MOLINISM, CREATURE-TYPES, AND THE NATURE OF COUNTERFACTUAL IMPLICATION

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Abstract: Granting that there could be true subjunctive conditionals of libertarian freedom (SCLs), I argue (roughly) that there could be such conditionals only in connection with *individual* "possible creatures" (in contrast to *types*). This implies that Molinism depends on the view that, prior to creation, God grasps possible creatures in their individuality. In making my case, I explore the notions of *counterfactual implication* (that relationship between antecedent and consequent of an SCL which consists in its truth) and *counterfactual relevance* (that feature of an antecedent in virtue of which it counterfactually implies something or other).

I. INTRODUCTION

Let '*C*' stand for the history of our universe up to the time at which the apostle Peter freely performed some action *A*. According to the Molinist theory of divine providence,[1] we may say that God knew, prior to creation, a *subjunctive conditional of libertarian freedom* (SCL) to the effect that, were Peter in *C*, he would freely *A*. Let '*Truth*' stand for the thesis that there are, prior to creation, true SCLs; and '*Knowledge*' for the thesis that God knows, prior to creation, such SCLs. By 'prior to creation'

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[1] See Alfred J. Freddoso, "Introduction", pp. 1-81 in Luis De Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, ed. and trans. Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

I mean logically prior to God's making any creative decision. We may say that 'prior to creation' picks out the pre-creation *world phase*, where a "phase" need not be temporal.

Truth and *Knowledge* can be challenged in a way that, as far as I am aware, has not yet been explored. Molinists have recognized that there are thorny issues in connection with referring to a creature in the context of a pre-creation world phase at which the creature does not exist; and have accordingly suggested that the SCLs known in "middle knowledge" (that alleged logical moment of knowing posterior to God's "natural knowledge" and prior to a creative decree and "free knowledge") directly involve, not "possible creatures" *per se*, but possibly exemplified *individual essences*.[2] So one might suppose that, prior to creation, God knows not (1) but (2)

(1) Were Peter in *C*, he would freely *A* [in *C*]

(2) Were an exemplifier of *E* in *C*, it [that exemplifier] would freely *A*,

where '*E*' stands for a property the exemplifying of which is necessary and sufficient for being Peter. However, it is controversial whether essences of possible creatures exist prior to creation.[3] One might think that, prior to creation, God grasps neither (1) nor (2) but rather something like (3):

(3) Were an exemplifier of *F* in *C*, it would freely *A*;

where '*F*' stands for a *type*, i.e., a property exemplified by more than one possible individual (whether *in* a possible world – for example, by Peter and Paul in *W* – or *across* possible worlds – for example, by Peter in *W* and Paul in *W**). Let us say that an *agent-singular* SCL concerns an individual possible agent, as (1) and (2) do;[4] and that an *agent-general* SCL concerns a type, as (3) does.

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[2] See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 187-188; Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 122, 124-126; and Flint, *Divine Providence*, pp. 46-47, 124.

[3] See, e.g., Robert Merrihew Adams, "Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity", *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979), 5-26; Robert Merrihew Adams, "Actualism and Thisness", *Synthese* 49 (1981), 3-41; Alvin Plantinga, "On Existentialism", *Philosophical Studies* 44 (1983), 1-20; Kit Fine, "Plantinga on the Reduction of Possibilist Discourse", pp. 145-186 in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 155-156; Linda Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation", pp. 119-144 in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Christopher Menzel, "Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge", *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), 475-507.

[4] I am ignoring "impossible agents" and SCLs involving them.

But suppose that there are no true agent-general SCLs. That is, suppose that, whatever one wants to say about individuals such as Peter and Paul, there are no facts of the matter about what kinds of agents would freely do in various circumstances. If there were true SCLs (if at all) only for individuals, and if no agent-singular SCLs were to exist prior to creation, then *Truth* (and therefore *Knowledge*) would be false.[5] And if there were true SCLs (if at all) only for individuals, and no agent-singular SCLs were grasped prior to creation, then *Knowledge* would be false. These considerations suggest the following anti-Molinism argument:

(4) An SCL is true only if agent-singular.

(5) Prior to creation, God does not grasp any agent-singular SCLs.

Therefore,

(6) Prior to creation, God does not know any SCLs.

(4) imposes a constraint on the nature of true SCLs (should there be any), and (5) implies that the constraint is not satisfied by any items of pre-creation divine cognizance. (5) could be true because there are no agent-singular SCLs at the pre-creation world phase, or because, though there are, they are not grasped. Now, there would seem to be no good reason to accept (5) apart from accepting a stronger premise denying a pre-creation divine grasp of "agent-singular" propositions more generally; such as

(7) Were an exemplifier of *E* in *C*, it might freely *A*

(8) Were Peter in *C*, he would probably freely *A*

(9) Were an exemplifier of *E* in *C*, it would *A*

(10) Were Peter to exist, he would exist

(11) Peter does not exist.

However, one might affirm such a view and nevertheless hold that (7) through (11) have certain "agent-general" correlates that God does grasp prior to creation; related true propositions that can play an action-guiding role for God. (4) precludes there being such correlates in the case of SCLs.

It may be instructive to contrast the nature of this challenge to Molinism with that posed by the "grounding objection", perhaps the most prominent objection to Molinism. The grounding objector attacks either *Truth* (and thereby *Knowledge*) or *Knowledge* by focusing on the connection – or lack thereof – between an allegedly true SCL's antecedent and consequent. (10)'s antecedent necessitates its consequent, as do those

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[5] I am assuming that a proposition can have a truth-value prior to creation and be known prior to creation only if it exists prior to creation.

of (7), (8), and (9) (we could easily suppose, in each case); whereas the SCL (1)'s does not. The grounding objector thinks that the alleged pre-creation truth (or knowledge) of SCLs both needs and lacks grounds. However, the anti-Molinism argument I have sketched does not turn on the nature of the relationship between an SCL's antecedent and consequent, nor on the relevant propositions' even being conditionals; since the existence and graspability of a proposition turns on its "matter" rather than its "form" (so to speak). One might deny that there exists an agent-singular SCL prior to creation, while granting that, were one to so exist, it would non-vacuously take a truth-value. And were such an SCL to exist prior to creation, one might deny that God grasps it prior to creation, while granting that, were He to so grasp it, He would grasp its truth-value.

The "prior to creation" index is crucial in these considerations. It is consistent with this argument that God comes to know some agent-singular SCLs posterior to creation; either because He comes to grasp them then, or because they come to exist and take a truth-value then. Such knowledge would be "middle knowledge" *qua* content (contingent truths over which God has no control), but not "middle knowledge" proper or *qua* stage of knowing.[6] Other anti-Molinism arguments have turned on considerations pertaining to the pre-creation world phase, but the challenge I have described turns on considerations pertaining to the existence and/or graspability of agent-singular SCLs, not on considerations pertaining either to possible world semantics for counterfactuals[7] or to explanatory priority and libertarian freedom.[8]

My aim in this paper is not to argue for the soundness of this anti-Molinism argument. I am inclined to think that (5) is false, that God does grasp, prior to creation, possible creatures in their individuality; though I think cogently defending such a position in light of objections that have been raised is no easy task.[9] In what follows, my aim is to motivate

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[6] It would be fallacious to infer, from a conditional's coming to be true "*post*-volitionally", that it becomes true *because of* divine volition; as William Craig seems to do – see William Lane Craig, "Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the 'Grounding Objection'", *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001), 337-352, 339.

[7] See, e.g., Edward R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 148-150.

[8] See, e.g., Wes Morriston, "Explanatory Priority and the 'Counterfactuals of Freedom'", *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001), 21-35.

[9] See, e.g., "Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity" and "Actualism and Thisness" by Adams, and Menzel's "Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge".

a qualified version of (4). If (4) is true, then to the extent that one finds a theory of pre-creation divine knowledge on which God grasps individual possible creatures implausible, to that extent (at least) one should find Molinism implausible. That is, Molinism could be no more plausible than such a theory of divine knowledge.

II. SCLs

By 'subjunctive conditional of libertarian freedom' ('SCL'), I mean a proposition to the effect that, were some agent in a certain circumstance, it *would* act in a certain way, *freely* (in a libertarian sense). SCLs constitute one kind of subjunctive conditional of indeterministic activity (SCI); where an SCI is a proposition to the effect that, were something with causal powers or liabilities in a certain circumstance, it *would* exercise such in a certain way, *contingently*. The class of SCLs is not wholly contained within that of SCIs, since some SCL consequents would obtain necessarily given their antecedents (e.g., "were God to freely A, He would freely A"); but I am only discussing SCLs that are SCIs. Further, I am only discussing SCIs the truth-values of which God cannot directly bring about (this qualification plausibly being redundant with SCLs for creatures), and I am only discussing SCIs with possible antecedents. I will assume in what follows that, for all we know, there could be true SCIs and SCLs; my argumentation not relying on assumptions that a Molinist should be expected to reject.

Let us think of an SCI as connecting two states of affairs. The truth of an SCI p implies, of some states of affairs S and T, that were S to obtain, T would contingently obtain. So, the truth of p could not consist in S's necessitating T. Further, p's truth could not be grounded in any connection between S and T established by divine decree. Moreover, p's *pre-creation* truth plausibly could neither consist nor be otherwise grounded in either the obtaining of S and/or T or the obtaining of any categorical facts of the matter to the effect that S and/or T "will" obtain. Even were there such facts,[10] p's truth "persists through" possible pre-creation world phases wherein there are not,[11] suggesting that p's truth could be at most overdetermined by them. On my understanding, true

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[10] See Timothy O'Connor, "The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge", *Philosophical Studies* 66 (1992), 139-166, 152.

[11] See Flint, *Divine Providence*, pp. 47, 124.

SCIs would be *just true*, and contingently: they could have been false instead. I will use the phrase 'counterfactual implication'[12] to denote this connection, insofar as it is a connection, between the antecedent and consequent of a true SCI. Counterfactual implication is a relation from one state of affairs to another that consists simply in the truth of an SCI, and the truth of an SCI is primitive.[13] More precisely, I think that Molinism implies the existence of a privileged class of SCIs – *perfect* SCIs – for which both of these claims would be true. A true perfect SCI is primitively true, and the counterfactual implying of such an SCI's antecedent of its consequent consists simply in its truth. However, there conceivably are *imperfect* SCIs which have their truth-values in virtue of other things; such as the truth-values of certain perfect SCIs.[14] In what follows, I will elucidate and motivate a qualified version of (4), in large part by exploring the distinction between perfect and imperfect SCIs.

III. PERFECT AND IMPERFECT SCLs

Consider the agent-general (3)

(3) Were an exemplifier of *F* in *C*, it would freely *A*,

and suppose that Peter and Paul are each possible exemplifiers or tokens of *F* in *C*, that each one's being in *C* would partly consist in his exemplifying *F*, and – for simplicity – that they are the only possible tokens of *F* in *C*. In other words, the obtaining of either (1)'s or (12)'s antecedent

(1) Were Peter in *C*, he would freely *A*

(12) Were Paul in *C*, he would freely *A*

implies that of (3)'s, and the obtaining of (3)'s implies that of either (1)'s or (12)'s.

I am initially inclined to accept (4)

(4) An SCL is true only if agent-singular

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[12] I have borrowed this phrase from Thomas Flint (Flint, *Divine Providence*); though it may be subjected to somewhat different treatment in my hands.

[13] One might think that true SCIs are grounded by certain "facts" (such as facts revealed by disquoting sentences expressing SCIs). If one does, he can qualify my remarks about primitive truth accordingly. But I think that the Molinist should just maintain that SCIs do not need grounds. Cf. ibid., p. 137; Craig, "Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the 'Grounding Objection'"; and Trenton Merricks, *Truth and Ontology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 150-151.

[14] Cf. Flint, *Divine Providence*, p. 50, n. 21.

because I am initially inclined to think that there could not be any fact of the matter about what a *kind* of agent *would* freely do in any circumstance. A non-Molinist might favour such a view because he thinks that there could not be any fact of the matter about what *any* agent would freely do in any circumstance. However, I think that there are special problems for the truth of agent-general SCLs.

Accordingly, the idea that there could not be facts of the matter about what kinds of agents would freely do needs to be qualified, for there are conceivable ways in which there could be such facts in virtue of being parasitic on facts about what individual agents would do. For example, suppose that (1) and (12) are true. It follows from this and from the fact that Peter and Paul are the only possible *F*-tokens in *C* that (3) is true. That is, if it is true of every possible *F*-token in *C* that it would freely *A*, then it is true that, were an *F*-exemplifier in *C*, it would freely *A*. Alternatively, suppose that both (13)

(13) Were an exemplifier of *F* in *C*, its identity would be that of Peter[15]

and (1) are true.[16] In these two cases, the agent-general (3) is imperfect, since it has its truth-value in virtue of other SCIs. In the first case, a true (3) would have import for possible *F*-tokens in general only through the logically prior obtaining of facts about every individual possible *F*-token (in *C*); and in the second case, a true (3) would not have import for possible *F*-tokens in general.

Because it is conceivable that there be true imperfect agent-general SCLs, I want to contend, not for (4) but for (14)

(4) An SCL is true only if agent-singular
(14) An SCL is perfect only if agent-singular.

(14) implies that the class of perfect SCLs falls completely within the class of agent-singular SCLs. Suppose, contrary to (14), that (3) is a perfect SCL that is true prior to creation. It seems to follow that (1) and (12) are

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[15] This does not fit my description of an SCI, though it is an "SCI" in a broader sense, where "indeterministic activity" encompasses the contingent obtaining of facts about identity.

[16] This inference is not based on the assumption of any transitivity principle. Cf. David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1973), pp. 32-35. Since Peter's being in *C* entails an *F*-exemplifier's being in *C*, the "closest" possible worlds wherein (1)'s antecedent obtains are worlds wherein (13)'s and (3)'s does. And given (13), the closest ones wherein this antecedent obtains are ones wherein (1)'s does. Adding in (1), the closest ones wherein these antecedents obtain are ones wherein Peter freely *A*'s; such that (3) is true.

both true (or would be, if/when each exists to take a truth-value; this qualification being subsequently left implicit). For I do not understand what it means to affirm the agent-general (3), if its truth does not have implications for what some possible tokens of *F* in *C* would freely do; and the truth of a perfect (3) seems to have import for all possible *F*-tokens in *C* if it has import for any. More generally, it seems that an agent-general SCL will have *indiscriminate* import for possible tokens of the relevant type in the relevant circumstance, unless it is grounded – implying imperfection – by something that "refracts" the range of import to a proper subset of such tokens. For example, if (3) were true partly in virtue of (13), it might not imply (12); but it would not be perfect. And if (3) became true only posterior to creation, and became true in virtue of the obtaining of (1)'s antecedent and consequent, it might not imply (12); but it would be imperfect.

Now, suppose that *the law of conditional excluded middle* (CEM) holds for the perfect (3); that is, that it is necessary that either (3) or (3*) is true

(3) Were an exemplifier of *F* in *C*, it would freely *A*

(3*) Were an exemplifier of *F* in *C*, it would not freely *A*.[17]

It follows from CEM's holding for (3), (3)'s implying (1) and (12), and (3*)'s implying (1*) and (12*) that the conjunction of (1) and (12*)

(1) Were Peter in *C*, he would freely *A*

(12*) Were Paul in *C*, he would not freely *A*

is impossible. For if it is necessarily the case that either an *F*-exemplifier would freely *A* in *C* or an *F*-exemplifier would not freely *A* in *C*, then every possible world is such that it falls into (just) one of two groups: those in which an *F*-exemplifier would freely *A* in *C*, and those in which an *F*-exemplifier would not freely *A* in *C*. And if (3) implies (1) and (12) and (3*) (1*) and (12*), then there is no possible world in either group wherein Peter would and Paul would not freely *A* in *C*. If CEM holds for a perfect agent-general (3), then the agent-singular (1) and (12) necessarily take the same truth-value.

However, I find it plausible (granting that there are facts of the matter about what individuals would freely do in various circumstances) that

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[17] In light of concerns that one might have over the modal status of the existence of agent-singular SCLs, we may interpret CEM's holding for an SCL *p* in terms of its being an essential property of the pair of *p* and *p** that one of them is true. Notice also that the SCI *p** will not itself be an SCL, since an agent's contingently failing to freely do something does not imply its freely refraining to do it.

it is *possible* that Peter would and a non-identical Paul would not freely *A* in *C* (and vice versa) – no matter how similar the *F*-tokens otherwise are (or would be). After all, it is possible that Peter would freely *A* in *C*, and it is possible that Peter would not freely *A* in *C*; and likewise with Paul. Why should not it be possible for it to be the case both that Peter would and Paul would not freely *A* in *C*? This possibility can be rendered compossible with (3) in two ways. First, suppose that (3) is true partly in virtue of (13). This undermines the reason for thinking that (3) precludes (12*). Second, suppose that, though (3) indeed entails (1) and (12), CEM fails for (3). (Let us say that such an SCI is *degenerate*.) This implies the possibility of worlds wherein neither (3) nor (3*) is true. Now, (3) is clearly imperfect on the first option: its truth-value depends (in a robust, asymmetric sense) on the truth-values of (1) and (13). And concerning the second option, it seems that the best (if not only) explanation for (3)'s being degenerate is that it is imperfect in a different way; namely, in that the truth-values of (3) and (3*) depend on how truth-values are distributed across (1) and (12). That is, the possible truth of the conjunction of (1) and (12*) explains (in a robust, asymmetric sense) the possibility of worlds wherein both (3) and (3*) are false.

I will discuss in the next section the idea that an agent-general SCL might be both degenerate and perfect, but for now it seems that we can provisionally say that (1) and (12*) are compossible only if (3) is imperfect. Since I find it plausible that (1) and (12*) are compossible, I am inclined to think that (3) is imperfect. And since the reasoning generalizes to any agent-general SCL, I am inclined to accept (14). To the extent that one shares my intuitions here, one already has a reason to accept (14). In the next two sections, I will present two lines of argument for (14). In the remainder of this section, I will discuss how contending for (14) instead of (4) affects the anti-Molinism argument sketched in section I; and then say a bit more about the perfect / imperfect distinction.

Let us assume (5), grant that there might be true agent-general SCLs, but, in accordance with (14), maintain that any such SCLs would be imperfect. If there existed no agent-singular SCLs prior to creation, then there would be no true imperfect agent-general SCLs, since the SCIs on which their truth would depend would not exist. This would not preclude the truth of agent-general SCLs in general, for it might be that posterior to creation certain SCIs come to exist and (non-vacuously) take truth-values, and thereby come to ground truth-values for agent-general SCLs. If, on the other hand, there existed true agent-singular

SCLs prior to creation, then the following two possibilities arise for pre-creation knowledge of agent-general SCLs. First, suppose that the ungrasped (1) and (12) are true and ground the grasped (3), and that God grasps (3)'s truth. The *probability* of such an agent-general p's being true depends partly on the number of agent-singular SCLs q, r, s, etc. that need to *harmonize* in truth-value in the right way; which depends on the number of possible tokens of the relevant type in the relevant circumstance (the assumption that there are only two possible tokens of F in C was motivated solely by considerations of simplicity and brevity of exposition). Second, suppose that the ungrasped (1) and (13) are true and ground the grasped (3), and that God grasps (3)'s truth. There are complications for this way of generating truth for an agent-general p which there is no space to explore. Can God create two tokens of the relevant type in the relevant circumstance; and if so, can any relevant SCI of (13)'s form be true?

In contending for (14), I am in effect contending for the following view of the relationship between agent-singular and agent-general SCLs ("*Singularity*"). The class of perfect SCLs lies within that of agent-singular SCLs, and agent-general SCLs are imperfect, depending for their truth on certain agent-singular SCLs. The salient alternative view ("*Generality*") reverses the priority, maintaining that the class of perfect SCLs lies within that of agent-general SCLs, and that agent-singular SCLs are (to the extent that they exist) imperfect, depending for their truth on certain agent-general SCLs.

On *Singularity*, the imperfection of an agent-general SCL p consists in its truth-value's depending on the truth-value of more than one perfect SCI. Let us say that such an SCI is *complex*; and that a non-complex SCI is *simple*. I have discussed two ways in which p might be complex; depending on whether there are or are not true SCIs concerning what the identity of a token of a type would be. If there are not, then p would seem to be degenerate. On *Generality*, agent-singular SCLs need not be degenerate: it might be that CEM holds for (3), that a true (3) would ground (1), and that a true (3*) would ground (1*); such that CEM holds for (1). Further, agent-singular SCLs need not be complex on this view: (1) has a sufficient ground in (3). I submit that the imperfection of (1) on *Generality* consists in (1)'s antecedent's containing *counterfactually irrelevant* information.[18] We can represent (3) and (1) as follows:

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[18] My use of 'counterfactually (ir)relevant' differs from Flint's (Flint, *Divine Providence*, p. 245).

(3) $S > U$
(1) $(S \& T) > U$;

where '>' stands for counterfactual implication, and 'T' for the information in (1) concerning the identity of the token of the type comprehended in (1) and (3). T is counterfactually irrelevant to U in the sense that T is not entailed by S and its being conjoined to S does not even *possibly* make any difference as to whether U is counterfactually implied. We may say that an argument from (3) to (1) would be valid, given an additional premise to the effect that the state of affairs with which the antecedent is "strengthened" (T) is counterfactually irrelevant.[19] Let us say that an SCI is *pure* if its antecedent includes only counterfactually relevant states of affairs; and *impure* otherwise.

I have said that a true perfect SCI is *primitively* true, and that the counterfactual implying of such an SCI's antecedent consists *simply* in the SCI's truth. Insofar as a true imperfect SCI is true in virtue of something else, we may say that the counterfactual implying of such an SCI's antecedent consists in something more than the SCI's truth (such as the counterfactual implyings of the antecedents of certain perfect SCIs). Let us say that perfect SCI antecedents *strictly* counterfactually imply their consequents, and that imperfect SCI antecedents *loosely* do. We may elucidate the counterfactual irrelevance of T on *Generality* – and thereby the impurity of (1) – by saying that, strictly speaking, $S \& T$ does not counterfactually imply anything. Rather, $S \& T$ only counterfactually implies U in the sense that a proper part, S, counterfactually implies U. Just as (1)'s truth is parasitic on (3)'s, $S \& T$'s (loose) counterfactual implying is parasitic on S's. Now, on *Singularity*, (1) is pure (its consequent's being strictly counterfactually implied by $S \& T$), the imperfection lying in (3) and its complexity; and we may elucidate this complexity in terms of (3)'s truth's being grounded in more than one "instance" of (strict) counterfactual implication – for example, the harmonizing implyings of $S \& T$ and (12)'s antecedent $S \& T^*$.

Summing up, we have two views of the relationship between agent-singular and agent-general SCLs, the first of which I take to be equivalent with (14). On *Singularity*, perfect SCLs are agent-singular, and agent-general SCLs are complex, the truth of which depends on the

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[19] Such an argument would also be valid given the premise that T is entailed by S. We may assume for the sake of discussion that an entailment of something relevant is intrinsically relevant.

truth of every SCI within a certain class (explaining why (3) might be degenerate); whereas on *Generality*, perfect SCLs are agent-general, and agent-singular SCLs are impure, containing counterfactually irrelevant information pertaining to the identity of the token of the type (explaining why (1) and (12) necessarily take the same truth-value). We may say that the imperfection of an impure SCI consists in its antecedent's containing *extraneous* information relative to its counterfactually implying its consequent, and that the imperfection of a degenerate SCI consists in its antecedent's not containing *enough* information to strictly counterfactually imply something or other.[20]

IV. THE PRIORITY OF THE SINGULAR (1/2)

I have submitted that *Singularity* is intuitively plausible. Consider any x, y, C, and free A such that CEM holds for x (y), C, and A. Why should it not be possible for it to be the case both that x would, and y would not, A in C – unless x and y are identical? It seems that the only possible agent z such that, necessarily, x would A in C just in case z would, is x itself. But were there a true, perfect agent-general SCL p, there would seemingly be some such C, A, and pair x and y (possible tokens of the type comprehended in p) for which this would not be possible. In this section, I will present an argument for *Singularity*, and in the next and final section, I will present another. The first turns on the idea that *Singularity*'s falsity implies that possible agents have a strange and implausible kind of *counterfactual power over* certain other possible agents. The second turns on a conception of the nature of counterfactual relevance on which the antecedents of agent-general SCLs are *not determinate enough in content* to strictly counterfactually imply anything.

Suppose that *Singularity* is false, that God knows, prior to creation, the perfect agent-general (3)

(3) Were an exemplifier of F in C, it would freely A,

and that He creates two universes u and $u^{\star}$ (two spatiotemporally unconnected systems), actualizing Peter's being in C in u and Paul's

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[20] The latter description would also hold for any complex agent-general SCL on *Singularity*; but it does not hold for complex SCIs as such. For example, suppose that (for some S, T, U) S counterfactually implies both T and U. It might be that "$S > (T \& U)$" is complex. It depends on whether "$S > (T \& U)$" depends on "$S > T$" and "$S > U$" (in which case it is complex) or vice versa.

being in C in u^*. We may suppose that u and u^* share qualitatively identical universe segments terminating respectively in Peter's and Paul's each being about to freely perform some action or other. It follows from the perfect (3)'s truth that Peter and Paul each freely A.

Now, were Peter to freely refrain from A'ing, (3) would not be true. He has "counterfactual power" over (3), the power to do something (refrain from A'ing) such that, were he to do it, (3) would not be true. But if (3) is perfect, then the relevant power constitutes a power to do something such that, were he to do it, (3*)

(3*) Were an exemplifier of F in C, it would not freely A

would be true; in which case Peter has the power to do something such that, were he to do it, either Paul would not be in C (as he in fact is) or Paul would not freely A (as he in fact does). For if CEM holds for (3), then every possible world includes the truth of either (3) or (3*) (exclusive), and there is no such world wherein one F-token in C does not freely A and another does. Further, if we assume that Peter does not have counterfactual power over whether Paul exists in C with full possession of the power over whether he A's, then Peter's unexercised power to refrain from A'ing constitutes a power to do something such that, were he to do it, Paul would freely exercise his (in fact unexercised) power to refrain from A'ing. And everything I have said about Peter's power over Paul applies vice versa.

There seems to be no good reason to think that Peter has this kind of power over Paul, or vice versa (*a fortiori*, and vice versa). It seems utterly bizarre, and it seems far more plausible that Peter's power to do otherwise consists merely in a counterfactual power over (1). We can affirm this if we accept *Singularity* and suppose that (3) is imperfect; and more specifically, degenerate. For were the agent-singular (1) and (12) perfect and the agent-general (3) degenerate, Peter's unexercised power to refrain from A'ing would not imply any counterfactual power either over (12) or over the obtaining of any state of affairs involving Paul. Were Peter to freely refrain from A'ing, (3) would be false; and were Paul to freely A (as he in fact does), (3*) would be false. Because CEM fails for (3), it is possible that both are false, permitting Peter and Paul to have no counterfactual power of the described kind over each other.

Now, I have been assuming that CEM holds for perfect SCIs; that is, that being degenerate suffices for being imperfect (and more specifically, complex). However, might we suppose that (3) is primitively true, and

yet that it is not necessarily the case that either (3) or (3*) is true? We could then suppose that Peter's unexercised power to refrain from *A*'ing does not consist in a power to something implying (3)'s falsity and (3*)'s truth, but merely consists in a power to do something implying (3)'s falsity. And yet (3) is still perfect, contrary to *Singularity*.

In response to this objection, I insist that the link between being degenerate and being imperfect (such that the former suffices for the latter) is very plausible. First, rejecting this connection prohibits one from accepting the following natural view of the relationship between counterfactually relevant information and CEM. I find it natural to think that the reason for which CEM would fail for an SCI *p* lies in *p*'s antecedent's not containing enough counterfactually relevant information to strictly counterfactually imply anything. In this vein, we may suppose that, with respect to any instance of indeterministic activity, there is a certain *threshold* of contextual information (describing the circumstances in which the activity takes place) such that CEM fails for an SCI involving that activity the antecedent of which fails to meet it; and such that CEM "kicks in" for an SCI the antecedent of which meets it.[21] We can integrate our conception of counterfactual relevance with CEM by supposing that counterfactually relevant information is that enough of which suffices for there to be a determinate fact of the matter about what would contingently happen. Now, the antecedent of a perfect SCI has "enough" relevant information to counterfactually imply some state of affairs or other; where the import of 'enough' here is to indicate the satisfaction of a necessary condition for counterfactually implying something or other (otherwise the SCI would be imperfect). But on a view where (3) might be perfect and degenerate, having "enough" information is not sufficient for counterfactually implying anything. This makes it a matter of brute, contingent fact *whether* an antecedent with "enough" counterfactually relevant information counterfactually implies anything (over and above the contingency pertaining to *what* is counterfactually implied). But it seems implausible that it is primitive and contingent whether there is any fact of the matter about what would occur, were such an antecedent to obtain.[22]

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[21] Cf. ibid., p. 47; Craig, "Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the 'Grounding Objection'", p. 338; and Alexander R. Pruss, "Prophecy Without Middle Knowledge", *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007), 433-457, 433, 439.

[22] And it seems just as implausible that the threshold for what constitutes "enough" varies across possible worlds.

Second, denying this link between being degenerate and being imperfect gives rise to the following dilemma. With respect to an agent-general p which is allegedly both perfect and degenerate, we can either retain the idea that an agent-singular q and r concerning possible tokens of the type comprehended in p are asymmetrically dependent on p for their alethic status, or we can give this up too, supposing that p, q, and r are all perfect. On the first horn, p would imply and ground q and r, p^* would ground q^* and r^*, and the falsity of (p v p^*) would ground (q v r) (exclusive); without implying – much less grounding – which disjunct is true. On the second horn, it seems that the truth-values of p, q, and r would be overdetermined. Suppose p, q, and r are all primitively true. It seems that q and r are overdetermined, being true both "primitively" and "in virtue of" p.[23] Likewise, it seems that p is overdetermined, being true both "primitively" and "in virtue of" (q & r). I submit that the consequences of both horns are implausible. In the first case, we have the possibility of a perfect agent-general SCL's grounding the obtaining of an irreducibly disjunctive state of affairs concerning agent-singular SCLs, and in the second case, we have the appearance of symmetric overdetermination of SCL truth-values. We can avoid both consequences by supposing that CEM fails for the agent-general (3) *because* it is *imperfect*; or more specifically, because of the way in which it is imperfect, namely, being such that the truth-values of (3) and (3*) are grounded in the truth-values of certain agent-singular SCLs. Bringing in my first point in response to the objection, we should hold that an SCI is degenerate *because* it does *not* contain enough counterfactually relevant information to (strictly) counterfactually imply anything.

Here is another objection to the argument for *Singularity* from counterfactual power. I presupposed that the type F and circumstance C comprehended in (3) are such that the former is possibly exemplified in the latter by two tokens in the same possible world. However, perhaps there are perfect agent-general SCLs concerning types that can only be exemplified in the relevant circumstances by different agents in different possible worlds. Let us modify the scenario such that, instead of having two universes and two F-tokens in one possible world, we have two possible worlds with qualitatively identical universe segments; Peter

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[23] This "in virtue of" predication need not be taken to be logically precluded by the supposed perfection of q and r, for we may suppose that being perfect does not (logically) preclude overdetermining "grounds".

being the relevant agent in one and Paul in the other (the nature of "*F*" and/or "*C*" now being such that an exemplifying of *F* in *C* precludes the co-existence of any diverse *F*-tokens in *C*). Now suppose that God actualizes a universe segment wherein Peter is in *C*. The truth of a perfect (3) implies that Peter freely *A*'s, and yet Peter has the unexercised power to do something such that, were he to do it, (3) would not be true. However, because no other *F*-tokens exist, Peter's unexercised power does not seem to consist in any kind of counterfactual power over states of affairs involving other *F*-tokens.

In response, I claim that a relevantly similar, implausible kind of counterfactual power is implied in this kind of case too. Suppose that Peter freely *A*'s in *C*, and that he is made privy to the facts that (3) is a perfect agent-general SCL and that he was a token of *F* in *C*. Following his action, Peter can rationally infer with certainty that (3) is true, and that any other possible *F*-token in *C* *would have* freely *A*'ed, were it to have been placed in *C* instead of him. For just as there is no possible world in which CEM holds for (3) wherein an *F*-token *x* in *C* freely *A*'s and a token *y* in *C* fails to, there is no possible world in which CEM holds for a perfect (3) wherein it is the case both that *x* freely *A*'s in *C* and it is false that *y would*. Now intuitively, Peter should not be able to rationally infer with certainty anything about what any other possible *F*-token in *C* would have done, and the reason is that it is implausible that he has the kind of counterfactual power the knowledge of which would undergird the inference. Such power is implied by the perfection of (3) and can be rejected if we accept *Singularity*. First, we could suppose that (3) is complex and degenerate, true if at all in virtue of (1) and (12). Second, we could suppose that (3) is complex, true if at all in virtue of (1) and (13). In either case, Peter should not infer (12) after freely *A*'ing; as his freely *A*'ing would be compossible with (12*).

In the "intra-world" case (where *F* is multiply exemplified in one world), Peter has counterfactual power over categorical facts involving other possible *F*-tokens; whereas in the "transworld" case (where *F* is multiply exemplified across worlds), Peter has counterfactual power over irreducibly subjunctive facts involving other possible *F*-tokens (and, relative to his retrospective reasoning, counterfactual facts). And I think the cases are relevantly similar: both kinds of counterfactual power are strange and implausible, and both are precluded by *Singularity*. One might be inclined to some stronger conclusions. First, one might think that it can be *shown* that the kinds of power I have described are

metaphysically impossible. Second, one might think that these kinds of power are *incoherent*, in the sense that the possession of libertarian freedom (or, the kind of agency necessary for moral responsibility, from an incompatibilist perspective) is logically inconsistent with the possession of these kinds of counterfactual power. But I am here insisting merely that it is far more plausible that *Singularity* is true than that any possible agents have the described kinds of power.

V. THE PRIORITY OF THE SINGULAR (2/2)[24]

Another line of thought in support of *Singularity* comes from the following considerations pertaining to the nature of counterfactual relevance. We know that, were there true SCIs, the information in their antecedents would not ground their consequents, in the robust sense of providing metaphysically sufficient conditions. And even were one inclined to think that an SCI's antecedent could explain the obtaining of its consequent, in spite of the non-necessitating connection from the former to the latter, it cannot be maintained that the role or function of the information in the antecedent of a perfect agent-*general* SCL would simply be to ground the consequent. For if an agent's exemplifying a general property can explain either its performing or its failing to perform an action, then presumably the conjunctive state of affairs of two agents' each exemplifying the property can explain the conjunctive state of affairs of one agent's performing and the other's failing to perform the action. And yet the truth of a perfect agent-general SCL would ground a uniformity in counterfactually implied action across its type's possible tokens. Hence, the function of the information in a perfect agent-general SCL could not be, in its entirety, that of providing even a non-necessitating ground for the proposition's truth; for the ramifications of such a truth would outstrip those of a non-necessitating explanation for a token occurrence of indeterministic activity.

So what exactly is the role or function of the information in an SCI antecedent? I suggest that it should be taken to be that of providing, not a *ground* for the consequent, but an *occasion* for it; that is, an occasion of indeterministic activity with respect to which it is primitively the

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[24] See also Dean Zimmerman, "Yet Another Anti-Molinist Argument", pp. 33-94 in *Metaphysics and the Good*, ed. L. M. Jorensen and Samuel Newlands (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

case that the consequent would contingently obtain.[25] Now, occasions of activity, or circumstances of activity, are "modally fragile",[26] in the sense that even the slightest adjustment in non-relational properties changes the identity of the occasion. For example, if Peter leaps a puddle of water, we have one occasion of activity, and were one of the soles of one of Peter's sandals slightly thinner, we would have a different occasion of activity. And if Peter is wearing Fred the sandal when he jumps, we have one occasion, and were he wearing Todd the sandal instead, a qualitatively identical but numerically diverse sandal, we would have a different occasion. And if Peter leaps a puddle, we have one occasion of activity, and were a qualitatively identical Paul to leap a puddle instead, we would have a different one.

My second argument for *Singularity* has two premises:

(15) The subjects of (strict) counterfactual implication are states of affairs representing individual possible occasions of indeterministic activity.

(16) The antecedents of agent-general SCLs represent merely types of possible occasions of indeterministic activity.

(16) follows from the modal fragility of individual occasions of activity; and more specifically and saliently, from the fact that a token occasion of free action is individuated in part by the identity of the agent who acts. I find (16)'s falsity just as absurd as, for example, the idea that a set or proposition has its non-relational properties accidentally (as if, for example, the very proposition that is *that Socrates exists* can be *that Plato exists*). My acceptance of (15) is primarily based on intuition, on the intuitive plausibility of the view that (granting the basic Molinist picture) the role of counterfactually relevant information is to provide an individual occasion of indeterministic activity with respect to which something is counterfactually implied. However, perhaps I can inculcate similar intuitions in you, and I can rebut some objections to (15). But first, I will explain how this argument for *Singularity* supports a stronger conclusion.

In addition to distinguishing agent-singularity and agent-generality, we can distinguish *circumstance*-singularity and -generality. If an SCL

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[25] Though such information might ground other kinds of consequents (and hence other kinds of conditionals, such as might- or would-probably-conditionals).

[26] I borrow 'modally fragile' from Karen Bennett, "Why the Exclusion Problem Seems Intractable, and How, Just Maybe, to Tract It", *Nous* 37 (2003), 471-497, nn. 7-8.

is agent-general, it is circumstance-general, because the identity of a token circumstance of action partly depends on that of the agent "in" it. However, if an SCL is circumstance-general, it may or may not be agent-general. It depends on the extent to which the identity of an agent depends on circumstances in which it exists. The argument from counterfactual power is an argument directly for the thesis that an SCL is perfect only if it is agent-singular, whereas the present argument from the nature of counterfactual relevance is an argument for the thesis that an SCL is perfect only if it is both agent- and circumstance-singular (i.e., involving an individual agent in an individual circumstance). Further, inasmuch as the present argument does not hang on considerations pertaining to libertarian freedom, it supports a conclusion pertaining to SCIs in general.[27]

When it comes to causally necessitated states of affairs, the circumstance of activity's identity *as such* is irrelevant to any (qualitative) fact about what happens, will happen, or would happen. For example, if certain events causally necessitate Peter's jumping over a puddle of water, we can adjust the circumstance without jeopardizing the outcome, provided that the adjustments are *causally* irrelevant to Peter's acting. For example, if we change the identity of one of Peter's sandals, Peter will still be causally necessitated to jump. Likewise, if we switch out Peter for a qualitatively identical Paul, the agent will still be causally necessitated to jump.[28] But we are dealing with SCIs, and counterfactually relevant factors do not ground consequent states of affairs in this way. So we should not assume that what is causally irrelevant in the case of something causally necessitated is counterfactually irrelevant in the case of something counterfactually implied.

Consider two (token) circumstances C and $C^{\star}$ in which Peter might find himself that are identical with respect to causally relevant factors, circumstances in which Peter would have the power both to A and to refrain from A'ing. Let us suppose that C and $C^{\star}$ are qualitatively identical and indiscernible to Peter, and let 'D' stand for a circumstance-type

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[27] I do not mean to imply that the first argument could not be adapted in support of stronger conclusions. For example, we could replace Peter and Paul in u and $u^{\star}$ with atoms randomly suffering decay, and try to evoke intuitions to the effect that what happens with the two is independent.

[28] Hence, there appears to be no reason to doubt the truth of certain subjunctive conditionals with general antecedents which we may call 'subjunctive conditionals of *compatibilist* freedom'.

of which C and $C^\star$ are possible tokens. It is possible that $C > A$ (i.e., that Peter would freely A in C), that $C > {\sim}A$ (i.e., that Peter would not freely A in C), that $C^\star > A$, and that $C^\star > {\sim}A$. Why should it not be possible that both $C > A$ and $C^\star > {\sim}A$? C and $C^\star$ are different (token) circumstances of action, after all. If you are inclined to agree that this is possible,[29] I think your intuitions (at least implicitly) favour the view that (15) is true and that SCIs the antecedents of which represent token circumstances are pure. If it is possible that C and $C^\star$ counterfactually imply different outcomes, then some differences between C and $C^\star$ are counterfactually relevant. Conversely, if you are inclined to think that an antecedent that represents merely a circumstance-type like D could (strictly) counterfactually imply anything, then I think you should have found it intuitive that, necessarily, $C > A$ just in case $C^\star > A$.

Let us suppose that the referents of 'C' and '$C^\star$' are separated by time, rather than by worlds; and that God places the apostle Philip in D (and thereby C), lets him act, places him in D again (and thereby $C^\star$), lets him act, and so on (for example, God could be making him undergo his meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch[30] over and over). Because D comprehends all the causally relevant factors, we may suppose that, whenever Philip is in D, he neither remembers nor is otherwise affected by any prior D-tokens. Now, I find it eminently plausible, not merely that it is possible that Philip A in C, that he refrain in C, that he A in $C^\star$, and that he refrain in $C^\star$; but that it is possible that Philip both A in C and refrain in $C^\star$. Conversely, I find it extremely implausible that Philip's A'ing in the first instantiation of D would "lock him in" such that, in every iteration, his power to refrain from A'ing would consist in a counterfactual power over what he did in the past.[31] If you agree, then you should agree that C and $C^\star$ possibly counterfactually imply different outcomes. Now, I see no relevant difference between a case where the token circumstances are separated by time and a case where they are "separated by worlds"; in virtue of which one should find it intuitive that *only* in the first kind of case are differences between the token circumstances counterfactually relevant. Unless you do, it seems to me that you should accept (15).

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[29] Which Alexander Pruss would not be, it seems to me. See Pruss, "Prophecy Without Middle Knowledge", pp. 445-454.

[30] Acts 8:26-40.

[31] My thinking on this and related issues is significantly indebted to Flint (correspondence).

Letting 'C' and 'C^*' stand again for the incompossible token circumstances in which Peter might find himself, the above thought experiment involving diachronic circumstance iteration undermines any objection to the compossibility of $C > A$ and $C^* > {\sim}A$ that trades on any of the following principles:

(17) If $(S\&T) > U$ and there is no reason to think that the outcome would be different given $S\&T^*$, then $(S\&T^*) > U$

(18) If T is causally irrelevant to U, then T is counterfactually irrelevant to U

(19) If T is epistemically irrelevant to a belief that $(S\&T) > U$, then T is counterfactually irrelevant to U.

For if we consider the case of Philip and let 'T' stand for some information pertaining to *which* token circumstance is currently underway, we have a very plausible counterexample to (17) through (19).

I have tried to elicit intuitions supporting (15), address some potential objections to (15), and place the burden of argumentation on one inclined to deny (15). I will conclude by addressing the intuition some might have that, granting $C > A$, $C^* > {\sim}A$ could not be (co-)true. First, even if $C > A$ and $C^* > {\sim}A$ are incompossible, (15)'s falsity does not follow. For suppose that $C > A$ becomes true in virtue of the obtaining of antecedent and consequent, and not in virtue of any perfect SCL $D > A$; and hence that the entailment of $C^* > A$ is mediated by something other than an instance of strict counterfactual implication (such as one's semantics for counterfactuals). Second, there are (defeasible) reasons to treat such an apparent intuition as untrustworthy. Firstly, one might fail to sufficiently consider the modal fragility of token circumstances and assume (perhaps tacitly) that the token circumstance of action (or even the token instance of acting) "persists" from C to C^*. Secondly, one might fail to sufficiently discriminate between intuitions about an agent's acting that are indeterminate with respect to whether it acts "freely" and those about its acting "freely", or intuitions about an agent's acting "freely" that are indeterminate with respect to specific theories of free agency and those about its acting "freely" in a libertarian sense, or a free agent and a free action, or a derivatively "free" action and a(n intrinsically) free one.

VI. CONCLUSION

Having granted that there might be facts of the matter about what agents would freely do in various circumstances, I distinguished perfect and imperfect subjunctive conditionals of libertarian freedom, only the former taking their truth-values primitively (sections II.–III.), and presented two arguments (trading on considerations pertaining to counterfactual power and counterfactual relevance respectively) for the thesis that perfect ones must be agent-singular; that is, about an individual as opposed to agent-type (IV.–V.). Further, I sketched how this thesis poses problems for any would-be Molinist who finds it implausible that God grasps possible creatures in their individuality prior to creation (I., III.).