, there is not space to consider all of the evidence for libertarian freedom. Additionally, it must be emphasized that I am *not* claiming that this evidence *proves* that we actually have libertarian freedom. As Thomas Flint observes, it is probably not possible to prove this in any sort of airtight or conclusive way. The evidence which can be brought forward in favor of either libertarianism or compatibilism “is simply inconclusive, and the rationality of dissenting opinions ought to be acknowledged by even the most fervent proponents of either side.”²¹ Nevertheless, it does seem to me that the evidence which follows constitutes very good grounds for embracing a doctrine of libertarian freedom. What, then, is this evidence?

In the first place, it seems that all Christians should agree that the notion of libertarian freedom is not intrinsically incoherent. After all, Christians have traditionally held that creation is a free act of God (in the libertarian sense). God did not *have* to create anything at all. Moreover, He could have chosen to create a very different world from the one He did create. In this respect, God would seem to constitute the paradigmatic example of what we mean by an agent who acts with libertarian freedom.²² And if this is true of God, then it may also be true of human beings who are made in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27, 9:6; Jas 3:9).²³

²⁰ I do not mean to imply that these are the *only* important questions that need to be addressed, but merely that these are two of the important questions that need to be considered. Since I am here concerned to defend middle knowledge against Crabtree’s charge of incoherence, I have chosen these two questions as those which seemed most necessary to address in light of my purposes in this paper.

²¹ Flint, *Divine Providence*, 26.

²² This is a point made by both Freddoso, “Introduction,” 16, and Flint, *Divine Providence*, 30.

²³ Flint makes the following relevant remarks: “God is a free creator. Yet it seems that the typical compatibilist complaints against the libertarian notion of a free action are (from an orthodox Christian perspective) not applicable to God’s actions. But then, if God’s actions can be rational and appropriate, actions for which He is properly seen as morally praiseworthy, even in the absence of any ultimate causes beyond his control, then there clearly can be no *conceptual* problem with the notion of free, rational, responsible, but undetermined actions. And if there is no such conceptual problem, then there seems to be no conceptual problem with viewing ourselves as agents with libertarian freedom as well.” See Flint, *Divine Providence*, 30.

Second, people sin and rebel against a multitude of divine exhortations and commands.²⁴ Unless we're to say that *God* is the author of sin and moral evil, it seems that we must grant to humanity a measure of libertarian freedom. For if Crabtree is correct, and we cannot do other than what God has predetermined us to do, then it seems extremely difficult to avoid the conclusion that God is the author of evil. For in that case it is *God* who has determined all of our sinful actions—and we are not free to do otherwise.

Third (and related to the previous point), God holds us morally responsible for our sins. But it is hard to see how God can *fairly* hold us responsible for our actions if we are not free to do otherwise (as Crabtree insists). As Flint observes, “moral responsibility seems hard to square with the kind of external determination countenanced by compatibilists.”²⁵

Finally, people are tested by God and rewarded for their faithfulness and obedience. But as Carson argues, such actions “appear utterly ridiculous if human responsibility is not presupposed.”²⁶ And as we have already seen, such responsibility seems much more rational on the assumption of libertarian freedom. In light of arguments such as these, then, it seems to me that there are very good reasons for believing that we have at least *some* measure of libertarian freedom. And if this is so, then provided we want to continue affirming a strong view of divine sovereignty, the Molinist perspective is “the only game in town.”²⁷

²⁴ The remaining lines of evidence are taken from categories provided in D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty & Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 18-23. However, it should be noted that I am primarily citing Carson for the categories, or headings, under which he discusses these issues. Since Carson rejects a libertarian conception of human freedom, preferring instead the compatibilist view, I do not want my readers to think that Carson develops his discussion in precisely the same way that I do here (although there are, of course, some similarities).

²⁵ Flint, *Divine Providence*, 28.

²⁶ Carson, *Divine Sovereignty & Human Responsibility*, 21.

²⁷ William Hasker, “Response to Thomas Flint,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 60, no. 1/2 (Sep-Oct. 1990): 118. Hasker’s entire comment, which is worth quoting in full, is as follows: “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” (see pp. 117-18). It should, of course, be noted that Hasker is not himself a Molinist (nor a divine determinist). Rather, he advocates a version of the “open theist” position.

The Grounding Objection

We've seen that Crabtree's primary objection to the doctrine of divine middle knowledge is the so-called "grounding" objection. According to this objection, there is nothing to "ground" the truths which God is said to know by means of His middle knowledge. After all, how can God possibly *know*, logically prior to His divine creative decree, what any free creature would do in any given set of circumstances? Prior to His decree, such creatures do not exist—and most of them will *never* actually exist. Does it really make sense to believe that God can know the truth about what such non-existent creatures would freely do in any hypothetical set of circumstances?²⁸ How is God's possession of such knowledge to be intelligibly accounted for?

Molinists have offered a variety of responses to this vexing issue. Molina himself appealed to the "depth" of God's knowledge, by which "He discerns what the free choice of any creature would do by its own innate freedom . . . even though the creature could, if it so willed, refrain from acting or do the opposite."²⁹ Crabtree, however, objects to this response noting that it "does not answer the question as to how middle knowledge is possible."³⁰ Of course, it must surely be admitted that even if *we* can't explain how it is that God has such knowledge, it hardly follows that His having it is impossible.³¹ Nor does it necessarily follow that Molina's *doctrine* of

²⁸ Many philosophers will also ask for an explanation of precisely what it is that *causes* counterfactuals of creaturely freedom to be true. After all, God cannot be the cause of these truths, for they are supposed to be true logically *prior* to His decree. But it also seems impossible that the creatures themselves could be the causes of such truths, for the creatures do not yet exist and may never exist. However, since this issue is *not* specifically raised by Crabtree, I have chosen not to address it in this paper. For some helpful discussions of these issues, please see: Craig, "The Middle-Knowledge View," 140-43; Flint, *Divine Providence*, 121-37; Freddoso, "Introduction," 68-75.

²⁹ Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, 49.11.

³⁰ Crabtree, "Does Middle Knowledge Solve the Problem of Divine Sovereignty?," 438.

³¹ The burden of proof in this matter would seem to rest upon those Christians who accept the traditional understanding of divine omniscience and yet wish to deny middle knowledge. For if God is truly omniscient, it seems that we should naturally affirm His middle knowledge unless presented with some very good reason not to. For similar statements by Craig regarding God's foreknowledge, see William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 119.

divine middle knowledge is somehow incoherent.³² Nevertheless, it does seem to me that Crabtree has raised an important issue, which naturally deserves as good a response as one can give. This being so, we might ask how Molina's fellow Jesuit, Francisco Suarez, purportedly solved this difficulty.

According to Craig (who generally seems to follow Suarez on this matter), Suarez believed that God must have knowledge of conditional future contingents (like free human choices) because the conditional propositions about such events are governed by the principle of bivalence.³³ This principle holds "that every statement is either true or false; that is, that every statement has a truth-value and that there are just two truth-values."³⁴ Since God (as Crabtree would readily affirm) is an omniscient being, He has the property of knowing all truths. But if He knows all truths, He must know all counterfactual truths and must therefore have middle knowledge.³⁵

Of course, not everyone is satisfied with this explanation. Some have argued that counterfactual statements either do not have a particular truth-value or are generally false.³⁶ And if such statements lack a truth-value, or if they are generally false, then clearly God cannot know

³² Indeed, as Crabtree himself admits, although Molina fails to explain *how* it is that God possesses middle knowledge, he has nonetheless "given us a believable account of how divine sovereignty and absolute human autonomy are compatible" (see Crabtree, "Does Middle Knowledge Solve the Problem of Divine Sovereignty?," 446).

³³ Craig, "Middle Knowledge, a Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?," 150.

³⁴ Antony Flew, ed., *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, Rev. 2nd ed. (New York: Gramercy Books, 1999), s.v. "bivalence, principle (or law) of."

³⁵ According to Craig, the standard definition of omniscience holds that an "agent is omniscient if and only if he knows all truths and believes no falsehoods." But as he is quick to point out, this definition clearly "entails that if there are counterfactual truths, then an omniscient being must know them" (see Craig, "The Middle-Knowledge View," 137).

³⁶ Robert Adams writes, "Philosophical theologians generally agree that an omniscient God would know any true counterfactuals of freedom. But are there any? My admiration for Molina is great. His theory is one of the most brilliant constructions in the history of philosophical theology. But I think it fails because counterfactuals of freedom are in general false." See Robert Merrihew Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," in *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. James Tomberlin, Philosophical Perspectives, vol. 5 (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1991), 345. For Craig's response to Adam's argument, see William Lane Craig, "Robert Adams's New Anti-Molinist Argument," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54, no. 4 (Dec. 1994).

them. But why should we think that either of these options applies to counterfactuals of creaturely freedom? Craig asks us to consider a counterfactual of creaturely freedom having the following form: If person *P* were in circumstances *C*, then *P* would freely do action *A*. He notes that this set of circumstances should be understood to include all of world history “up until the point of decision.”³⁷ He argues that it is reasonable to believe that such a counterfactual proposition must be either true or false. After all, “once the circumstances are fully specified, any ambiguity which might cause us to doubt that the counterfactual has a truth value is removed. And it is plausible that in many cases *P* would freely do *A* in *C*, just as the counterfactual states.”³⁸ Moreover, since *P* must either do *A* or *non-A* (there being no other option available), it is very difficult to see how such a statement cannot have a particular truth-value. And if such a statement *does* have a particular truth-value (as it appears it must), then an omniscient being must surely know whether or not it is true.

In spite of this, however, some still see a difficulty with contending that God has such knowledge logically *prior* to His creative decree. For prior to His decree such creatures do not actually exist (and, indeed, may never exist should God decide not to create them). But this is problematic, for as Robert Adams observes, “in the case of counterfactuals of freedom that are about non-actual creatures . . . the conditionally predicted actions are not there to be corresponded with because they never actually occur.”³⁹ And if the correspondence theory of truth is correct this creates a difficulty, for “there is no reality to which such statements can correspond.”⁴⁰ How should the proponent of middle knowledge respond to such an objection?

Here, it seems to me, Craig is quite correct in arguing by analogy. He points out that just as future-tense statements can be true (provided that the realities with which they are

³⁷ Craig, “The Middle-Knowledge View,” 139.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Adams, “An Anti-Molinist Argument,” 345.

⁴⁰ Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 140.

concerned *will* exist), so also counterfactual statements can be true (provided that the realities with which they are concerned *would* exist in the appropriate circumstances). Consider our previous counterfactual statement: If person *P* were in circumstances *C*, *P* would freely do *A*. What makes this statement true is simply the fact that *if* person *P* were placed in circumstances *C*, then *P* would freely do *A*! This does not conflict with a correspondence theory of truth. As Craig observes, “The view of truth as correspondence requires only that such actions *would* be taken if the specified circumstances *were* to exist.”⁴¹ It thus appears that the grounding objection is ultimately unsuccessful and that plausible reasons can be offered for believing in God’s middle knowledge. And if this is so, then Crabtree has erred in assessing this doctrine as incoherent.

Conclusion

The revival of interest in the doctrine of divine middle knowledge among contemporary Protestant and Roman Catholic philosophers and theologians constitutes a small, but important, part of the much larger world of scholarly discourse which is currently taking place in modern theology. In this paper I have argued (contra J. A. Crabtree) that the doctrine of divine middle knowledge is *not* incoherent and that it ought to be embraced by anyone who desires a rationally consistent way of reconciling a strong view of divine sovereignty with a libertarian view of human freedom.

In the first place, if it is more probable than not that human beings possess at least a measure of libertarian freedom, then (as we have seen) Molinism is “the only game in town” (provided, of course, that we are also committed to a strong view of divine sovereignty). For if we do possess a measure of libertarian freedom, and if God really did plan the world in meticulous detail “before” bringing it into being, then God *must* possess middle knowledge—for without it, He would lack the cognitive resources which such prevolitional planning naturally requires. And clearly, if God really does possess middle knowledge, then the doctrine which rightly ascribes such knowledge to Him can hardly be incoherent!

⁴¹ Ibid.

In spite of this, however, many scholars think that the grounding objection *has* proven this doctrine incoherent. If they are correct, then either man does *not* have libertarian freedom after all (as Crabtree believes), or else a strong view of divine sovereignty must be false (as Open Theists maintain). But while Crabtree's formulation of the grounding objection has a certain appeal, it is far from proving the incoherence of divine middle knowledge. For even if we grant that Crabtree is correct in judging Molina's explanation of divine middle knowledge to be inadequate, it hardly follows that the doctrine itself is incoherent.⁴² If (as I have argued in this paper) counterfactuals of creaturely freedom do in fact have a truth-value, then God, as an omniscient being, must know whether or not such propositions are true. And since (as we have seen) He must possess such knowledge logically prior to His creative decree, it follows that He must have middle knowledge.⁴³

⁴² I am not personally persuaded that Molina's explanation *is* inadequate. However, I am willing to concede this to Crabtree for the sake of argument because I am personally more attracted to the approach initially suggested by Suarez and defended in our own day by scholars like William Lane Craig.

⁴³ Craig, "The Middle-Knowledge View," 143.

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