

Middle Knowledge and Christian Exclusivism

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SUMMARY

David Hunt has criticized a middle knowledge perspective on Christian exclusivism on evangelistic and metaphysical grounds. He argues that from a middle knowledge perspective attempts to evangelize another person are either futile or superfluous and that an omnibenevolent God would have created a post-mortem state of the blessed without ever creating any of the damned. Hunt's evangelistic objection is unfounded because by our evangelistic efforts we may bring it about that people are saved who otherwise would not have been saved. Hunt's metaphysical objection errs in thinking that God judges people on the basis of what they would do rather than what they in fact do.

MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE AND CHRISTIAN EXCLUSIVISM

In another place, [1] I have attempted to formulate and defend a middle knowledge perspective on the exclusivity of salvation through Christ. The difficulty posed by the doctrine of Christian exclusivism, it seems to me, is counterfactual in nature: granted that God has accorded sufficient grace to all persons for their salvation, still some persons who in fact freely reject God's grace might complain that they would have responded affirmatively to His initiatives if only they had been accorded greater or more congruent grace. If God is omnibenevolent, He must surely, it seems, supply all persons with grace efficacious for their salvation. But then Christian exclusivism is incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God.

To this challenge the Molinist may respond that it is possible that there is no world feasible for God in which all persons freely respond to His gracious initiatives and so are saved. Given the truth of certain counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, it is possible that God did not have it within His power to realize a world in which all persons freely respond affirmatively to His offer of salvation. But in His omnibenevolence, He has actualised a world containing an optimal balance between saved and unsaved. If it be further objected that God would not actualise a world in which some persons are damned as a concomitant of others' being saved, though the former, if placed under other circumstances, would themselves have freely accepted salvation, then the Molinist may respond that God in His omnibenevolence has chosen not to create any such persons; He has instead elected to create only persons who would freely reject Him in any world which is feasible for Him to actualise, persons who, accordingly, freely possess the property of transworld damnation. God in His providence has so arranged the world that as the Christian gospel went out from first century Palestine, all who

would respond freely to it if they heard it did hear it, and all who do not hear it are persons who would not have accepted it if they had heard it. In this way, Christian exclusivism may be seen to be compatible with the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God.

It seems to me that this middle knowledge perspective on what I have called the soteriological problem of evil provides a solution of extraordinary power and fecundity. As a result, however, of a lengthy and even-handed critique by David Hunt, [2] it does seem to me that this perspective is in need of clarification and qualification.

Preliminary Remarks

Before looking at Hunt's critique proper, I should like to make two comments on preliminary concerns. First, I wish to endorse Hunt's emphasis on what he calls the practical debate concerning the theological fruitfulness of a Molinist model. I think it extremely dubious that the detractors of middle knowledge will succeed in demonstrating the logical incoherence of that doctrine. To put the point as baldly as possible, when a person with the philosophical acumen of an Alvin Plantinga is prepared to endorse and defend the coherence of this doctrine, [3] then it is somewhat unlikely that the doctrine will turn out to be *demonstrably* logically absurd. Whether we choose to adopt such a model in our theological theorising is likely to depend, therefore, on how fecund a source of theological insight we find Molinism to be. In my own work, therefore, I have sought not merely to refute the theoretical objections to middle knowledge, [4] but also to exhibit its truly stunning theological richness. [5] It will be on the basis of such considerations, I believe, that the doctrine of middle knowledge is apt to stand or fall.

This leads me to my second comment, namely, I think that Hunt has skewed both the statement of the problem as well as the proposed middle knowledge solution. With respect to the statement of the problem, Hunt's formulation is troublesome in a couple of respects. First, he portrays hell itself as an evil and therefore tends to think of the problem in terms of the prolongation of suffering into eternity. He writes, "... for many people, death will only inaugurate a condition of incalculable misery enduring for all eternity. This multipl[ies] (by infinity) the amount of evil that must be reconciled with the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God..." [6] Or again, "... post-mortem evil, which is infinitely greater than premortem ... evil consists of the sufferings of the damned ...". [7] But this is not, as I understand it, the soteriological problem of evil. For on the Christian view, hell is in fact good and the suffering of the damned just. The doctrine of hell constitutes the ultimate triumph of God's justice over evil; it assures us that we do, after all, live in a moral universe in which justice will prevail. A world without punishment for sin would be one in which the moral order is ultimately vacuous, justice is compromised, and God is not holy. The doctrine of hell shows us that God's terrible holiness and hatred of sin are not to be trifled with, that we cannot sin with impunity, that our sins shall, indeed, find us out. [8] Hell is thus a good

thing; what is evil (and tragic) is the damned's freely willed rejection of God's grace by which they consign themselves to this state. Insofar as the damned continue in their hatred and rejection of God even in hell, evil is prolonged into the postmortem state. But the evil consists in the perverse wills of the damned, not in their being justly punished by God. The soteriological problem of evil does not consist in the sufferings of the lost, but the apparent irreconcilability of God's existing and His allowing human beings to freely make everlasting ruin of their lives.

The most difficult feature of this problem, as I said, is the counterfactual aspects of it. But Hunt again skews the problem by casting it as "a matter of comparative justice." [9] Certain people exist in circumstances which are more conducive to their receiving God's grace than are the circumstances in which others exist. "God appears to be in the position of a casino operator who stacks the deck in favour of the house at certain tables while stacking it in favour of the patron at other tables." [10] Moreover, some people who are lost would have been saved if they had existed under different circumstances. "... but it seems unfair that Jack, who would have accepted Christ under other conditions, must pay with his immortal soul the price of God's cosmic fine-tuning." [11] Furthermore, some people will be saved, even though they, like Jack, would have rejected Christ had they existed under similar circumstances. "This certainly appears to be a clear case of comparative injustice." [12]

What this presentation of the problem omits is any mention of the doctrine of sin. According to the Christian view, the natural man exists in a state of rebellion against God, spiritually dead, alienated from God, and morally guilty before Him. The natural man is therefore already under the just condemnation of God, meriting only His wrath. Salvation of *anybody* is therefore only by God's grace, by His unmerited favour. God's choosing one person to be saved and leaving the remainder to their just desserts can thus never be a matter of *unfairness* or comparative *injustice* on God's part (except in the peculiar sense that God is not just toward the one saved, having chosen to be merciful instead). I am reminded of a riveting scene from Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*, in which two condemned criminals, Peppino and Andrea, are being led to the executioner's block, when a last minute pardon, secured through the influence of the Count, arrives on behalf of Peppino:

'For Peppino!' cried Andrea, who seemed aroused from the torpor in which he had been plunged. 'Why for him and not for me? We ought to die together. I was promised he should die with me. You have no right to put me to death alone. I will not die alone - I will not!' And he broke from the priests, struggling and raving like a wild beast, and striving desperately to break the cords that bound his hands ...

'What is passing?' asked Franz of the count ...

'Do you not understand,' returned the count, 'that this human creature who is about to die is furious that his fellow sufferer does not perish with him? And, were he able, he would tear him to pieces with his

teeth and nails rather than let him enjoy the life he himself is about to be deprived of? ...'

All this time Andrea and the two executioners were struggling on the ground, and he kept exclaiming, 'He ought to die! - he shall die! - I will not die alone!'

'Look! look!' cried the count ...; 'look, for, on my soul, it is curious. Here is a man who had resigned himself to his fate, who was ... about to die without resistance ... Do you know what consoled him? It was that another partook of his punishment, that another partook of his anguish, that another was to die before him! Lead two sheep to the butcher's ... and make one of them understand his companion will not die: the sheep will bleat for pleasure ... But man - man, whom God created in His own image - ... what is his first cry when he hears his fellow-man is saved? A blasphemy! Honour to man, this masterpiece of nature, this king of the creation!' And the count burst into a laugh; but a terrible laugh that showed he must have suffered horribly to be able thus to laugh ...

Franz sprang back, but the count seized his arm and held him before the window.

'What are you doing?' said he. 'Do you pity him? If you heard the cry of "Mad dog!" you would take your gun - you would, unhesitatingly, shoot the poor beast, who, after all, was only guilty of having been bitten by another dog. And yet you pity a man who, without being bitten by one of his race, has yet murdered his benefactor; and who, now unable to kill any one, because his hands are bound, wishes to see his companion in captivity perish. No, no! Look! look!'

This recommendation was needless. Franz was fascinated by the horrible spectacle. The two assistants had borne Andrea to the scaffold; and there, spite of his struggles, his bites, and his cries, had forced him to his knees. During this time the executioner had raised his mace, and signed to them to get out of the way. The criminal strove to rise, but ere he had time the mace fell on his left temple. A dull and heavy sound was heard, and the man dropped on his face like an ox, and then turned over on his back. The executioner let fall his mace, drew his knife, and with one stroke opened his throat, and mounting on his stomach, stamped violently on it with his feet. At every stroke a jet of blood sprang from the wound.

This time Franz could sustain himself no longer, but sank half fainting into a seat ... The count was erect and triumphant, like the Avenging Angel. [13]

The reason we find the Count's behaviour horrifying is not because he was unjust, even comparatively so, in securing the pardon of only one man, when he could have rescued them both; it is rather that he was only comparatively merciful. He apparently pitied the one criminal, but not the other.

Similarly, in God's case, His salvation of some and reprobation of others seems to call into question, not

God's *justice*, since all deserve condemnation, but rather His *love*. God is supposed to be omnibenevolent, and it seems difficult to deny that He would be more benevolent if He were to save all persons rather than just some, should this lie within His power. [14] The objection posed by the soteriological problem of evil, then, challenges, not God's justice, but His love. The middle knowledge perspective I offered seeks to preserve God's omnibenevolence, but modifies His omnipotence in order to maintain consistency with some people's being lost.

Turning now to Hunt's statement of the middle knowledge perspective under discussion, we again find that some correction is in order. First, according to Hunt, my favoured version of Christian exclusivism is that "everyone is given an adequate chance in *some possible* life" rather than that "everyone is given an adequate chance in *this* life." [15] But this is a misunderstanding, since I repeatedly endorsed in my article Molina's view that "In choosing a certain possible world, God commits Himself, out of His goodness, to offering various gifts of grace to every person which are sufficient for his salvation." [16] Everyone in this life is given an adequate chance of salvation; indeed, many of the lost may actually receive greater gifts of prevenient grace and, thus, better chances of salvation than many of the saved. And I certainly do not think that exclusivism is defensible by maintaining that everyone is given an adequate chance of salvation in some possible world if they are denied it in the actual world.

Second, neither do I "note with approval" [17] the solution to the question of the salvific status of infants according to which God judges them on the basis of what they would have done had they grown up and been confronted with the gospel. I give this as one among several illustrations of "how often ordinary Christian believers naturally assume that God has middle knowledge" and comment that "accepting the doctrine of middle knowledge does not necessarily commit a person to holding such views," although "these views cannot be held without assuming divine middle knowledge." [18] It is also noteworthy that the illustration about the salvation/damnation of infants is followed by a solution to the problem of those not reached with the gospel which is not the solution to that problem which I defend. In fact, my reason for rejecting both of these doctrinal employments of middle knowledge is very much the same as the argument which Hunt will use against my position; namely, it would be unjust to judge a person on the basis of what he would have done rather than on the basis of what he actually did.

Hunt's Evangelistic Objection

With these emendations in mind, let us turn to Hunt's two-pronged critique. His first objection is that my middle knowledge perspective involves "evangelical fatalism." [19] This label is rather puzzling. Rather than "evangelical," Hunt evidently means "evangelistic." The word "fatalism" seems even more inappropriate, since fatalism is the doctrine that it is not within one's power to do anything other than what one will do, and Hunt is not arguing that one does not have the power to refrain from evangelising those whom one does. Rather his argument is aimed at showing that it is somehow futile (or

superfluous) to engage in evangelisation. Accordingly, his accusation might be better expressed as "evangelistic futility."

In a nutshell, his argument is that if any person, say, Jack, suffers from transworld damnation, then efforts to evangelise him are futile. If he suffers from transworld salvation, then efforts to evangelise him are superfluous. If he is only contingently saved, then his salvation may well depend on my sharing the gospel with him; but since he will be damned only if he suffers from transworld damnation, I can be certain that had I failed to share the gospel with him, he would still have been saved by some other means. Thus, my evangelistic efforts make no difference to anyone's salvation; it is not possible for my efforts to result in someone's being saved who would not otherwise have been saved.

Now even if this line of reasoning is correct, its conclusion does not strike me as very serious. It certainly does not prove that Molinism is impossible or even contingently false. At best all it proves is that my claim is false that the middle knowledge perspective I defended "helps to put the proper perspective on Christian missions." [20] Suppose, then, this claim is wrong. Nothing whatsoever follows concerning the Molinist solution to the soteriological problem of evil, nor does it follow that we have no motive for evangelisation. Our motivation for evangelisation should perhaps instead be the privilege and joy of being God's instruments in bringing another human being to salvation or, if nothing else, at least our moral duty to obey the Lord's command to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28.17).

But it does not seem to me that Hunt's argument succeeds in establishing even the modest conclusion that my above missiological claim is wrong. For what is the "proper perspective on Christian missions" of which I spoke? I explained, "... it is our duty to proclaim the gospel to the whole world, trusting that God has so providentially ordered things that through us the good news will be brought to persons who God knew would respond to it if they heard it." [21] And again, "Thus the motivation for the missionary enterprise is to be God's ambassadors in bringing the gospel to those whom God has arranged to freely receive it when they hear it." [22] The point of the middle knowledge perspective is that we engage in evangelisation, not because if we fail to do so, people will go to hell who would otherwise have been saved - a negative perspective which makes the damnation/salvation of the unreached hang on the contingencies of our personal obedience and leads to a guilt-ridden conscience -, but rather because we can be confident that God, knowing via His middle knowledge that we would engage in certain activities, has so providentially arranged the world in advance that as we go out sharing the gospel there will be people whom He has placed in our paths who will be ready and willing to receive the good news we bring and to trust in Christ for salvation - a positive perspective on missions which leads to joyous and victorious service for God.

The problem with Hunt's argument is that he seems to be operating under the presupposition that a proper perspective on evangelism entails the notion that our activities must somehow make a difference

between someone's salvation and damnation. But this is not a presupposition which I accept, nor has he given any justification for it.

In fact, however, we can show that on a middle knowledge perspective Hunt's *desideratum* that "... my evangelical efforts might make a difference to someone's salvation - i.e. that it is possible for these efforts to result in someone being saved who would not otherwise have been saved" is fulfilled. [23] Consider first the case of someone who is transworldly damned. Here, a *mea culpa*: my intention in broaching this doctrine was to formulate a notion which is in fact broader than transworld damnation as I defined it. What I really meant was what we may call transcircumstantial damnation, which is a contingent property possessed by an individual essence if the exemplification of that essence would, if offered salvation, freely reject God's grace and be lost no matter what freedom-permitting circumstances God should create him in. (I thus accept what Hunt calls the "Broad Interpretation.") I agree that attempts to evangelise him will be futile, for no matter what we do he would freely reject God's grace. But it does not follow that "Evangelism, on this account, is clearly futile." [24] What follows is that evangelisation of a transcircumstantially damned person is futile. But on a middle knowledge perspective, some *other* person might exist in place of *that* person were we to engage in evangelistic activities. Suppose a missionary decides to preach the gospel to an unreached people group or, closer to home, that we decide to share our Christian faith with a neighbour down the street. God, knowing via His middle knowledge that such outreaches would be made, may have providentially arranged for people to be in the tribe or to be our neighbours who He knew would respond to the gospel under those circumstances, people whom He otherwise would not have created. Thus, as a result of our evangelistic efforts, there might well be people in the world who will be saved through those efforts who otherwise would not have been saved (because they would not have been created). Thus, our evangelistic efforts do make the sort of difference Hunt desires: these efforts may result in someone's being saved who would not otherwise have been saved. This, again, puts a very positive perspective on Christian missions: by our obedience to our Lord's Great Commission we can help to maximise the number of the saved, but we need not worry that through our disobedience people who would have been saved will instead be lost. We need only note that since we, of course, do not know who is transcircumstantially damned and who is not, we should proclaim the gospel to all peoples indiscriminately, trusting that as we sow the seed of the gospel some of it will fall on fertile ground, which God has prepared, and grow and bear fruit.

The case of persons possessing the property of transworld or even transcircumstantial salvation is similar. It seems obviously possible that, given God's decree in every possible world to provide sufficient grace for salvation to every creature, some persons respond affirmatively to God's grace and so are saved in any set of circumstances in which God creates them. Of course, we do not know if any such persons exist in the actual world. If any do, then, as Hunt says, they will accept Christ even if I fail

to share the gospel with them. But from that it does not follow that "there is no particular urgency to my doing so." [25] For as in the case of the transcircumstantially damned, it might be the case that if I were not to engage in certain evangelistic activities, then God would not have created the transcircumstantially saved individual. For a world in which I do not share the gospel with that individual but somebody else does might be deficient in *other* respects. By my obedience to our Lord's command, I could help to bring it about that such an individual have been created, thereby increasing the number of the saved. That lends urgency enough to the task of evangelisation, without our having to hold that such an individual would have been lost had I failed to share the gospel.

Finally, consider the case of the contingently, or better, circumstantially, saved, persons who are in fact saved but who would have been lost had they been placed in other circumstances. [26] Hunt seems to think we have "little incentive" for sharing the gospel with such persons, since they will fail to be saved only if they are transworldly damned, which they are not. Thus, "... I can be certain that the effect I actually had in this case would have been brought about in some other way if I had not acted as I did." [27] Again, this conclusion does not follow. For although it is true that if I do not evangelise such persons, they will still be saved, it may equally be true that were I not to evangelise such persons, they would not be saved (either because they would be damned or because God would have refrained from creating them). The Christian who refrains from evangelisation excuses himself on the basis of indicative conditionals; but the evangelist draws incentive from counterfactual conditionals. The latter finds in these counterfactual conditionals sufficient motivation for sharing the gospel, knowing that if he were to fail to act as he does, the effect he actually has might well not be brought about in some other way.

In sum, Hunt's charge of evangelistic futility is both unfounded and insignificant. It is insignificant because it undercuts neither the possibility nor the truth of the middle knowledge perspective and because other motivations and incentives for evangelisation are readily available. It is unfounded because whether people are transcircumstantially damned, transcircumstantially saved, or circumstantially saved, we still have motives for engaging in evangelistic activities. By sharing the gospel we can help to bring it about that people are saved who would otherwise not have been saved. By neglecting evangelisation, we contribute to bringing it about that there are not persons saved who otherwise would have been saved. The one thing we cannot do is bring it about that people are damned who, if not for our negligence, would otherwise have been saved (thank God!). We can thus help to maximise the number of people in heaven and minimise the number of people in hell - a worthy incentive if ever there was one!

Hunt's Metaphysical Objection

In a nutshell, Hunt's metaphysical objection is that it is possible that God create a full post-mortem state

of the blessed without ever creating any damned and that an omnibenevolent God would prefer such an alternative to creating a world containing persons who are damned. Hence, the Molinist alternative is untenable. [28] Hunt reasons that since God judges people on the basis of what they would do in various circumstances, there is no need to create a pre-mortem world at all; rather He could simply create the blessed in heaven and never create any of the damned. This objection is, however, based on the incorrect presupposition that according to the middle knowledge perspective God judges people on the grounds of what they would do rather than what they actually do. Hunt writes,

On the Molinist soteriology, ... God's assignment of souls to a post-mortem destiny is based entirely on the truth of certain subjunctive conditionals about how those souls would have responded under various pre-mortem conditions. These subjunctive conditionals, in turn, are true independently of which pre-mortem world is actual ... But then the postmortem fate of any soul can be determined independently of which world is actual; indeed, since this fate is fixed logically prior to the actualization of a pre-mortem world, it is fixed *whether or not a pre-mortem world ever exists*. [29]

But neither Molinism nor the middle knowledge perspective I defended implies that God judges people on any basis other than their actual acceptance or rejection of God's grace. It would be crazy to condemn someone who actually did *not* sin because he *would have* sinned under other circumstances. People who are damned are so because they willingly reject God's grace and ignore the solicitation of His Spirit. But what I suggested was that, if we are concerned that it would be unloving on God's part to condemn someone for rejecting His grace who would under other circumstances have accepted it, then we can hold that God in His mercy would not create such persons, but would only create individuals who would have rejected His grace under any circumstances. Thus, God is not unloving to condemn such individuals on the basis of their rejection of God's sufficient grace for salvation in the actual world. As I said before, this business about transworld or transcircumstantial damnation has nothing to do with comparative injustice on God's part; it is all about His love. It states that God is too loving to condemn someone who is only circumstantially damned - even though he deserves damnation for his free rejection of God's sufficient grace -, and so He creates among the lost only persons who would have rejected Him under any circumstances. But those who are lost are judged only on the basis of what they have actually done. And, of course, the doctrine of transcircumstantial damnation is merely an auxiliary doctrine proposed in response to an objection based on what I regard as the very dubious assumption that necessarily, an omnibenevolent God would not create persons who actually reject His grace and are lost, but who would have been saved under other circumstances.

Contrary to Hunt's initial version of the metaphysical objection, therefore, a holy God could not simply create persons in heaven (or hell) on the basis of what they would have done, but never in fact did. [30]

Hunt now raises a second problem. Even if the post-mortem existence of the blessed entails the pre-

mortem existence of the blessed and the post-mortem existence of the damned entails the pre-mortem existence of the damned, nevertheless the pre-mortem existence of the blessed does not entail the pre-mortem existence of the damned. [31] Since it is not God's unconditional desire to create the damned but only His conditional will that they exist as the necessary concomitant of the pre-mortem existence of the blessed, God would have no reasons to create the damned if some other way could be devised to facilitate the appropriate pre-mortem environment for the blessed. The other way proposed by Hunt is that in the place of the damned God create soulless simulacra. Since these simulacra do things in the world like give birth to real people, start wars, and run governments, it is evident that Hunt takes them to be not mere phenomenal percepts of the blessed, but physical, mindless automata. He states,

It seems that each of us could have exactly the experiences we actually have even though (unbeknown to us) none of the other bodies in our experience is itself a center of experiences. Why then could not God arrange things so that only the elect have a psychological 'inside' - a mind or soul - while the role of the damned (which is solely to elicit experiences in the elect) is played by perfect simulacra? [32]

Hunt anticipates the objection that such a strategy would involve deception on God's part and is therefore unacceptable. He responds that (i) it is not clear that such a strategy involves deception and (ii) the avoidance of people in hell constitutes a morally sufficient reason for God's engaging in deception of this sort.

But to my mind, Hunt's proposal is so morally abhorrent and unworthy of God that He could not entertain it. After all, we are not talking here of the sort of mild deception involved by, say, Berkeleyian idealism. We are talking about a world filled with automata with which the elect enter into significant human relations, a scenario which constitutes a moral offence to the elect of unspeakable proportions. Can one imagine being married to an automaton, giving oneself to that thing in love, trust, and sexual surrender? Or giving birth to and loving an automaton? Or having a mother and father or trusted friends who are automata? I cannot convince myself that God would create such a world. And though the fate of the lost is tragic, their creation involves no moral failure on God's part as does Hunt's proposal. It must always be remembered that God loves the lost, desires their salvation, and provides sufficient grace for them to be saved; their ability to reject God's love is testimony to their status as morally significant persons whom God treats with due respect. By contrast Hunt's proposal involves God's treating real persons without the moral respect they deserve.

Conclusion

The area of soteriology is one of the *loci* of dogmatic theology where a Molinist perspective can be very helpful, especially when contrasted with its alternatives. We have seen that the doctrine of hell poses a significant challenge, not to God's justice and holiness, but to His omnibenevolence. Hell is a

demonstration of God's justice, but it is difficult to understand why an omnibenevolent God does not do more to prevent persons from going there. The middle knowledge perspective I proposed holds that it may not be feasible for God to create a world of free creatures in which more are saved and fewer are lost than in the actual world and that God in His mercy providentially arranges the world such that any person who would receive the gospel if he heard it does hear it.

Hunt's objection that this perspective leads to evangelistic futility is both insignificant and false, insignificant because there are other cogent motivations for evangelisation and false because, by helping to spread the gospel throughout the world, we can bring it about that people will be saved who would not have been saved, had we remained silent.

Hunt's metaphysical objection that God could have created a plenitude of the saved without creating any lost is based on a false assumption and an apparently impossible supposition. He falsely assumes that Molinism holds that God judges people on the basis of subjunctive conditionals concerning them rather than on the basis of their actual response to God's grace. And his supposition that God might have created a world in which the lost are mindless automata is morally unworthy of God and a violation of human personhood which does not characterise the Molinist alternative.

For his own part, Hunt honestly admits that a biblical theist cannot be a universalist, but he seems to be attracted to a risk-taking God who lacks middle knowledge and tries His best to defeat and redeem evil. But such a God is the epitome of moral recklessness, since logically prior His decree to create the world, He had no idea whatsoever whether anyone would enter into divine fellowship or whether *all* might be lost forever in hell. Moreover, such a God seems peculiarly indifferent to the fate of the billions of people who have never heard the gospel and most of whom are therefore lost, but who, for all He knows, might receive Christ were they only to hear of him, and yet whom He passes over in relative neglect, content to provide them only inefficacious general revelation and to let His Church, plodding and uncertain, advance the vacillating frontiers of the kingdom of light. Compared to that, Molinism seems a welcome alternative.

Footnotes:

[\[1\]](#)

William Lane Craig, "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 172-88.

[\[2\]](#)

David P. Hunt, "Middle Knowledge and the Soteriological Problem of Evil," *Religious Studies* 27 (1991):

3-26.

[\[3\]](#)

Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp 169-89; idem, "Reply to Robert Adams," in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. J.A. Tomberlin and P. Van Inwagen, Profiles 5 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), pp. 372-82.

[\[4\]](#)

See William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism I: Omniscience*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 19 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), pp. 246-78.

[\[5\]](#)

In addition to the article mentioned in note 1, see William Lane Craig, "Middle Knowledge: a Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?" in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. C. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1989), pp. 141-64; idem, "'Lest Anyone Should Fall': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Perseverance and Apostolic Warnings," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 29 (1991): 65-74; idem, "Theism and Big Bang Cosmology," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1991): 492-503.

[\[6\]](#)

Hunt, "Middle Knowledge," p. 5.

[\[7\]](#)

Ibid., p. 19. Hunt overreaches his bounds, however, when he speaks of "innumerable" and "countless" souls in hell (Ibid., pp. 19, 22), for the number of the lost will be finite.

[\[8\]](#)

Of course, the good news of the gospel is that Christ has borne the punishment for our sins, so that those who accept his pardon are no longer under God's condemnation.

[\[9\]](#)

Hunt, "Middle Knowledge," p. 6.

[\[10\]](#)

Ibid., p. 7.

[\[11\]](#)

Ibid., p.8.

[\[12\]](#)

Ibid.,

[\[13\]](#)

Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1946), pp. 430-32.

[\[14\]](#)

This is, however, a moot point. Nevertheless, the New Testament teaches that God desires the salvation of all persons (II Pet. 3.9; I Tim. 2.4), so that for the biblical theist a conflict arises between God's desire and His failure to fulfill that desire.

[\[15\]](#)

Hunt, "Middle Knowledge," p. 24. He also errs in asserting that I cite Mt. 11.21-24 as a proof text for middle knowledge. On the contrary, I explicitly state, "The passage in Matthew 11 is probably religious hyperbole meant to underscore the depth of the depravity of the cities in which Jesus preached (William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1987], p. 137).

[\[16\]](#)

Craig, "'No Other Name'," p. 179; cf. pp. 184, 186.

[\[17\]](#)

Hunt, "Middle Knowledge," p. 21.

[\[18\]](#)

Craig, *Only Wise God*, p. 188.

[\[19\]](#)

Hunt, "Middle Knowledge," p. 12.

[\[20\]](#)

Craig, "No Other Name", p. 186.

[21]

Ibid.

[22]

Craig, *Only Wise God*, p. 151

[23]

Hunt, "Middle Knowledge," p. 17.

[24]

Ibid., p. 14.

[25]

Ibid., p. 17.

[26]

It might be doubted whether there are any circumstantially saved people. One can entertain a couple of arguments for a negative conclusion. Suppose

Jack is only circumstantially saved.

Therefore, there are circumstances under which Jack would be damned.

Necessarily, Jack would be damned if any of these circumstances were actual.

Necessarily, God would not create any circumstances under which Jack is circumstantially damned.

From these four premisses, the first argument continues:

Therefore, if any of these circumstances were actual, Jack would be transcircumstantially damned.

If Jack were transcircumstantially damned, then he would be damned in a.

Therefore, if any of these circumstances were actual, Jack would be damned in a.

If those circumstances sufficiently close to a were actual, it would be the case that were the circumstances in a to be actual, Jack would be circumstantially saved.

But premisses (vii) and (viii) are incompatible, and therefore (i), (iii), or (iv) must be false. The most dubious of these is (i). But why should we regard (viii) as true? It needs to be kept in mind that counterfactuals are (on the possible worlds analysis of their truth conditions) true or false relative to a world. In the possible world in which the envisioned circumstances exist, different counterfactuals might be true of Jack, so that in that world it would be true that he would not be saved under the circumstances in a, though if a is actual he would. Thus, (vii) may be true rather than (viii). It might be rejoined that (viii) is plausible since Jack *is* saved under the circumstances in a, and so if worlds were to obtain having circumstances which are fairly close to those in a but under which Jack is damned, then the differences are not sufficient to make us think that if the circumstances in a were to be actual instead, Jack would not still be saved under such circumstances. It does not seem to me that our intuitions are firm here. But the Molinist could concede the point, adding merely that in such a case God would necessarily not have actualised those circumstances under which Jack is damned, since Jack would then be only circumstantially damned, which we have assumed for the sake of argument to be impossible. In other words, (viii) has an impossible antecedent and so describes no possible world. Thus, if Jack is circumstantially saved, there is no possible world in which he is circumstantially damned. That does not imply that Jack is saved in all worlds in which he exists, for he is damned in all those worlds in which it is not true that if he were in the circumstances in a, he would be saved.

These reflections lead to a second argument which proceeds from (i)-(iv) to

v'. Therefore, it is not possible that any of these circumstances be actual.

vi'. Therefore, it is not possible that Jack be damned.

vii'. If Jack is circumstantially saved, then it is possible that Jack be damned.

viii'. Therefore, Jack is not circumstantially saved.

Instead of inferring from (i)-(iv) that Jack would be transcircumstantially damned, (v') infers that worlds in which he is damned are impossible, that is to say, there are no such worlds, because he would be circumstantially damned in such worlds, which is impossible. It could be responded that worlds containing some of the envisioned circumstances are possible if the circumstances are quite different from those in the actual world, so that the counterfactual would be true in those worlds that if Jack were in the circumstances in a, he would be damned. But the Molinist could actually concede (v') and (vi'), but deny (vii') This strange position results from the fact that the existence of an Anselmian God plays havoc with our modal intuitions of what constitute possible worlds. Worlds which seem quite imaginable

turn out to be impossible because God would necessarily not permit them to be actual. In order for Jack to be circumstantially saved, there need not exist any worlds in which he is damned, only circumstances in which he is damned. This points up a deficiency in the currently fashionable possible worlds analysis of counterfactuals, *viz.*, its inability to deal with counterfactuals having impossible antecedents. What we want is an account of counterfactuals which permits us to say, "If God had actualised certain circumstances, then Jack, who is in fact saved, would have been damned," which, assuming (v'), the possible worlds account does not permit us to say. What we want to say is that the foregoing counterfactual is true, that Jack is only circumstantially saved, and that God would not let him be damned. (For more on this problem, see my "Lest Any Should Fall".) Of course, all our discussion is predicated on the truth of (iv), which I regard as dubious.

[\[27\]](#)

Hunt, "Middle Knowledge," p. 17.

[\[28\]](#)

It is not altogether clear to me whether Hunt takes this objection to defeat a middle knowledge perspective in its role as a *defense* or as a *theodicy*. He tends to speak in terms of theodicy, in which case the proposed solution will continue to function successfully as a defense, even if his objection is sound.

[\[29\]](#)

Hunt, "Middle Knowledge," p. 18.

[\[30\]](#)

A second misunderstanding evident in the above quotation is that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true or false independently of which pre-mortem world is actual. As I point out in response to Anthony Kenny's objection about counterfactuals' being true or false "too late" for God to make use of them in actualising a world, the actual world is already instantiated in certain respects logically prior to the divine decree, so that which counterfactuals are true or false is based on which world is thus far actual. What is correct to say is that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true or false logically prior to the existence of the physical universe.

[\[31\]](#)

"Entails" is really too strong a word; I am saying that it is possible that there is no feasible world involving a more optimal balance between saved and unsaved than the actual world, not that there is no

possible world having such a balance. The pre-mortem existence of the saved does not entail the pre-mortem existence of the lost, since there is a possible world in which billions of people freely receive salvation and no one is lost. But Hunt's argument requires only feasible worlds anyway.

[\[32\]](#)

Hunt, "Middle Knowledge," p. 22.