

# The Convolutions of Necessitarianism

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## Abstract

This article presents three letters written by Arthur Norman Prior to his wife Mary from 29<sup>th</sup> April 1945. Numbered 131–133, they concern ‘the convolutions of necessitarianism’, and is an analysis of how Fatalism and Despair constitutes a central theme in Melville’s *Moby Dick*. The letters discuss Jonathan Edwards’ view on predestination and, Luis de Molina’s theory of scientia media. They are relevant for understanding Prior’s later discussion of determinism and reveal that he had carried out extensive theological studies of Molinism as part of his work on reformed theology, was influenced by Barth’s discussion of Molinism in *Church Dogmatics* and viewed Molinism as a precursor of Jonathan Edwards’ theory and rejected both as Beltistian schemes, i.e., as a defense of the idea that God has created the best of all possible worlds. This article argues that Prior’s early study of determinism reveals a strong influence of Karl Barth’s criticism of Molinism, which, in light of Prior’s early criticism of Barth’s philosophical idealism, explains why he either had to reject divine foreknowledge or accept what he considered an unorthodox view of divine foreknowledge.

**Keywords:** A. N. Prior; Determinism, *Moby Dick*, Tense logic; Dynamic view of time; Realism.

## 1 Introduction

Arthur Norman Prior (1914–1969) is widely recognized for his significant contributions to the development of tense logic, which has found practical application in formal discussions regarding the nature of time, existence, and future contingency. While tense logic has evolved to constitute an independent discipline within the realm of computer science, it remains a fundamental semantic framework for examining future contingency and is thus an integral aspect of Prior's philosophical legacy. Prior's interest in the problem of future contingency was rooted in personal experiences. At the age of 16, he rejected the Arminianism of his father and the Methodist church and embraced Calvinism. His subsequent study of Jonathan Edwards' view on free will sparked his desire to take upon himself 'the mantle of Jonathan Edwards' (Prior 1931, 183). Although his early adherence to Edwards gave way to the theology of Karl Barth, he continued to grapple with Edwards' philosophy, as evidenced in his work *Past, Present and Future* (1967). Prior's discovery of tense logic marked a significant turning point in his philosophical journey. It led him to reject the possibility of divine foreknowledge, explicitly denying the reasoning of Jonathan Edwards in 1956. His tense-logical analysis of the ancient master argument convinced him that while models that allowed for indeterminism could be constructed, they did not support foreknowledge. Thus, while Edwards remained convinced that divine foreknowledge was incompatible with indeterminism, Prior drew the opposite conclusion: that God does not have complete foreknowledge.

It remains unclear to what extent Prior had undertaken significant studies of divine foreknowledge and human freedom before his discovery of tense logic, which may explain why he so readily abandoned the idea of divine foreknowledge. Answering this question would provide insights into why he did not include discussions of such models in his work in the mid-60s, even though he attempted to formulate a tense-logical model compatible with the classical indeterminist view on foreknowledge of Ockham and Luis de Molina.

Recent research has uncovered a series of letters from Arthur to Mary, written on 28th and 29th April 1945, which shed light on this issue. These letters reveal three surprising discoveries: firstly, that Prior's views on future contingency were influenced by his reading of Melville's *Moby Dick*; secondly, that his reflections on future contingency, informed by his reading of *Moby Dick*, formed a core of his work on Scottish theology

that was never published due to a fire; thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Prior's reflections on these matters led him to undertake a study of Luis de Molina's theory of scientia media, which he categorically rejected as a Jesuit version of Jonathan Edwards' determinism.

## 2 The Convolutions of Necessitarianism

From 1943 to 1945 A.N. Prior was in the New Zealand Airforce. When he enrolled, he had just met Mary Wilkinson after divorcing his first wife Clare Hunter. The divorce had a significant impact on Prior and indeed contributed to the loss of belief that he experienced at the end of 1941. As an atheist he wrote several articles, of which the most important was *Can Religion be Discussed?* Then he met Mary Wilkinson, the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, and they began a discussion of his articles and unbelief, which culminated in romance and a return to his Christian beliefs in July 1943.<sup>1</sup> They married later that year and frequently corresponded while Prior was stationed on the New Hebrides as an Air Force mechanic during the war. This correspondence has recently been released and is in the process of being made available for the community of researchers interested in Arthur Norman Prior's work on the virtual lab for Prior studies.<sup>2</sup> While much of their correspondence naturally focused on their normal lives as a married couple, a significant proportion also focused on philosophy, theology, and literature. Arthur and Mary published several articles together on topics ranging from theology to logic and literature. In 1945 they published *The Apocalypse of Ishmael* based on Melville's story *Moby Dick*, and it turns out that much of the correspondence between them during the first half of 1945 was about *Moby Dick*. Arthur perceived 'the defiance of fate' to be the central theme of *Moby Dick*. Working on this in four letters from 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April, he formulated a view on what he described as, 'the convolutions of Necessitarianism'.

'These three letters (131,132,133)<sup>3</sup> plus the bit on the last two pages of the one before (130) about Fatalism and Defiance, I've worked

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this development in Arthur's life, see Jakobsen 2020.

<sup>2</sup> See [research.prior.aau.dk](http://research.prior.aau.dk) and [nachlass.prior.aau.dk](http://nachlass.prior.aau.dk)

<sup>3</sup> Arthur numbered his letters to Mary so that he could archive and refer to them more easily.

out the convolutions of Necessitarianism more thoroughly than I've ever done it before. I was doubtful when I began it of the value of the history, but when my notes on my Scots book of which your draft instalment reminded me, in turn reminded me that Edwards echoed the Jesuits, a whole lot of things began to click in my mind, & they've been doing it ever since.'

(Arthur to Mary Prior, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1945, p. 2).

Prior's reflections on the convolutions of necessitarianism makes it clear that his reading of *Moby Dick* drew heavily on his work on Scottish theology, in which the problem of predestination constituted a central part, and that his understanding of this matter was to a large extent inspired by Karl Barth's theology.

### **3 Fatalism in 'Moby Dick'**

Prior's contemplation on the intricacies of Necessitarianism was supported by his and Mary's perusal of Melville's *Moby Dick*. This was done in the context of his inquiry into Scottish theology and its exploration of the issue of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. A significant number of letters exchanged between Prior and Mary in the spring of 1945 focused on their shared reading of *Moby Dick*. Their engagement with the novel ultimately led to the publication of *The Apocalypse of Ishmael* (1945) in *The Presbyterian*. Considering the article's brevity, spanning only four pages, it is surprising to note the extent to which the letters delved into the themes of *Moby Dick*. Several of the letters, often spanning up to eight pages, were solely dedicated to discussing the story. The primary reason for this was that through his reading of *Moby Dick*, Prior was led to contemplate the central question that had occupied his studies in 1931 – that of determinism and free will. This question resurfaced later in his career, when he discovered tense logic. In his letters to Mary in the spring of 1945, Prior saw in *Moby Dick* an important 'connection between Fatalism and Defiance, & the logic of Ahab's alternations between pride & despair' (Arthur to Mary 131, 1). According to Prior, the fatalist sees all events, including subjects, wills, desires, and deeds, as identical with God's will. As Prior points out, 'any identification reads both ways', which has two consequences. On the one hand, the fatalist despairs at the recognition that they have no 'real will' of their own and are a mere puppet in the hands of Destiny. On the other

hand, the fatalist can also defy fate, or the Almighty, by forcing fate to defy itself. By exploring the interplay between fatalism and defiance in *Moby Dick*, and specifically in Ahab's character, Prior was able to delve deeper into the question of whether individuals have the ability to act freely or are bound by forces outside of their control. The fatalist can say in pride:

'But after all it is not only I who am defying fate – in my predestinated defiance, fate is defying [8] itself' – he can even say, in a sense, since it really is his own will to defy fate, 'I am forcing fate to defy itself, I am dragging the whole chain of Destiny behind me in this defiance, so the final victory is mine', and again it is the most complete kind of victory.

In Arthur's reading of *Moby Dick*, this is key to understanding Ahab's titanic drive towards defeating what is a mere dumb animal. This point is emphasised in *The Apocalypse of Ishmael*, and given key importance in the analysis:

'When the prudent and humane first mate Starbuck reproaches his captain for being thus "enraged with a dumb thing", Ahab answers, "All visible objects, man, are but pasteboard masks. But in each event – in the living act, the undoubted deed – there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the moldings of its features behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mast! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate. ... Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealously presiding over all creatures. But not my master, man, is even that fair play. Who's over me? Truth hath no confines".'

(Arthur and Mary Prior 1945, 27).

In their analysis, Arthur and Mary examine the character of Ahab, the obsessive whaleman, who is driven by an inscrutable malice to defy his fate and pursue *Moby Dick*, a symbol of something that transcends him.

According to Prior's letters to Mary, this quest for defiance and its consequences can be linked to discussions in Scottish reformed theology that grapple with the problem of God's inscrutable decree to create a world that is destined to fall into sin and be saved or damned according to His grace. This theological problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom resonates with the fatalistic and defiant themes present in *Moby Dick*, as Prior argues that the characters' struggles with fate and free will mirror the larger philosophical and theological questions at hand.

## 4 Prior's work on Scottish Theology

In 1968, Prior wrote in *Who's Who* that he 'used to be a Barthian Calvinist, and have an expert knowledge of seventeenth-century Scottish theology, which I now never use, and have no religious belief' (Kenny 1970, 277). Prior's expertise in Scottish theology was rooted in his early interest in the works of Jonathan Edwards and his efforts to write a history of Scottish theology. According to Mary Prior's interview with Hasle (2003), Prior was actively engaged in this project until the house burned down for the second time in 1949, after which the project was never resumed. The letter to Mary dated 29 March 1943 gives us a good idea about the project that Prior apparently hoped would be his *magnus opus* on 'The Theologians of Scotland':

'The "Magnus Opus" was to have had five volumes as follows:

Vol. I. The men & their work

Vol. II. On the Rule of Faith.

Vol. III. On God & His Decrees.

Vol. IV. On the Calling of Israel.

Vol. V. On God's Church & God's World.'

(29 March 1943)

One of the theologians Prior had worked on for Vol. III<sup>4</sup> was John Witherspoon (1723–1794), a Scottish American Presbyterian who was president of Princeton University from 1768–1794. Artur was especially interested in Witherspoon's criticism of 'Beltistian schemes', i.e., attempts like Leibniz's to prove that God had to create and did create the best of

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<sup>4</sup> The full reference Prior gives is 'Vol. III, ch. 2, §3'.

all possible worlds. Like Witherspoon, Prior did not believe that 'God is really honored by attempts to prove that "all is for the best in his best of all possible worlds".' (Arthur to Mary 131, 2). In his analysis of Witherspoon, Prior identified a figure who resisted the modernist Beltistian tendencies that Prior identified in Jonathan Edwards' work. Specifically, Prior noted Witherspoon's reluctance to reference his predecessor at Princeton, Jonathan Edwards, and his emphasis on transforming Princeton from a mere Bible seminary into a more comprehensive educational institution. Prior viewed Supralapsarian Calvinism as a modernist Beltistian scheme. This theory pertained to the Fall of Adam and Eve and argued that God's hands were somehow tied by some outward connection of things when He created the world. Supralapsarianism posits that God, 'above' the Fall (lapsus), chose to save some individuals to bring glory to His mercy and not to save others to bring glory to His justice, and then actively decreed a manner in which this would happen through the Fall. According to Prior, as a Beltistian scheme to explain why evil is a part of the the best possible world, it ultimately leaves us with a God who is bound by a mysterious moral necessity.

'It is plain that supralapsarianism hinges on the belief that God could not exercise His mercy & His punitive justice unless the world was fallen, & so had to have a fall once He had decided to exercise these attributes – God's hands are in some sense tied by the outward connections of things. ... And supralapsarianism is obviously one form of the theory that this world with all its evil, &c, is still the best one that God could have made, because if there hadn't been evil He wouldn't have been able to show us His mercy.'

(Arthur to Mary 132, p. 1).

## 5 Prior's discussion of Molinism

It is a surprising discovery that Prior held such a strong view on Luis de Molina's Molinism, and had studied it's relation to supralapsarianism. As Prior notes, Molinism prefigures Jonathan Edwards' theory of the will (Prior to Mary 131, p. 2), and he characterizes it as the belief 'that man is free in the sense that he is left to make his own decisions, at least on such subjects as the acceptance or rejection of Christianity; but that God knows just how any given free agent will act under given conditions, so He leaves these "free agents" to themselves, but places them under the

conditions in which they will choose to act as He wants them to do.’ (Prior to Mary 131, 2–3). Prior’s analysis also highlights the Leibnizian ‘optimism’ inherent in both Molinism and supralapsarianism. He observes ‘that poor old God couldn’t do any better because His hands are tied by unnamed forces which seem sometimes to be more powerful than He is’ (Arthur to Mary 132, 1). Although Prior acknowledges that establishing an inner connection between Molinism and supralapsarianism is difficult, he believes they share this same sense of Leibnizian optimism (Arthur to Mary 132, 1). In Prior’s view, the core issue with Molinism is linked to the fear of Fatalism. As he explains in his third letter to Mary on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1945, he perceives Molinism as ‘the Jesuit version of Edwards’ doctrine of the will’ (Arthur to Mary 133, 1). Essentially, Molinism portrays God as calculating how to achieve results in a world where the basic working conditions are not imposed by Him (Arthur to Mary 133, 1). One is indeed left to wonder how God knows, what he knows on Molinism. This problem is closely related to the discussion of Fatalism in *Moby Dick*. It prompts the question, ‘if God doesn’t impose these conditions upon either Himself or us, ... Who does impose them?’ (133, p. 1). Prior sees this as a critical flaw in Molinism, as it implies that there are external forces beyond God’s control that shape the conditions under which human decisions are made. This notion stands in stark contrast to the Christian doctrine of God’s sovereignty, which asserts that God is in control of all things, including the conditions under which human choices are made. The silent, unheard-of entity who imposes conditions on God becomes to us what *Moby Dick* is to Ahab, which raises the question of whether we can trust in such a God:

‘Is another God somewhere, one whom we haven’t heard about & of whom it is advisable not to speak? Maybe this other God is not a person – maybe what our God has to contend with is just “the void”; but there’s something sinister even about that. Particularly when it leads the Jesuits to describe God as being forced by this unnamed power to resort to “scheming”. It means this: God does not trust His creatures; because they are not His creatures only, but have been given form partly by the unnamed Unknown. So instead of trusting us, He juggles with us, & turns us into weapons with which He keeps the Unknown at bay.’

(133, p. 1).



From Arthur's second letter to Mary dated 29<sup>th</sup> April 1945, it is evident that he had consulted Karl Barth's discussion of Molinism in *Church Dogmatics*, II, 1. On 29<sup>th</sup> April 1945 he writes that 'Barth points out ... that the "Jesuit Calvinists" included Gomarus the early 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch supralapsarian, who horrified Arminius into abandoning Calvinism altogether.' This gives us a good idea of the Barthian inspiration behind Prior's views on Molinism. In *Church Dogmatics*, II, 1, pp. 569–586 Barth discusses Molina's theory and, as Prior points out, writes about Gomarus' use of Molina's theory to develop a theory of 'conditioned foreknowledge', by which God knows certain futures – not absolutely but under certain conditions, which in Barth's interpretation is a strengthening of the rejection of Molina's theory, 'by basing the divine sovereignty over everything on a plan for the world which precedes the whole executive will of God and even the divine foreknowledge.' (Barth 1957, p. 575). Such a view on predestination is, according to Barth, difficult to distinguish from fatalism. (Barth 1957, p. 575). Like Prior, Barth not only remarks upon Molinism's problem with fatalism, but also sees a deep, mystic connection between hyper-Calvinism and Molinism. Barth writes:

'The question cannot be evaded: Was there not in fact a very deep and solid community of interest between hyper-Calvinism of Gomarus and the ultimate intensions of Molinism in spite of the fact that historically they were as different as day and night?'  
(Barth 1957, p. 575).

Arthur Prior's reading of Melville's *Moby Dick* suggests that the human predicament of despair confronted with the void has, in hyper-Calvinism as well as Molinism, become a divine predicament. Restrained in His omnipotence by some ultimate metaphysical necessity, God is like Ahab, the mad whaleman, pursuing control of whatever mystical unknown lurks behind creatures' free actions. God, Prior points out, cannot trust His own creatures because through them He struggles with a great unknown void that threatens to corrupt His own plan, desire, and goal for creation. *Essay on Religion* dealt with such a picture of God as 'modern arminianism' when describing the indeterminism of William James:

'God, according to James is like a chess player, and the universe is at once his "game" and his "opponent." We creatures have free wills which we can exercise for or against him, and he cannot

foresee what is coming next; but when it does come, he is wise enough to meet it with such moves as will bring the universe towards a safe conclusion in spite of it, knowing that no matter how much it might “zig-zag”, he could surely bring it safely home at last.’

(Prior 1931, 215).

In 1931 Prior rejected such ideas of God as irreverent, based on an appeal to our sense of moral fitness. It is not a fit or pleasant thing to believe that ‘God has ever, in the smallest degree, abandoned the Universe to blind Chance; I like to think rather that even the disasters and moral failures are fulfilling some inscrutable purpose in an ordered and harmonious Scheme of things.’ (Prior 1931, 218). James presents us with a God who is finite and rejects an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable Spirit as ‘a mere figment of the “remote, professorial mind”, and the true, the living, God is an admittedly finite being like ourselves – immeasurably more powerful and good than ourselves, it is true, yet a being not literally all powerful and all knowing.’ (Prior 1931, 214–215). Against this view of God, Prior argued in 1931 that it is a moral spiritual necessity that God is a spirit infinite, eternal, and unchangeable and that ‘a God who is not in all things Supreme, whose sovereignty and foreknowledge is not absolute, does not seem to me worthy of worship.’ (Prior 1931, 218). However irreverent Prior found such an Arminian presentation of God, it is also clear that he was attracted to William James’ presentation. He found James’ view of God ‘immeasurably loftier than certain more recent notions’ (Prior 1931, 215). Similar praise is given to another of the ‘modern Arminians’, H.G. Wells’ *God, The Invisible King*, which presents us with ‘a most fantastic picture of the deity as a great “Captain of Mankind”, putting up gallant struggle against the blind and unsympathetic forces of Nature hemming us in all around.’ (Prior 1931, 215).

## 6 Prior’s predicament

The new discoveries in Arthur Prior’s correspondence with Mary make it clear that Prior had undertaken theological studies, in his study of Reformed Scottish theology, of the problem of determinism and human freedom, which he revisited while reading through *Moby Dick* with Mary. Ahab’s struggle with the white whale is ultimately the ancient story of the futility and pride involved in trying to defy one’s fate.

Melville's work reminds Prior of his 'Scot's book' and how much 'Edwards echoed the Jesuits'. Moby Dick is a metaphor for the biblical Leviathan, where Ahab is God, who in Prior's analysis must overcome the 'void' assumed in Belastian schemes to get his will. 'God stands before Necessity as Ahab before the White Whale and behaves like Ahab too.' (Arthur to Mary 133, 3). The letters between Arthur and Mary reveal Barth's considerable influence on Prior's view on predestination because it demonstrates that Barth not only influenced his rejection of Jonathan Edwards' theology, but also influenced Prior's view on Molinism. According to Prior, both theories present us with a view of the universe that is largely perceived as being beyond the control of God.

'God can't help the universe being bad; He cannot transform it into anything different; & so He takes it for what it [3] is, & takes its "necessities" as absolute; & then does what He can with it, cleverly, masterfully, Jesuitically, like Ivan Karamazon's Grand Inquisitor (who has a similar pessimism).'

(Arthur to Mary 133, 1).

The letters reveal the extent to which Prior's theology was shaped by Barth's views on determinism and free will. He had completely abandoned Edwards' theology on the matter and followed Barth's rejection of Molinism. It is for that reason also evident that Prior was trapped in a tension with the philosophical idealism central to Barth's rejection of Molinism. To Barth, Catholicism must continue to understand the relationship between Creator and Creation in the stalemate achieved between Thomists' and Molina's theology on the question of divine foreknowledge and human freedom (Barth 1957, 580–584). According to Barth this is ultimately because of Catholicism's adherence to the idea of an analogy of being, *analogia entis*, according to which both God and man are categorised ontologically as 'beings', despite their vast differences. It is, to Barth only possible to reject the errors of Molinism if one ceases to base man's freedom in ontology instead of theology.

'For an effective denial of Molinism is possible only when we cease to think in a God-creature system, in the framework of the *analogia entis*. It is possible only when theology dares to be theology and not ontology, and the question of a freedom of the creature which creates conditions for God can no longer arise.'

(Barth 1957, 583).

To Barth, Catholicism's adherence to *analogia entis*, which is ultimately a question of the knowability of God, explains why it cannot pass a final judgement against Luis de Molina in favour of Thomas Aquinas. Freedom must be grounded in facts common to God and man, which to some extent limit God. Prior's rejection of Molinism therefore follows Barth and seeks to provide historical and philosophical reasons to consider Molina's theory a forerunner to Edwards as a different version of the same thing: a Belvistian scheme. Yet while Prior echoes Barth in his rejection of Molinism he could not follow him in his belief that we should somehow ground freedom in theology and not in ontology. Ultimately, Prior was deeply unsatisfied with Barth's rejection of the ontological realism assumed in Catholic theology. Under Findlay's influence Prior had come to see philosophical idealism as a disease and something that had to be challenged and discarded in Barth (see Jakobsen 2020). Prior had perceived how important Barth's theology would become, but still maintained that theology of the future would have to 'submit more readily to the disciplines of fact and logic'. He was painfully aware of the shortcomings of Barth and addressed them in *Revaluations* (1937), where he writes: 'I am becoming increasingly convinced that we must give a far more respectful consideration to the traditional "proofs of the existence of God" than Barth accords to them' (Prior 1937, 11). In light of Barth's rejection of *analogia entis*, this was an 'enormous concession', but Prior argued that by emphasizing the importance of these arguments, especially the ontological argument, Barthian theologians would be prevented from 'confusing questions of the form "Is this the case?" with questions of the form "How do we know this?"' (Prior 1937, 11). Prior used the story of Mark 9:24 to illustrate the difference between accepting doubt as an epistemic condition that challenges belief and on the other hand pushing God into a realm of logical contradiction:

'We can pray, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief", but it is meaningless to pray, "Lord, I believe, and my belief is false, but please make it true", and wicked to pray, "Lord, I believe, and my belief is false; but make me go on believing all the same". [...] The Reality of God is deeper than all our doubts, and unaltered by them, if He is real – there is our comfort. But if He is unreal, His unreality is deeper than all our certitude – there is our peril. And there is no way of evading this. Barth tries to evade it, often.'

(Prior 1937, 11).

The correspondence with Mary during the war illustrates the considerable influence Barth still had on Prior's thinking after his return to Christianity in 1943. The letters also make it evident that a tension lurked in his Barthian rejection of Edwards' and Molina's construct of a philosophical defense of foreknowledge and predestination. In 1946 Prior began a lectureship at Canterbury University College in Christchurch, which had become vacant after the departure of Popper. As he was reading up for this work he returned to the notes from Findlay's teaching and his own M.A. thesis 'The Nature of Logic', and it becomes clear that he was not so impressed with this (see Jakobsen 2019). It is evident from a letter to Mary, most likely written in 1947, that Prior was grounding his teaching on the same rejection of philosophical idealism to which Findlay had introduced him:

'Have been re-reading Bosanquet's "Essentials of Logic". We used it for advanced Logic in my day, Findlay pulling it to pieces bit by bit. It is rather poisonous stuff & not Logic at all. I'm going to read a few Hegelian & Pragmatist Logics, through, I think; to keep track of the Enemy. I'll need it if I do land in Auckland next year!

(Prior to Mary, [B46] The Martin Collection Aalborg, 3.)

He had not given up his Christian beliefs, indeed he became an elder in the Presbyterian church in 1951, but by 1954 it was evident that his Barthian days were merely a part of his past. Writing to Mary he explained that he considered himself a bad elder and it is evident that he struggled with doubt. The letters from 1945 make it evident that Prior, not being able to ground his thinking on Barth's theology, was left with a perspective of divine foreknowledge that presented us with a God that could not trust His creatures but had to treat us somehow as an enemy to his own freedom. Like Ahab's Moby Dick, God in Edwards' as well as Molina's philosophy struggles with a void that somehow limits his foreknowledge or imposes a moral necessity upon him. Modifying a phrase later used by Mary to describe her husband's intense studies of Calvinism we can say that while the God of Calvinism was not human enough, the God of Molina was too human. Like us, or perhaps like Ahab, he must scheme and manipulate in order to get his way.

## **Conclusion**

Arthur and Mary Prior's discussion of Molinism as they read through Moby Dick help us better appreciate his peculiar place in the history of

philosophical theology. It is clear that Prior's invention of tense-logic is an important yet overlooked reason why philosophical theology to everyone's surprise was able to flourish in the rather anti-metaphysical atmosphere of analytic philosophy (see Jakobsen 2023 & 2024). Prior does not fit into the general explanations given so far. Some emphasize the work of philosophers who held theistic belief (Wolterstorff 2009) and others, for that reason, view it as a desecularization (Smith 2001). Prior's importance nuances such accounts. While he, until the discovery of tense-logic in 1954, was a theist, he constantly struggled with skepticism. His former discussions help us see, that his investigations, as an analytic philosopher, of a tense-logic for future contingency, was a continuation of intense studies of Scottish Reformed History on the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. A decade before theist philosophers began wrestling with theology and religion in analytic philosophy, it had already been done by Prior. In 1945 he did it as a Barthian believer who was looking for a better alternative than Jonathan Edwards. Prior, the analytic philosopher, undoubtedly preferred Edward's logic and realism, but could not accept his view on determinism. He quickly turned from Edwards to Barth. To Prior, the Barthian, Luis de Molina's account came close to a solution compatible with Edward's realism. Such a solution was not tenable. Ultimately, the convolutions of necessitarianism were not untangled before his study of omniscience, after the invention of tense-logic. While it led him to another conclusion that later logicians, such as Øhrstrøm (2014), his discussions began the modern discussion of divine foreknowledge and human freedom (Hasker 1998, Jakobsen 2024).

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3. Prior, A. N. First letter from Arthur to Mary, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1945: Letter 131, the Ann Prior Collection box 3, The Bodleian Library, Oxford. Published in The Digital Prior Archive: [virtuallab.prior.aau.dk/first-letter-from-arthur-to-mary-29th-april-1945-letter-131](http://virtuallab.prior.aau.dk/first-letter-from-arthur-to-mary-29th-april-1945-letter-131)
4. Prior, A. N. Second letter from Arthur to Mary, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1945: Letter 132, the Ann Prior Collection box 3, The Bodleian Library, Oxford. Published in The Digital Prior Archive: [virtuallab.prior.aau.dk/second-letter-from-arthur-to-mary-29th-april-1945-letter-132](http://virtuallab.prior.aau.dk/second-letter-from-arthur-to-mary-29th-april-1945-letter-132)
5. Prior, A. N. Third letter from Arthur to Mary, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1945: Letter 133, the Ann Prior Collection box 3, The Bodleian Library, Oxford. Published in The Digital Prior Archive: [virtuallab.prior.aau.dk/third-letter-from-arthur-to-mary-29th-april-1945-letter-133](http://virtuallab.prior.aau.dk/third-letter-from-arthur-to-mary-29th-april-1945-letter-133)