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HASKER ON MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE

Rod Bertolet

This paper disputes two arguments William Hasker gives against the doctrine of middle knowledge in his book *God, Time, and Knowledge*. Hasker argues that middle knowledge cannot ground counterfactuals of freedom, and that the standard account of counterfactuals is inapplicable to counterfactuals of freedom. I maintain that the first argument is quite inconclusive, and that the second is wrong to deny that the standard semantics for counterfactuals applies to counterfactuals of freedom. I further suggest that reliance on the standard semantics for such counterfactuals is not something that the proponents of middle knowledge need accept.

I wish to question two of the arguments against the doctrine of middle knowledge that William Hasker offers in his book *God, Time, and Knowledge*.¹ My purpose is not to defend middle knowledge, but rather to suggest that these arguments are not compelling against that view. The arguments in question are not the only ones Hasker gives, so I will not be discussing his full case against middle knowledge. But as Hasker himself points out, all of the arguments are important:

...it is clear that in a controversy as heated as this one, it is a merit and not a defect to assemble multiple independent arguments for the same conclusion; a single argument, even if apparently unimpeachable, is too likely to be treated with suspicion when it contravenes strong inclinations.²

It is important, then, to know whether these arguments carry any force, even if they do not exhaust Hasker's criticisms.

I. *Middle Knowledge*

What would it be to have middle knowledge? As Hasker formulates it, the doctrine is that

for each possible free creature that might exist, and for each possible situation in which such a creature might make a free choice, there is a truth, known to God prior to and independent of any decision on God's part, concerning what definite choice that creature would freely make if placed in that situation.³

Middle knowledge would be handy for God to have, because it offers risk-free creation without the subordination of human wills to causal determinism.

Knowing what you would do if you were to exist and find yourself in various circumstances, God could choose whether to create you and your compatriots depending on whether the upshot suited his purposes. If divine foreknowledge and freedom are, despite what Hasker insists throughout his book, compatible, then middle knowledge provides a powerful account of how it is that God can know what your future free acts will be.

Such knowledge would be knowledge of what Hasker, following recent usage, calls counterfactuals of freedom. What is distinctive about the contemporary theory of middle knowledge, as rediscovered by Alvin Plantinga,⁴ is its reliance on the semantic analysis of counterfactuals in terms of possible worlds, an analysis unavailable for the 16th Century version of the theory. As Hasker notes,

the central idea of this semantics is that a counterfactual is true if some possible world in which the antecedent and the consequent are both true is more similar to the actual world than any in which the antecedent is true and the consequent false.⁵

While I shall come to criticize Hasker for undue reliance on this analysis, I shall assume it for the time being.

Although Hasker does not set his arguments out in this fashion, they may be regarded as posing a dilemma for the theory of middle knowledge. True counterfactuals of freedom would have to be either contingent or necessary. Hasker argues that if we take them to be contingent, we find that they are not grounded in anything. But if they are necessary, they are not counterfactuals of freedom. So either way, they are dubious creatures, of no use to the theory of middle knowledge. In section II, I will challenge Hasker's claim to have shown that such propositions are ungrounded if contingent. In section III, I will attempt to show that his argument that such propositions must be necessary if the theory of middle knowledge is true fails. If I am right about this, Hasker has not shown that true counterfactuals of freedom are anything but perfectly respectable, adequately grounded contingent truths: no dilemma emerges from these arguments.

II. *The Ground of Counterfactuals of Freedom*

Hasker's first objection to the theory of middle knowledge is that it cannot answer the question of what the ground of the truth of counterfactuals of freedom is—what it is that makes counterfactuals of freedom true.⁶ Plantinga, perhaps unintentionally echoing a view to be found in Suarez, seems to hold that it is simply “an ultimate fact about the agent in question that, if placed in the indicated circumstances, she would act as the counterfactual states,” a fact that “requires no analysis or ‘grounding’ in terms of further, non-counterfactual states of affairs.”⁷ Hasker claims that this runs afoul of the intuition that

In order for a (contingent) conditional state of affairs to obtain, its obtaining must be grounded in some categorical state of affairs. More colloquially, truth about "what *would be the case...if*" must be grounded in truths about what *is in fact* the case.⁸

Hasker suggests this is the case for material and causal conditionals—think for instance of explaining what *makes* it true that a pane of glass is fragile in terms of facts about its microstructure. This is plausible, but the analysis of causal conditionals is controversial: Lewis analyzes causation in terms of counterfactual dependence between events.⁹ With this in mind—for that matter without this in mind—I suggest that Hasker's insistence that some categorical state of affairs must underlie the truth of a counterfactual is not very persuasive. While Hasker is not entirely explicit about how the argument proceeds, if it is to avoid assuming the point at issue it must first move from his claims about material and causal conditionals to the generalization that all conditional states of affairs must be grounded in categorical states of affairs, and then from this generalization to the conclusion that counterfactuals of freedom must be grounded in this way. While the second step seems safe enough, the first is far from assured. Even if we set aside the prevalent scepticism about whether material conditionals are genuine surrogates for any 'if-then' statements, the controversy over the proper analysis of causal conditionals, and the fact that Plantinga and those who share his views do not have the slightest inclination to accept the relevant generalization about conditional states of affairs, the first inference is certainly not irresistible. Generalizing about all conditionals from facts about material and causal conditionals seems unduly hasty, and the support for such a generalization seems correspondingly weak. When we turn to counterfactuals of freedom, insisting that the truth of what I would do if I were relieved of my position by the governor be grounded in what is in fact the case seems a bit too much like—I do not say *just* like—demanding that we offer truth conditions for alethic modalities solely in terms of what is in fact the case, without recourse to the truth value of statements in possible worlds distinct from the actual world. That can't be done; but this merely shows the constraint to be unreasonable—and it may be equally unreasonable to insist that counterfactuals of freedom be grounded in truths about what is in fact the case. While I don't find Plantinga's ultimate and unanalyzable facts very satisfying, I do not think that Hasker's rejection of them has been sustained in a compelling fashion.

In discussion, Hasker allowed that this sort of complaint would be in order if he "had claimed to conclusively settle the controversy on the basis of this intuition," but that this misrepresents his intent. He maintains that his intention was rather to "cite the intuition as one which holds considerable weight for me and, I would suppose, for a number of other philosophers as well."¹⁰ Further, "if a philosopher finds little or no force in the appeal, it would be

fatuous to assume she must yield to the intuition just because it seems compelling to me." I certainly do not wish to question Hasker's account of what he intended to be doing in offering these considerations, but I think the reader may be forgiven for taking a different view of what these were. The argument in question appears in a section entitled "Objections to Middle Knowledge," and Hasker notes before giving the argument that if the discussion is to be advanced by opponents of middle knowledge, "more substantial arguments are needed [and] are available."¹¹ This does not prepare one to expect that the 'first argument' is really autobiographical in nature, not even if the lives of others are demonstrably similar. My point is that if the argument is as weak as I claim, it is not at all convincing, and hence not particularly substantial. Hasker does explicitly indicate that he does not regard the argument as decisive.¹² But he also suggests, by the phrase "more substantial arguments," that he hopes to take us beyond the "general considerations of plausibility" on which many opponents of middle knowledge rely.¹³ This is something that I submit he has not done with this argument. That counterfactuals of freedom are contingent is, so far as these considerations go, still a live possibility.

With this in mind, let us pursue the question of the ground of counterfactuals of freedom a little further. The fault of a position like Plantinga's, Hasker insists, is that it cannot provide a *noncounterfactual* ground for counterfactuals of freedom. Why are Plantinga and other proponents of middle knowledge so unperturbed by this failure? Consider what Plantinga has to say, by way of analogy, about the ground of his freely performing action *A* yesterday:

What was or is it that grounded or founded my doing so? I wasn't *caused* to do so by anything else; nothing relevant *entails* that I did so. So what grounds the truth of the proposition in question? 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.¹⁴

This is again the unanalyzable 'counterfactual fact' about Curley that Hasker finds dissatisfying. But what is the answer to Plantinga's question about the ground of the proposition that he freely did *A* yesterday? We cannot explain this in terms of the "character, psychological tendencies, and the like of the agent"¹⁵ without lapsing into causal determinism, and we cannot explain it by appeal to God's doings without lapsing into theological determinism. Given those limitations, what *can* we say about the ground of the proposition that Plantinga did *A* freely yesterday? My suggestion is that Plantinga's remarks and the libertarian view that Hasker presupposes are cotenable. Hasker disagrees; in discussion he insisted that the ground of the proposition in

question "is simply the *event* of his doing *A* yesterday."¹⁶ He added, correctly, that no such event grounds counterfactuals of freedom.

I'm afraid that I agree with Plantinga that this isn't much of an answer. It certainly isn't, and on a libertarian theory cannot be, much like our answer to the question of why the pane of glass is fragile. As Hasker conceded, "it's perfectly true that libertarian free will involves choices which lack sufficient causes and are thus in some sense 'ungrounded'—though not, let me point out, unmotivated."¹⁷ I don't find Hasker's 'ground' of the proposition that Plantinga freely did *A* yesterday or Plantinga's 'ground' of the proposition that Curley would have taken the bribe very satisfactory. But more importantly, I don't see that one of these claims should disconcert me more than the other. So I do not see that the grounding objection shows that counterfactuals of freedom cannot be contingent. But Hasker next argues on other grounds that they must, if the theory of middle knowledge is true, be necessary.

III. *The Modal Status of Counterfactuals of Freedom*

Hasker's second (and novel) objection is that the theory of middle knowledge gets the modal status of counterfactuals of freedom wrong, ruling them necessary when they ought to be contingent. If this argument is sound, it shows that the proponents of middle knowledge have done themselves in, since the counterfactuals in question will not be counterfactuals of *freedom* at all. So it is a very serious objection. How does it run? When we consider conditionals such as 'If David were to have stayed in Keilah, Saul would have besieged the city,' much escapes our notice—there is a wealth of detail concerning the facts about the world that goes unspecified. God, Hasker points out, is in a quite different epistemic situation. "Surely, the antecedents of the conditionals *he* considers must include *everything* that might conceivably be relevant to Saul's deciding one way or the other."¹⁸ Hasker suggests that we understand the conditional God considers as an initial-segment counterfactual, "in which the antecedent specifies a *complete initial segment of a possible world* up to a given point in time, and the consequent an event that may or [may] not take place at that time."¹⁹ Letting '*A*' symbolize a proposition specifying the entire initial segment of the possible world God considers as the one in which Saul makes his decision about attacking the city, and using '>' as our counterfactual connective, we have

(10) *A* > Saul besieges Keilah

and its contrary

(11) *A* > Saul does not besiege Keilah.

We suppose that the first of these is true. But now what of its modal status?

What would it take for it to be false at some other possible world, that is, contingent? Hasker writes

The answer is that (10) might be false if the actual world were different than it is; what is crucial is the similarity of envisaged possible worlds to the actual world, and so if the actual world were a different world (in ways we need not attempt to specify) than the one which is in fact actual, it might turn out that the world specified in (11) would be more similar to *that* world than is the world specified in (10), in which case (11) would be true and (10) false.²⁰

This is how Hasker thinks (10) might be false, but he argues that this little story can't be told without violating "the fundamental idea that underlies the possible-worlds semantics for counterfactuals."²¹ This, because there is no role for comparative similarity to play in assessing initial-segment counterfactuals.

The point of comparative similarity, Hasker maintains, is to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of the worlds in question, and to clarify what would otherwise be an ambiguity in our counterfactuals. When we contemplate Lewis' example, "If kangaroos had no tails, they would topple over," are we to consider relevant worlds in which these beasts have access to crutches, and salvage their dignity in a tailless world by figuring out how to negotiate the outback on those props? No, Lewis tells us, "Those worlds are too far away from ours. What is meant by the counterfactual is that, things being pretty much as they are—the scarcity of crutches for kangaroos being pretty much as it actually is, the kangaroos' inability to use crutches being pretty much as it actually is, and so on—if kangaroos had no tails they would topple over."²² The point of comparative similarity between worlds, Hasker claims, "is to place limits on the worlds that are relevant for the evaluation of a given counterfactual."²³ This is correct—in part. Now, enter Hasker's objection:

But of course, (10) is already maximally limited in this way; it already includes *everything* about the envisaged world up until the time when Saul makes his decision. With regard to initial-segment counterfactuals, then, comparative similarity has no work left to do.²⁴

I have three criticisms of the way Hasker proceeds here. The first is that his remarks do not clearly show anything about the modal status of (10). The second is that he is wrong to resist the applicability of a theory such as Lewis' to initial-segment counterfactuals. The third is that he is wrong to tie the evaluation of counterfactuals to the Lewis-style comparative similarity theory in the way he does in the first place. I shall develop these points in turn.

A. Modality

What does Hasker's claim that (10) is already maximally limited have to do with the modal status of (10)? Hasker continues,

Ask yourself this question: In evaluating (10), *why* should it make a difference whether the actual world is as it is, or is a world different in various ways from this one? After all, if A^* were actual, then *neither* "our" actual world nor that other one would *be* actual—so why should the truth of (10) depend in any way on which of those worlds is actual as things now stand?²⁵

We do not yet have the full force of Hasker's objection before us, but notice that, at least as Hasker develops the point, this is the wrong question. What Hasker claims he is going to show is that the theory of middle knowledge gets the *modal status* of counterfactuals of freedom wrong, but what he asks here is why the *truth* of (10) should depend on what the actual world is like. On what does the modal status of a proposition turn? In the standard semantics for modal logic, (10) is contingent iff there is a standard model in which there is a world w^* such that wRw^* (where w is the actual world) and (10) is false at w^* . We have as of yet not the slightest reason to think that there is no such w^* at which (10) is false. So far, then, we have no reason to think that (10) is not contingent.²⁶

Suppose, though, that I am overlooking something here, and that Hasker has asked the right question in wondering why the truth of (10) should depend in any way on which world is the actual world. There is, I think, a short and adequate answer to this question: this is how minimal change possible worlds semantics *works*—counterfactuals are evaluated in just the way Hasker indicated earlier, by determining whether the worlds in which the antecedent is true and the consequent is false are less similar to the actual world than a world in which both the antecedent and consequent are true. Hasker sharpened his objection to this line in discussion:

Well, sure—that's how it works, all right, but *why* does it work this way? The semantics didn't just drop down from heaven, nor did it arrive by Federal Express from one of Lewis' all-too-actual "possible worlds". There is a *philosophical idea* behind the semantics, the idea nicely captured by Lewis' example of the tailless kangaroos. The idea is, that in constructing the set of possible worlds relevant to evaluating the counterfactual, we make those worlds as much as possible like the actual world, changed as little as possible in order to make the antecedent of the counterfactual true. But when the counterfactuals involved are initial-segment counterfactuals, the set of relevant possible worlds is already fully specified *by the expressed antecedent of the counterfactual*; the notion of comparative similarity to the actual world has no further role to play.

In the next section, I shall argue that while Hasker is right about the determination of the set of relevant worlds, it is not true that comparative similarity has no further role to play. Before moving on to that, though, it will be useful to have Hasker's concise summary of what he takes the situation to be before us:

The theory of middle knowledge is obliged to hold that some initial-segment counterfactuals are logically contingent. But in order to do this, the theory

must apply to these counterfactuals the notion of comparative similarity to the actual world, and I have argued that this notion has no legitimate application here—which is to say the notion is *misapplied*. The correct conclusion to be drawn from counterfactual logic, then, is that if initial-segment counterfactuals are true at all, they are true in *all* worlds and thus are *necessarily* true. But this conclusion is fatal to middle knowledge.²⁷

I have already expressed my doubts about whether Hasker's remarks pertain to the modal status of initial-segment counterfactuals, as opposed to their truth. However, I will continue to suppose for the sake of argument that I am mistaken about this, and turn to a closer examination of the role of comparative similarity. First, I shall argue that Hasker is wrong to say that Lewis' semantics does not apply to initial-segment counterfactuals, and hence that his argument about the modal status of such propositions fails. Then I shall argue that once we see *why* his argument fails, we can also see a way to establish that his conclusion is true after all (given some important assumptions).

B. *The Role(s) of Comparative Similarity*

Hasker's thesis about initial-segment counterfactuals is that Lewis' theory does not apply to them, that it is misapplied if it is used for such counterfactuals, because there is "nothing for comparative similarity to do" in the evaluation of them. Why is this? Because while ordinarily the antecedents of counterfactuals leave much open, and so leave room for us to specify a set of worlds relevant to the evaluation of the conditional, there is no such latitude with initial-segment counterfactuals: there are, as Hasker says, no gaps that we might fill in one way or another. I said earlier that Hasker is right—in part—about the role of comparative similarity. It is critically important to recognize, however, that while Hasker always speaks of *the* role of comparative similarity, it actually has two jobs. The first is to specify a set of relevant worlds, excluding those that are too remote from the actual world to matter. *That* task is preempted in the case of initial-segment counterfactuals, since the set of relevant worlds is, as Hasker says, completely determined by their antecedents. This simply reflects the unusual nature of initial-segment counterfactuals. The other task, reflected in Lewis' truth conditions, is to determine whether some world at which the antecedent and consequent are both true is *more similar to the actual world* than any world in which the antecedent is true and the consequent is false. *This* task is *not* preempted by the fact that the set of relevant worlds is determined in an unusual way for initial-segment counterfactuals. So it does not follow, from the fact that there is no work for comparative similarity to do in determining the set of relevant worlds, that there is nothing for it to do at all.²⁸

Of course, when we come to answer the question of whether some world in which the antecedent and consequent are true is more similar to the actual world than any world in which the antecedent is true but the consequent is

false, something odd happens. All A^* -worlds are *identical*, up to the time of the decision, since they include everything about the world's past history up to the time when the decision was made. So, none is more similar to the actual world than any other. (In saying this, I am joining Hasker in assuming that the similarity of the A^* -worlds does not turn on anything that happens after the time of the decision, and that comparative similarity must be determined without appeal to counterfactuals; these are assumptions whose merits will be discussed at the end of this subsection. It is vitally important to keep in mind that these assumptions are in place in evaluating what follows.)

But is the semantics misapplied because of this—do initial-segment counterfactuals “have a feature which contravenes the controlling idea of Lewis’ theory” and which therefore renders the theory inapplicable? I think not. What we have is a set of relevant worlds all of which are *equally similar* to the actual world. But Lewis’ theory explicitly allows for such ties. This can be seen both from the formal development of the theory and from some remarks Lewis makes about a troublesome example. The comparative similarity system Lewis develops involves a weak ordering of worlds rather than a strong ordering, which means that “ties are permitted: two different things can stand in the relation to each other, and thus be tied in the ordering.”²⁹ So clearly the formal theory recognizes the possibility of ties among two (or more) worlds. But it is also clear that for Lewis this is more than an abstract possibility. Consider what he says about the following example.

A is “Bizet and Verdi are compatriots”, F is “Bizet and Verdi are French”, I is “Bizet and Verdi are Italian”. Grant for the sake of argument that we have the closest F -world and the closest I -world; that these are distinct (dual citizenships would be a gratuitous difference from actuality); and that these are the two finalists in the competition for closest A -world. It might be that something favors one over the other—for all I know, Verdi narrowly escaped settling in France and Bizet did not narrowly escape settling in Italy. But we can count on no such luck. The case may be perfectly balanced between respects of comparison that favor the F -world and respects that favor the I -world.³⁰

So the fact that comparative similarity does not rule some worlds in the set of relevant worlds more similar to the actual world than others does *not* render the theory inapplicable. (Notice that this suggests that Hasker’s description of the first role of comparative similarity being *preempted* may be unduly pejorative: why not instead say that it is carried out effortlessly?) The fact that all of Hasker’s A^* -worlds are equally similar to the actual world, then, does not show that Lewis’ theory is misapplied if it is used for initial-segment counterfactuals. I conclude that Hasker’s objection that the theory of middle knowledge gets the modal status of initial-segment counterfactuals wrong fails. But I shall now show that his conclusion can be derived from his premises after all.

Suppose that there are A^* -worlds in which it is true that Saul besieges Keilah, and A^* -worlds in which Saul does not besiege Keilah. (This is just the supposition that (10) is contingent.) Now let us ask whether (10) is true. While God has preempted our usual procedure for resolving vagueness, he has fixed a set of relevant worlds, the A^* -worlds, and who are we to argue?³¹ Is it the case that some world where A^* and 'Saul besieges the city' are both true is more similar to the actual world than any world in which A^* is true and 'Saul besieges the city' is false? No! All the A^* -worlds are equally similar to the actual world.³² So quite straightforwardly, on Lewis' semantics, (10) is false. By the same reasoning, (11) is also false. Indeed all initial-segment counterfactuals are false if they are contingent. In one more step we arrive at Hasker's conclusion, by contraposition. But we do so without claiming that Lewis' theory is misapplied, and without any convoluted claims about what would be the case if the actual world were different than it is.

We have however made and been operating under some crucial assumptions: first, that differences in worlds after the time of the decision do not bear on comparative similarity. This assumption is not merely crucial but controversial. It is clear from Lewis' discussion in "Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow" that he regards this assumption as false.³³ I shall not stray into the details here, but it is plain that his claims about the comparative similarity of the various sets of worlds he considers in reply to the 'future similarity objection' turn on features of those worlds subsequent to the time of the antecedent of the conditional in question.³⁴ Other theories, such as Bennett's, offer no favoritism of earlier over later times.³⁵ The point is just this. Hasker gives no argument for this controversial assumption, though he clearly makes it and has to make it. The dire consequences for middle knowledge I have just reached by relying on it are no firmer than the assumption itself (and I'm not at all sure that it is true).

The proponent of middle knowledge will, as a referee pointed out, likely insist that it is worse than this, since I have also accepted Hasker's claim that Plantinga is wrong to hold that one measure of comparative similarity involves the *counterfactuals* that a world shares with the actual world.³⁶ One who sides with Plantinga on this issue will not be persuaded that it has been shown that all the A^* -worlds are equally similar to the actual world, since we have not taken counterfactuals the A^* -worlds share with the actual world into account.³⁷ It should be noted that Hasker does argue against Plantinga's position, insisting that similarity to the actual world must be based on non-counterfactual respects.³⁸ The objection is, as he observes, closely related to the 'grounding' objection, and I think that it stands or falls (hence, falls) with that objection. So while Hasker's conclusion can be derived from his premises, the defender of the theory of middle knowledge is not likely to be moved by the argument.

C. The Need for Comparative Similarity

My final objection to Hasker's argument concerning initial-segment counterfactuals concerns its reliance on the comparative similarity theory. It is quite true that Plantinga's version of the theory of middle knowledge, which is Hasker's main target, relies on the assumption that the truth conditions of counterfactual statements are to be given by appeal to claims about the comparative similarity of possible worlds, or minimal changes in the actual world. But it is by no means clear that this analysis is required for counterfactuals, and without it, the objection developed by appeal to initial-segment counterfactuals fails even if my preceding remarks are wrong and Hasker's argument works against minimal change theories. Hasker seems to suppose that the possible worlds analysis is the only game in town—he notes Alfred Freddoso's suggestion that “we might wonder why it wasn't perfectly obvious from the start that comparative similarity wouldn't help us if the conditionals in question involve genuine causal indeterminism,” but suggests that “getting rid of the semantics...eliminates a good deal of the theory's philosophical substance.”³⁹

But getting rid of ‘the’ semantics—getting rid of the possible worlds analysis, that is—need not leave us with just our gut feelings about counterfactuals. Igal Kvat's 1986 theory seems to provide the sort of analysis of counterfactuals the proponents of middle knowledge would welcome. I cannot go into the quite complex details of Kvat's theory here, due to space limitations that have been imposed on this paper—but I shall try to describe the salient features of the theory that suggest that it is well worth further investigation.

The theory makes no appeal to possible worlds (though it has a possible worlds description), but is grounded instead in objective conditional probabilities.⁴⁰ Objective conditional probabilities presumably reflect ‘facts about what is the case,’ and so should be suitable for grounding counterfactuals even by Hasker's standards. This means Kvat's approach is immune to the grounding objection discussed in section II above. Kvat's theory is not equivalent to minimal-change theories such as Stalnaker's, Lewis', or Pollock's,⁴¹ and its application requires no judgment about the relative similarity of possible worlds. Hence it is not subject to Hasker's objection, discussed in section III B, to minimal change theories. It is also not deterministic; Kvat quite explicitly sets out to provide a theory that is compatible with the libertarian view Hasker presupposes, one that applies to “counterfactuals whose antecedents describe various human actions, decisions, etc. (when it is assumed that it was possible for the agent as of that time, to have acted otherwise).”⁴² Such an indeterministic theory is, after all, just what Freddoso suggests. And finally, it is not interest-relative or context-dependent in the way Lewis' theory is.⁴³ In short, the theory seems to have all the features

Hasker, as well as his opponents, regard as desirable, and none of the features Hasker finds objectionable.

Of course, Kvat's advertisements for his theory may prove to be misleading under further scrutiny, and it may turn out that it will not be suitable for understanding counterfactuals of freedom.⁴⁴ But my point is that abandoning the minimal change theory that appeals to similarity relations among possible worlds may very well not have the consequences Hasker suggests. He worries that "Those philosophers (their name is legion) who are disposed in any case to be suspicious of counterfactuals can only have their suspicions confirmed if we are deprived of any systematic account of their semantics."⁴⁵ It is however simply false that giving up the minimal change theory would deprive us of a systematic account of the semantics of counterfactual conditionals. If Freddoso is right and it should have been perfectly obvious from the start that comparative similarity will not help with conditionals involving genuine causal indeterminism, perhaps it is a theory like Kvat's that assumes indeterminism that ought to be explored by the defenders of middle knowledge. The question of whether they will find anything useful in this exploration is one that I regard as open.

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NOTES

1. Cornell University Press, 1989; hereafter abbreviated *GTK*. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Indiana Philosophical Association in April of 1990 as part of a symposium on this book, with Hasker commenting. The present version contains what survived Hasker's reply, and some additional thoughts it provoked. When I cite Hasker's views 'in discussion,' I am quoting from a copy of his comments that he generously gave me. I wish to acknowledge his helpful comments, and conversations with my colleagues Bill Gustason and J. A. Cover. I am also indebted to very useful comments from two referees and the editor.

2. *GTK*, p. 18. Hasker is here commenting on the apparent redundancy of arguing against middle knowledge given that he is concerned to refute a view middle knowledge presupposes, namely the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom, but the point has more general applicability.

3. *GTK*, p. 20.

4. See Ch. 9 of *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford, 1974).

5. *GTK*, p. 25. This is a little loose since (a) this characterizes only counterfactuals that are nonvacuously true and (b) the world in question must be accessible from the actual world. I will join Hasker in ignoring these niceties, however. For various formulations of this sort of theory, see Robert Stalnaker, "A Theory of Conditionals," in N. Rescher (ed.), *Studies in Logical Theory* (Basil Blackwell, 1968); David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Harvard University Press, 1973); and John Pollock, *Subjunctive Reasoning* (D. Reidel, 1976).

6. *GTK*, p. 29.

7. *GTK*, p. 30.

8. *GTK*, p. 30.

9. In "Causation," reprinted in *Philosophical Papers* volume II (Oxford University Press, 1986).

10. He goes on to quote Robert M. Adams' bewilderment about what sort of property Plantinga is talking about, originally cited in *GTK*, p. 25. (See Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977), pp. 109-17.)

11. *GTK*, p. 29.

12. In his introductory remarks to the chapter on middle knowledge, he writes that "a series of objections to this theory will be considered, leading up to one that I consider decisive" (*GTK*, p. 19), and the argument under consideration is not that final argument.

13. I do not, by the way, wish to deny that the intuition provides a certain plausibility to the denial of middle knowledge. I am not entirely unsympathetic to the view Hasker takes here, but my concern is with whether his remarks have any further weight.

14. Plantinga, "Reply to Robert M. Adams," quoted in *GTK*, p. 30. As Hasker notes, Plantinga is appealing to an example he gave in *The Nature of Necessity*. While Plantinga is right to pose this question about the ground of the proposition that he freely did *A* yesterday, it might be even more interesting to ask what, according to Hasker, grounds the truth of a proposition expressing an actual but *future* free act. If he says that this is currently not grounded, then it is unclear that there is any complaint to be made about counterfactuals of freedom. If it is instead claimed that such a proposition is now grounded, it needs to be shown that whatever it is grounded *in* is not something to which a proponent of middle knowledge might appeal. This point, which I owe to an anonymous referee, requires further exploration, but I do not have the space to conduct it here.

15. *GTK*, p. 31.

16. I assume he meant the event of Plantinga's doing *A* *freely* yesterday, since one can perform an act without performing it freely.

17. In discussion.

18. *GTK*, p. 32.

19. This move is itself at least somewhat dubious, though I won't rely on the point. Is the day on which the last Brontasaurus expired, or the size of the polar ice cap on the day of creation, even conceivably relevant to Saul's decision? I doubt it, chaos theory notwithstanding, and if it and other things are not relevant, then there is no reason to think that the antecedent of the conditional God considers is that of an initial-segment counterfactual.

20. *GTK*, p. 33.

21. *GTK*, p. 33.

22. Lewis, *Counterfactuals*, pp. 8-9, quoted by Hasker on p. 34.

23. *GTK*, p. 34.

24. *GTK*, p. 34.

25. *GTK*, pp. 34-35.

26. One referee suggested that perhaps Hasker is asking the right question, since if it

is irrelevant which world is actual, (10) is arguably necessary. That may be—though it would still need to be argued that it *is* irrelevant which world is actual—but this is not how Hasker's argument proceeds. The suggested approach would be part of an attempt to show that on the standard semantics, (10) is a necessary truth. But Hasker is, as we shall see, using this claim to attempt to establish that the standard semantics is *inapplicable*, because the notion of comparative similarity "has no legitimate application here" (GTK, p. 35). So if Hasker is indeed posing the right question, it is not for the reason that he offers. And however this may be, the ensuing discussion does not depend on my being right about this point.

27. GTK, p. 35. One might wonder why, if the semantics is really *misapplied*, initial-segment counterfactuals come out true at all worlds rather than neglected or untreated by the semantics—but since this point would not be of much use to the fans of middle knowledge, I think we can ignore it.

28. Someone might object (since someone did) that there aren't really two *separate* roles for comparative similarity, on the grounds that in fulfilling the second role, it automatically fulfills the first, excluding from our interest those worlds which are too remote from the actual world to matter. In the 'normal' cases, this is in fact how things work: we do not *first* screen off Hasker's world "in which a large and active Animal Friendship League was assiduously providing prosthetic devices for 'handicapped' animals" (GTK, p. 35) and its ilk and *then* determine whether a world in which antecedent and consequent are both true is more similar to the actual world than the remaining ones in which the antecedent holds but the consequent fails. But it does not follow that these are not separable, logically independent roles for comparative similarity. I suggest that both the results with initial-segment counterfactuals and Lewis' explicit allowance for ties in comparative similarity (discussed below in the text) show that they are in fact logically independent. If the reader prefers to see them as two aspects of a single task, my point still holds.

29. *Counterfactuals*, p. 48n.

30. "Counterfactuals and Comparative Possibility," in *Philosophical Papers* volume II (Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 06-07. This passage occurs in his objection to Stalnaker's theory, which is why he is discussing *the* closest *A*-world here. But he declares the sort of treatment I give of ties "reasonable enough" when he moves on to Analysis 2, which does not require that there be a closest *A*-world, and that treatment is (I argue below in the text) what follows from Analysis 3, the one he endorses.

31. Again, I grant that the task of determining a set of relevant worlds has been preempted, or perhaps executed with great ease, with initial-segment counterfactuals because the set of relevant worlds is determined by the antecedent of the counterfactual. What I am suggesting is that this in itself does not matter—it is due to the peculiarity of initial-segment counterfactuals. Lewis' semantic analysis applies nonetheless, as I shall now show.

32. Notice that initial-segment counterfactuals are not *special* in this regard. The same result holds for the Bizet and Verdi counterfactuals, *if* the relevant worlds are all tied in regard to similarity to the actual world.

33. In *Philosophical Papers* volume II; see pp. 43-48, especially the discussion of big and little miracles.

34. See pp. 43-48.

35. See Jonathan Bennett, "Counterfactuals and Temporal Direction," *The Philosophical Review* 93 (1984), pp. 57-94.

36. See *The Nature of Necessity*, p. 178, and "Reply to Adams," noted on p. 35 of *GTK*.

37. It was also suggested that the argument depends on assuming that neither (10) nor (11) is true, which would simply be assuming that the theory of middle knowledge is false. This assumption would be hopelessly question-begging, but I do not see the need for it. One need not insist that (10) and (11) are both false; one only needs to claim that it is not legitimate to appeal to such counterfactuals in judging similarity of A*-worlds to the actual world.

38. See *GTK*, pp. 35-36.

39. *GTK*, p. 39n. See note 43 below, however.

40. Igal Kvart, *A Theory of Counterfactuals* (Hackett, 1986). Counterfactuals are initially reduced to what Kvart calls causal irrelevance and purely positive causal relevance, which are later done away with in favor of objective conditional probabilities. (And despite the suspicion the appeal to causal factors may raise, he insists he presumes indeterminism.)

41. See Kvart, chapters 7 & 8, where proofs of this are offered.

42. Kvart, p. xii; see also pp. 31 and 70.

43. See Kvart, pp. 186-89. I should say that the version of the minimal change theory Plantinga and Hasker are discussing is also neither interest-relative nor context-dependent, despite the fact that these are two of Lewis' favorite features of his theory, because the proponents of middle knowledge can't live with this aspect of his theory. This departure from Lewis requires (and perhaps can be given) some justification; Kvart's theory does not have these features to begin with.

44. One crucial question is whether Kvart's sense of "could have done otherwise" is robust enough for the libertarian tastes Hasker and his Molinist opponents share. The fact that the theory is avowedly *indeterministic*, and indeterministic precisely to accommodate statements about human actions, strongly suggests that Kvart's "could" is not that of one who thinks that free will and determinism can be reconciled. But we need to sift carefully through the details of the theory, in a way that I cannot here, to be certain that this aim is fulfilled.

45. *GTK*, p. 39n. In discussion, Hasker said that he did not mean to imply that there are no alternative possibilities for the semantics of counterfactuals, and added that the proponents of middle knowledge have in fact not constructed such an alternative. Fair enough. But I stand by the claim that his comments in his book *seem* to suggest this, and note that even if the proponents of middle knowledge have not developed it, there is at least one well-worked-out alternative to minimal change theories available.