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# PROPHECY WITHOUT MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE

Alexander R. Pruss

While it might seem *prima facie* plausible that divine foreknowledge is all that is needed for prophecy, this seems incorrect. To issue a prophecy, God has to know not just how someone *will* act, but how someone *would* act were the prophecy issued. This makes some think that Middle Knowledge is required. I argue that Thomas Flint's two Middle Knowledge based accounts of prophecy are unsatisfactory, but one of them can be repaired. However the resources needed for repair also yield a sketch of a foreknowledge-only account of prophecy.

## 1. Introduction

Middle Knowledge, I will take it, is the doctrine that God non-trivially knows the truth values of all subjunctive conditionals of free will ("F-conditionals") of the form:

- (1) Were  $x$  to be in circumstances  $C$ , then  $x$  would freely choose to do  $A$  in  $C$ ,

where  $C$  specifies the circumstances, in maximum detail but not including what the decision is, in such a way that  $x$ 's being in  $C$  does not entail that  $x$  freely chooses to do  $A$  and does not entail that she does not so freely choose. Note that I am only interested in the case of actual persons  $x$ , though usually the doctrine is extended to the case of non-actual persons.

The "non-trivially" in my statement of the doctrine rules out the view offered by Robert M. Adams<sup>1</sup> that all propositions of the form (1) are false, in which case it does not take Middle Knowledge to know the truth values. Specifically, the "non-triviality" constraint, I take it, specifies that whenever  $x$ ,  $C$  and  $A$  are as above, then either (1) holds or:

- (2)  $x$  is in circumstances  $C$   $\square \rightarrow x$  would not freely choose to do  $A$  in  $C$ , holds, where I will henceforth use  $\square \rightarrow$  to indicate subjunctive conditionals.

The doctrine of Middle Knowledge would follow from the Subjunctive Conditional Law of Excluded Middle (SCLEM), that for all  $p$  and  $q$  we have  $p \square \rightarrow q$  or  $p \square \rightarrow \sim q$ .<sup>2</sup> However, SCLEM is false. It is neither the case that were the moon made out of French cheese, it would be made of Brie, nor is it the case that were the moon made out of French cheese, it would not be made of Brie. There is a long debate about whether it makes sense to assert (1) in counterfactual circumstances  $C$ —it seems, on the face of it, that one cannot talk truthfully of contingent outcomes of non-actual choices, since then one



is talking of what is not. However, Middle Knowledge has been argued for on the basis of the attractive theological consequences. Middle Knowledge was introduced by Molina to give an elegant solution to the problem of free will and the efficacy of grace. If God knows who would freely accept an instance of grace, then he can give this grace only to those who would accept it, thereby guaranteeing that this grace is always efficacious, without overriding anyone's free will. This is not, of course, the only solution to that problem. There are also Scriptural accounts that on the face of it appear to require Middle Knowledge, though this has been disputed.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Middle Knowledge appears needed for an account of prophecies about the future. While it is a tautology that simple foreknowledge of what *will* happen is all that would be needed for *God* to know the future, it seems that God's telling human beings about future occurrences dependent on human free will requires Middle Knowledge. It is this claim that I shall discuss. First, I will discuss why it seems that foreknowledge is not enough. Second, I will discuss an argument Thomas Flint gives against the usefulness of Middle Knowledge in cases of prophecy, as well as Thomas Flint's two variant solutions. The argument, I believe, is correct. The solutions fail as given, though one of them may be fixed by positing necessarily true "relevant similarity" principles. I will then argue that given enough such principles, prophecy is possible even without Middle Knowledge.

The "relevant similarity" principles are necessary truths of the form:

- (3) If (1) holds, and  $C^*$  is relevantly similar to  $C$ , then it is also the case that were  $x$  to be in  $C^*$ , she would also freely choose to do  $A$  in  $C$

The opponent of Middle Knowledge can believe that by simple foreknowledge God knows the truth value of (1) in cases where the person satisfying  $S$  exists and really finds herself in  $C$ . Given that and a "relevant similarity" principle, God can also know some counterfactual claims about what the person would do in non-actual circumstances  $C^*$ . And this can be enough for prophecy. At the same time, we shall see that weaker "relevant similarity" principles are needed for an account of prophecy given Middle Knowledge. Thus, I will argue that while the Middle Knowledge account of prophecy has an easier time of it, a simple foreknowledge account, while requiring that more "relevant similarity" principles be true, is still possible, at least as long as prophecy is the only issue under consideration.

## 2. Why Foreknowledge Is Not Enough

Consider a concrete case within Christianity. Jesus said to Peter: "Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times" (Matthew 26:34, RSV). Let us assume, plausibly, that the denials are essentially free acts.<sup>4</sup> Can we not account for this by simple foreknowledge? Jesus foreknows that Peter will deny him three times. And so he says this to Peter. This seems simple and unproblematic, assuming foreknowledge is unproblematic.

For simplicity, I will conflate God's speaking to Peter and Jesus's speaking to Peter. A more complex story involving hypostatic union may need to be told, but nothing of relevance to my argument hangs on this. Now, consider God's deliberation about what to say to Peter. The thing about

deliberation in general is that it requires not just simple knowledge about the future, but counterfactual knowledge about what *would* transpire were a given choice made.

To decide whether to swallow an aspirin while having a headache, I need to have some idea of what likely *would* happen were I to swallow the aspirin. The case of the aspirin is particularly obvious because simple knowledge that my headache *will* go away is in fact useless for my deliberation, since it gives me no incentive to take the aspirin rather than not to take it. And were I to have more thorough knowledge, such as that my headache *will* go away because I *will have* taken the aspirin, then not only this knowledge would not help me make a free decision but, it seems, would undercut the very possibility of my making a free decision. What I need to know is that were I to take the aspirin, (likely) the headache *would* go away, and were I not to take it, (likely) it would not.

Thus, as a general principle, it seems that deliberation requires for action-guidance that one have appropriate subjunctive conditional beliefs about the future, and categorical knowledge of the future consequent on the decision appears to undercut the possibility of deliberation. The latter claim is theologically problematic in that it would seem to render impossible God's deliberating about anything if he knows everything about the future. The response to this has to be that God is in effect *bracketing* this categorical knowledge when making the decision or that God's knowledge of the future is posterior *in the order of explanation*, but not in the temporal order, to the decision about what future to actualize. Given this modification, we get the claim that deliberation requires subjunctive conditional beliefs about the future, and deliberation is undercut when *based on* categorical knowledge of those parts of the future that are consequent on the decision.

However cases of prophecy may be thought different. Suppose that instead of deciding whether to take an aspirin, I need to decide whether to *say*: "My headache will soon go away." It seems that to make this decision, all I need to know is that my headache *will* in fact soon go away, as well as unproblematic nomic counterfactuals about the connection between my speaking and your hearing, etc.

Unfortunately, this does not generalize to the prophecy case. Presumably, if I believe that my headache will soon go away, my having the belief is not dependent on any future event. I have the belief, most likely, based on inductive data about the past. But in the case of prophecy, assuming libertarian free will, God cannot know with complete certainty what will transpire based on inductive data about the past. Yet, suppose for a moment that that is how he knew what would happen. He would *still* need to know a subjunctive conditional claim: He would need to know what Peter *would* do were God to *tell* him that he would deny God. When making an inductive inference, one needs to include all the relevant circumstances in one's consideration, and surely that God told Peter that Peter would deny God is relevant.

Now go back to the non-inductive case. God needs, I will assume, complete certainty when issuing prophecies. Scripture is clear on the complete reliability of God. I will assume that it also will not do to suppose that God is 99 percent sure that Peter will freely deny him, and in the unlikely

1 percent case, God is committed to *forcing* Peter (or allowing a non-free devil to force him) to non-freely deny God. That seems, at least *prima facie*, contrary to divine goodness, and besides, as Flint argued, the notion of a non-free denial seems contradictory. Thus, God's belief that Peter will deny him must be responsive to Peter's choice. What explains why God believes that Peter will deny him is God's omniscience together with Peter's actual future denial. In other words, Peter's denial is explanatorily prior to God's belief. But God's belief is explanatorily prior to God's decision to speak to Peter. And God's speaking to Peter is explanatorily prior to Peter's decision, it seems, since it is a part of what formed the character that Peter had while making the decision. This means that we have a vicious circularity in the order of explanation.

Hence, mere reliance on foreknowledge would require a vicious circularity in the order of explanation. Now, while it has been alleged that a circularity is present in divine decisions based on Middle Knowledge,<sup>5</sup> and I find the allegation persuasive in most cases (see Section 6.2), I will assume for the sake of the argument that the allegation fails.<sup>6</sup> Given Middle Knowledge, we have seemingly a neat account. God knows that Peter *would* deny him if Peter were told that he will. It is a problem to see *how* God knows this, but if we dispute *that* he knows this, then we are disputing all of the Middle Knowledge account. Given this, God can honestly decide to tell Peter that Peter will deny him. And then Peter makes his free choice, and indeed denies Christ.

### 3. A Problem for the Middle Knowledge Account

As Thomas Flint notes, however, we now have a problem. Let  $C$  be the complete circumstances of Peter's choice. These circumstances include the claim that God told Peter that Peter will deny Christ in these very circumstances, though they do not (we may suppose) include specific claims saying what God believes about the future or about F-conditionals. On the Middle Knowledge account, God knows:

- (4) Peter is in  $C \square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

However, not only is (4) true, but it is also true that:

- (5) Peter is in  $C \Rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ,

where the double arrow indicates entailment. For that Peter is in  $C$  entails that God tells Peter that Peter will deny Christ. And that God tells Peter that Peter will deny Christ *entails* that Peter will deny Christ, because, necessarily, God always says the truth.

But likewise, then, God knows all kinds of other claims, such as:

- (6) Andrew is in  $C_1 \square \rightarrow$  Andrew denies Christ,

where  $C_1$  includes God's having told Andrew that Andrew will deny Christ, or:

- (7) Peter is in  $C_2 \square \rightarrow$  Peter does not deny Christ,

where  $C_2$  includes God's having told Peter that Peter will not deny Christ. For in each of these cases the corresponding entailment holds, and the

entailment implies the necessary truth of a subjunctive conditional. But God's Middle Knowledge covers *contingent*, not necessary, truths. Hence, first of all, it seems that it is not by Middle Knowledge that God knows (4). Secondly, the fact that (4) is true is of no help to God when God is making up his mind *what* to say, because (7) is equally true, and is of no help to God when deciding *whom* to speak to, because (6) is also true.

In fact, not only is Middle Knowledge not needed for knowing (4), but foreknowledge is not needed, either. Divine knowledge is in fact not needed: everyone who knows that God essentially has the property of speaking only the truth is in a position to know (4). However, if anything is clear, it is that prophecy requires at least foreknowledge. Thus, to claim that what God has to know to honestly tell Peter what Peter will do is (4) is to misidentify the knowledge behind prophecy.

Consider an analogous case. Suppose a Scripture writer is writing in the way described by Second Vatican Council:

In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted. (*Dei Verbum*<sup>7</sup> 11)

This is a plausible account of divine inspiration, one that coheres well with the humanness of the style of Scripture. Let us suppose this account is true in the case of at least one writer of Scripture, for concreteness let us say Paul, and suppose further that in this case the writer is aware that he is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 7:10 as opposed to verses 12 and 25). Since this is just for illustration purposes, it is not necessary for the combination of acting as true author and knowing about inspiration to have actually occurred.

Now suppose that Paul is reflecting on Christ's sayings and on the Law and trying to figure out whether to pen a prohibition of divorce for Christians. It occurs to him: "I am writing under inspiration, and I know that were I to write under inspiration that divorce is wrong, then divorce would be wrong." But he cannot be guided by this proposition, since it is equally true that were Paul to write *under inspiration* that divorce is acceptable, then it would be the case that divorce would be acceptable. Instead, Paul has to figure out whether divorce is wrong on the merits of the question. Paul, of course, came to the conclusion that divorce *is* wrong, for various reasons such as that Christ would never divorce the Church. In doing so he came to know that were he to write under inspiration that divorce is wrong, then divorce would be wrong. But he came to know that this is so for a storable reason distinct from the triviality of the conditional.

What we need to identify, then, in cases of prophecy is what the reason distinct from the triviality of the condition (4) is. One would like to say something like:

(8) God knows that (4) is true not just because it is necessarily true.

Such locutions *do* make sense in some cases. Thus, I know that

- (9) Fermat's Last Theorem holds or Napoleon was vanquished at Waterloo

is true not merely because it is necessarily true. However, in this case I can specify another proposition that is contingently true in virtue of which (9) is also true, namely the proposition that Napoleon was vanquished at Waterloo. And without having identified such a proposition, I have not said enough about (8) to figure out whether Middle Knowledge is or is not required in cases of prophecy.

One might try to baldly stick to (8). This, however, is philosophically unsatisfactory: it leaves the crucial questions unanswered. More promisingly, one might expand (8) by saying that God knows (4) *by his faculty of Middle Knowledge* in addition to knowing it by inferring it from (5), and leave the distinction at that. However, this requires a *real* distinction between faculties in God in a way that does not seem compatible with divine simplicity. Moreover, proceeding in this way opens one up to the circularity criticisms of Adams.<sup>8</sup> Finally, this still leaves quite opaque the question of what *additional information* is available beyond the logically necessary claims.

Before going on to solutions, something should be said about why the highly plausible claim that knowledge of (4) is sufficient to guide God's prophetic action no matter whether the knowledge came from foreknowledge, middle knowledge or just God's knowledge of his own infallibility is false. It is false precisely because the right hand side of (4) reports an essentially free action: I am assuming that something only counts as a denial if it is free. (Otherwise, just modify the consequent to say "freely denies.") Now not just *any* conditional of the form  $p \square \rightarrow x \text{ will freely do } A$  is action-guiding in the sense that God could, on the basis of that conditional and some value judgments, decide to directly bring it about that  $p$ .

For instance, consider the conditional that were Peter to freely deny Christ, he would freely deny someone who loved him, a conditional God knows to be true. Even if God saw a value in the state of affairs that he would thereby know would eventuate were he to bring the antecedent about, he could not do so, because by bringing it about that Peter denies Christ, he would be ensuring that Peter does not do so *freely*. In general, it seems that in a case where  $p \square \rightarrow x \text{ will freely do } A$  holds, additional constraints are needed in order to ensure that it be possible to use this counterfactual in an action-guiding way. And one plausible constraint is that the knowledge of this counterfactual has to depend on some bit of *relevant* foreknowledge or Middle Knowledge, or else the holding of  $p$  has to causally depend, at least in part, on  $x$ 's doing  $A$ . The simple account based on God's knowledge (5) does not satisfy this desideratum. And neither do the two variants of Flint's solutions.

#### 4. Flint's First Variant Solution

##### 4.1. The Solution

The first variant of the solution of Flint's that I am interested in is as follows.<sup>9</sup> Let  $C^*$  be a reduced set of circumstances, which includes all the data

in  $C$  other than that God tells Peter that Peter will deny Christ. Then, God can guide his decision whether to prophesy on the basis of the following F-conditional:

(10) Peter is in  $C^*$   $\square \rightarrow$  Peter will deny Christ.

Now observe first that, as Flint notes, God does not know (10) solely on the basis of his Middle Knowledge, since the circumstances  $C^*$  are not maximally specific the way the circumstances  $C$  are. One might think this is not a big deal: perhaps we should just drop the maximal specificity requirement. But as it happens I can give an argument for that requirement.

For suppose we say instead that God knows in *all* possible circumstances, described specifically or not, what any created agent would do. Let  $C_1$  be the circumstances of my being placed very hungry on the moon, with the moon being made of French cheese and no other food being available. Then, if Middle Knowledge is not restricted at all, God knows whether it is the case that were I in  $C_1$ , I would freely eat Brie or whether were I in  $C_1'$ , I would not freely eat Brie. But to know that just is to know a fact equally dubious as the fact whether the moon would be made of Brie were it made of French cheese. Indeed, if we think, as we probably should, that there is no fact of the matter about the latter question, then we should likewise think that there is no fact about the former.

However, Flint notes that there is an indirect route to (10). Suppose that God knows:

(11) (Peter is in  $C^*$  and God did not tell Peter that Peter will deny Christ)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ

and

(12) (Peter is in  $C^*$  and God did tell Peter that Peter will deny Christ)  $\Rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

The first of these claims is a *bona fide* F-conditional with maximally specific antecedent. Thus, God can know it by Middle Knowledge. The second of these is just our old friend (5). Together these two claims entail (10) by the very plausible principle of counterfactual reasoning that if  $p \square \rightarrow q$  and  $r \Rightarrow q$ , then  $(p \text{ or } r) \square \rightarrow q$ .

Now, God can guide his decision whether to speak or not by his knowledge of (10). And this knowledge does depend on Middle Knowledge.

This account does have a disadvantage. It means that if (11) is not true, then God cannot tell Peter that Peter will deny him. Thus it seems that something is limiting God's powers of prophecy. But since the limits seem to be ones derived from logical considerations, this should not worry one unduly. For full disclosure, I should note that the problem will appear in stronger form on my preferred account.

#### 4.2. *The Action Should Be in the Antecedent of Action-guiding Subjunctives*

There is, however, a more serious problem with this proposal. I will expose this problem in five interrelated parts. First, note that to guide my actions, I need to rely on knowledge of counterfactuals of the form *were I to do A, B would result*. My actions are not guided by the mere knowledge of a subjunctive of the form *were p to hold, B would result*, where  $p$  is a



proposition compatible with the claim that I do *A*, for exactly the same reason as that my actions are not guided by mere knowledge of what *actually* will happen. In fact, a categorical claim about the future is just a special case of a subjunctive of the form *were p to hold, B would result* in the case where *p* is a tautology.

But the subjunctive guiding God's action on the present proposal is (10). However, an action-guiding subjunctive should include the proposed action in the antecedent, and (10) does not.

#### 4.3. No Additional Reason for Accepting (4)

Recall the intuition what is needed is that God should know (4) for a reason other than his knowledge of the necessary truth (5). The present proposal does not satisfy this intuition because it does not give God an additional reason for accepting (4). For, first of all, the reasoning for (10) itself depended crucially on (5). Secondly, it is fallacious to derive (4) from (10) alone. For a counterfactual with a stronger antecedent may be false while one with a weaker antecedent is true. For instance, the following two counterfactuals can be both true:

(13) Fred is offered a bribe in  $C_1$   $\square \rightarrow$  the bribe is not accepted in  $C_1$

(14) Fred accepts a bribe in  $C_1$   $\square \rightarrow$  the bribe is accepted in  $C_1$

even though the antecedent of (14) entails that of (13). In fact, the only way I can think of to derive (4) from (10) is to make use of (5).

#### 4.4. First Parallel

Consider an analogy in the case of inspiration. Suppose that I know I am divinely inspired and would like to issue a prediction of some sort. I am debating whether I should issue a prediction that next week I will have a terrible illness on the basis of *prima facie* ambiguous messages I have received from God. But one thing I do know clearly. I know if I claim to prophesy without divine inspiration, God will punish me for it in some appropriate way. And what better way to punish me for predicting a terrible illness for myself than by ensuring I get that illness. Thus, I become convinced that:

(15) Without inspiration I claim to prophesy that I will have a terrible illness  $\square \rightarrow$  I will have a terrible illness.

I also know:

(16) With inspiration I claim to prophesy that I will have a terrible illness  $\Rightarrow$  I will have a terrible illness.

These two things entail:

(17) I claim to prophesy that I will have a terrible illness  $\square \rightarrow$  I will have a terrible illness.

Could I reasonably use this as an action-guiding subjunctive in deciding whether to prophesy the illness or not? I think not. For nowhere in my reasoning did I depend on any special knowledge of the future. I only depended here on a belief in (15) based on general considerations and the necessary truth (16). Insofar as (17) is analogous to (10), and (17) is not by

itself sufficient to give an action-guiding reason for prophesying, neither is (10).

#### 4.5. Second Parallel

Next, observe another parallel situation. Let  $C^{**}$  be the circumstances that are further reduced not only by omitting the claim that God told Peter that Peter would deny him, but also by omitting information on whether Peter was aware of his moral frailty when making the decision whether to deny Christ or not. If (10) is sufficient to guide God's action, surely so is:

(18) Peter is in  $C^{**}$   $\square \rightarrow$  Peter will deny Christ.

In both cases the set of circumstances is not maximally specific, of course. But now observe that in fact (18) is not sufficient to guide God's action, even when combined with and not just derived from:

(19) (Peter is in  $C^{**}$  and God did not tell Peter that Peter will deny Christ)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ

and

(20) (Peter is in  $C^{**}$  and God did tell Peter that Peter will deny Christ)  $\Rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

To see this, note that (18)–(20) are compossible with the conjunction of the following claims:

(21) (Peter is in  $C^{**}$  and God did not tell Peter that Peter will deny Christ)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter is not aware of his frailty.

(22) (Peter is in  $C^{**}$  and God did tell Peter that Peter will deny Christ)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter is aware of his frailty.

(23) (Peter is in  $C^{**}$  and God did not tell Peter that Peter will deny Christ and Peter is not aware of his frailty)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

(24) (Peter is in  $C^{**}$  and God did not tell Peter that Peter will deny Christ and Peter is aware of his frailty)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter does not deny Christ.

But (18)–(24) do not give information sufficient in an action-guiding way to justify God in telling Peter that he will deny Christ, assuming of course that God cannot tell a falsehood. For all the *contingent* information in favor of God telling Peter this is contained in (19). But in light of (21), (23) and (24), it is clear that the reason Peter would deny Christ in  $C^{**}$  without the prophecy has something to do with his lack of awareness of his frailty, i.e., it has something to do with his pride, and so this information does not do anything to support the claim that Peter would deny Christ in circumstances where he *would be* aware of his frailty, and if God were to give him the prophecy, this would be precisely one of these circumstances.

Now, it might be objected that although (18) is insufficient to guide God's action, (10) is. Now it is not clear why (10) is supposed to be sufficient. If one thinks it is sufficient because in general to justify a prophecy all that is needed is knowledge of a subjunctive conditional of the form  $x$  is in  $C_1$   $\square \rightarrow x$  does  $A$ , perhaps ruling out tautologous circumstances and having *some* relevancy condition on the circumstances, where  $C_1$  are circumstances that in fact will obtain, then by exactly the same reasoning (18) is

sufficient. If one thinks that (10) is sufficient because it gives God a reason to accept (4) that does not depend on (5), then I suspect any argument to that effect will apply just as well, or just as badly, in the case of (18).

#### 4.6. *The Smile and the Unsure Prophet*

As noted on multiple occasions in the above discussion, the fact that, necessarily, *were God to tell Peter that Peter will deny him then Peter would deny him* is useless vis-à-vis guiding God's prophetic actions. All my objections to Flint's first solution can be seen as different ways of stating that the solution implicitly and illicitly gives an action-guiding role to (5).

To see this perhaps most clearly, consider a final parallel situation. Christ has a strong, but not overwhelming, desire to:

(25) smile kindly to Peter if and only if Peter will in fact deny him.

Perhaps the smile would not be the most appropriate thing under the circumstances in the Garden of Gethsemani, except that Christ wants Peter to remember the kind smile after the denial, in order that he be moved to repentance. Suppose that in fact, because of his knowledge of the future, Christ smiles to Peter. Now, let  $C_1$  the circumstances of Peter's choice minus the fact of Christ's smile and, of course, not including Christ's knowledge of what Peter will do. Then, the following parallel to (12) is no longer true:

(26) (Peter is in  $C_1$  and Christ smiled kindly to Peter)  $\Rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

Christ's smiling does not *entail* that Peter would deny him, and I assume that  $C_1$  does not contain any additional information to make for this entailment. However, the claim parallel to (11) can in fact be true:

(27) (Peter is in  $C_1$  and Christ did not smile kindly to Peter)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

It is quite clear that, so far, insufficient information has been given for Christ to make a decision on the basis of a desire to perform (25), i.e., to smile if and only if Peter will deny him. The claim (27) may give a weak consideration in favor of the decision, but the consideration will be quite weak indeed.

There seems to have to be an additional *contingent* fact about the situation that Christ needs to know, namely a fact of how Christ's smile would affect Peter's decision. Christ has to know whether it is true that:

(28) (Peter is in  $C_1$  and Christ smiled kindly to Peter)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

And for exactly the same reasons that an additional contingent fact would need to be known over and beyond (27) for Christ to make on firm grounds the decision whether to smile, so too an additional contingent fact would need to be known over and beyond (11). Since (12) is not a contingent fact, Flint's account does not give God enough information to make his decision.

In Section 6, I will argue, however, that such an additional fact need not be contingent. It just cannot be the purely logical fact about God's

inerrance that grounds (12). And this is the crux here. For (12) is a purely logical fact that does not give us any further information about how Peter would choose. *This* is the real problem with (12), and not just its necessity.

The value of parallel case of the smile was that (26) did not hold. We can also get a similar sort of argument while remaining within the scope of prophecy, by weakening the assumption of omniscience to infallibility (a being is omniscient in a context if it knows everything; she is epistemically infallible in a context if all her beliefs in that context are true, without it being claimed either that the beliefs are knowledge or that they are complete). Suppose that Andrew was given the gift of prophetic infallibility, and moreover that it was revealed to him that

- (29) (Peter is in  $C_2$  and Andrew does not tell him he will betray Christ)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

We may add, for completeness, that Andrew also knows that:

- (30) (Peter is in  $C_2$  and Andrew does not infallibly tell him he will betray Christ)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

However, let us suppose, Andrew does not know whether it is true that:

- (31) (Peter is in  $C_2$  and Andrew tells him he will betray Christ)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

Moreover, Andrew does not know that he is infallible. It is clear that as long as Andrew only knows (29) and (30), he is missing a substantive piece of information that would be necessary to justify with absolute certainty a choice to tell Peter that Peter will deny Christ: he needs knowledge of something like (31).

Suppose now that in addition to knowing (29) and (30), Andrew learns that he is infallible, i.e., that whatever he will say about the case will in fact be true. Surely this should not help him make up his mind what to say, though of course once he says it, it will be clear to him that it was right. Knowing that Andrew is infallible does not give Andrew any substantial information *about Peter*. But if Flint's analysis of how an action-guiding reason for prophecy can be obtained is correct, then as soon as Andrew learns that he is infallible, he is in a position to conclude that:

- (32) Peter is in  $C_2$   $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ,

since Andrew knows (30) and also knows the tautology that if he were to infallibly tell Peter that Peter would betray Christ, then Peter indeed would betray Christ. And so, according to Flint, Andrew then has an absolutely certain truth-oriented reason to tell Peter that Peter will deny Christ. But surely just learning that he is himself infallible did not by itself give Andrew any relevant information here.

## 5. Flint's Second Variant Solution

### 5.1. Harmony

Consider the circumstances  $C^+$  which are obtained by taking the impoverished circumstances  $C^*$  which do not include God's having told Peter that Peter will betray him, and adding the fact that Peter *believes* that God told

him that Peter will betray him. Now Flint thinks that it may, but need not, be the case that the reason why it happens that Peter has this belief  $B$  does not affect how Peter would act. Consider counterfactuals such as:

(33) (Peter is in  $C^+$  and Peter has belief  $B$  because of a demonic influence)  
 $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ

and

(34) (Peter is in  $C^+$  and Peter has belief  $B$  because of a neural malfunction)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

Indeed consider all such counterfactuals where the consequent is that Peter denies Christ and the antecedent between them differs only in how Peter came to have the belief, though ensuring that no antecedent is such as to entail the consequent. Say that matters are “harmonious” provided all such counterfactuals have the same truth value. Flint thinks that it is a contingent matter whether there is such harmony. But there may well be such harmony.

Now if there is such harmony and God has Middle Knowledge, God knows that there is such harmony. Suppose, further, that God knows that the harmony is such that all the counterfactuals are in fact true. God can then add to this knowledge the claim:

(35) (Peter is in  $C^+$  and Peter has belief  $B$  because God told him it is so)  
 $\Rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

But (35) together with the conjunction of all the harmonious counterfactuals above, combined with an appropriate inference principle for subjunctives, yields:

(36) Peter is in  $C^+$   $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

And God can use this for guiding his action.

This solution, Flint notes, will only work if God is fortunate enough that there is such harmony between counterfactuals. There may well be such harmony, and God can simply refrain from prophesying in cases where there isn't. One might note that the three great monotheistic religions tend not to posit very many cases of precise future-directed prophecy of free actions *qua* free actions,<sup>10</sup> and so the limitedness of application is not a serious problem.

## 5.2. Problems

Unfortunately all of the problems I pointed out that plague Flint's first solution reappear in modified form. The problem with the first solution was that the part of divine knowledge that depended on information about what will or would happen was irrelevant on its own for God's deliberation about what to prophesy, while that part which seemed to provide an appropriate action-guiding subjunctive was necessarily true. The same still holds here. When God knows the harmony claim, which is a substantive contingent claim on this account that requires Middle Knowledge, he knows by Middle Knowledge that all the subjunctives like (33) and (34) are true, with the crucial exception of the case where the source of the belief  $B$  is divine testimony. But it is what happens in this crucial case that is relevant.

The objection from Section 4 that I think makes this clearest is the final one. Suppose Christ were deciding whether to smile to Peter, again based on a desire to smile if and only if Peter will deny him. And suppose Christ knew the corresponding harmony thesis, namely that all the propositions of the form:

(37) (Peter is in  $C^+$  and Peter because of  $C$  has the belief that Christ smiled to him)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ

have the same truth value where  $C$  ranges over all possible sources of that belief, with the exception of the cases where the belief comes from the smile, and assume Christ knew that the common truth value was *true*. While knowing this would provide Christ with strong *evidence* that were he to smile to him, Peter would still deny him, nonetheless this strong evidence is not an entailment on Flint's view. There is a piece of contingent information that is missing, namely what the truth value is of:

(38) (Peter is in  $C^+$  and Peter because of Christ's smiling to him has the belief that Christ smiled to him)  $\square \rightarrow$  Peter denies Christ.

This is a substantive piece of data that, on Flint's view, requires Middle Knowledge.

Thus, knowledge of the harmony thesis and of the truth value of the harmonizing propositions is not enough in the smile case—something more has to be known via Middle Knowledge or foreknowledge or something like that. But intuitively the same thing is true in the case of prophecy. The harmonizing propositions do not give God another conclusive reason to accept (4) independent of the non-action-guiding entailment (5).

## 6. A Solution to the Puzzle

### 6.1. Relevant Similarity between Circumstances

Flint's second solution does, however, have a certain plausibility. This plausibility comes from the fact that we find the harmony thesis deeply plausible in practice. Consider the following dialogue, which we can imagine as taken from a bad movie:

Fred: You should not have drunk that coffee in the house of your mortal enemy. It might have been poisoned and you would not have tasted the poison in coffee. You were quite foolish.

Bob: But I would not have, or at least might not have, drunk the coffee had it been poisoned.

There is an obvious problem with Bob's response in that even if the counterfactual he states were true, his choice to drink the coffee would not have been rational. But intuitively, there is a further problem. We would actually deny both the stronger "would not have" and the weaker "might not have" claim. In fact, we think that in this story it is true that had the coffee been poisoned, Bob would have died of poisoning. And this depends on our acceptance of the claim that had the coffee been poisoned, Bob would *still* have drunk it.

This suggests that we accept the following principle of relevant similarity between circumstances:

- (39) If  $C$  and  $C_1$  are circumstances differing in ways invisible to the agent  $x$ , and both are circumstances where  $x$  would act freely, then if  $x$  did do  $A$  in  $C$ , then  $x$  would have still done  $A$  in  $C_1$ .

Or, more generally:

- (40) If  $C$  and  $C_1$  are circumstances differing in ways invisible to the agent  $x$  and are such that  $x$  would freely act in  $C$  as well as in  $C_1$ , and if  $x$  would have done  $A$  in  $C$ , then  $x$  would also have done  $A$  in  $C_1$ .

A difference is “invisible” in the relevant sense provided that the agent is not only unconscious of it but it also has no impact on the conscious or unconscious mental state in which the agent makes the decision. For clarity, let me state that “the mental state in which a decision is made” does not include the particular decision itself.

Now, given an appropriate version of such a principle, Peter would have done the same thing no matter how he would have come to have the belief in question, as long as this would result in the same subjective state at that time. There are some complications here, however, as to whether the invisibility of the difference is supposed to hold only from the standpoint of the time of the action or must have always held. In the case at hand, we can suppose the latter. Thus, we are distinguishing a case where Christ told Peter that Peter would betray him from a case where Peter had hallucinated, in the same way, that Christ said this. And the claim is that in both cases Peter would have acted in the same way.

The problem with Flint’s second solution was that the harmony claim was tantamount to a claim that all the different particular cases *happened* to have the same truth value. But if they all merely happened to have the same truth value, then this would tell us nothing conclusive about the crucial veridical case, as was clear in the case of the smile. However, suppose that they did not merely happen to have the same truth value, but had the same truth value on account of some *general* fact about the choice being independent of factors outside of Peter’s ken. In that case, the criticisms would, it seems, no longer apply.

Suppose for instance that the principle (40) is a true general principle, not true merely by coincidence. Then knowing by Middle Knowledge that were Peter to have hallucinated Christ’s smile, Peter would have betrayed Christ, would in fact be relevant to knowing that were Peter to have seen Christ’s smile, Peter would have betrayed Christ.

Similarly whatever general facts make (40) true, when combined with the contingent facts (33) or (34), they would give *another* reason for accepting (4), a reason essentially based in part on a *contingent* matter of fact and not just on (5).

This is the right kind of a solution. Consider the parallel case in the deliberation of a divinely inspired writer. What Paul would be looking for is precisely a *general principle* on the basis of which to conclude that were he to write under inspiration that divorce is wrong, then it would be the case that divorce is wrong, a principle that implies that the claim would be true no matter what circumstances it had been made in.

Moreover, I think the initial plausibility of Flint's second solution comes from the fact that the solution can *prima facie* be read along these lines. However, I think the general principle approach is different. For principles like (40) are not mere contingent truths, as they would be on Flint's account.

For suppose that they were contingent truths, but nonetheless were not mere accidental generalizations. The most familiar case of contingent truths that are not accidental generalizations are laws of nature. But it does not *prima facie* seem that (40) is a law of nature: it seems of a very different form from them.

Moreover, there is an epistemological argument against (40) being a contingent claim. If it is such, then our knowledge of it would, surely, have to proceed by some inductive procedure or by direct observation. But there is no inductive access to (40) and it cannot be directly observed. To see that (40) is true in some case, we would need to see that someone does *A* under *C* and then let time roll back—an incoherent notion itself—and observe that she would still have done *A* under  $C_1$ . Thus we have not observed even one inductive instance of (40).

There is one alternative, and this is if we accept something like (40) only in cases where the circumstances make the action objectively highly probable. In such cases, we may have good inductive evidence that in circumstances *C* or any like circumstances, the person does *A*, and hence *a fortiori* that in such circumstances she does the same thing. However, the central libertarian cases I am interested in are, I shall assume, not like that. Suppose that Bob was deliberating whether to drink his coffee. He would offend his host by not drinking it. But maybe the drink would kill him. It does not seem to be the case that these circumstances would have to make it *highly* likely that he would drink the coffee. Nor does our belief that had the enemy poisoned the coffee, Bob would have died seem to depend on the claim that Bob was very likely to have drunk the coffee. It seems only to depend on the claim that indeed he did drink it, and that he would not have been able to tell the difference had it been poisoned.

Thus we accept (40) without having the sorts of grounds that are appropriate for contingent claims. If our belief in (40) is justified, it seems that (40) is actually going to have to be a metaphysically necessary truth, one accepted on conceptual and not empirical evidence. And I think there is much plausibility to this. Nonetheless, what I say below will also work if (40) is necessary in a weaker way, say nomically so. All I will need is that (40) have an alethic necessity status of some sort.

Note that this account satisfies the constraint given at the end of Section 3. For on this account, God's decision is based on a bit of relevant Middle Knowledge. For principle (40) makes the knowledge that Peter would have denied Christ were he to non-veridically think Christ predicted this denial be relevant.

### 6.2. Logical Possibility of Prophecy without Middle Knowledge

We are now in a position to spell out a logically possible case where God can tell Peter that Peter will deny him *without* Middle Knowledge, using mere foreknowledge. Suppose that God knows that Peter has a malfunctioning neural system which if God does not intervene will cause Peter to



hallucinate Christ's telling him that he will deny Christ. God now decides that Peter will in fact be in state  $C^+$  (see Section 5), either through the malfunctioning neural system or through a prophecy. Next—where all the sequencing is in the explanatory order, which may not correspond to temporal order—God foreknows that Peter will in fact deny him.

At this point, God knows that Peter will be in the circumstances  $C^+$  either due to a hallucination or due to being given a prophecy. These disjunctive circumstances differ invisibly, if at all, from the circumstances of Peter being in  $C^+$  through being given a prophecy. Therefore by (39), God knows:

- (41) (Peter is in  $C^+$  and Peter believes  $B$  because God told him so)  $\square \rightarrow$   
Peter denies Christ.

Moreover, God knows this by a route independent of knowledge of the necessary truth (5). God can use this knowledge then to decide to issue the prophecy.

This does not involve one in any explanatory loop. In the explanatory order we have the following sequence:

- (42) God decides that Peter at  $t_1$  will be in  $C^+$  due to receiving a hallucinatory or real prophecy about denying Christ.
- (43) Peter at  $t_1$  is in  $C^+$  due to receiving a hallucinatory or real prophecy about denying Christ.
- (44) Peter denies Christ at  $t_1$ .
- (45) God knows (43), (44) and the relevant similarity principle (39) to be true.
- (46) God therefore brings it about that at  $t_0$  Peter receives a real prophecy about his denying Christ.

Now it may seem that (46) is, problematically, prior in the order of explanation to (43), since the reason Peter is in the disjunctive state is because God has prophesied to him. But one may argue that (43) is not dependent on God's decision to issue the prophecy but only on God's decision to issue the prophecy *or* to allow Peter to suffer a hallucination.

It is, of course, crucial here that God's knowledge of (39) not require Middle Knowledge. That is why we need here that (39) be a *necessary* truth or at the very least some kind of a general principle that can be known to hold independently of specific knowledge of particular instancial cases. But this is precisely what was also needed in the Middle Knowledge account. Thus exactly the same kind of "relevant similarity" principle that was plausibly used to rescue the Middle Knowledge account can be used to rescue a pure foreknowledge account.

But this account is obviously badly limited. It assumes that Peter was going to have a hallucination. This kind of an assumption puts a *severe* limitation on when God can prophecy if God's righteousness does not allow him to produce hallucinations of possibly false prophecies. On this account God can only issue prophecies in such a way that the issuing of the prophecy would produce a state in the agent indiscernible from the state

that would have occurred had the prophesy not been issued, and rare is it that such conditions would be satisfied.

Limited as it is, the account does accomplish something. It shows that prophecy is logically possible on a foreknowledge-only account. Furthermore, if correct, it shows that the believer in foreknowledge does have reason to accept that *some* F-conditionals are true. For the principle (39) lets one move from categorical facts about the future to counterfactual claims. And it does so in a way that eludes the three basic criticisms of F-conditionals.

First, it escapes the criticism that we have insufficient reason to believe in F-conditionals. For while we have insufficient reason to believe in F-conditionals in general, we do have reason to believe in *some* F-conditionals, such as those produced by (39). Plantinga has argued, similarly, that someone who rejects F-conditionals should still accept that if Curley took a small bribe, he would have taken a larger one, and Adams agreed:

What makes [the counterfactual that a particular larger bribe would have been accepted], I think, is that its consequent is true and the truth of its antecedent would not have prevented, or made less likely, the event that makes the consequent true.<sup>11</sup>

I will discuss these kinds of cases in Sections 6.4–6.5, below. The cases mentioned here are also of a similar sort.

Second, this account escapes the truthmaker criticism that there is nothing in the actual world in virtue of which the contingently true F-conditionals are true. For the particular F-conditionals coming from a relevant similarity principle are true in virtue of an indisputably actual fact, such as Peter's *actually* denying Christ, together with whatever it is that makes the general principle (39) necessarily true. It is admittedly not clear what the truthmaker of the latter will be, but the problem is perhaps not greater than that of finding what makes *other* necessity claims true: (39) could be a conceptual truth about what counterfactuals *mean* in the case of libertarian free actions. Besides, one might think that it is only contingent propositions that need such grounding in the actual world.

Third, this account avoids Adams's circularity-in-the-order-of-explanation objection to God's using Middle Knowledge in providential decisions. The way it escapes it has essentially been described above. However, I leave it to the reader to verify that given (39), the Middle Knowledge theorist can also avoid this objection in exactly the same way and in the same cases—but there is no advantage of the Middle Knowledge account then.

### 6.3. Extending the Account

The general structure of this account of foreknowledge is as follows. We start with a "relevant similarity" principle of the form:

(47) If  $CRC_1$ , and if  $x$  does do  $A$  in  $C$ , then  $x$  would have still done  $A$  in  $C_1$ .

Here  $R$  is a "relevant similarity" relation which is technically an equivalence relation:  $CRC$  always holds,  $CRC_1$  holds if and only if  $C_1RC$  holds, and if  $CRC_1$  and  $C_1RC_2$  hold, then so does  $C_1RC_2$ . Moreover, our account

in the previous section requires the technical condition that if  $CRC_1$ , then  $(C\text{-or-}C_1)RC_1$ .

Given such a relevant similarity principle, if  $C_1$  would ensue without God's issuing the prophecy that  $x$  would do  $A$ , and if God's issuing of the prophecy would result in circumstances  $C$ , where  $C$  and  $C_1$  are relevantly similar, then God can use his foreknowledge of  $x$ 's doing  $A$  together with his knowledge of the relevant similarity principle to issue the prophecy that  $x$  will do  $A$ . For, God knows that  $x$  will do  $A$  and, we may suppose, has decided that  $C\text{-or-}C_1$  will eventuate. From this and (47), God finds out that were  $x$  to be in  $C$ ,  $x$  would do  $A$ . This gives God an action-guiding substantive reason for thinking that were he to prophesy  $x$ 's doing  $A$ , the prophecy would be true.

Thus, the wider the relevant similarity relation is, the more possibility for prophecy God has and the more F-conditionals God knows without Middle Knowledge. To account for prophecy given Middle Knowledge, we did not escape the need for a relevant similarity principle. However, we only needed a very narrow principle, one that would imply that Peter would act in the same way whether his perception was veridical or not. This gave rise to a very narrow set of cases, one so narrow that it is highly implausible that it would even cover the Biblical case if God had only foreknowledge and not Middle Knowledge.

But a wider relevant similarity relation is also possible, one that might be wide enough to encompass the Biblical case. The principle that invisible differences between circumstances do not matter might be part of a wider principle that all that matters in the circumstances is the time, the character of the agent, the subjective mental state, external causal influences on the agent, and maybe the history of previous choices. Let  $R$  be the relation that holds between a pair of circumstances when all these factors are the same between them.

If (47) holds with this choice of  $R$ , then we can account for the Biblical case of Peter. For observe that in the Biblical account after the cock crowed, "Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75, RSV). This implies that Peter had *forgotten* the saying of Jesus when he denied Jesus. Thus, it may well be that Peter was making his decision whether to deny Jesus in circumstances subjectively identical to those that he would have been in had Jesus not made the prophecy. It is possible, too, that Peter's character and history of previous choices were not affected by the prophecy. This could be true for purely natural reasons, or because God brought it about that the prophecy would not affect these things, or because God was committed to bringing it about that even if he did not make the prophecy, the same kinds of changes of character would occur (e.g., Peter would become more conscious of his frailty). If so, then God could first decide that circumstances would occur that would stand in relation  $R$  to the circumstances that would occur had Christ made the prophecy and Peter forgotten it. Then, God could use foreknowledge of Peter's denial together with (47) to get a substantive action-guiding reason for making the prophecy.

There is at least *some* plausibility to a relevant similarity principle of this sort. Of course we must be careful to ensure that the plausibility

remains given libertarianism—for, of course, given compatibilism there is little problem in any of this. But there is some plausibility in thinking that if hearing something did not affect one's character, and did not change the history of one's actions (this history might matter if one has a metaphysics on which one's actions are in some sense a part of oneself), and one has now forgotten it, then one would have acted the same way as one would have had one not heard it in the first place. To get an intuition favorable to this, consider a worry that professors have about whether their students do not just forget what they have been taught, and hence the teaching does not affect the students at all. This worry may be assuaged by being told that their teaching changes the students' character. But suppose it did not change the students' character and the students just forgot it. Would there be much reason to think that the student would or might act differently as a result?

One might, of course, wonder if Peter's forgetting was in fact total and one might have similar worries with respect to any alleged lack of character change. However, God could have committed himself to *ensuring* that Peter's forgetting was total. One might also think that it is impossible to freely choose while knowing how one will choose, and this would give independent reason for God to ensure Peter would forget.

#### 6.4. Agency

Observe that the more lax the relation  $R$ , the easier it is for cases of prophecy to be possible, but at the same time the harder it is to justify (47). So the challenge for coming up with foreknowledge-only possibilities for prophecy on this account is to find relations  $R$  that are lax enough to make these prophecies possible while yet (47) remains plausible.

Note now that there is an account of agency, grounded in ideas of Thomas Aquinas, that makes (47) plausible in the case of a fairly wide range of relations  $R$ . In fact, (47) may even be a conceptual truth, grounded in the way that choices, even libertarian-free choices, depend on reasons. Thomas Aquinas thought that we make our choices on the basis of opposed reasons, and that the choice is indeterministic when there is no strict domination relation between the reasons for one option and those for another. Here we say that one reason dominates another provided that they are reasons of the same type, but the first is either stronger than or of the same strength as the second. We say that the domination is strict if the reasons are not the same. We can then say that a set of reasons in favor of action  $A$  dominates a set of reasons in favor of action  $B$  provided that for each of the reasons for  $B$ , there is a dominating reason for  $A$ , a different one corresponding to each of the different reasons for  $B$ . The domination is then strict provided that at least one of the individual domination relations is strict.

Given this, we can formulate Thomas's view by saying that our choices are indeterministic when and only when there is no option for which the subjective reasons strictly dominate the subjective reasons for each of the other options. If there *is* such a strictly dominating option, we may well be free in choosing—this will be the situation of the blessed in the afterlife in respect of the choice whether to love God according to St. Thomas—but the freedom is not of a libertarian sort. Given this kind of a framework, one on which the reasons for a libertarian-free choice are real but

incommensurable reasons, it would be highly plausible to say that when a person chose to do *A*, she did so *because of* the reasons for *A*, though of course there were reasons for non-*A*, and had she chosen to do non-*A*, this would have been because of the reasons for non-*A*.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, something like (47) is arguably implied by Lewis's semantics for counterfactuals, since a world where one acts on the same reason that one acted on in the actual world under relevantly similar circumstances will surely be closer than one where one acted on a different reason—but since Lewis's semantics have flaws, this consideration has only heuristic value, however.

Now, we may extend the account quite plausibly by positing that if one chose to do action *A* in circumstances *C*, then were one to have been in circumstances that are exactly the same in respect of what subjective reasons they present, or that induce stronger reasons in favor of *A*, one would still have done *A*. This can be thought to follow from the claim that one chose on account of the reasons. Thus, the person who took the smaller bribe would have taken the larger one had it been offered, as long as the larger one didn't offer additional reasons for rejection (e.g., greater jail penalties if one were caught). If the larger bribe did offer additional reasons for rejection, then there might be no fact of the matter as to how the person would have acted. This kind of account could be used to construct a fairly lax relation *R* that still plausibly supports the necessity of (47). In fact, one might get something even more general than (47) here, something where the relation is not symmetric, but is more like a domination relation, and this might conceivably allow for even more cases of prophecy.

Moreover, if we take the giving of reasons for free actions to be *explanatory*, then one might think that considerations about the robustness that explanation often involves might make (47) quite attractive, since it shows that the explanation in terms of reasons for an action not only works in the actual world but in some neighboring worlds. However, attractiveness and truth are not the same. But there is another route from considerations of explanation to something like (47).

### 6.5. Explanatory Relevance

We can now give another argumentative route to a principle like (47), inspired by the comments of Adams quoted in Section 6.2, above. Suppose that events *D* and *E* in fact occurred, with *E* occurring at *t*. Assume that were *D* not to have occurred, *E* might not have occurred, a condition I will abbreviate as:

(48) *D* does not occur  $\diamond \rightarrow$  *E* does not occur.

Assume, further, that *D* and *E* are non-overlapping events. Then, surely, *D* is explanatorily relevant to *E*, i.e., *D* enters essentially into some explanation of *E*, where something enters essentially into an explanation if the explanation would be less explanatorily complete without it. That condition (48) is sufficient for explanatorily relevance seems to be an analytic truth about explanation and counterfactuals, though of course condition (48) is not necessary for explanatory relevance—cases of overdetermination settle that.

We can generalize the above observation by making use of the notion of a proposition  $p$  being explanatorily relevant to a proposition  $q$  given circumstances  $C$ . This means that  $p$  enters essentially into some explanation of  $q$  not merely by explaining the occurrence of  $C$ : without  $p$ , the explanation would be impoverished, and not just because  $C$  would become more mysterious. A different way to express this condition is to say that  $C$  does not “screen off” all of the explanatory relevance of  $p$  for explaining  $q$ . Contrapositively,  $p$  is explanatorily irrelevant to  $q$  given  $C$  if  $C$  does “screen off” any explanatory relevance of  $p$  for explaining  $q$ . For instance, on standard Newtonian accounts, if  $C$  is the complete state of the universe at  $t_1$  while  $p$  reports an event after  $t_1$ , then any report of an event before  $t_1$  is explanatorily irrelevant for explaining  $p$  given  $C$ , since it enters into an explanation of  $p$  only through partly explaining  $C$ . Another example of explanatory irrelevance is that Fred’s having pulled the trigger is explanatorily irrelevant to Bob’s having died of a gunshot wound *given that the gun fired in such-and-such a direction vis-à-vis Bob*. But Fred’s having aimed the gun at Bob is explanatorily relevant *given that the gun was fired*.

A generalization of the connection stated above between “might” conditionals and explanatory relevance is that if we have a situation where  $D$  and  $E$  are actual disjoint events, with  $E$  occurring at  $t$ , and the circumstances  $C$  are also actual, then the condition

(49) ( $D$  does not occur and circumstances  $C$  do occur)  $\diamond \rightarrow E$  does not occur at  $t$

implies that  $D$  is explanatorily relevant to  $E$  given  $C$ .

Suppose we accept this. I shall let  $A$  be a description of an action. Then, suppose that we have actual circumstances  $C$  and an actual event  $D$ , and that  $x$  does  $A$  at  $t$ . Let  $C_1$  be the circumstances of  $C$  and  $D$  occurring, and let  $C_2$  be the circumstances of  $C$  occurring without  $D$ . Assume that  $D$  is explanatorily irrelevant to  $x$ ’s doing  $A$  at  $t$  given  $C$ . Then we must have the negation of (49) by the above considerations, where  $E$  is the event of  $x$ ’s doing  $A$  at  $t$ . Given the standard duality between “would” and “might” conditionals that  $p \square \rightarrow q$  if and only if  $\sim(p \diamond \rightarrow \sim q)$ , this implies:

(50) ( $D$  does not occur and circumstances  $C$  do occur)  $\square \rightarrow x$  does  $A$  at  $t$ .

If we use  $R$  to denote the relation between circumstances  $C$  and  $C_1$  that holds if the above conditions are satisfied, then (47) holds, as long as the specification of  $A$  includes that it was done at  $t$ .

These observations allow one to construct F-conditionals from categorical facts. Moreover, these observations apply in the case of the larger bribe. Suppose Curley took a bribe in the amount of, say, \$5,000 and we want to argue that he would have taken \$10,000. Let  $C$  be the actual circumstances minus a statement of the exact amount of the bribe but with the specification that the bribe was at least \$5,000. Let  $D$  be the event of the bribe not being \$10,000. Intuitively, then,  $D$  is explanatorily irrelevant to Curley’s accepting the bribe given  $C$ . (It is explanatorily relevant if we are not given  $C$ , because  $D$ , at least formulated in this way, entails that a bribe was offered, and this is plainly relevant.) Thus, we can say that had  $C$  occurred without  $D$ , Curley would still have taken the bribe. In other words, had there been a bribe that *was* \$10,000, Curley would have taken it.

We can now use the above considerations to justify various “relevant similarity” principles. Suppose that given a full description of one’s character and state of mind at  $t$ , forgotten past events that did not induce one to have acted differently in the past (again, this is a sop to those who accept a metaphysics on which we have an intimate connection even with our past actions) are explanatorily irrelevant to our actions. Then, the above considerations entail precisely the kind of “relevant similarity” principle that we need to handle the case of Peter.

#### 6.6. *Objection: Rolling Back the Clock*

Now, admittedly, an image one sometimes uses to explain libertarianism is that if one rolled back the clock and put someone in the very same circumstances all over again, then the person might well choose differently. Such an image seems incompatible with *any* principle like (47). If so, then the whole approach is wrong—not just this account of how God could prophesy in the case of Peter given mere foreknowledge, but also our solution to the same problem given Middle Knowledge. However, the image is one to be examined carefully. It is incoherent to suppose that time is rolled back *and something else happens*. That would mean that  $A$  happened at  $t$  and then (later?)  $A$  did not happen at  $t$ . Rather, what is meant is that were the person put in qualitatively the same circumstances again at a later time, with memory having been reset, she might act differently. And this claim is logically compatible with (47), as long as our relation  $R$  is such that  $CRC_1$  entails that  $C$  and  $C_1$  occur at one and the same time.

Of course it may be that there is an intuition behind the redoing-the-choice image that is incompatible with the intuitions behind cases of (47). But at the very least, we do not at present have an *argument* that libertarianism entails the denial of the necessity of any non-trivial version of (47). And maybe that is all that we theologically need. Prophecy could be a *mystery*, one whose possibility cannot even be demonstrated,<sup>13</sup> but which can only be defended from objections. My account is such a defense, a defense independent of the doctrine of Middle Knowledge, and one that will stand as long as it has not been proved that there are no relations  $R$  that make (47) necessary and that are sufficiently lax to be of use to God in the actual cases where God is believed to have issued prophecies.

#### 6.7. *Objection: Fragmentation*

Here is a variant of an objection Flint makes, and responds to, in the Middle Knowledge case. It appears that God’s act of will is deeply fragmented. Some parts of the divine willing are prior in the order of explanation to Peter’s choice and some are posterior. I do not know if this is the only problem. Nor is it completely clear to me why the fragmentation is necessarily a problem. It may seem to threaten divine simplicity, but does not in any obvious way do so any more than other distinctions within the divine will, say between things willed contingently (e.g., that Adam should exist) and things willed necessarily (e.g., that God be loved by God, or that the Son should proceed from the Father). In the end, I think divine simplicity can be saved from the objection that it is incompatible

with such distinctions, but to argue for that would require another, much harder paper.

I can, however, indicate how Flint's response in the Middle Knowledge accounts, namely to globalize the divine choice and to think of God as simultaneously directly willing everything he is directly willing, would give one *logically possible* account of how the divine act of will could be unified. The notion of *directly willing* is to be distinguished from the indirect way that, say, one who directly wills that  $p$  also "wills" any proposition  $q$  entailed by  $p$  that would not have held had  $p$  not held. The notion of directly willing is closely related to the notion of *intending* as understood in the context of the principle of double effect.

If the arguments of my paper are sound, God can know these arguments with a single act of understanding, without the need for anything contingent to be prior to that knowledge. God can then will various conditional propositions, such as that if Peter denies Christ and the circumstances of Peter's choice are such that prophecy of it be possible, then a prophecy of it is made, and he wills these propositions all at once, while willing various categorical propositions, say that Adam should exist. This means that a part of what God wills are various contingency plans that never come off, such as what is to happen should Peter choose not to deny Christ.

It may seem a little strange to see how God could will that it be the case that if Peter denies Christ under such-and-such circumstances, then Christ will have prophesied it, without simultaneously willing that Christ prophecy it, which would of course make a part of God's act of will explanatorily posterior to Peter's choice on the pure foreknowledge account. But unless we are occasionalists, we are likely to entertain the possibility of God's engaging in certain kinds of acts of direct conditional willing. For instance, we might think that God directly wills the (nomic) conditional that if an object is dropped in such-and-such circumstances, then it drops, and God also might directly will that the object be dropped without us having to conclude with the occasionalists that God directly wills that the object drop. (There are problems here with regard to God's concurrence and doctrines of continual creation, but these can perhaps be handled when we think of God as concurring with events under a description that does not entail that a particular one of the events should happen.)

It may be puzzling that God could will that some conditionals going from the future to the past should be true, as in the prophecy case, but we should not expect there to be *nothing* puzzling about prophecy. Note that *if* (and this is by no means obvious) the only way God could directly will a conditional and its antecedent without directly willing its consequent would be by willing into existence some kind of a casual power (e.g., the power for the object to fall upon being dropped), then this account would entail backwards causation. But it would be a backwards causation that, at least in the cases of prophecy, would not involve any circularity paradoxes—the careful way the account was set up in Section 6.1 takes care of that. If such an account could be spelled out, then God could simultaneously directly will all that he directly wills, including both categorical and conditional states of affairs.



## 7. Conclusions

Prophecy without Middle Knowledge can be handled by building up from simple foreknowledge to a relevant F-conditional via a relevant similarity principle. It may not always be obvious that such a principle is available. But *some* relevant similarity principle is needed, it seems, even given Middle Knowledge. Thus, while things are more complicated without Middle Knowledge, the case is neither hopeless nor radically different. An omniscient being will be able to see much better than we which relevant similarity principles are true and how to ensure their applicability, and will be able to decide which prophecies to issue on the basis of this knowledge.

And there is a sense in which my account of prophecy is simpler than the Middle Knowledge account: It may need to posit a stronger relevant similarity principle than the Middle Knowledge account, but it does not require something of a *different kind* from what the Middle Knowledge account requires, while the latter requires the existence of a class contingent facts not grounded in anything actually existing, something that the simple foreknowledge account has no need of.

The most troublesome case for my account would be if the content of the prophecy entered into the subjective reasons for the prophesied free action. However, it is not clear that we need to suppose such cases to have occurred. And such cases seem problematic in *any* case since they seem to give rise to circularities in the explanatory order if one grants that the prophesied free action is explanatorily—but not temporally—prior to the prophecy.<sup>14</sup>

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## NOTES

1. "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977), 109–117.

2. This argument for Middle Knowledge was made by D. Kowalski, "Revisiting Adams's Middle Knowledge Objection," presented at the American Philosophical Association Central Division Meeting, Minneapolis, 2001.

3. Cf. the discussion in Adams (1977).

4. As Flint observes, some actions, such as denial or sinning, are essentially free. To deny someone (with the moral force that "deny" implies here) is to deny that person *freely*. See Thomas Flint, "Prophecy, Freedom and Middle Knowledge," in *Our Knowledge of God*, ed. K. J. Clark (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992), pp. 151–65. Substantially the same account is given in Chapter 9 of Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998.

5. Robert M. Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), pp. 343–53.

6. The most plausible account of its failure, I think, would be to deny that the truth-value of the conditional specifying what *x* would do in *C* is explanatorily posterior to *x*'s choice in *C* in the case where that choice is actually made.

7. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html).

8. See Adams (1991).

9. What I discuss as two solutions are taken by Flint as variants of a single solution. Flint also discusses a solution that applies only in the case of actions that are not essentially free. Like Flint, I do not think this solution is sufficient. Finally, Flint discusses a combination of his accounts to take care of a particular "fragmentation" objection. Since that objection is not one I am using against his account, and since his combined account does not help with the objections that I am actually putting forth, I will ignore that version. See also Section 6.7, below.

10. For instance, there may be a prophecy of the outcome of a battle. This prophecy is not of a free action *qua* free action, and God can issue the prophecy without even foreknowledge, simply based on an estimate of probabilities and on God's commitment to ensure that if the counterpredicted outcome should look like it is going to come out, God would intervene miraculously.

11. Adams (1977), p. 115.

12. In *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), I defend an account like this and suggest that such an account might be the best way of defending the compatibility of the Principle of Sufficient Reason with libertarian free will. There is even an essentially physicalist account, though one I do not endorse, compatible with the above claims: see Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

13. The doctrine of the Trinity has this property. For the doctrine claims that God is *essentially* a Trinity. But were it logically demonstrated that God could essentially be a Trinity, by S5 it would be thereby demonstrated that God in fact is a Trinity. But it is widely acknowledged that it cannot be demonstrated that God is a Trinity.

14. I am grateful to Thomas Flint and David Manley for discussions of these topics. I am also grateful to an anonymous reader whose criticism forced me to refine the crucial propositions (39) and (40).