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Articles

Middle knowledge: The “foreknowledge defense”

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A recent article in this journal by Richard Otte, as well as brief passages in a couple of books by Jonathan Kvanvig and William Lane Craig, have set forth a distinctive strategy for defending middle knowledge from its critics.¹ The approach in question not only differs significantly from other defenses of middle knowledge that have been put forward, but also captures well one of the main reasons why middle knowledge has come to possess whatever plausibility it now enjoys in philosophical circles. I happen to think that this defense is not ultimately successful; but since it does represent a central strand in the case for middle knowledge, its failure is instructive in a way that makes it amply worth re-examining. In undertaking such a re-examination, I will focus my comments on the more extensive discussion to be found in Otte’s article.

The notion of middle knowledge, which seems to have made its first appearance in the course of a 16th-century dispute between the Jesuits and the Dominicans over the relationship between divine grace and human freedom,² has lately re-entered the arena of philosophical debate as a result of its employment by Alvin Plantinga in his formulation of the “free will defense” against the problem of evil.³ The free will defense will be sufficiently familiar to readers of this journal that it should be unnecessary to recapitulate it here; but a brief summary of the way in which middle knowledge figures in Plantinga’s argument may still be in order.

Middle knowledge enters the account in the form of an epistemic capacity purportedly exercised by God as He tries to decide what type of world to create. Obviously the sort of information that would be most valuable to God in this situation of cosmic deliberation is a knowledge of *how things would turn out* under the various options open to Him. What epistemic resources could God draw upon in order to gain possession of such information? Clearly His exhaustive knowledge of pure possibilities,

which enables Him to calculate all the conceivable ways things *could* go were He to actualize a given cosmic arrangement, is not going to do the trick; for in the typical case this will tell Him only that things *could* go exceedingly well and they *could also* go exceedingly poorly, which is mighty thin stuff to stake a world on. What the quest for middle knowledge hopes to turn up is some divine talent for selecting a unique *would* out of the innumerable *coulds*. Is such a capacity intelligible? Certainly it is, if we restrict the worlds in question to those in which determinism is true; for then God can simply *deduce* the requisite information from His knowledge of the initial conditions needed to bring such a world into existence together with the causal laws operating in that world. But what about worlds like our own – worlds which contain free creatures whose freedom is understood (as it is by most theists) in a manner incompatible with determinism?

For one of these libertarian worlds – the one that we know God ultimately decided to actualize – the complete history of events following God’s creative decree is accessible to Him through His foreknowledge. But this will not take Him very far, for at least two reasons. In the first place, it is doubtful that He could avail Himself of information based on foreknowledge in the context of divine deliberation over which world to actualize, a context which is logically prior to any created world *being* actual, and thus foreknowable (it presumably being no easier for the Divine Mind to deliberate over what It already knows It is going to do than it is for human minds). In the second place, such information would be inadequate in any case; for God’s eventual decision to create the world we know to be actual will fall short of the sagacity expected of the Supreme Being unless He bases His decision on the judgment that this world is *better* than (or at least not significantly exceeded by) the available alternatives – unless, that is, He also knows how things would go under the *other* choices available to Him, and the actual world compares favorably with these.

Obviously He can know the history of these other (nonactual libertarian) worlds neither through foreknowledge, nor through a knowledge of pure possibilities, nor through extrapolation from initial conditions and causal laws. To know what *would* have happened *if* a different libertarian scheme had been selected evidently requires some further epistemic resource. This putative resource is what the Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina, called “middle knowledge.” It is so-called because it falls somewhere between a knowledge of what *actually* happens and a knowledge of

all the things that logically *could* happen. Specifically, it is a knowledge of *counterfactuals of freedom* – propositions of the form, “If *x* were the case, *A* would do *y*,” where *x* is a counterfactual condition, *A* is a free agent, and *y* is some action with respect to which *A* is significantly free.

For those of us who regard this supposed epistemic resource with skepticism, there are at least a couple of ways to respond. One is to deny that any propositions of the indicated form *could* possibly be *true*. The other is to argue that, while there may indeed be true counterfactuals of freedom, it is logically impossible for any of them to be objects of *knowledge*. It is not easy to see how the latter argument would go, particularly in light of the fact that this stricture on knowledge would have to apply to God as well as more limited beings. But the first approach is no cakewalk either; in particular, it conflicts with the fact that counterfactuals of freedom, such as *If Tom had come to the party, Suzy would have left* and *If the light had turned red, I would have stopped*, are an integral part of daily discourse, and thus would have to be assigned some other linguistic role if they are barred from ever expressing true propositions. Since there do appear to be *prima facie* difficulties with each of these approaches, I am happy to assume (on behalf of the opponents of middle knowledge) the burden of proof in this matter, while ceding to Otte the enviable position of defender.

Before examining Otte’s defensive strategy, however, something should be said about what is really at stake in this conflict. From the role that middle knowledge plays in Plantinga’s version of the free will defense, one could easily conclude that theists should be cheering on the forces of middle knowledge. But this is far from being the case. Middle knowledge, as Plantinga himself has recently noted,⁴ only makes things more difficult for the theodist. In general, the less God knows (middle or otherwise), the less His goodness can be impugned by the existence and amount of evil in the world; and if God’s ignorance in this regard is perfectly compatible with His omniscience (as it would be if there were no true counterfactuals of freedom to be known), the orthodox theodist could secure all the advantages of Plantinga’s free will defense without implicating himself in Plantinga’s notorious thesis of “transworld depravity.”

It is ironic, then, that the notion of middle knowledge, which was reintroduced onto the philosophical stage in a role which turns out to be inconsequential, has since found employment in other areas where it could actually make a genuine contribution (assuming for the moment that the

notion itself is coherent). David Basinger, for example, has attempted to illuminate the workings of divine providence and foreknowledge from a middle-knowledge perspective,⁵ while Del Ratzsch has recently developed an account of causal laws based on counterfactuals of divine freedom.⁶ Such efforts need to be acknowledged in determining what is at stake in this controversy, though it is too early to say whether these applications have the potential to outweigh the ill-effects of middle knowledge on theodicy. All things considered, it appears that the overall coherence of theism will not be altered dramatically by the success or failure of middle knowledge, and that the conflict is therefore one in which theists (*qua* theists, anyway) can afford to remain neutral.

As it happens, every attack on middle knowledge has taken the first of the two approaches mentioned above: a denial that there are any true counterfactuals of freedom.⁷ Otte constructs his defense of middle knowledge with particular attention to the earliest, and still the most important, of these attacks, that of Robert Adams in his 1977 article “Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil.”⁸ Otte sums up the essence of Adams’ complaint against middle knowledge as follows: “The reason Adams believes that conditionals of freedom are necessarily false is that he cannot understand what it would be for them to be true.”⁹ A similar point could be made about another opponent of middle knowledge, William Hasker, whose skeptical article on the subject focuses on the question, “Who or what is it (if anything) that *brings it about* that these propositions are true?”¹⁰ Indeed, the question of what it would *be* for counterfactuals of freedom to be true – or, alternatively, what could *bring about*, or *cause*, or *ground* their truth – seems to lie at the heart of the debate over middle knowledge. Among defenders of middle knowledge the tendency has been to dismiss such questions. Plantinga, for example, has replied to Adams as follows: “It seems to me much clearer that some counterfactuals of freedom are at least possibly true than that the truth of propositions must, in general, be grounded in this way;”¹¹ and Basinger has remarked laconically that “they simply *are* true.”¹² With one side demanding a “ground” (as I will sum up the feature in question)¹³ and the other side flatly rejecting the demand, things seem to have reached an impasse. The differences between the two parties are apparently so deeply rooted that further discussion along these lines is unlikely to lead to any progress.

What is distinctive about Otte’s strategy is that it is based on a recognition of the utter futility of continuing to slog it out over the issue of

“grounding” while each side rejects the crucial intuitions of the other. In the face of this apparent stalemate, Otte proposes a way of approaching the issue indirectly. The idea, as I reconstruct it, is to find some other genre of knowledge k such that k possesses the following two characteristics:

- (1) the epistemic acceptability of k – especially the truth of the “ k -statements” which are the objects of k – is not in dispute; and
- (2) there is no relevant difference between k -statements and counterfactuals of freedom with respect to the quality of their “grounding.”

If some plausible candidate for k can be identified, then the argument would proceed as follows. Adams et al. are claiming that counterfactuals of freedom are insufficiently grounded to be true. If this is correct, then no statement possessing the same quality of groundedness as counterfactuals of freedom should be true. But k comprises true statements possessing the same quality of groundedness as counterfactuals of freedom. Therefore we must reject the claim that counterfactuals of freedom are insufficiently grounded to be true.

In his article Otte selects divine *foreknowledge* as the substitution-instance for k .¹⁴ The relevant k -statements, then, would be propositions about future free choices, or ‘*futurefactuals* of freedom’ (as I will term them in contrast to *counterfactuals* of freedom). The first question to be asked, then, is, How well does Otte’s choice of foreknowledge really satisfy (1)? The answer must be that it falls considerably short of expectations.

For a little perspective on this, compare Otte’s strategy with the one that guides *God and Other Minds*,¹⁵ where Plantinga argues that, in virtue of crucial similarities in our epistemic situation *vis-à-vis* belief in other minds and belief in God, the rational acceptability of the former accrues to the latter as well. There are obvious parallels here with Otte’s argument, in which middle knowledge, foreknowledge, and quality of groundedness play the roles, respectively, of belief in God, belief in other minds, and rational acceptability. Whatever the extent of these strategic parallels, however, there is a crucial difference in execution: Plantinga’s argument really does satisfy its version of (1), since the acceptability of belief in other minds is not genuinely in dispute. Foreknowledge, on the other hand, is highly controversial (even among theists); moreover, such controversy concerns not only the proper analysis of foreknowledge, but its very

existence as well. The best that Otte can do with regard to (1) is to note that foreknowledge is “a doctrine of traditional theism, which Adams does not deny.”¹⁶ But whether this is enough to satisfy (1) depends on how stable one’s commitment to foreknowledge proves to be in the course of an argument designed to bring it into conflict with Adams’ reasoned rejection of middle knowledge. If foreknowledge and middle knowledge really do belong in the same epistemic boat, as Otte maintains, then what is to prevent Adams et al. from rejecting both together? Perhaps the assumption that foreknowledge is “a doctrine of traditional theism” would give such critics pause. Still, it is far less costly for a theist to respond to Otte’s argument with “so much the worse for foreknowledge” than it is for the atheist in *God and Other Minds* to adopt a similar line regarding belief in other minds.¹⁷

In sum, since foreknowledge is far from the epistemic paragon called for by (1), it cannot anchor its end of the comparison with middle knowledge securely enough to force acceptance of the latter. The most that Otte’s argument can do, then, is convict of inconsistency those theists who accept foreknowledge while rejecting middle knowledge. Perhaps Otte would reply that this more modest objective is all he is aiming for – after all, his argument is *clearly* ineffective for anyone who doubts the intelligibility of foreknowledge. But I deny that even this objective is within his reach, since foreknowledge is even less suited to (2) than it is to (1).

Otte notes that Adams had given brief consideration to a couple of proposals for what might ground the truth of counterfactuals of freedom. These proposals are (i) that the antecedent of the counterfactual necessitates the consequent, and (ii) that the actual desires, intentions, and character of the agent referred to in the consequent guarantee the truth of the counterfactual. But Adams rejects both of these candidates on the basis of their incompatibility with free agency: the first for obvious reasons, and the second because even the condition of an agent’s will cannot (in a libertarian scheme, anyway) guarantee the performance of a particular free action (the agent may, for example, act out of character).¹⁸ Now Otte shows that the same two proposals could be put forward as grounds for the truth of *future*factuals of freedom, and that they encounter in this context the same basic objection they ran up against in the case of *counter*factuals of freedom: they are incompatible with the assumed freedom of the agent. A free agent’s future behavior, no less than his counterfactual behavior, must be free of necessitation by anything in the present, including facts about the agent’s will.

This comparison of counterfactuals and futurefactuals with respect to the two proposals for grounding canvassed in Adams' article constitutes the heart of Otte's case for assigning middle knowledge and foreknowledge to the same epistemic boat and concluding that the one is acceptable just in case the other is. The elaboration of this case consists of a reply to a skeptical rejoinder. Suppose the opponent of middle knowledge who nevertheless accepts foreknowledge suggests the following ground for the latter: "propositions about future free choices are true because what they claim will occur actually occurs."¹⁹ Unlike the two candidates discussed by Adams, which seem to be equally applicable (or inapplicable) to counterfactuals and futurefactuals, the present proposal marks a distinctive feature of futurefactuals alone, since "The states of affairs that make a proposition about a future free choice true will be actual at some time, whereas the states of affairs that a conditional of freedom is based on may never be actual."²⁰ Otte's response to this line is simply that the difference cited is ultimately trivial (perhaps even irrelevant altogether) when it is the grounding of these statements that is at issue; as he puts it, the claim that "propositions about future free choices are true because they correspond to what *will* happen, or what *will* be actual at a certain time ... does not appear to be significantly different from saying that conditionals of freedom are true because they correspond to what *would* happen, or what *would* be actual in certain situations."²¹

This is a surprising statement, at first blush, given the obvious and significant differences between *will* and *would*, not the least of which is the difference cited by Otte himself: the fact that *will*, but not *would*, is wedded indissolubly to the actual world. After all, isn't rootedness in the actual world precisely the sort of quality that ought to make a crucial difference to grounding? What apparently leads Otte to discount its significance, however, is the belief that it masks a more fundamental similarity between the two cases, a similarity which he explains as follows: "Both are true in virtue of corresponding to some state of affairs that is neither actual nor is necessitated in any way by what is actual."²²

This answer requires a little unpacking. He surely cannot mean, in claiming that both are true in virtue of corresponding to some state of affairs that *is not actual*, that they thereby correspond to some *nonactual* state of affairs; for futurefactuals *are* true in virtue of corresponding to an actual state of affairs, albeit one that lies in the future (naturally). To rule out this unwanted difference between the two cases, the first and third 'is' in the last statement of the preceding paragraph must be taken as tensed,

with the copula specifically indicating a state of affairs that *is* (present tense) not actual *now*. Such a construal, however, would exclude the past as well as the future, thus omitting an additional source of similarity between counterfactuals and futurefactuals of freedom; for it is also the case that both are true in virtue of corresponding to some state of affairs that neither *was* actual nor is necessitated by what *was* actual. This suggests that his point should be rephrased as follows:

- (3) Neither counterfactuals of freedom nor futurefactuals of freedom are entailed by any state of affairs that has *already* (past or present) been actualized.

This appears to be the basis upon which he rests his conclusion that “it would seem to be no easier to account for true propositions about future free actions than it is to account for true conditionals of freedom ... Neither is more problematic than the other.”²³

It’s hard to know what to make of this argument. In the first place, it seems to assume a fairly narrow view of what can render a statement problematic. On what basis could (3), which addresses only *one* possible source of alethic difficulty, be used to underwrite the conclusion that counterfactuals of freedom have *no* problems with grounding not shared by futurefactuals of freedom? In other words, what reason do we have for accepting (3) as sufficient to satisfy the requirements of (2)? The fact is that no such reason has been given, nor is it easy to see what such a reason could possibly be.

In the second place, this argument assumes that the difference between counterfactuals and futurefactuals of freedom with respect to the actual *future* can be overlooked in light of their similarity with respect to the actual *past* and *present*. But this assumption obviously requires some justification. If it is generally true that a difference in one tense is insufficient to derail an argument based on a similarity in the remaining two tenses (an absurd notion on its face), then the following argument should also be valid. Let us define a ‘*pastfactual* of freedom’ as a statement about a past free choice. Such pastfactuals, however, are similar to counterfactuals in that both are true in virtue of corresponding to some state of affairs that is neither *present* nor *future*. Therefore (and without further ado), “neither is more problematic than the other.” But of course this conclusion is ridiculous: if a pastfactual like “Caesar crossed the Rubicon” is just as problematic as a counterfactual like “If Pompey had extended an olive branch, Caesar would have remained in Gaul” (let alone Quine’s “If

Caesar had commanded the UN forces in Korea, he would have used the atom bomb”), then the whole notion of one statement being more problematic than another has been gutted of all content.²⁴

It would seem, then, that the justification for Otte’s discounting of future differences in grounding must have something to do with the specific character of the future itself. It is worth quoting in this connection the entire passage in which Otte addresses and dismisses his opponent’s insistence that correspondence with the actual future puts the grounding of futurefactuals on a different footing from that of counterfactuals:

One might respond to my argument by pointing out that there are differences between conditionals of freedom and propositions about future free choices. For example, we can eventually determine if a proposition about a future free choice is true, but we are never able to determine if a conditional of freedom is true. The states of affairs that make a proposition about a future free choice true will be actual at some time, whereas the states of affairs that a conditional of freedom is based on may never be actual. However, this does not imply that what makes a proposition about a future free choice true is any better understood than what makes a conditional of freedom true. Propositions about future free choices are true *now*, which is before we can determine which ones are true, or before the states of affairs that “ground” their truth are actual.²⁵

Otte appears to be arguing in this passage that the actual future (unlike the actual past and present) suffers from a lack of determinateness, and that this lack is sufficiently serious to reduce the viability of the future as a source of grounding to the same level as a merely possible (i.e., nonactual) state of affairs. If successful, this argument would support

- (4) Both counterfactuals of freedom and futurefactuals of freedom are true at a [world, time] at which whatever grounds their truth is indeterminate

as a candidate for satisfying the requirements of (2). Indeterminateness, however, can be understood in either an epistemological or an ontological sense. Otte runs the two senses together in this passage; but if we are to evaluate the justice of this charge against the future, we will need to disentangle them.

The epistemological version of Otte’s argument, when extracted from the above passage, goes as follows:

- (5) “We can eventually determine if a proposition about a future free choice is true, but we are never able to determine if a conditional of freedom is true.”
- (6) But: “Propositions about future free choices are true *now*, which is before we can determine which ones are true.”
- (7) Therefore: The difference between counterfactuals and futurefactuals cited in (5) “does not imply that what makes a proposition about a future free choice true is any better understood than what makes a conditional of freedom true.”

Unfortunately, this version of the argument, at least, is an unqualified failure.

In the first place, no argument based (as this one is) on the epistemic indeterminateness of the future will succeed in engaging the enemies of middle knowledge. Their acceptance of foreknowledge (if they do accept it) is not premised on our ability to *know* which futurefactuals of freedom are true; it is premised on such futurefactuals *being* true (or false) whether we know it or not. Likewise their rejection of middle knowledge is not based on our failure to *determine* which counterfactuals of freedom are true; it is based on such counterfactuals’ failure to *be* true. Adams’ complaint concerned what (ontologically) *grounds* or *makes* counterfactuals true, not whether we can (epistemically) *determine* them to be true. Outside the circle of anti-realists, at least, such matters are thought to be quite distinct.

In the second place, the argument is invalid regardless of its intended audience. One conclusion that does follow from (5) and (6) is

- (8) The inability of human beings at time *t* to determine which counterfactuals of freedom are true does not (by itself) prevent such counterfactuals from being true at *t*.

But as we noted in the preceding paragraph, no opponent of middle knowledge ever took the position being disputed in (8). This is presumably why (8) is not employed as the conclusion of the argument; but (7), the conclusion that is actually used, simply does not follow from the purely epistemic premises of that argument. Consider the following variation on (5)–(7):

- (5′) We can eventually determine if a proposition about the planets of Sirius is true, but we are never able to determine if a conditional of freedom is true.

- (6') But: Propositions about the planets of Sirius are true *now*, which is before we can determine which ones are true.
- (7') Therefore: The difference between counterfactuals and propositions about the planets of Sirius cited in (5') does not imply that what makes a proposition about the planets of Sirius true is any better understood than what makes a conditional of freedom true.

But while (5') and (6') are true, (7') is false. It is not necessary to determine *whether* it is true that the Sirian system contains a planet larger than Jupiter in order to understand *what it is* for this proposition to be true.

In the third place, notice that Otte's epistemological argument refers only to the capacities that *we* possess: *we* cannot know which futurefactuals of freedom are true, therefore *we* are in the same epistemic position regarding both counterfactuals and futurefactuals. But the real issue concerns the epistemic position of *God*, and it is unclear just what is supposed to follow for the Supreme Being from the fact that *human beings* lack both these epistemic capacities. Is there anything about our own lack of epistemic access to counterfactuals and futurefactuals of freedom to suggest that they must come as a "package deal" (both or neither) for all potential knowers?

Insofar as Otte hints at any justification for such a generalization, it seems to be the following. Though many of the limitations upon human knowledge are ones that we can easily conceive a Supreme Being transcending, this is not so clearly the case when it comes to the strictures on human foreknowledge and middle knowledge; for the latter are a product of the situation adumbrated in (4), which not only denies possession of foreknowledge and middle knowledge to human beings, but also makes it exceedingly obscure how *any* being could have such knowledge. The orthodox conception of God, however, assures us of the reality of divine foreknowledge. God must, then, know futurefactuals of freedom in some basic or logically primitive way that we are unable to grasp.²⁶ But if divine foreknowledge is acceptable in spite of its apparent flouting of (4), we have no grounds for denying a similar indulgence to divine middle knowledge as well. If it is possible for God to *just know* futurefactuals of freedom, and that's all there is to it, there is no apparent reason why He couldn't *just know* counterfactuals of freedom as well.

If this is how the "package" is tied together, it is a pretty flimsy affair. The fact remains that foreknowledge and middle knowledge are distinctively different species of (putative) knowledge.²⁷ The claim that their fates are nevertheless intertwined, so that the one is rationally

acceptable only if the other is also, has been made to depend upon the view that the epistemic grounding of each is equally ungraspable. The latter, in turn, is supposed to follow from (4). But (4) is a generalization based on evidence of *human* incapacities; why it should apply to God has not been explained. Indeed, the suggestion that foreknowledge belongs on the same epistemically basic level as middle knowledge is especially strange in light of the many accounts that have been offered of how foreknowledge might work. For example, one traditional conception of God places Him outside of time, so that every temporal event is present to Him, rather than being separated from Him by some temporal interval.²⁸ As another example, relativity theory has opened up intriguing possibilities for how peculiar properties of space and time, or peculiar particles like *tachyons*, could enable information from the future to reach the present.²⁹ For many defenders of foreknowledge, the view that God *just knows* the future, without the merest hint of an explanation of how this remarkable talent might operate, would be the position of last resort, if not tantamount to an admission of defeat. Even if there are problems (and there surely are) with most of the accounts that have been offered – e.g., with the intelligibility of an atemporal deity, or the paradoxical consequences of retrocausation – such problems, and the chances of solving them satisfactorily, do not at all appear to be in the same epistemic boat as the success or failure of middle knowledge.

Both the scenarios mentioned above (a timeless God and exotic relativity-effects) would allow foreknowledge; neither would render middle knowledge possible if it was not possible on other grounds. Before concluding that the “package deal” has fallen irretrievably apart, however, let us consider one attempt at reconstituting it. Suppose it is claimed that scenarios analogous to those that were sketched on behalf of foreknowledge could also be constructed on behalf of middle knowledge. For a God who surveys all of history from outside of time, the analogue would be a deity who is not confined to the actual world, but occupies a “transcosmic” vantage point from which He can inspect all possible worlds while belonging to none. For space-time loops and relativistic particles, the analogue would be the possibility of communicating with alternative possible worlds, perhaps in something like the manner depicted in the story “All the Myriad Ways” by Larry Niven (cited by David Lewis as an illustration of modal realism).³⁰ But whatever the merits of these scenarios (and they strike me as much more clearly incoherent than their twins introduced in the preceding paragraph), they would do nothing to

bring middle knowledge back into the same epistemic package with foreknowledge.

Take the first suggestion of a transc cosmic God. If we assume modal realism, then a world can be considered actual only from the perspective of that same world; from a transc cosmic perspective, on the other hand, all worlds (or none?) would be actual, and no counterfactuals at all would be true (since the truth-conditions for counterfactuals make essential reference to a unique actual world). If modal realism is instead denied, the actual world would presumably be identifiable from a transc cosmic standpoint by its concreteness, in contrast to the abstractness of the other possible worlds. But which of the latter would be the world that *would* have been actual if the antecedent of some counterfactual of freedom had obtained? Would it display a ghostly semi-reality, intermediate between the concrete and the abstract? (Does middle *knowledge* require some sort of middle *being* to ground it?) No such questions arise regarding the relevance of divine atemporality to foreknowledge, since the world whose future grounds the truth of futurefactuals of freedom is readily identifiable from an atemporal perspective as *the only world that is actual*. The same point can be made about the second scenario as well. Even if we could receive messages from other possible worlds, and we succeeded in identifying the possible world from which a particular transc cosmic message issued, we would be no closer to answering the question upon which middle knowledge depends: Is that world, or is it not, the one that *would* have been actual if such-and-such conditions had obtained?

The epistemological argument, then, fails to associate middle knowledge with foreknowledge in any sense that would require us to accept the former if we accept the latter. But perhaps Otte's non-epistemological argument will fare better. It looks like this:

- (9) "The states of affairs that make a proposition about a future free choice true will be actual at some time, whereas the states of affairs that a conditional of freedom is based on may never be actual."
- (10) But: "Propositions about future free choices are true *now*, which is ... before the states of affairs that 'ground' their truth are actual."
- (11) Therefore: The difference between counterfactuals and futurefactuals cited in (9) "does not imply that what makes a proposition about a future free choice true is any better understood than what makes a conditional of freedom true."

One virtue of this version is that its premises advert to the sort of facts that seem relevant to the *grounding* of counterfactuals and futurefactuals, not merely to human epistemic capacities.

Nevertheless, this argument is no more persuasive than the first one. The principal reason is that foreknowledge is grounded in something that actually happens, and it is the occurrence of that future event that sanctions the foreknowledge of it. In contrast, whatever grounds the truth of counterfactuals of freedom is something other than an actually occurrent event.³¹ The indeterminateness of those states of affairs in virtue of which counterfactuals of freedom are true is therefore of a wholly different order from the indeterminateness of those states of affairs in virtue of which futurefactuals of freedom are true. Though the latter are *not yet* determinate, they nevertheless *will be*. Yet according to Otte, this is to count for no more than if they were never determinate at all. This is a position that needs a good deal more justification than has been forthcoming if it is to be considered at all credible.

In the second place, if the fact that future events are included in the actual world is of so little import that they are considered no better grounded than nonactual possibilities, it makes it correspondingly easier for the orthodox theist to escape Otte's dilemma altogether by abandoning foreknowledge. Some philosophers have understood the indeterminateness of the future to entail that statements about future contingencies are neither true nor false. Otte evidently does not accept this entailment, since he holds that such statements are true *now*. But he does not say *why* he rejects it. In the absence of any good reason against it, the theist who grants Otte's claim regarding the indeterminateness of the future would seem well within his rights in concluding that futurefactuals of freedom are neither true nor false, and that foreknowledge is therefore not a consequence of the traditional doctrine of divine omniscience after all. If Otte is also correct in linking the epistemic fate of futurefactuals with that of counterfactuals, then the proper conclusion to draw is that God is not in a position to know *either* of them.

In the third place, what actually follows from the argument is

- (12) The nonactuality at *t* of those states of affairs that ground counterfactuals of freedom does not (by itself) prevent such counterfactuals from being true at *t*.

But like (8), the conclusion that actually follows from Otte's epistemological argument, (12) is nothing that the opponents of middle knowledge

have ever been concerned to challenge.³² By suggesting that the most serious threat to middle knowledge is its failure to be grounded appropriately in the actual world, Otte sets up a straw man that diverts our attention from the real malady with which middle knowledge is afflicted.

In order to implement the strategy adumbrated in (1) and (2), Otte must (among other things) come up with a characterization of the quality of groundedness possessed by futurefactuals of freedom. Given the comparison he ultimately wishes to make with counterfactuals of freedom, he draws particular attention to the way in which futurefactuals of freedom are ungrounded in any actual states of affairs – or, more perspicuously, the way in which such futurefactuals are true at (earlier) times at which the states of affairs which ground them are not (yet) actual. Since this is still not precisely the situation that obtains with counterfactuals, whose grounding may *never* be actual, Otte must show that this minor difference between the two cases does not justify the assignment of a different value to their qualities of groundedness. He accomplishes this, not so much by closely comparing the two cases and concluding that their grounding is similarly structured (i.e., in the way that Plantinga does for the theological and analogical arguments in *God and Other Minds*), as by insisting that the two cases and concluding that their grounding is similarly as by insisting that what they have in common – the fact that the truth of such propositions does not depend on the present (or past) actuality of those states of affairs that ground them – renders them equally *mysterious*. So Otte concludes, “Although there are important differences between conditionals of freedom and propositions about future free choices, there is no reason to think that we have a better understanding of what it is for propositions about future free choices to be true than we do of what it is for conditionals of freedom to be true.”³³

This assessment of futurefactuals of freedom, it should be noted, is exceedingly dubious. The fact that those states of affairs that make a proposition about a future free choice true are not *now* actual but nevertheless *will be* actual, far from rendering such propositions mysterious, is precisely what constitutes their truth. Certainly there is no mystery *now* about what grounds the truth of some pundit’s remark on March 15, 1988, that Michael Dukakis *will be* the Democratic nominee for President. It is Dukakis’s subsequent status as the nominee that made it true *then* (before the states of affairs that grounded it were actual) that he would be the nominee. Likewise, if the statement that Jesse Jackson *will be* the nominee in 1992 is true *now*, it is because his being the nominee *will be* actual in

1992. Though Otte treats such cases as mysterious, it is unclear just what the mystery is supposed to be.

Counterfactuals of freedom, unlike futurefactuals, may indeed be mysterious; as a skeptic regarding middle knowledge, I happen to believe that they are. Otte grants their mysteriousness, but for a very different reason: it is so he can then point out (incorrectly) that futurefactuals of freedom share this same mysteriousness, and conclude that anyone who accepts foreknowledge while demanding an account of middle knowledge is being unreasonable. But Otte has traced the mysteriousness of counterfactuals of freedom to the wrong source. Whether a statement requires contemporaneous (or any) grounding in the actual world depends on the kind of statement that it is. If a statement is not of a kind that requires such grounding, it is unclear why its lack should be mysterious. It is not as though actual (contemporaneous) grounding is the only sort available; pastfactuals, like futurefactuals of freedom, have a noncontemporaneous grounding; statements of pure possibility, like counterfactuals of freedom, have a nonactual grounding.³⁴

Now the difference in grounding cited in (9) is a difference with respect to a standard for *futurefactuals*. (11) is quite correct, then, in pointing out that the failure of counterfactuals to satisfy this standard is not an adequate basis for impugning their intelligibility. But the reason the difference between counterfactuals and futurefactuals cited in (9) “does not imply that what makes a proposition about a future free choice true is any better understood than what makes a conditional of freedom true” is not because of something more fundamental that they *share* (a certain quality of groundedness based on (3), (4), or simply the sheer mysteriousness of their truth); rather, it is because of something they *do not* share: a single standard of grounding. The argument contained in (9)–(11) is therefore irrelevant to the project of throwing foreknowledge and middle knowledge into the same epistemic boat in such a way that some of the “good name” of the former (such as it is) might rub off on the latter. If counterfactuals of freedom are problematic, it must be in relation to their own standard of grounding, not that of some other variety of proposition. But we never get a glimpse of that standard in Otte’s article; indeed, it is a significant feature of his argument that the nature of counterfactuals remains largely a cipher. It is not surprising, then, that the case against middle knowledge is transformed in Otte’s hands into the divorce of counterfactuals of freedom from the actual world, a case quite different from the one that the main opponents of middle knowledge would themselves wish to make.

Let us return, then, to Adams' original complaint about the grounding of counterfactuals of freedom. It isn't that counterfactuals of freedom lack any grounding in what has already occurred or what is presently determinate (a position that would involve Adams in inconsistency if he also endorsed foreknowledge). It isn't even that counterfactuals of freedom may lack any grounding whatsoever in the actual world. Rather, the problem with counterfactuals of freedom is that there appears to be a *contradiction* at their very heart. Skepticism regarding the possibility of middle knowledge arises primarily from the fact that the force of the 'would' connecting antecedent and consequent seems incompatible with the status of counterfactuals of freedom as propositions about the free actions of free agents. When Adams conjures up his two candidates for the role of what *makes* counterfactuals of freedom true, he selects them for the express purpose of having something to validate the 'would' that is such a characteristic feature of these expressions. It is only after these two candidates are in place that he evaluates them according to the second criterion: their compatibility with the assumed freedom of the agent. Adams' rejection of both candidates is a direct consequence of the antagonism between these two criteria.

Before spelling out the precise nature of the incoherence Adams claims to discover at the heart of counterfactuals of freedom, it is worth considering why Otte never addresses this question himself in the course of a defense of middle knowledge geared specifically to Adams' attack. I think the reason for this omission is that Adams' specific complaint against counterfactuals of freedom is part of what makes up the ongoing stalemate between the opposing forces, and Otte has designed his strategy precisely in order to find a way *around* this deadlock, not to add one more layer of forces to the current standoff. Unfortunately, it is harder to avoid the battle of entrenched intuitions that separates the two sides than Otte may have imagined. His strategy of comparing counterfactuals and futurefactuals of freedom inevitably relies upon a particular way of understanding the logic of counterfactuals. Adams' rejection of middle knowledge also depends upon a particular way of reading counterfactuals. But these two readings happen to conflict. Otte's strategy, then, far from avoiding those substantive issues over which the opposing forces have reached an impasse, actually presupposes a particular position on one of those contested issues. Let us see how this happens.

Otte wants to show that counterfactuals and futurefactuals of freedom are alethically similar, so that anyone who accepts the possibility of true

futurefactuals of freedom is rationally compelled to accept the possibility of true counterfactuals of freedom. Now the modal picture presupposed by the futurefactual of freedom *A will do y* is one in which (i) there is a plurality of possible worlds sharing their past history with the actual world but diverging from each other into the future, (ii) in at least one of these worlds *A* does *y*, (iii) in at least one of these worlds *A* does not do *y*, and (iv) a privileged status (i.e., *actuality*) is claimed on behalf of one of the worlds in which *A* does *y*. The central move in Otte's argument, however – that “an account of what it is for propositions about future choices to be true is very similar to an account of what it is for conditionals of freedom to be true”³⁵ –, has no hope of acceptance unless the modal picture presupposed by counterfactuals of freedom is the spitting image of the one just sketched for futurefactuals. That is, Otte's whole strategy is built on the assumption that the counterfactual of freedom *If x were the case, A would do y* is such that (i') there is a plurality of possible worlds sharing their past history with *the-actual-world-minimally-modified-to-accommodate-x* but diverging from each other into the future, (ii') in at least one of these worlds *A* does *y*, (iii') in at least one of these worlds *A* does not do *y*, and (iv') a privileged status (i.e., “counterfactuality,” or *the way things would be if ...*) is claimed on behalf of one of the worlds in which *A* does *y*. In other words, just as there is a particular way things will turn out under actual conditions (without this closing off the alternatives required by free agency), so there is also a particular way things will turn out under specified counterfactual conditions (without this closing off the alternatives required by free agency either).

At the beginning of this essay I claimed that Otte's article, while novel in the strategy it pursues, also casts into sharper relief one of the main reasons why middle knowledge has appeared plausible to its various supporters all along. What I had in mind when I made that claim is Otte's assumption, adumbrated in the previous paragraph, that counterfactuals of freedom (with the exception of their characteristic counterfactual shift) share exactly the same modal structure as futurefactuals of freedom. Plantinga makes this assumption as well:

suppose we think about a state of affairs that includes Curley's having been offered \$20,000, all relevant conditions – Curley's financial situation, his general acquisitive tendencies, his venality – being the same as in fact, in the actual world. Our question is really whether there is something Curley would have done had this state of affairs been actual ...

The answer, I should think, is obvious and affirmative. There is something Curley would have done, had that state of affairs obtained ... [As to *what* he would have done,] we may not know what that answer is; but we should reject out of hand, I should think, the suggestion that there simply is none.³⁶

A detailed critique of Plantinga's own defense of middle knowledge is obviously outside the scope of this paper; but notice that his positive grounds for accepting counterfactuals of freedom, as expressed in the above passage, rest squarely on the same assumption as that of Otte: that just as there is a particular way things will turn out under actual conditions, so there is also a particular way things will turn out under specified counterfactual conditions. It is this assumption, I believe, that is primarily responsible for encouraging the partisans of middle knowledge in the notion that there is no more problem with counterfactuals of freedom than there is with futurefactuals (or other indicatives) of freedom.

This is a highly controversial assumption; moreover, it is an assumption that is rejected by the opponents of middle knowledge, for whom the apparent similarity between counterfactuals and futurefactuals of freedom (and between subjunctives and indicatives generally) is an illusion. The reason they take this position is that a *would* seems to imply a certain necessity (which is what prompts David Lewis to include the necessity-operator as part of his symbolization for counterfactual conditionals). If it is true that, under given conditions (whether actual or counterfactual), *A* might do *y* and *A* might not do *y*, then one cannot also say that under those conditions *A would* do *y*. Yet the assumption that *A* is free with respect to *y* entails (on the libertarian conception of freedom shared by all other participants in the middle-knowledge debate and not disputed by Otte) that, under given conditions, *A* might do *y* and *A* might not do *y*. Therefore, if *A* is free with respect to *y*, it cannot be true to say that *A would* do *y*. This, in short, is the basis for Adams' claim that all counterfactuals of freedom are necessarily false.

But one *can* say, under those same conditions, that *A will* do *y*. Thus the genuine crux in counterfactuals of freedom, as opposed to the pseudo-cruces discussed by Otte, cannot be used to book passage for middle knowledge on the same epistemic boat as foreknowledge. The difference in futurefactuals that renders them compatible with free agency is that their truth is grounded in the actualization of *one* particular pathway through the branching patterns of future possibilities compatible with the actual past and present. Since they entail only that *A* do *y* in *one* of the

relevant worlds (namely, that one whose future turns out to be actual), they leave open plenty of other relevantly similar worlds in which *A* may refrain from *y*, as the conditions for free agency require.

Counterfactuals of freedom, on the other hand, cannot be grounded in the actualization of one pathway out of a plurality of possibilities. (That is the real significance of their disjunction from the actual world, of which Otte makes so much). How, then, are they grounded? In the semantics for counterfactuals developed by Lewis, this ground involves a kind of monopoly exercised by counterfactuals over all the relevant possible worlds: the claim that *A* would do *y* if antecedent condition *x* were to obtain entails that *A* do *y* in *all* the relevantly similar *x*-worlds, leaving none available for *A*'s pursuit of other options. Assuming that this reading of counterfactuals is correct, there appears to be an insuperable obstacle to any consequent of a true counterfactual conditional giving expression to a free action. But if this reading of counterfactuals is somehow mistaken, Otte needs to show why; the issue cannot be avoided through a strategy of "neutrally" comparing middle knowledge with foreknowledge, since this strategy itself rests upon a particular reading of counterfactuals, and thus assumes the very point at issue.^{37, 38}

Notes

1. Otte, "A Defense of Middle Knowledge," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 21 (1987): 161–169; Kvanvig, *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God*, Library of Philosophy and Religion (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan Press, 1986), pp. 135–137; and Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 140.
2. Robert Merrihew Adams gives a brief account of this controversy in "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (April 1977): 109–117, and identifies Luis de Molina, a Jesuit theologian, as the probable originator of the term "middle knowledge" (or *scientia media*).
3. Middle knowledge becomes a prominent feature of Plantinga's free will defense in *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974), ch. 9.
4. "Without the assumption of middle knowledge it is much harder to formulate a plausible deductive atheological argument from evil; and it is correspondingly much easier, I should think, to formulate the free will defense on the assumption that middle knowledge is impossible. If no counterfactuals of freedom are true, then God could not have known in detail what would have happened for each of the various courses of creative activity open to him. He would not, in general, have known, for a given world *W*, which world would be actual if he were to strongly actualize *T(W)*. He would have had detailed

acquaintance with each possible world W , but he wouldn't have had detailed knowledge, for any such world, of what would happen if he were to strongly actualize $T(W)$. But this should make the free will defender's job easier, not harder." From Plantinga's replies to his critics in James E. Tomberlin & Peter van Inwagen, eds., *Alvin Plantinga, Profiles: An International Series on Contemporary Philosophers and Logicians*, vol. 5 (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Reidel, 1985), p. 379.

5. In, respectively, "Human Freedom and Divine Providence: Some New Thoughts on an Old Problem," *Religious Studies* 15 (December 1979): 491–510; and "Divine Omniscience and Human Freedom: A 'Middle Knowledge' Perspective," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (July 1984): 291–302.
6. "Nomo(theo)logical Necessity," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (October 1987): 383–402.
7. Robert Adams, for example, makes such claims as the following throughout "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil": "I deny the possibility of middle knowledge, because I deny that the relevant subjunctive conditionals are true" (p. 117); and he reiterates this charge in his contribution to the Plantinga Festschrift, op. cit. A similar position is taken by James W. Felt in "Impossible Worlds," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (September 1983): 251–265, and in "God's Choice: Reflections on Evil in a Created World," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (October 1984): 370–377; and by William Hasker in "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge," *Nous* 20 (December 1986): 545–557, and in "Reply to Basinger on Power Entailment," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (January 1988): 87–90. Anthony Kenny, another opponent of middle knowledge, also argues against the possibility of there being any true counterfactuals of freedom; but he restricts his argument to the situation of cosmic deliberation prior to God's selection of a world to be actual, leaving it unclear what he thinks about the possibility of God possessing middle knowledge *after* a world has been actualized. The heart of Kenny's argument is to be found on page 70 of *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979).
8. Op. cit.
9. P. 163.
10. "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge," p. 547.
11. *Alvin Plantinga*, p. 374.
12. "Divine Omniscience and Human Freedom: A 'Middle Knowledge' Perspective," p. 300.
13. Lumping under this single rubric all the allegedly deficient features of middle knowledge mentioned earlier in this paragraph may suggest a unity that is simply not there – e.g., under a very natural reading of these phrases, what it is for something to *be* true is going to be quite different from what *causes* it to be true. Nevertheless, it is convenient not to have to make these distinctions quite yet, since the precise nature of Adams' complaint against counterfactuals of freedom will be unpacked only near the end of the paper.
14. Otte discloses his strategy and its appeal to foreknowledge on page 166: "Adams rejected the possibility of true conditionals of freedom because he did

- not believe an account could be given of what it is by virtue of which they are true or false. Hence if there is no acceptable account of what it is for propositions about future free choices to be true, Adams should reject them also. In the following I will argue that it is no less difficult to account for the truth of propositions about future free choices than it is to account for the truth of conditionals of freedom.”
15. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967.
 16. P. 165.
 17. One theistic response (though not one I would be inclined to make myself) might go as follows: “I never could see much in the view that propositions about future events are neither true nor false, but it appears now that I was too hasty in my judgment. Otte has just convinced me that it is irrational to accept foreknowledge while rejecting middle knowledge. But middle knowledge is *obviously* unacceptable. That means that I’m forced to reconsider foreknowledge. But perhaps this isn’t as bad as it seems, if orthodoxy requires only *omniscience*; for I can have omniscience without foreknowledge so long as the supposed objects of foreknowledge – namely, propositions about future events – have no truth-value. And come to think of it, perhaps they don’t.”
 18. This seems to me to be the point in Adams’ argument at which a counterattack by the forces of middle knowledge has the greatest potential for success. I hope to deal with this issue in some detail on another occasion.
 19. Otte, p. 167.
 20. *Ibid.*, p. 168. In saying that “the states of affairs that a conditional of freedom is based on may never be actual,” Otte is evidently rejecting the view (possibly held by Plantinga – see note 24 below) that “the states of affairs that a conditional of freedom is based on” are to be understood primarily as characteristics the agent possesses in the actual world. Instead, Otte is assuming that the “basis” or “ground” for a counterfactual of freedom consists only of states of affairs (those described in the consequent?) which belong to worlds in which the antecedent of the counterfactual obtains. If the antecedent happens to become actual (and the counterfactual is true), the states of affairs that ground the counterfactual will also be actual; but such an occurrence would be sheer happenstance, and thus such states of affairs “may never be actual.” In this paper I accept, at least for the sake of argument, Otte’s assumption that the ground of counterfactuals of freedom should be construed as nonactual.
 21. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. *Ibid.*
 24. Plantinga appears to disagree. On page 374 of *Alvin Plantinga*, after expressing skepticism regarding Adams’ demand for grounding, he cites as a paradigm of well-groundedness a pastfactual about the performance yesterday of some action *A*, and then comments: “Perhaps you will say that what grounds its truth is just that in fact I did *A*. But this isn’t much of an answer; and at any rate the same kind of answer is available in the case of Curley. For what grounds the truth of the counterfactual, we may say, is just that in fact

Curley is such that if he had been offered a \$35,000 bribe, he would have freely taken it.” There is undoubtedly a sufficiently vacuous sense of ‘ground’ in which the demand for something to ground the truth of a counterfactual of freedom might deserve such cavalier treatment. But Plantinga would presumably not dismiss in this way a request for the *truth-conditions* for a counterfactual of freedom, nor deny that such truth-conditions would differ significantly from those for a pastfactual of freedom. Yet such truth-conditions are much closer to what Adams is requesting than the sort of “Snow-is-white”-is-true-*iff*-snow-is-white grounding that Plantinga seems to be assuming in this passage.

25. Op. cit., pp. 167–168. The complete paragraph from which this passage is taken continues for two more sentences, but they simply repeat points made earlier in the paragraph.
26. Otte endorses the plausibility of this proposal on page 165.
27. Middle knowledge certainly differs from foreknowledge in its *range*. But suppose it is argued that, while the *objects* of middle knowledge do not coincide with the objects of foreknowledge, the *epistemic capability* that is brought into play is exactly the same in each case. While Otte does not make this claim himself, other supporters of middle knowledge have suggested that foreknowledge is simply a special case of middle knowledge – namely, knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom whose antecedents are true in the actual world. Basinger, for example, writes as follows: “God knows that the individual will in fact freely perform a certain action because he knows that the relevant hypothetical conditional of freedom is true and has decided to actualize a world in which the state of affairs described in the antecedent of this conditional will obtain” (“Divine Omniscience and Human Freedom,” op. cit., p. 301). A similar account of foreknowledge is offered by Kvanvig, op. cit., ch. 4, and Craig, op. cit., ch. 12; and Molina himself puts the notion of middle knowledge to a similar use. Notice, however, that this assimilation of foreknowledge to middle knowledge is available only *after* the integrity of middle knowledge has been vindicated; it cannot be used to buttress a move in an argument where the viability of middle knowledge is precisely the point at issue.
28. Aquinas is only the most prominent of many philosophers who have adopted this position. See, e.g., *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 14, a. 13.
29. For a recent discussion of this issue, see William Lane Craig, “Tachyons, Time Travel, and Divine Omniscience,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 85 (March 1988): 135–150.
30. *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 124–125.
31. See note 20 above.
32. James Felt, op. cit., is perhaps an exception; but the doubts he has about middle knowledge reflect larger doubts that he has about possible worlds in general, and the latter lead naturally to skepticism regarding any proposal for nonactual grounding.
33. P. 168.
34. The last claim in this sentence is intended only to assert a difference between

statements of pure possibility and counterfactuals of freedom, on the one hand, and statements about how things go in the actual world, on the other hand (where the difference is simply that the former do *not* make assertions about how things go in the actual world). This is also the sense in which I have been construing Otte's denial of actual-world grounding to counterfactuals of freedom. Neither Otte's claim about the grounding of counterfactuals of freedom nor my claim about the grounding of statements of pure possibilities should be interpreted in any stronger sense than this – particularly any sense that would beg the question against actualism about possible worlds.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
36. *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 179–180.
37. Regarding the question of whether the cause of middle knowledge might be advanced through a revised reading of counterfactuals, the most obvious course would be to adopt the “uniqueness assumption” involved in Robert Stalnaker's semantics for counterfactual conditionals, according to which the relevantly similar worlds that are appealed to in the analysis of counterfactuals are to be restricted to that unique world which is “closest” (or *most* similar) to the actual world. One question is whether this uniqueness assumption is compatible with the possible-worlds implications of libertarian freedom. Another question is whether the uniqueness assumption is a plausible assumption to make in its own right, regardless of its implications for free agency. David Lewis offers his own reasons for rejecting the uniqueness assumption in §4, ch. 3, of *Counterfactuals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), while Stalnaker himself, on page 134 of *Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books, The MIT Press, 1984), admits that the uniqueness assumption “is, without a doubt, a grossly implausible assumption to make about the kind of similarity relation we use to interpret conditionals,” while noting that “it is an assumption which the abstract semantic theory that I want to defend does make.” His reply is that, “like many idealizing assumptions made in abstract semantic theories, it may be relaxed in the application of the theory.” It appears doubtful, then, that the uniqueness assumption will be much use in the defense of real-life counterfactuals of freedom, regardless of who has the better of the theoretical dispute between Stalnaker and Lewis.
38. My thanks to Bob Adams for his advice on the penultimate draft of this paper.