20th Century Free Will Debates in the *De Auxiliis* Controversy

The consequence argument for incompatibilism is one of the most famous arguments in analytic philosophy. In this paper, I argue that there are close analogues of key parts of the debate concerning the consequence argument in scholasticism. I present a version of the consequence argument raised by 17th-century scholastic Molinists against the Thomistic Báñezians, who were theological determinists. Charles René Billuart offered the best Báñezian response to this earlier consequence argument, which essentially mirrors David Lewis’s: even though I cannot cause God’s predetermination to be otherwise than it is, I can do something such that, if I did it, God would have predetermined me to act otherwise than God in fact did. These Molinists think they have a response to this objection which involves a crucial distinction between counterfactual and explanatory dependence, a move also employed in the contemporary literature. I conclude by briefly showing how the Molinists invoke a version of Meinongianism to address some worries to their solution.

Keywords: consequence argument, Molinism, David Lewis, free will, providence

The consequence argument for incompatibilism is one of the most famous arguments in analytic philosophy and has developed a substantial literature.[[1]](#footnote-1) There is another literature, where a consequence argument was much discussed—namely, in 17th and 18th-century scholasticism, in the *De Auxiliis* controversy and subsequent debates concerning issues of freedom, grace, and providence between the Molinists and Báñezians. The works springing from these debates contain some of (if not the) most detailed and sophisticated treatments of free will in the history of philosophy, and the works are largely unexplored.[[2]](#footnote-2) This article seeks to treat some of the under-explored works and authors of this period by examining a sophisticated version of the consequence argument developed by the 17th century Molinists, essentially the same as those versions familiar to us today but transposed into a theistic context, which they used against their Báñezian, determinist colleagues. The best response offered by the Báñezians, I argue, essentially mirrors the response given by David Lewis to Peter van Inwagen’s consequence argument; the Molinists, however, think they have a response to the objection, which crucially involves distinguishing between merely counterfactual and explanatory relations, a move also made in the contemporary literature, showing that a key part of the contemporary dialectic is a repeat of a debate in the 17th and 18th centuries.

In this paper, (§I) after giving an overview of the Báñezian view that the Molinists are attacking, as well as of the 20th century consequence argument and Lewis’s response, I present (§II) this Molinist consequence argument and the Lewisian response to it offered by the important 18th century Thomist, Charles René Billuart (d. 1757). The Molinists (§III) did not admit defeat, however, and offered a version of the argument that can plausibly overcome the Lewisian objection. This response will also make clear how the 17th-century Molinists thought they were able to consistently run a version of the consequence argument and yet remain libertarian Molinists, the possibility of which has been questioned in the contemporary literature.[[3]](#footnote-3) Their response crucially relies on the assumption that some of God’s knowledge and the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (CCFs) depend on the creature’s actions. I briefly (§IV) expound the response offered by the Molinists to the objection that this cannot be the case. But we must begin with Molinism and Báñezianism.

1. The Background: Molinism, Báñezianism, and the Consequence Argument

Perhaps the most heated dispute in 16th and 17th century scholasticism was the *De Auxiliis* controversy. The dispute was carried out by the (mostly Franciscan and Jesuit) followers of Luis de Molina (d. 1600) on the one hand and followers of Domingo Báñez (d. 1604)—who took themselves to be defending the views of Thomas Aquinas—on the other. [[4]](#footnote-4) The controversy surrounded the issues of grace, free will, and providence. The Molinist and Báñezian agree that God is completely provident, having detailed control over all of creation—not a leaf falls from a tree without God’s express foreordination.[[5]](#footnote-5) But they defend competing theories of how such divine governance of the world is compatible with our free will. According to the Molinist, God knows from eternity what any possible free agent would freely choose to do in any given circumstances (these are the CCFs). In light of His knowledge of the CCFs, God places particular creatures in particular circumstances such that He knows in advance that His providential aims will be achieved. For example, if God wishes for Ceasar to call a census to bring about His providential aims, He puts Ceasar in those circumstances in which He knows that Ceasar would freely choose to call a census (provided that there is such a circumstance).[[6]](#footnote-6) One goal of this theory is to reconcile providence with a robust, libertarian conception of free will.[[7]](#footnote-7)

On the other side, the Báñezian thinks that the provident God determines our actions by a divine volition through what is often called a physical premotion or determination. The Báñezian Augustinian Bernard of St. Theresa (d. 1723) explains that a physical premotion or determination is “an entity by which God determines, moves, and applies a secondary cause to operation so that without it the secondary cause never operates, and having posited this it infallibly elicits the operation.”[[8]](#footnote-8) The Báñezian view is that a power such as a will is in potency to acting and, like all movements from potency to act in Thomistic metaphysics, requires some entity (usually a form) which moves the will from potency to act in order that it may will something.[[9]](#footnote-9) The premotion given by God determines the will to an end, and is a necessary and sufficient condition for so acting.[[10]](#footnote-10) Some Báñezians think the premotion itself is a created accident and others think it is a mode really distinct from the action, but either way, what is important for our purposes is the role it plays as the entity which determines the will to an end.[[11]](#footnote-11) Another important 17th-century Thomist, Jean Baptiste Gonet (d. 1681), adds that “the prefix ‘pre’ does not designate a priority of duration or time, but only of nature or of causality and dependence,”[[12]](#footnote-12) that is, the premotion is logically prior to the action as its cause. Gonet and the Thomists insist that the premotion is explanatorily prior to the act of the will.[[13]](#footnote-13)

 Given this position, the Báñezians are compatibilists; they think the will is determined to the ends providentially willed for it by God, but that such determinism is compatible with their freedom. There is obviously more to say here about the intricacies of the Báñezian position, but that is sufficient for our purposes.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Jumping forward several hundred years, today the consequence argument is often considered the most powerful argument against compatibilism. It goes like this. Let F be the proposition that creature C performs the token act ϕ. Let L be the proposition stating the conjunction of the laws of nature. Let H be the proposition characterizing the complete state of the world in the pre-human past. Let ‘N(X)’ express the proposition that ‘X and no human has nor has ever had a choice about whether X.’ The argument relies on an instance of BETA-2, which is the following principle: (N(A) ∧ ◻(A⭢B))⭢N(B). The argument, then, is as follows:[[15]](#footnote-15)

1. ◻(L ∧ H⭢F) (Determinism)
2. NNN N(L∧H) (Premise)
3. N(HOHNNif (N(L∧N) ∧ ◻(L∧H⭢F))⭢N(F) (Instance of BETA-2)
4. Therefore, N(F)

1 follows from a common (contemporary) definition of determinism, as the determinism defended by most in the 20th century is not a theistic determinism, but one whereby the history of the past plus the laws of nature determine all future events. 2 is plausible, since no human can have a choice about the laws of nature and the history of the pre-human past. Similarly, BETA-2 has some initial plausibility; how can one have a choice about the entailments of a truth one has no choice about?[[16]](#footnote-16) Despite the initial plausibility of the argument, it is of course highly controversial. Perhaps the most famous objection to it is that of David Lewis.

According to Lewis, we need to distinguish two interpretations of the N operator: on one reading, (I’ll use ‘Nc(X)’ to designate this sense) I have no choice about X just in case, to paraphrase Lewis, I am not able to do anything such that, if I did it, the proposition would have been falsified (though not necessarily by my act, or by any event caused by my act).[[17]](#footnote-17) On this interpretation, Lewis says, 2 if false: even though it is determined that C performs ϕ, C is able to do something (namely, not-ϕ) such that, if C did it, L would have been false (and the laws would have been otherwise than they are). So were C to not-ϕ, as C can, there would have been some divergence miracle, whereby what are actually the laws of nature would have been falsified.[[18]](#footnote-18) This has some extra plausibility for Lewis because he is a Humean about the laws of nature, so the laws depend (in part) on our actions rather than the other way around.[[19]](#footnote-19) On the second reading, (I’ll use ‘Na(X)’ to designate this) I have no choice about X just in case I am not able to do anything such that, if I did it, the proposition would have been falsified either by my act itself or by some event caused by my act.[[20]](#footnote-20) On this reading, Lewis would agree with 2—neither C nor C’s act can violate the laws of nature; we cannot *cause* the laws of nature to be otherwise than they are or act such that the act itself is a violation of the laws. However, on this reading, the transfer principle 3 fails; [[21]](#footnote-21) even though, in the specified sense, we do not have power over L and H and those together entail that C will perform ϕ, C can still perform not-ϕ since, were C to do so, there would be divergence miracle allowing (and ensuring) that C performs not-ϕ. Lewis’s objection to the consequence argument is of course also controversial, but has proven to be popular.[[22]](#footnote-22) So tempting are the lines of reasoning of both the consequence argument and Lewis’s response that versions of them were offered hundreds of year before.

1. The Molinist Consequence Argument and the Báñezians’ Lewisian Response

The Molinists thought that only their theory of providence protected free will and sought to show that the Báñezian’s use of premotion destroyed it. One of their main arguments to establish this conclusion was an argument that will look very familiar. The following version from the Prince of the Scotists, Bartholomeo Mastri (d. 1673), is representative (the numbering in the quotation corresponds to the formalized premises below):[[23]](#footnote-23)

[3]whenever some consequent follows necessarily from some antecedent in whose power is not that antecedent, no less in their power is that consequent….[1]But a future contingent necessarily follows the determination of the divine will at least by the necessity of the consequence; therefore in whose power is not such a determination, neither will that which necessarily follows (namely, the future contingent) be in their power. Then, I apply this to the current debate. [2] A determination entirely antecedent to the use of the liberty of a creature, nor in any way involving it… cannot be in any way in one’s power. Therefore, etc.

Let P be the proposition that God gives C a premotion to ϕ. Mastri’s argument then is the following:[[24]](#footnote-24)

1. ◻ P ◻(P⭢F)
2. NNN N(P)
3. if (N(P) ∧ ◻(P⭢F))⭢N(F)
4. Therefore, N(F)

As you can see, this is essentially Finch and Warfield’s version of the consequence argument transposed into a theistic context, even [3] explicitly using BETA-2. But BETA-2 was not the only transfer principle used. In Peter van Inwagen’s formulation of the argument prior to Finch and Warfield’s, he used instead BETA-1: (N(A) ∧ N(A⭢B))⭢N(B).[[25]](#footnote-25) Not only did some scholastics use BETA-2, but also Lessius uses something very much like (an instance of) BETA-1 in his version of the consequence argument: “if [a supposition] is not in my power that it may be or not be and, with that existing, it is not in my power to impede its efficacy, it is evident that it is not in my power to impede its effect.”[[26]](#footnote-26) So (something like) both BETA rules are already present in the 17th century.

Consequence arguments were very popular with the Molinists.[[27]](#footnote-27) And just as many of its contemporary defenders, they were also quite confident in its success. After giving his version of the consequence argument, Lessius states, “if this reason does not convince, I frankly confess that this whole matter of liberty is more obscure to me than any of the mysteries of our faith.”[[28]](#footnote-28) After Mastri gives the argument, he introduces the Báñezian objections to it before attempting to refute them, saying, “there are various contrived responses, or rather evasions, from the Thomists for the purpose of dissolving this Gordian knot.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

 But try to dissolve this knot they did. The best objection is from Billuart, whose response mirrors Lewis’s.

Billuart maintains that we have the power to dissent from the premotion. That is, even if we are premoved to ϕ, we maintain the power to not ϕ.[[30]](#footnote-30) Billuart explains his view succinctly:[[31]](#footnote-31)

something can be said to be in our power in two ways: either [i] because it is under our power, and in this way the divine decree is not in our power, or [ii] because it is present to us as an assisting cause which we would use if we wish. And in this [latter] way the divine decree is in our power, because God as the most universal cause and general provider lacks nothing according to his exigency. For it should not be judged that God, while He decided on some act, removes those things which are necessary for the opposite; this imagination is perverse and alien to the nature of a universal cause and general Provider. On the contrary, by that by which He decides on a freely produced act from us, at the same time, He decides to provide everything which is necessary in order that it would be free and with a power for the opposite, such that [iii] He is prepared also to concur with the opposite [act] if the present disposition of the will thus were to demand.

So, there are two senses of something ‘being in our power.’ In the first sense, [i] the sense of being “under our power,” the premotion is not in our power. I take this to mean that our normal, efficient causal power does not extend over the divine decree, and as such cannot cause the premotion to be other than it is. However, [ii] the premotion is in our power in the sense that it would assist it were we to wish it. If [iii] we were to do otherwise than we do (which, recall, we have the power to do), God would have premoved us differently than He in fact has and would have concurred with that act. So, we cannot cause the premotion to be other than it is, but we can do something, such that, if we did it, the premotion would have been otherwise than it is, i.e. we can resist the premotion. So Billuart distinguishes two versions of the argument:

1. ◻(P⭢F) 1. ◻(P⭢F)

2a. NNN Na(P) 2c. NNN Nc(P)

3a. if (Na(P) ∧ ◻(P⭢F))⭢Na(F) 3c. if (Nc(P) ∧ ◻(P⭢F))⭢Nc(F)

4a. Therefore, Na(F) 4c. Therefore, Nc(F)

As we see here, Billuart explicity rejects 2c, because he does think we retain the power to do something such that, if we did it, we would have been premoved to do otherwise. He never (as far as I can see) explicitly rejects 3a, but given that he accepts 1 and 2a but rejects 4a, he would have to.[[32]](#footnote-32) Billuart thus repeats the Lewisian move in the theistic context.

 So it seems the Báñezians have a response to the Molinist consequence argument. Moreover, it’s one that puts pressure on the Molinists dialectically, since they themselves run a similar response to an argument against standard Molinist doctrine, a point pressed home more recently by Kenneth Perszyk.[[33]](#footnote-33) However, the tension was not only noted in Perszyk (2003), but also in Montoya (1629). The great 17th-century Jesuit Diego Ruiz de Montoya (d. 1632), who earned the epithet “the Most Erudite,” addresses the following argument (again, I have added numbers corresponding to premises of the formalized version below): “[7] in a good consequence wherein one cannot destroy the antecedent, one cannot destroy the consequent. [5] But this is a good and necessary consequence: ‘God knows that Peter will sin; therefore, Peter will sin.’ [6] And Peter cannot destroy the antecedent. [8] Therefore, he cannot destroy the consequent, and thus he cannot not sin.”[[34]](#footnote-34) The argument is of the same form as the consequence argument. Let S be the proposition that Peter will sin, and let G be proposition that God knows that S.[[35]](#footnote-35) Then the argument is:

1. ◻(G⭢S)
2. N(G)
3. if (N(G) ∧ ◻(G⭢S))⭢N(S)
4. Therefore, N(S).

This argument, of course, is at least very similar to the consequence argument and relies on the same transfer rule. Here’s Montoya’s response: [[36]](#footnote-36)

I respond by distinguishing that major premise, as above, for if the antecendent essentially supposits the truth of the consequent, as foreknowledge of the future sin, it supposes the future sin. Then, Peter although he cannot destroy the antecendent, namely, the divine foreknowledge, nevertheless he can destroy the consequent, namely his sin. Nevertheless he will not cause that there would be a true antecedent and a false consequent, because he will not cause that there is not his sin, with the foreknowledge affirming that this sin will be remaining in God. That is, if Peter were not to sin, as he can, God from eternity would foreknow that Peter is not about to sin; that if God were to foreknow that Peter is about to sin, God foreknows that because Peter is about to sin.

Montoya makes the now-familiar move of distinguishing between two senses of having no choice about something. On one reading of N, namely Na, he rejects the transfer principle (Na(G) ∧ ◻(G⭢S))⭢Na(S) (“although Peter cannot destroy the antecedent…he can destroy the consequent”). On the other reading, Nc, he rejects Nc(G) (“if Peter were to not sin, as he can, God from eternity would foreknow that he is not about to sin”). And because of the Molinist commitment to divine foreknowledge and the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, the Molinists need to make such a response.[[37]](#footnote-37) The problem then is that the Molinists need a response to Billuart’s Lewisian objection in order to put pressure on the Báñezians, but it is unclear how they can do that when the Molinists themselves seem to make an exactly analogous move to defend their own view. This is a tricky place to be in. However, the 17th century Molinists thought they had answers to this challenge.

1. The Molinists Contra Lewis

One way to respond to objections of this sort to consequence arguments is to introduce a new interpretation of N which is more favorable to your cause. Peter van Inwagen, for instance, insisted on his version of the N operator against the interpretations given by Lewis.[[38]](#footnote-38) The Molinists did the same. And, as it turns out, the relevant distinction they found between the foreknowledge case and the premotion case is very similar to the difference noted by Philip Swenson between a foreknowledge case and a determinism case: in the case of foreknowledge, God’s knowledge explanatorily depends on the action and not the other way around, whereas in the case of determinism, the action depends on the determining factors.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Lessius, for instance, discusses the features that the thing which entails that you will will something (“the supposition”) would need to have in order to be a threat to freedom. i.e., he discusses the features that need to be had by the thing in the “P” or “L and H” spot in the consequence argument. He claims that there are three cases where the supposition does not destroy your liberty. The first case is one where the act is directly in my power in that I can efficiently cause it. He gives an example: “necessarily he who runs is moved, not absolutely but in the composed sense… nevertheless absolutely and in a divided sense he is freely moved, because it is in his power to prevent the race.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Clearly, we have a choice about moving even if moving is entailed by running, since we have a choice about running. The second case which is not a threat to freedom is one where the supposition depends on my act.[[41]](#footnote-41) Lessius gives the example of foreknowledge—because the foreknowledge depends on our free action, and not the other way around, divine foreknowledge is not threat to freedom, even though that it entails, for example, that I will will to sit tomorrow. God foreknows our future action because it will be, it is not the case that it will be because it is foreknown. Note here that this response is not available to the Báñezian. According to them, someone acts because they are premoved. The explanatory and causal dependence goes the opposite direction than it does for Molinistic foreknowledge. Mere counterfactual power over the supposition isn’t enough to protect freedom—the order of explanation has to run from our free choice to the supposition, not the other way around. The third kind of supposition that is not a threat to freedom is one where the supposition supposes something which depends on my will. An example of this is God’s concurrence with an action, which depends on the truth of a CCF which is in the power of the agent.[[42]](#footnote-42)

 So, Lessius doesn’t think that just because something entails that you will will something, you are not free. For Lessius, in order that your freedom not be threatened, the dependence relation has to go the right way. If your action depends on what entails it (rather than the other way around), then you do not have power over the action. In contrast, if what entails your action depends on your action, then you do have power over the action, despite the entailment. Many of Lessius’s compatriots seems to have something similar in mind. For example, Mastri says (filling in a small portion of the quotation above that I ellipsed away): “Then, I apply this to the current debate. A determination entirely antecedent to the use of the liberty of a creature, nor in any way involving it… cannot be in any way in one’s power. Therefore, etc.” Mastri here specifies the sense in which we do not have a choice about the premotion, namely it is antecedent to our act. I take this to mean that it is logically or explanatorily prior, such that the act depends on the premotion and not the other way around.[[43]](#footnote-43) We can formalize something like their thought, then, in this way: let ‘Nd(X)’ signify that X and no human is able to do something such that ~X would depend on one’s act or the event caused by one’s act and, were one to do it, ~X would obtain.[[44]](#footnote-44) Then, we can reformulate the argument:

1. ◻(P⭢F)

2d. NNN Nd(P)

if 3d. (Nd(P) ∧ ◻(P⭢F))⭢Nd(F)

4d. Therefore, Nd(F)

The Báñezian cannot reject Nd(P)—A cannot efficiently cause the premotion to be other than it is, and A’s act depends on the premotion and not the other way around. The best option for the Báñezian then is to deny the transfer principle (Nd(P) ∧ ◻(P⭢F))⭢Nd(F), which is derived from the generic transfer principle (Nd(A) ∧ ◻(A⭢B))⭢Nd(B). However, this transfer principle has some plausibility. Rejecting the earlier transfer principle (Na(A) ∧ ◻(A⭢B))⭢Na(B) is plausible because even if one cannot efficiently cause something such that the act frustrates the premotion and even if the premotion entails that C performs ϕ, C can still perform not-ϕ if the premotion depends on ϕ (or P depends on F).[[45]](#footnote-45) Since the dependence goes in the right direction, one can still perform not-ϕ, as P is true *because* of F. But the Báñezian cannot avail themselves of this thought with (Nd(A) ∧ ◻(A⭢B))⭢Nd(B). The problem with the Báñezians (and Lewis, our Molinists would add, if we were to run a version of the consequence argument against him using Nd) is that they get the orders of dependence wrong; not only can C not efficiently cause the premotion to be other than it is, but also C cannot do any act whereby her being premoved would depend on her doing that act. It is hard to see, then, how you could still maintain a power to perform ϕ. (*mutatis mutandis*, were you substitute L and H for P).

1. Dependence and Intentional Being

In many ways, the story I want to tell is over, and I wish I could end the paper with the above section. However, there is a worry with the above solution that needs to be discussed. It may be objected here that the Molinists are not better off than the Báñezians. After all, it is plausible that God’s foreknowledge and the truth of the relevant CCF do not depend on the action, first because the former obtain in eternity, and the action takes place later in time. The second reason is that because there is divine knowledge of and true CCFs about actions that will never in fact take place, those actions do not exist for them to depend on. How then, could divine knowledge and the truth of CCFs depend on the actions? This is a difficult question and circles around issues close to the grounding objection and explanatory circle worries about Molinism, not to mention that it is closely related to many questions of intra-Molinist dispute. A true response would require an article-length treatment which cannot be offered here. However, something needs to be said here, enough to gesture in the direction of the response of the scholastic Molinists.

The scholastic Molinists are careful to affirm the dependence of divine foreknowledge and the truth of the CCF on the action. For instance, the influential Nominalist Jesuit Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza (d. 1641) addresses a version of the consequence argument using divine foreknowledge or the truth of a CCF against our freedom. In his response, he clarifies: [[46]](#footnote-46)

[i] although middle knowledge would antecede the absolute futurity [of the act] physically, nevertheless [ii] it does not antecede it intentionally, supposing some condition anteceding the futurity absolutely, because [iii] the antecedent thing under condition is simply nothing. Moreover, [iv] knowledge of the object absolutely anteceding the effect and entailing it necessarily destroys its liberty, but [v] not knowledge which does not antecede the effect, but supposes the same object. And thus the futurity does not destroy liberty because it is not the cause of itself; nor again does the truth [of the future conditional], which depends on this futurity.

Hurtado [i] concedes that the middle knowledge (and the truth of the CCF) antecedes the action (if such an action will take place) in time, but he denies [ii] that it antecedes the action intentionally, i.e., the action as an intentional object precedes the middle knowledge and truth of the CCF.[[47]](#footnote-47) Were [iv] the middle knowledge or the truth of the CCF not posterior to the action in this way, they would destroy the liberty of the action, but because [v] the middle knowledge and truth of the CCF depend on the action qua intentional object and not the other way around, liberty is preserved. The thought is that in God’s knowledge of vision, He sees the free action of each creature under any circumstance; this seen action is not thereby a real being, but merely an intentional object of divine knowledge. And just as God’s knowledge depends on the way things will be and not the other way around, as the Molinists are quick to say (and quote many of the Church Fathers as saying),[[48]](#footnote-48) so too does God’s knowledge of what would be the case under certain circumstances depends on what would be the case under those circumstances. And the very thing that would be the case under those circumstances is the object of God’s knowledge of vision; as Montoya explains, “God does not only see the being which the future conditionals have in God (which is the uncreated being of God Himself), but also the divine vision terminates in the true, real, proper, and essential being of the future things which they would have in themselves if such a supposition and such circumstances were posited.”[[49]](#footnote-49)

Montoya here and the other Molinists are part of the long scholastic tradition of holding the Meinongian view that God (and intellectual creatures) can cognize non-existent objects. Aquinas, for example, says that, “The relation of the divine knowledge to other things, therefore, will be such that it can be even of non-existing things.”[[50]](#footnote-50) In his discussion of divine knowledge, Aquinas follows the Boethian line of God being present in eternity to all of time. Even though the past and future do not exist, God is present to them, and as such has knowledge of future and past objects as real: “for of the things that for us are not yet God sees not only the being that they have in their causes but also the being that they have in themselves, in so far as His eternity is present in its indivisibility to all time.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Similarly, Scotus agrees that no one (even God) can think of something unless it is, but denies that it has to exist in order to be cognized.[[52]](#footnote-52) He gives a helpful example, “if Caesar were annihilated and nevertheless there were a statue of Caesar, Caesar would be represented by the statue.”[[53]](#footnote-53) He explains that Caesar would not have being *simpliciter*, but “intelligible being” or “diminished being.”[[54]](#footnote-54) So the Molinists are keeping with large parts of the scholastic tradition that non-existent object can have certain properties, namely the relational properties of being represented or cognized.[[55]](#footnote-55) And although, for example, it is Caesar himself who is represented, Caesar is only present as an intentional object, not as a real being. What Montoya and the other Molinists add to this general picture is that not only are possibles present in intentional being to God in this way, but also what the true CCFs are *about*, namely free creatures choosing some action under certain circumstances. Just as, on the standard Boethian view, God looks out (as it were) and sees past, present, and future objects in the real being they had, have, or will have (respectively), on this counterfactualized, Molinist Boethian view, God looks out (as it were) and sees the creatures freely choosing things in certain circumstances in the real being they would have were such circumstances to be actualized.[[56]](#footnote-56) And on neither view is any real being there, floating around before creation.

As such, God’s knowledge of which CCFs are true depends on the future conditional object and not the other way around. Indeed, it depends on the very object as intentionally present which would be present in real being were God to posit the circumstances. So too does the truth of CCFs themselves depend on the future conditional objects: Montoya says that “propositions pertaining to the contingent existence of any future things are not true except because of their existence which is future or which would be if such circumstances were posited.”[[57]](#footnote-57) Montoya here holds the common sense view that what is true depends on the way the world is; the true CCFs are true because if the creatures were in such circumstances, they would freely choose to act in the way described in the CCFs. And the truth of the CCFs depends on the act which would be present under those circumstances, present from all eternity as an intentional object.[[58]](#footnote-58) As I mentioned, there is much more that could be said—many objections and questions could be raised.[[59]](#footnote-59) But those will have to be left to a later project.

1. Conclusion

The 20th century debates concerning the consequence argument are some of the most famous in 20th century philosophy. As we have seen, however, there was a very sophisticated discussion circling around a version of that argument from around 400 years before. Many Molinists and anti-Báñezians wielded this argument against the Báñezians to show that the Báñezian theory did not protect human freedom. Billuart had the best response, which mirrored David Lewis’s; he thought that, though we cannot cause the premotion to be inefficacious, we can do something, such that if we did it, we would have been premoved to do otherwise than we were. Further, the Molinists were in a difficult situation of their own, since they thought the consequence argument was very powerful, but it also seemed to undercut their own position, as a version of it can run using divine knowledge or the truth of a CCF to show that creatures are not free if Molinism is true (as was noted by them and Molinist opponents today). The main Molinist response to this was to give an interpretation of ‘not having a choice about’ in such a way that the Molinist could safely reject the claim that we had no choice about the divine foreknowledge or the truth of the CCF, but the Báñezian could not reject the claim that we had no choice about the premotion, since the divine knowledge and truth of the CCF depend on the free action, whereas the free action depends on the premotion. In response to the objection that the truth of the CCF and divine knowledge cannot depend on the free action, since the free action doesn’t exist in logical moment of God’s middle knowledge, these Molinists claimed that the conditional action was present from eternity in intentional being to God, whereby God saw the true, real being the action would have under the given circumstances. The quasi-Meinongian solution provides a way for the truth of the CCF and God’s knowledge to depend on action as a non-existent object.

 This small study on one argument and some of the conversation it started also contributes to the study of the philosophically neglected period of the *De Auxilis* controversy and its subsequent debates. As this article shows, there is much of interest in this period for contemporary analytic philosophers of free will and philosophers of religion.

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1. For a classic formulation and discussion, see van Inwagen (1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The most notable exceptions being the works of Molina (e.g. 1988) and Banez (e.g., Matava 2016) themselves. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Notably, Perszyk (2003). See also, Cohen (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Despite the fact that the Báñezians called themselves Thomists and not Báñezians, I will refer to them by the more neutral title of Báñezians, since what Aquinas’s own view consists in is a matter of much dispute today. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For more details concerning what providence amounts to, see chapter 1 of Flint (1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Whether or not there is such a circumstance is not up to God. There are certainly possible worlds where Ceasar calls a census, but they may not be actualizable by God; there may not be circumstances such that the CCF that he would call one is true, and it is outside of God’s power to change the CCFs. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This is true both for historic and contemporary Molinists. For more on Molinism, see Molina’s own presentation (1988) along with Freddoso’s excellent introduction and Flint’s contemporary analytic explication and defense (1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bernard of St. Theresa *Novae Philosophiae* Physics q. 2 a. 3 p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See the famous Dominican Thomist John of St. Thomas (d. 1644) *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus* Physics q. 25 a. 2 p. 571 and another Dominican Juan Martinez de Prado (d. 1668) *Controversiae Metaphysica* 2 p. c. 12 a. 6 n. 104 p. 536. For this reason, a premotion is a necessary condition for acting. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Gonet confirms the sufficiency of the premotion for acting: “from its proper essence and from what is intrinsic it is efficacious independently from any created consent” *Clypeus Theologiae Thomisticae* d. 6 a. 4 s. 1 n. 67 p.436. See also, the famed 17th-century Reformed controversialist Francis Turretin (d. 1687) *Institutes of* *Elenctic Theology* I t. 6 q. 5 n. VI p. 506, who, along with many of his fellow Reformed philosophers and theologians, essentially adopts the Báñezian view of providence and premotion. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Prado *Controversiae Metaphysica* 2 p. c. 12 a. 6 n. 102-103 p. 535. Modes are properties which are incomplete beings that, unlike accidents, cannot even by divine power by separated from their subjects; see Prado *Controversiae Metaphysica* 1 p. c. 10 a. 4 n. 57-60 p. 170-171. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Gonet *Clypeus Theologiae Thomisticae* d. 6 a. 4 s. 1 n. 65 p.436. See also Bernard of St. Theresa *Novae Philosophiae* Physics q. 2 a. 3 p. 108 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In addition to Gonet, see e.g. Bernard of St. Theresa *Novae Philosophiae* Physics q. 2 a. 3 p. 108

 and Turretin *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* I t. 6 q. 4 n. XVII and q. 5 n. II p. 505 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For more information on and defenses of premotion in English, see Garrigou-Lagrange (1939) and Oderberg (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This version closely follows Finch and Warfield (1998), as well as Pruss (2013). See also van Inwagen (1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Finch and Warfield (1998), p. 522. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Lewis (1981), 119. The “c” in “Nc” stands for counterfactual. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Lewis (1981), 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For Lewis’s “best systems account” of the laws of nature, see Lewis (1994). Lewis’s account of laws, however, is not essential to his account. Moreover, Dorr (2016) endorses a broadly Lewisian strategy to respond to the consequence argument, but suggests that we are able to do something such that, if we did it, H would have been falsified, not L. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Lewis (1981), 119. The “a” in “Na” stands for “act.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Because Lewis addresses a different version of the consequence argument in “Are we free to break the laws?”, he doesn’t explicitly state this. However, on this reading of the N operator, he rejects the conclusion and accepts 2, so he must reject 3 (p.119-120). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For citations of authors who defend Lewis’s strategy, see Cutter (2017, p. 286). For a response to Lewis’s objection, see van Inwagen (2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Mastri, *Disputationes Theologiae* I d. 3 q. 3 a. 6 p. 148 n. 149. Although Mastri is not himself a Molinist, he too uses this argument against the Banezians. When giving the argument, he cites the important early Molinist Leonard Lessius (d. 1623) as his source. Mastri’s formulation, however, is particularly crisp and clear, so I present his version. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. I have taken the liberty of substituting the relevant instance of BETA-2 into the argument, whereas Mastri simply states BETA-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. van Inwagen (1983, p. 94). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Lessius *De Gratia* c. 2 n. 17 p. 17, see also n.11 p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See, for example, the 17th-century Spanish Jesuit Phillip Aranda (d. 1695), who runs a version using (something logically equivalent to) BETA-2, *Schola Scientiae Mediae* d. 13 s. 1 n. 69 p. 134. As mentioned, Lessius also runs a version using BETA-1, *De Gratia* c. 2 n.11 p. 14. Others, such as Francisco Suarez (d. 1617), merely implicitly assume a transfer principle without explicitly stating one, *De Concursu* I bk. I chapter 10 n. 2 p. 42. Ruiz de Montoya offers a closely related argument which employs some different technical terminology, *De Scientia* *Dei* d. 34 s. 1 n. 1-6 p. 289-290. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Lessuis *De Gratia* c. 2 n.11 p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Mastri, *Disputationes Theologiae* I d. 3 q. 3 a. 6 p. 148 n. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Billuart *Cursus Theologiae* d. 8 a. 4 p. 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Billuart *Compendium Theologiae* I d. 8 a. 2 p. 294. Numbers inserted for ease of reference. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. An earlier Banezian, Thomas de Lemos (d. 1629), explicitly denies the transfer principle, *Panoplia Gratiae* t. 3 c. 23 p. 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Perszyk (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Montoya *De Scientia* *Dei* d. 35 s. 2 n. 1 p. 304. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. A similar argument could be run with the CCF itself instead of God’s knoweldge. This is closer to the way that Perszyk sets up the problem. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Montoya *De Scientia* *Dei* d. 35 s. 2 n. 2 p. 304. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. There are other responses the Molinists *could* make, but from my survey of 17th and 18th century Molinist treatises, this is the route they go. Whatever move they do make, it is open for the Báñezian to attempt the same move. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Van Inwagen (2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Swenson (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Lessius *De Gratia* c. 2 n.18 p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Lessius *De Gratia* c. 2 n.18 p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Lessius *De Gratia* c. 2 n.18 p. 17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Mastri, *Disputationes Theologiae* I d. 3 q. 3 a. 6 p. 148 n. 149. In the portion of the quotation elipsed away here, Mastri lists in short, jargon-filled lines the two ways in which the premotion does not “involve” the use of the liberty of the creature, where the first way is the Molinist theory of pre-vision (which will be explained below) and the second is the “eminential and virtual containing of the liberty of a creature in the divine,” which is the mechanism for his own Scotist theory of providence. We do not have the space to discuss Mastri’s own theory of providence here. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Nd(X) differs from Nc(X) by specifying the direction of dependence, and it differs from Na(X) because it covers all kinds of explanatory dependence, not simply efficient causal dependence. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. The Molinist should think that 3a is true even though the general transfer principle (Na(A) ∧ ◻(A⭢B))⭢Na(B) is invalid, since all the arguments one can marshal for (Nd(P) ∧ ◻(P⭢F))⭢Nd(F) also support 3a, since the dependence relation goes in the right direction in that instance. Thanks to X for suggesting this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Hurtado *Universa Philosophia*, De Anima d. 9 s. 6 n. 160 p. 596. “licet antecedat physice scientia media futuritionem absolutam, non tamen antecedit intentionaliter, supponens aliquam conditionem antecedentem absolute futuritionem, quia antecessio sub conditione nihil est simpliciter: scientia autem de obiecto antecedente absolute effectum, et illum inferente necessario, tollit illius libertatem: non vero quae non antecedit, sed supponit obiectum idem. Itaque futuritio non tollit libertatem, quia non est causa sui: nec item veritas, quae pendet ab hac futuritione.” [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. The action in intentional existence [iii] is “simply nothing,” i.e., not a real being, precisely because it is merely intentionally present to God and is not an existing entity. Because God’s knowledge is a real being in eternity, it antecedes the act in real being. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See, for example, Montoya *De Scientia Dei* d. 36 p. 307-309. The Thomists disagree here, since they think that God’s knowledge is causal (see, e.g., John of St. Thomas *Cursus Theologicus* q. 14 d. 19 a. 1 p. 420 n.15); as such, that the thing will be depends on God’s knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Montoya *De Scientia Dei* d. 75 s. 1 n. 2 p. 787 “Deus non solum videt esse, quod futura conditionate habent in Deo, quod est increatum esse ipsius Dei, sed etiam divina visio terminator ad verum reale, proprium, et essentiale futurorum esse, quod in seipsis haberent, si talis suppositio, talesque circumstantiae ponerentur.” [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *Summa Contra Gentiles* I c. 66, translation by Pegis, emended. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. *Summa Contra Gentiles* I c. 66, translation by Pegis. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Scotus *Ordinatio* I d. 36 q. 1 n. 28. “Because if something does not exist, it can be understood by us (and this as to either its essence or its existence), and yet not because of our intellection does one posit that it has true being of essence or of existence; nor is there any difference – as it seems – between the divine intellect and ours in this respect, save that the divine intellect produces those intelligibles in their intelligible being, and ours does not produce them first. But if this being is not of itself such that it requires being simply, then ‘to produce it in such being’ is not to produce it in any being simply; and therefore it seems that if this intelligible being – when comparing it to our intellect – does not require being simply, then when comparing it also to the intellect ‘producing it in this being’ there will not be being simply.” Translation by Simpson. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Scotus *Ordinatio* I d. 36 q. 1 n. 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Scotus *Ordinatio* I d. 36 q. 1 n. 28, 46. Richard Cross convincingly argues that intelligible being and diminished being in Scotus are the being corresponding to the object of the intellect, i.e., intentional being. See Cross (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. For a contemporary analytic view that is a development of these scholastic accounts, see Adams (2021), esp. chapter 3. For a treatment and defense of medieval views of non-existent objects and a comparison with the doctrines of Meinong, see Klima (2001), esp. §5. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. How God does this, which cannot be discussed here, is a matter of dispute among the Molinists. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ruiz de Montoya *De Scientia Dei* d. 75 s. 2 n. 4 p. 788 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. This position advocated by the 17th century Molinists also provides some resources for one to respond to explanatory circularity arguments, such as Law (2020) and Climenhaga and Rubio (2022), against Molinism. Obviously, these remarks here are brief and a greater treatment of this difficult issue is called for. I would hope to lay this out in greater detail in a later work. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. For instance, it seems this view may make God’s knowledge dependent on the intentional objects, compromising aseity. Moreover, one may ask what the mechanism is by which God knows the future conditional objects. Why does God know the future conditional object of Socrates’s ϕing in circumstances C, when it is equally possible that he not ϕ in C? For a contemporary defense of the view that Molinists should be Meinongians, see chapter 8 of Miravalle (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)