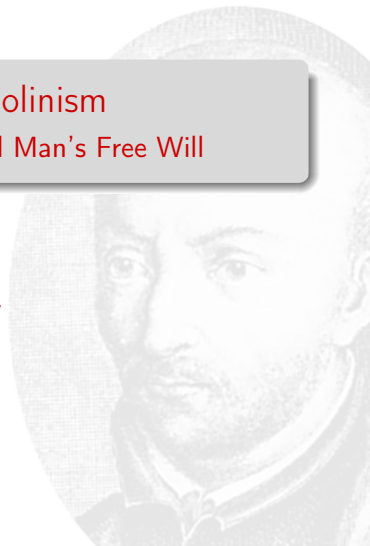


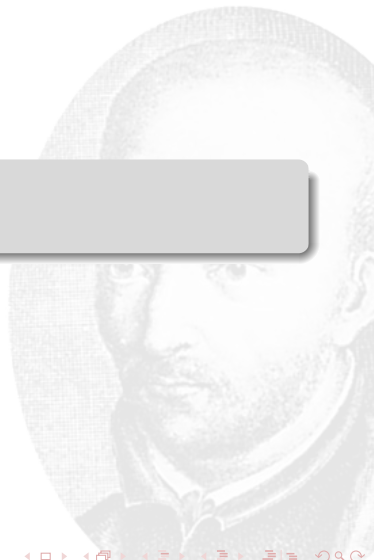
An Introduction to Molinism  
Harmonising God's Sovereignty and Man's Free Will

Wessel Venter

<http://www.siyach.org/>

2016-06-07





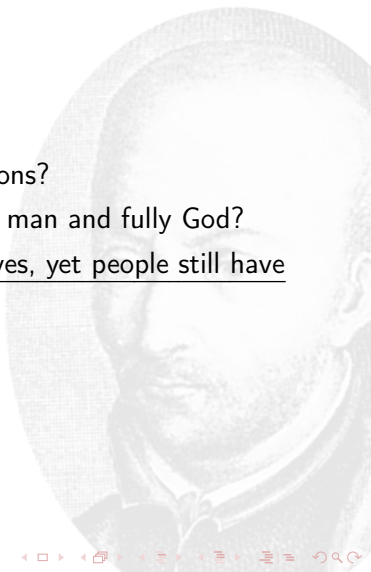
# Introduction

# Mysteries of the Christian Faith

1. How can God be One, but Three Persons?
2. How can Jesus simultaneously be fully man and fully God?
3. How can God be sovereign over our lives, yet people still have free will?

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# Preliminary Definitions I

## Definition (Soteriology <sup>[7]</sup>)

“The study of salvation.” In Christianity this includes topics such as regeneration, election, predestination, repentance, sanctification, justification, glorification, etc.

## Definition (Possible World)

A world that *could have been*, if history had progressed differently. E.g., if there was not a traffic jam, I would not have been late for work on Monday. Possible worlds are purely theoretical, and not the same as parallel universes.



# Historical Overview



## Pelagian Controversy

# Pelagius (c. 360–418)

- ▶ Ascetic monk from the British Isles
- ▶ Visits Rome c. 380 to preach to the poor
  - ▶ Disillusioned by the nominalism he sees in Rome
  - ▶ Disagrees with Augustine's view of his own will in his *Confessions*
- ▶ Begins preaching a controversial message (Pelagianism):
  1. Humans possess libertarian free will
  2. Man is untainted by Original Sin
  3. Salvation by works



Figure: Pelagius



## Early Church Fathers' Views on Free Will

Theophilus [20, Book II Ch. 27]:

*"If, on the other hand, he would turn to the things of death, disobeying God, he would himself be the cause of death to himself. For God made man free, and with power of himself."*

Clement of Alexandria [4, Book I Ch. 6]:

*"[We] have believed and are saved by voluntary choice."*

John Chrysostom [9, Homily XII]:

*"[God] does not anticipate our choice, lest our free will should be outraged."*

# Early Church Fathers' Views on Free Will

Justin Martyr [10, Ch. 7]:

*“Every created being is so constituted as to be capable of vice and virtue. For he can do nothing praiseworthy, if he had not the power of turning either way.”*

Irenaeus [8, Book IV Ch. 4]:

*“But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect similar to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself his own cause that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff.”*

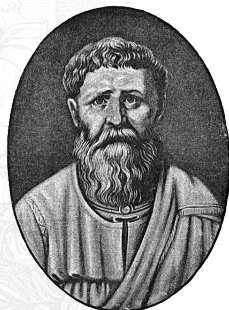
# Early Church Fathers' Views on Free Will

Tertullian [19, Book II Ch. 5]:

*"I find, then, that man was constituted free by God. He was master of his own will and power... For a law would not be imposed upon one who did not have it in his power to render that obedience which is due to law. Nor again, would the penalty of death be threatened against sin, if a contempt of the law were impossible to man in the liberty of his will... Man is free, with a will either for obedience or resistance."*

# Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

- ▶ Christian convert after studying philosophy, bishop of Hippo Regius (Tunisia)
- ▶ Greatly influenced by Ambrose of Milan
- ▶ Responds to Pelagius by condemning his central teachings in two ways<sup>[1]</sup>:
  - ▶ We are not untainted by the sin of Adam & Eve
  - ▶ We no longer possess libertarian will (which was forfeited for all humanity by Adam & Eve)
- ▶ Salvation is decreed by God and in no way based on man's merit or free will
- ▶ Sin impairs free will; grace restores it



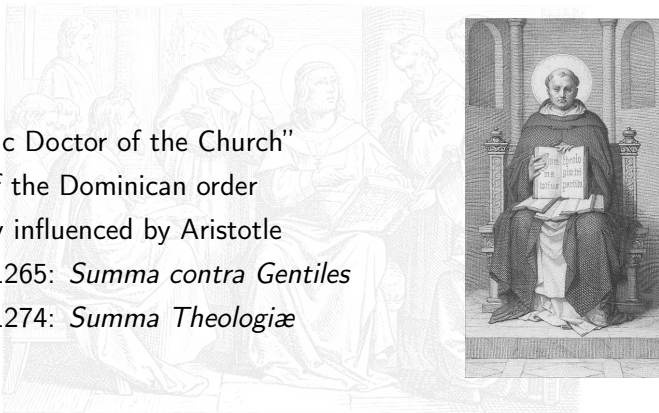
**Figure:** Augustine of Hippo

# Outcomes of the Pelagian Controversy

- ▶ Pelagianism condemned at the Council of Carthage (418), Ephesus (431)
- ▶ Supporters of Pelagianism reform and put forth semi-Pelagianism
  - ▶ Compromises between Pelagianism and Augustinianism
  - ▶ Man initially comes to God out of free will
  - ▶ Thereafter God's grace works in man's life
- ▶ Council of Orange (529):
  - ▶ Semi-Pelagianism addressed
  - ▶ Semi-Augustinianism affirmed

# Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

- ▶ “Angelic Doctor of the Church”
- ▶ Part of the Dominican order
- ▶ Greatly influenced by Aristotle
- ▶ 1259–1265: *Summa contra Gentiles*
- ▶ 1265–1274: *Summa Theologiae*



**Figure:** Thomas Aquinas

# Thomas Aquinas on the Freedom of the Will

- ▶ Human will: appetite for the rational
- ▶ Most rational: to maximise happiness (humans' *nature*)
- ▶ Ultimate happiness: union with God
- ▶ This goal is *necessary*, therefore opposed to freedom
- ▶ Freedom: exercise or non-exercise of the will; not being coerced
- ▶ Volition: that which follows from the will
- ▶ “[Humans] will will voluntarily the Good, but not do it freely” <sup>[14]</sup>
- ▶ Nothing in this life can *necessarily* move the will towards the good
- ▶ ⇒ Human do have free will, but need to be moved towards God by God Himself

# Martin Luther (1483–1546)

- ▶ Augustinian monk and priest
- ▶ Begins the Protestant reformation in 1517 after witnessing gross abuses by the Roman Catholic church



Figure: Martin Luther



# Martin Luther (1483–1546)

1525: Writes *De Servo Arbitrio* (*On the Bondage of the Will*) in response to Desiderus Erasmus's *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio* (*Of Free Will: Discourses or Comparisons*)

- ▶ Erasmus:
  - ▶ Disagreed with Luther's doctrine of predestination; unbiblical
  - ▶ Repentance, baptism and conversion depended on man's free will
  - ▶ Grace  $\implies$  man could come to a knowledge of God
  - ▶ *God's foreknowledge of events was not the cause of events*
- ▶ Luther:
  - ▶ Due to sin, man is incapable of working out their own salvation
  - ▶ Man has no free will
  - ▶ If man could choose their own salvation, God could not be sovereign

## The Reformation

## John Calvin (1509–1564)

- ▶ Highly influential French reformer and theologian
- ▶ 1536–1559: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
- ▶ 1543: *The Bondage and the Liberation of the Will: A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice Against Pighius*

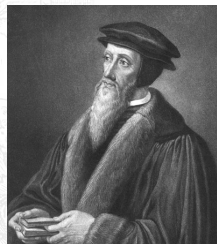


Figure: John Calvin

## Calvin's *The Bondage and the Liberation of the Will*<sup>[2]</sup>

- ▶ Defends Luther's *On the Bondage of the Will* against the criticisms by Roman Catholic Albert Pighius
- ▶ Affirms the Augustinian view of freedom of the will
- ▶ After the fall, no part of a human is immune from sin, including the will
- ▶ The will is bonded to sin
- ▶ But humans sin willingly, not coerced
- ▶ Man *does* will out of voluntary necessity (prior to effectual grace)
- ▶ Man is not free to choose good & evil towards God (not libertarian freedom)

# Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609)

- ▶ Pastor in Amsterdam and professor of theology at Leiden university
- ▶ His teaching on grace, regeneration, predestination and free will is inconsistent with Calvin
- ▶ His views on the roles of church and state also was contrary to Calvin



Figure: Jacobus Arminius

# Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609)

- ▶ Opponents accused Arminius of Pelagianism, unorthodoxy and heresy
- ▶ He claimed to still adhere to the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism, although he also proposed that they be rewritten
- ▶ A number of debates and public addresses were held, but no synod was called during his lifetime
- ▶ After his death, his teachings would be codified as “Arminianism” and lead to increased conflict with those who held to the views of Calvin

# Luis de Molina (1535–1600)

- ▶ Spanish Jesuit priest
- ▶ Counter-reformer
- ▶ Held a high view of God's sovereignty
- ▶ Asked to reconcile the controversy of God's sovereignty and man's free will
  - ▶ 1588: *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiædonis, divina præscientia, prædestinatione et reprobatione*
  - ▶ Commentary on parts of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiæ*
  - ▶ Causes another controversy with the Dominicans and Jansenists



Figure: Luis de Molina

## Further History — Roman Catholicism

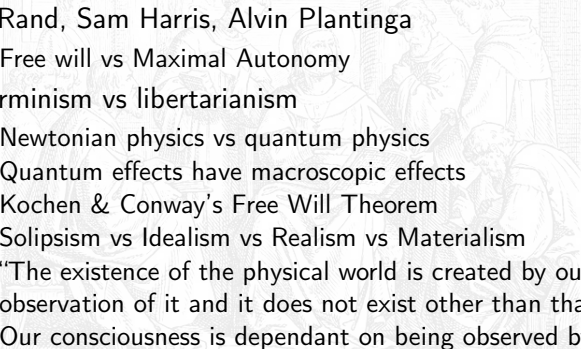
- ▶ Rift continued to grow and drew papal attention
- ▶ Pope Clement XIII imposed silence on the discussion
- ▶ Molina's theory was scrutinised and it looked like it would be rejected
- ▶ Pope Paul V exonerated him
- ▶ Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), who held more closely to the Augustinian and Thomist (Jansenism)
- ▶ At one point the soteriology of Jansenism was condemned as heresy by pope Innocent X (1653)
- ▶ Debate continues until the present day

# Further History — Protestantism

- ▶ Arminian
  - ▶ Dominates Anglicanism during the 18th century despite the Westminster Confession of Faith
  - ▶ John Wesley (1703–1791), Charles Wesley (1707–1788) → Methodism
- ▶ Calvinist
  - ▶ Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), George Whitefield (1714–1770), *et al.*
  - ▶ Currently the most prevalent soteriological view amongst reformed evangelicals
- ▶ Debate continues until the present day



# Secular Debate I

- 
- ▶ Ayn Rand, Sam Harris, Alvin Plantinga
    - ▶ Free will vs Maximal Autonomy
  - ▶ Determinism vs libertarianism
    - ▶ Newtonian physics vs quantum physics
    - ▶ Quantum effects have macroscopic effects
    - ▶ Kochen & Conway's Free Will Theorem
    - ▶ Solipsism vs Idealism vs Realism vs Materialism
    - ▶ "The existence of the physical world is created by our observation of it and it does not exist other than that."
    - ▶ Our consciousness is dependant on being observed by God



# Arminianism and Calvinism







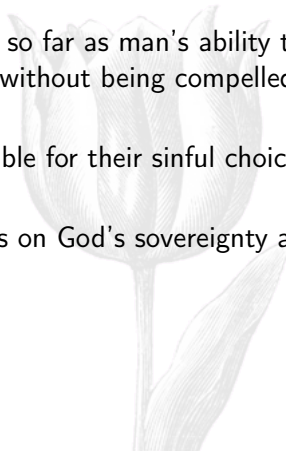
# Calvinism

- ▶ Synod of Dort “codified” the five points of Calvinism
- ▶ Famous TULIP acronym
  1. **T**otal Depravity
  2. **U**nconditional Election [13, 3:5]
  3. **L**imited Atonement
  4. **I**rresistable Grace [13, 10:1]
  5. **P**erseverance of the Saints



# Calvinism

- ▶ Does *not* deny free will, except as so far as man's ability to chose to accept Christ as Saviour without being compelled by God to do so (compatibilism)
- ▶ Humans will still be held accountable for their sinful choices before God
- ▶ Places particularly strong emphasis on God's sovereignty and glory



# Arminianism vs Calvinism

Remonstrance	Calvinism	Arminianism
Total Depravity	Total Depravity	Partial Depravity
Conditional Election	Unconditional Election	Conditional Election
Unlimited Atonement	Limited Atonement*	Unlimited Atonement
Prevenient Grace	Irresistible Grace	Resistible Grace
Conditional Preservation	Perseverance of the Saints	Conditional Salvation*

**Table:** Summaries of soteriological views contrasted.

# Arminianism vs Calvinism

## ▶ Arminianism

- ▶ The Bible, in places, seem to affirm human free will
- ▶ Human free will is necessary to explain the origin of evil (alternative is untenable as it contradicts the ontology of God)
- ▶ If humans lack free will (to do good), then there is, in a sense, no moral accountability
- ▶ Can encourage individualism and flirts with the heresies previously condemned

## ▶ Calvinism

- ▶ Above all, God must be absolutely sovereign
- ▶ Everything which God does is, first and foremost, for His own glorification
- ▶ The logical conclusion of Calvinism seems to deny His omnibenevolence (in its strictest sense) and can lead to theological fatalism (determinism)



# Arminianism vs Calvinism

GotQuestions.org:

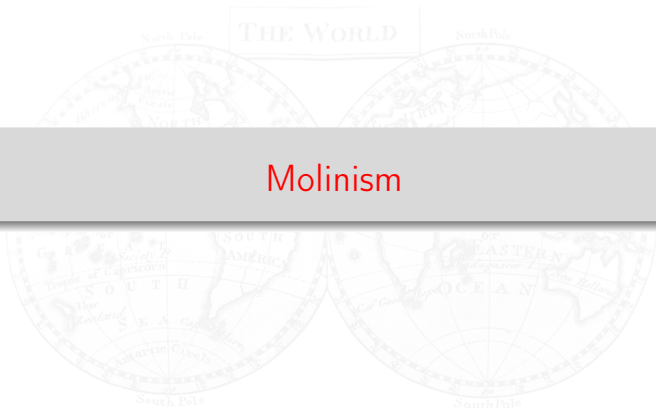
*“Ultimately, it is our view that both systems fail in that they attempt to explain the unexplainable. Human beings are incapable of fully grasping a concept such as this. Yes, God is absolutely sovereign and knows all. Yes, human beings are called to make a genuine decision to place faith in Christ unto salvation. These two facts seem contradictory to us, but in the mind of God they make perfect sense.”*

# The Contemporary Debate

Arminianism	Calvinism	(Molinism)
Roger Olsen	James R. White	Alvin Plantinga
Jerry Walls	John Piper	William Lane Craig
Robert Picirilli	D. A. Carson	Kenneth Keathley
Billy Graham	R. C. Sproul	Thomas Flint
Rick Warren	Paul Helm	Max Andrews

**Table:** Soteriological views held by some contemporary biblical scholars, theologians and Christian philosophers.



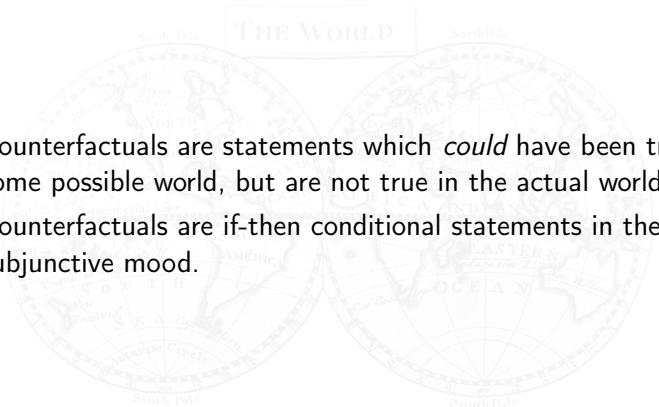


# Molinism

# What is Molinism?

- ▶ Molinism describes God's knowledge about real and hypothetical worlds
- ▶ Having this understanding gives us the tools to think about soteriology
- ▶ Molinism is the application of the doctrine of *Middle Knowledge*
- ▶ Middle Knowledge is God's knowledge of all true counterfactual propositions in the subjunctive mood (specifically, counterfactuals of creaturely freedom [CCFs])
- ▶ It sits "in between" God's Natural and Free knowledge
- ▶ Molina: *supercomprehension* ("Foreknowledge 2.0" [3])

# Counterfactuals

- 
- ▶ Counterfactuals are statements which *could* have been true in some possible world, but are not true in the actual world.
  - ▶ Counterfactuals are if-then conditional statements in the subjunctive mood.

# Subjunctive Conditionals

1. If Wessel did not eat the hotdog, then someone else did.
2. If Wessel had not eaten the hotdog, then someone else would have.

Sentence (1) is an *indicative* conditional. Sentence (2) is an *subjunctive* conditional, and indicates a counterfactual.

# Subjunctive Conditionals — Context

“Goodman’s, nearly enough” [17]:

1. If Caesar were in command, he would use the atom bomb.
2. If Caesar were in command, he would use catapults.

Character and nature of Caesar are evident in both scenarios.

Caesar is constrained by his milieu.

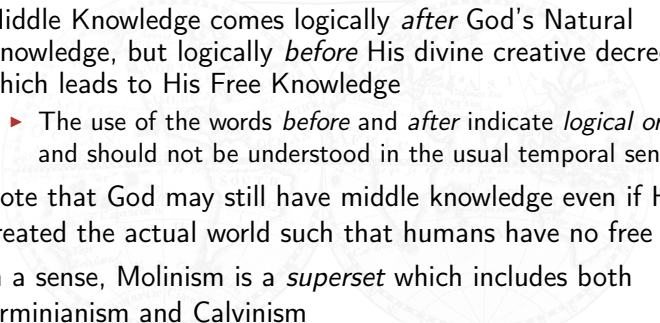


## Counterfactuals

# Biblical Evidence for God having Knowledge of Counterfactuals

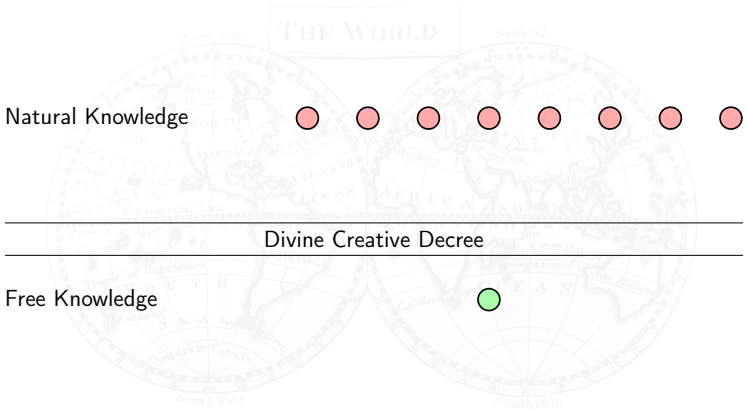
- ▶ **1 Samuel 23:7–13**: David escapes Keilah
- ▶ **Jeremiah 38:17–23**: The fate of Zedekiah & Jerusalem during the Babylonian siege
- ▶ **Amos 7** — Warning visions; Amos pleas, God relents
- ▶ **Matthew 11:21–24\***: Jesus: judgement on Chorazin, Bethsaida & Capernaum contrasted with Tyre, Sidon & Sodom
- ▶ **Matthew 26:24**: Jesus: it would have been better for Judas if he had never been born
- ▶ **Luke 16:19–31**: The rich man and Lazarus
- ▶ **John 15:22, 24**: If Jesus had not come to proclaim the gospel, His opponents would have been better off
- ▶ **1 Corinthians 2:8**: Jesus would not have been crucified if His executioners understood God's redemptive plan

# Middle Knowledge

- 
- ▶ Middle Knowledge comes logically *after* God's Natural Knowledge, but logically *before* His divine creative decree, which leads to His Free Knowledge
    - ▶ The use of the words *before* and *after* indicate *logical ordering*, and should not be understood in the usual temporal sense
  - ▶ Note that God may still have middle knowledge even if He created the actual world such that humans have no free will
  - ▶ In a sense, Molinism is a *superset* which includes both Arminianism and Calvinism

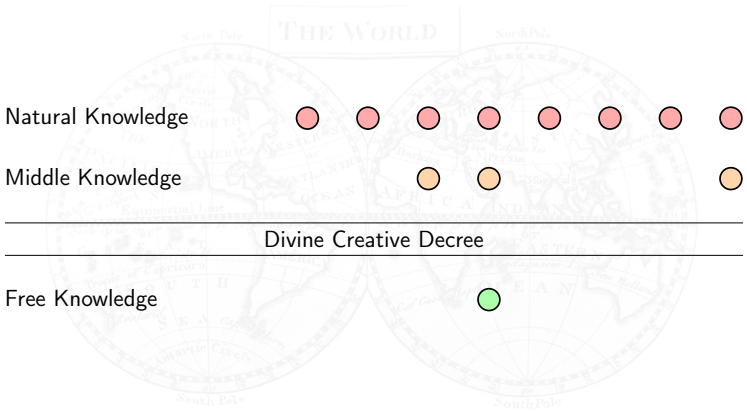
Middle Knowledge

# God's Knowledge



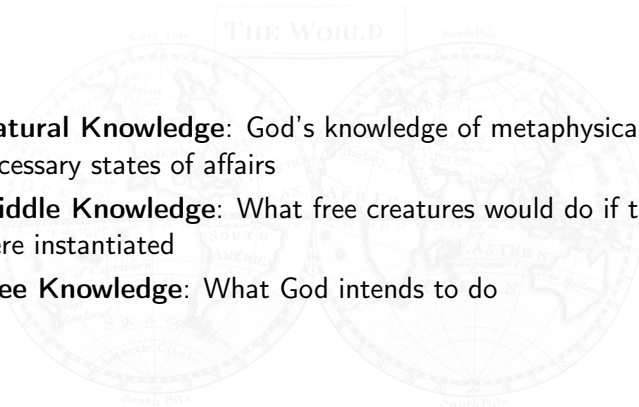
Middle Knowledge

# God's Middle Knowledge



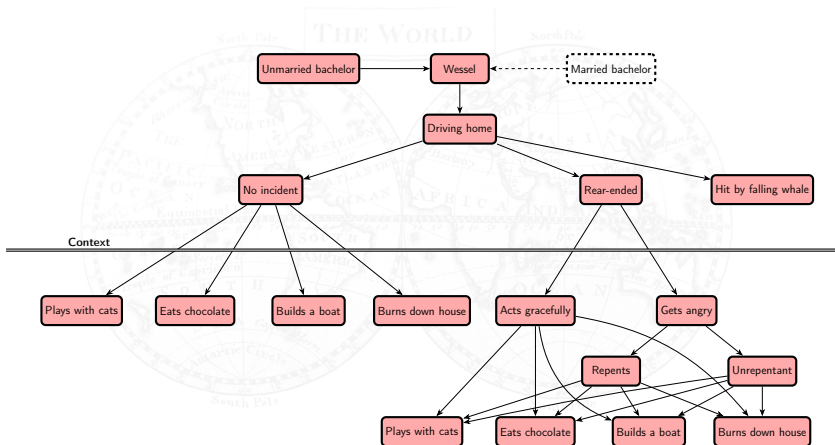
## Middle Knowledge

# Middle Knowledge

- 
1. **Natural Knowledge:** God's knowledge of metaphysically necessary states of affairs
  2. **Middle Knowledge:** What free creatures would do if they were instantiated
  3. **Free Knowledge:** What God intends to do

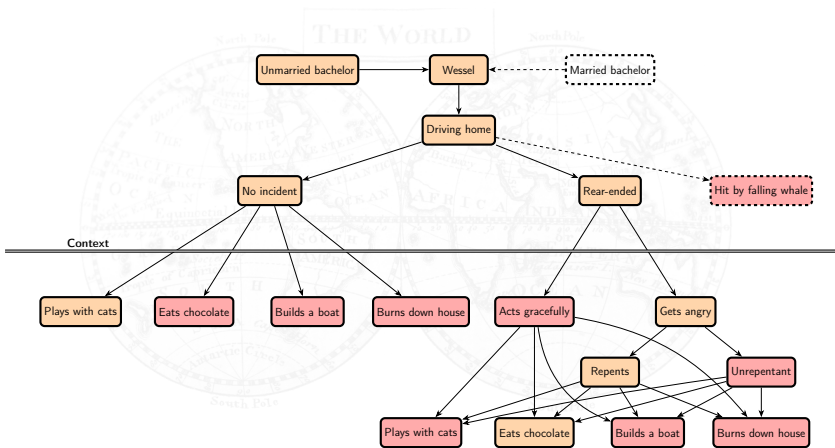
## Middle Knowledge

## Illustration: Natural Knowledge (What Can Happen)



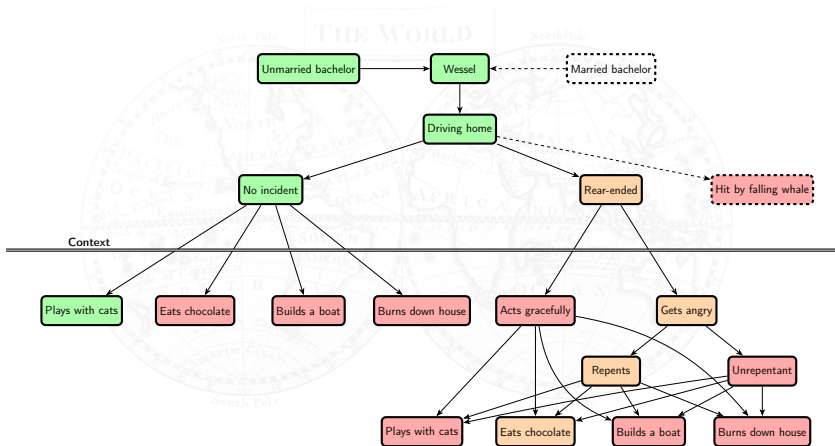
Middle Knowledge

# Illustration: Middle Knowledge (What Would Happen)



Middle Knowledge

# Illustration: Free Knowledge (What Will Happen)





## Middle Knowledge

## Illustration: Takeaway

1. Our context is determined by
  - (i) The actions of others (or situations which otherwise occur “naturally”)
  - (ii) God’s (possible) direct intervention
2. Our choices and actions contribute to the context of others
3. At any point, God *can* intervene and override our context or even our free will
4. Even though God’s divine creative decree determines the actual world, these “levels of knowledge” all exists before Creation itself

# Middle Knowledge vs Foreknowledge

- ▶ Middle Knowledge
  - ▶ Exists within the second logical moment of God's knowledge
  - ▶ What *would* happen
  - ▶ God's knowledge of future contingents not causally determined by the present state of affairs
  - ▶ "Divine deliberation"
- ▶ Foreknowledge (Free Knowledge)
  - ▶ Exists within the third logical moment of God's knowledge
  - ▶ What *will* happen
  - ▶ God knowledge of all true propositions in the actual world
  - ▶ For example: a barometer reflects the atmospheric pressure, but does not determine it (WLC)

## Middle Knowledge

Another Example: Charles Dickens' *a Christmas Carol*<sup>[5]</sup>

The Ghost of Christmas Future reveals to the miserly Scrooge the future

1. Natural Knowledge: what *could* be
2. Middle Knowledge: what *would* be
3. Free Knowledge: what *will* be

The ghost warns Scrooge that, *if* he continued living his life as he was doing, what the consequences *would* be. Scrooge changes his life, and therefore what *will* be.



# Implications

- ▶ God would possess His middle knowledge, even if He did not actualise a world with any free will
- ▶ Which world did God actualise?
  - ▶ William Lane Craig: World with libertarian free will where the most people are saved
  - ▶ Something else...?
- ▶ Provides a framework for thinking about aspects of God and theology (see “Conclusions”)

# Application to Soteriology

- ▶ God chooses those who **would** freely respond to His grace when offered
  - ▶ Does not necessarily need to apply to every individual
  - ▶ Does not require prevenient grace offered to everyone
- ▶ Holds a “Calvinistic” view of God’s comprehensive sovereignty
- ▶ Holds an “Arminian” view of libertarian free will
- ▶ ⇒ “Radical compatibilism” / Soft Libertarianism

*Solus Christus*

*Sola Scriptura*

Objections and Criticisms

*Sola Gratia*

*Sola Fide*

# Miscellaneous Objections and Criticisms

- ▶ Arminians: “complicated Calvinism”
- ▶ Calvinists: “sophisticated Arminianism”

*Solus Christus*

*Sola Scriptura*

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  - ▶ *False*: Genetic fallacy; cannot automatically disregard an idea based on its origins

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- ▶ “Molinism is semi-Pelagian”
  - ▶ *False*: Prevenient grace is still necessary
- ▶ Doctrine of Divine Immutability<sup>[15]</sup>
  - ▶ Immutability does not rule out extrinsic change
  - ▶ E.g. temporally indexed truths
  - ▶ Knowledge is not part of God’s essential nature
  - ▶ Alternatively: since God is atemporal, we cannot know how God knows, as we only understand knowledge changing with time

# Miscellaneous Objections and Criticisms

- ▶ Doctrine of Divine Simplicity
  - ▶ Aquinas held that God had distinct logical moments of His knowledge
  - ▶ Middle Knowledge forms a part of God's omniscience
  - ▶ Some Molinists do agree there is a tension here and some reject Divine Simplicity<sup>[16]</sup>
- ▶ Greg Koukl: In Molinism, God elects a *world*, not individuals, and this is not biblical
  - ▶ Election of individuals vs possible worlds
  - ▶ Is it not possible for God to select (predestine) a world where Alice and Bob are saved, but not Charlie, vs one where only Alice is saved and not Bob and Charlie?
  - ▶ Romans 9

# Thinly Veiled Open Theism<sup>[3]</sup>

“Molinism is a thinly-veiled, or close relative of, Open Theism”

- ▶ *False*: poor understanding of philosophy & definitions
  - ▶ Open Theism: God has *no* foreknowledge
  - ▶ Molinism: God has supercomprehension (foreknowledge 2.0)
- ▶ Misplaces Middle Knowledge
  - ▶ God does not receive His knowledge from the actual world
  - ▶ God’s Middle Knowledge is located *before* His divine creative decree, not *after* (i.e. not a case of “let’s see what happens”)

# The Truth/Existence of CCFs<sup>[18]</sup>

## ▶ Objection

- ▶ CCFs cannot exist prior to God's divine creative decree
- ▶ *Deliberative conditional*  $\implies$  antecedents  $\implies$  actualisation of the world has already happened

## ▶ Response

- ▶ Counterfactuals are only true relative to a world
- ▶ One cannot compare worlds based on their antecedents
- ▶ Worlds cannot be compared beyond when a counterfactual has "taken place"

# Divine Voodoo Worlds<sup>[6]</sup>

## ▶ Argument

- ▶ CCFs are hypersensitive to the context of the creature
- ▶ “Butterfly effect” on free choices (transworldly manipulable [TM])
- ▶ God can manipulate the world in an infinite number of ways, leading to the appearance of free choices within a particular context

## ▶ Responses

1. CCFs are not hypersensitive
2. Creatures in extreme TMs are still free
3. Deny this argument as a serious defeater for Molinism

# Grounding Problem<sup>[12]</sup>

Grounding problem / card dealer problem / doctrine of God being the cause of all things

## ▶ Objections

- ▶ How does God know counterfactuals? Where do they come from?
- ▶ God does not determine the truth of counterfactuals

## ▶ Responses

- ▶ Objection is poorly defined
- ▶ Burden of proof on the objector
- ▶ "Truth-maker theory": negative propositions seem to imply truth makers to be "special, non-objectual entities having a complexity which is essentially logical"

# Not Biblical

“Molinism is philosophy; it is not biblical; it is not necessary; sola scriptura”

- ▶ Denies God's inspiration and common grace
- ▶ Molinism is not in conflict with the Bible's gospel message
- ▶ The role of philosophy in God's revelation (Calvin, Aquinas)
- ▶ Sola what?





## Applications and Conclusion



# Applications of Molinism

Provides a framework for thinking about God's knowledge and His actions in the real world:

1. Soteriology (God's sovereignty + human libertarian free will)
2. "God changing His mind" passages and unfulfilled prophecies
3. Theological Fatalism
4. The Natural Problem of Evil
5. The Problem of Prayer
6. Biblical inspiration
7. Etc.

# Molinism Maximises God's Great-making Attributes

1. Omniscience
2. Omnipotence
3. Omnibenevolence



# Molinism: Omniscience

1. A being that has knowledge of counterfactuals has more knowledge than a being which does not have knowledge of counterfactuals
2. God is maximally great in His knowledge
3. Therefore, God has knowledge of counterfactuals

# Molinism: Omnipotence

1. If it is the case and God is unable to be sovereign if His creation has free will, then He is not maximally sovereign
2. God is maximally sovereign
3. Therefore, can God allow humans to have free will while remaining completely sovereign

Thus Molinism can show that God's sovereignty and man having free will are not logically contradictory

# Molinism: Omnibenevolence

- ▶ God loves all of His creation and desires that none should perish
- ▶ To maximally express His love, God grants His humans free will
- ▶ God does not (typically) intervene in the free will choices of His creation
- ▶ While human free will has led to much suffering, it is more valuable (to God) to have a creation with free will than not

# A Molinist Informed Soteriology

## ROSES acronym

1. Radical Depravity
2. Overcoming Grace
3. Sovereign Election
4. Eternal Life
5. Singular Redemption



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## Other Resources

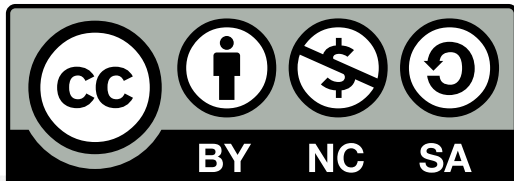
The following people and resources were heavily relied upon in the making of this presentation:

- ▶ **William Lane Craig:** [Reasonable Faith](#)
- ▶ **Max Andrews:** [Sententias](#)
- ▶ **Tim Stratton:** [Free Thinking Ministries](#)
- ▶ **Randy Everest:** [Possible Worlds](#)
- ▶ **J. W. Wartick:** [jwwartick.com](http://jwwartick.com)

## Questions



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