

Christian Scholarship . . . for What?
An International, Interdisciplinary Conference

September 27-29, 2001

Session: Christian Scholarship and Issues Related to the Study of Human Nature

Divine Modeling, Counterfactuals of Freedom and the Grounding Objection

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Abstract

This paper attempts to construe counterfactuals of freedom as true, and as definite in their claims. The central question revolves around reconciling libertarian freedom with the notion that there are definite truths about what agents would *freely* do in various situations in which they might be placed. The argument grounds the truth of counterfactuals of freedom in actual states of affairs, namely, the activity of idea-models in God's mind. This view is then defended against objections, and advantageous implications are detailed, to yield the conclusion that this construal successfully provides a truth-ground for definite counterfactuals of freedom.

**Divine Modeling, Counterfactuals of Freedom
and the Grounding Objection**

I believe that there are some actions I would not perform, that it is true that I definitely would not do certain things, and not just unthinkable actions, like setting fire to my wife for amusement. It seems to me to be true, for example, that I would not, upon discovering that my address had been given to a junk-mailing list, write an angry letter to the list-making organization, demanding that I be removed from the list. It is not that I would have no desire to write the letter; I find junk mail an irritating waste of time. Nor am I presupposing any overwhelming desire or hardened character trait that would

prevent writing. Moreover, I don't see the time and effort wasted in writing the letter as obviously greater than the inconvenience of receiving the forthcoming junk mail. Nevertheless, I'm sure it's true that I would not write the letter.

However, I also believe that my agency is free, that my course of action is up to me and is causally indeterministic with respect to the history of the world prior to my acting. Given such freedom, though, given that I actually *could* (in the sense of causal possibility) write the angry letter, can it be true that I *would*--not merely *might* or *probably would*--reject that option, especially in light of the admitted desire to write it?

The Issue and its Importance

That question can be rephrased in more general terms to present the problem investigated in this paper: can indeterministic freedom, or metaphysical *libertarianism*, allow the possibility of true, definite *counterfactuals of freedom*? For many libertarians assert that while an agent's free actions occur indeterministically, nevertheless, certain conditionals are true of any agent, such that those conditionals describe what the agent *would freely do* in *any* situation in which the agent might be placed. That is, these conditionals--called counterfactuals of freedom--state what a given being would freely do if a specific state of affairs were to obtain, or what the being would have freely done if the state of affairs had obtained. For example, we might say of my friend James Jeffers, that, "If you had offered to wash James' Corvette, he would have freely accepted your offer and handed you a bucket and soft cloth."^{i[1]} Alvin Plantinga notes that the basic question underlying the truth of these counterfactuals is whether, in regard to a certain free agent in specified circumstances, there is *something*--in a definite sense--the agent "would have done had this state of affairs been actual".^{ii[2]} According to Plantinga, "The answer, I should think, is obvious and affirmative," for even if we did not know which option the agent would choose, "One thing we would take for granted" is that there is a right answer here.^{iii[3]}

However, opponents within the libertarian camp hotly contest just what Plantinga hopes could be taken for granted. For the argument does not center on discovering *which* option an agent would freely choose in a given situation, but on whether there *is* an option that she *would* freely choose--that is, on whether counterfactuals of freedom

can be true at all. Objectors charge that, assuming libertarian freedom and the required causal indeterminism, counterfactuals of freedom cannot be true. They assume an "antirealist" stance toward these conditionals, because such counterfactuals supposedly lack "adequate metaphysical grounds" for their truth.^{iv[4]} After all, counterfactuals of freedom concern contingent matters. So unless we can discover some ground for them--some reason to show why a given libertarianly free agent would *certainly* freely act in such and such a way in some specific circumstance--doesn't it seem more rational to believe that the matter is indeterminate, that the action *might* be performed *or* avoided? In that case, any *definite* counterfactual of freedom must automatically be false.

Why should that bother us, though? Why should we not heed Timothy O'Connor's rather plaintive request--made after his own rejection of counterfactuals of freedom--to *drop* the issue of their possible truth?^{v[5]} The most obvious reason concerns the difficulties in reconciling our freedom with God's providence. Many Christians, for example, have traditionally regarded God both as possessing foreknowledge of future events, and as providentially governing creation in such a way that every occurrence is under His control. Christian thought also has a tradition of libertarianism. However, these commitments seem incompatible. God's foreknowledge of, and governance over, our actions seems highly questionable, if those actions are libertarianly free and truly up to us. And if those actions are foreknown and governed, they appear less than free. Yet, as Thomas P. Flint has pointed out in his excellent, recent book on providence, true counterfactuals of freedom can reconcile these beliefs. If the omniscient God knows the true counterfactuals of freedom, that would (in part) constitute His *middle knowledge*,^{vi[6]} so called because it concerns *contingent* facts (unlike God's *natural knowledge* of necessary truths) but is *independent* of God's will for its truth (unlike God's *free knowledge* of facts determined by His creative decisions, like how many planets the solar system has).^{vii[7]} Using the combination of His free knowledge, of what free creatures He'll create and what situations they'll be placed in, and His middle knowledge, of what those creatures would do in those situations, God gains foreknowledge and providential control regarding creaturely actions. Yet He can maintain His governance without interfering with the freedom of those performances.^{viii[7]} Thus, defending the possibility of true counterfactuals of freedom may be vital to maintaining the consistency of some important Christian beliefs. For any Christian or

similarly-minded religious believer, then, there is strong motivation to rigorously examine the truth-status of counterfactuals of freedom.

In what follows, I shall offer an argument to defend the possibility of true counterfactuals of freedom. But first, we should note a distinction crucial to this argument: we must distinguish a sub-set of counterfactuals of freedom that Robert Adams calls "semifactuals." Using an example of a Boston city mayor who has just freely accepted a bribe for \$35,000, Plantinga cites as a true counterfactual of freedom that: if the mayor had been offered a bribe for \$36,000, he would have freely accepted it.^{viii[8]} Adams grants that the conditional may be true, but points out that it is a "semifactual." Its consequent--that the mayor would freely accept a bribe--is already true; and the conditions of the antecedent have been altered insignificantly, or irrelevantly, enough that it makes the consequent no less likely to be true.^{ix[9]}

Yet many counterfactuals of freedom concern both actions that never actually occur and even agents that never actually exist, at least as anything more than possibilities-for-creation in God's mind. For instance, as part of His middle knowledge God supposedly knows what *every possible* free creature would freely do in *every possible* circumstance; that is, He knows all the true counterfactuals of freedom about every possible free creature. However, large numbers of those beings are never created and never exist beyond God's ideas of them as possible. Such creatures then cannot have their actions described by conditionals with true consequents, since those beings never *actually do* anything.

Since semifactuals are less controversial, we shall focus our examination on the more purely counterfactual cases, namely: "Ö all counterfactuals of freedom about possible but non-actual creatures, and all that have [otherwise] false consequentsÖ ;î for they are the target of accusations of categorical falsity.^{x[10]} Here in these cases we shall have the clearest opportunity to see if and how counterfactuals of freedom can be true.

The Grounding Objection

Upon examining counterfactuals of freedom whose consequents don't obtain, we quickly see that the problem centers on the apparent lack of actually occurring states of affairs to ground their truth. As an example, consider again my friend James, who doesn't own any priceless antique cars. Now take this counterfactual of freedom: if you offered to wash James's fleet of priceless Packards, he would freely accept and hand you a bucket and soft cloth. Obviously, James has never accepted, nor does he accept, offers to wash his priceless Packards, since he owns none--nor (barring a Powerball lottery win) will he ever own any. Thus no state of affairs obtains in which James does anything like letting someone wash his priceless Packards. Objectors balk at that and say, "Nothing ever determines what would (have) happen(ed)"; the question of what James *would* do is indeterminate, and any definite assertion concerning his actions in such circumstances must be false.^{xii[11]} That leaves counterfactuals of freedom in a worse position than even predictions about the future, for the indeterminacy of the future eventually resolves; and upon occurring, those resolving events could determine which propositions about what *will* happen are true.^{xiii[12]} Adams takes up this objection, granting that future-predictions can be true by corresponding to future events, but maintaining that nothing ever occurs to which counterfactuals of freedom may correspond. No state of affairs actually obtains to grant them truth.^{xiii[13]} Even Flint, who defends counterfactuals of freedom, nevertheless grants that this "*grounding objection*" presents the most serious obstacle to accepting them.^{xiii[14]}

Unfortunately, this objection, so far, remains unanswered. A brief look at Flint's view--the most recent defense by one of the ablest and most dedicated proponents of freedom counterfactuals--will show us why. Flint, like nearly all those defending counterfactuals of freedom, utilizes the Stalnaker-Lewis possible worlds semantics for counterfactuals. According to the Stalnaker-Lewis scheme, if no grounding activity takes place in our actual world for counterfactuals of freedom, it can take place in another.^{xiv[15]} On this view, p counterfactually implies q iff:

Either: (1) there are no possible worlds in which p is true;

Or: (2) there is a world W in which both p and q are true,

And: (3) there is *no* world W^* , as or more similar to the actual world than W , in which p is true and q is false.^{xv[16]}

In other words, putting aside cases of (1) where p is impossible, a counterfactual's truth is determined by whether all the "closest" possible worlds in which the antecedent is true also contain the consequent as true. If any of the closest worlds with the true antecedent contain the consequent as false, the counterfactual is false. For example, with the counterfactual regarding James' freely allowing you to wash his priceless Packards: if we look at all the worlds least changed from the actual to achieve the facts that James owns the Packards and that you offer to wash them, then we observe whether it is true in all of them that he freely accepts your offer. If so, the counterfactual is true; if in *any* of those worlds he freely declines, the counterfactual is false.

The opponents of true counterfactuals of freedom, however, have proposed a devastating problem with this picture. If an action is free, the opponents say, the agent possibly can perform it *or* refrain. Thus, there will be possible worlds where the action is performed, and worlds where the agent refrains.^{xvi[17]} But given the action's *free* nature--that is, given the *causal indeterminacy* of the agent's performing vs. refraining--there seems to be *no* plausible way to say that *all* the closest worlds must be, say, performance ones.^{xvii[18]} At most, we could say that given an agent's character and motivations, performance is the *more likely* option, so that (proportionately speaking) *more* of the closest worlds would be performance ones. Even in that case, though, a counterfactual definitely implying performance would be false.^{xviii[19]}

In response, Flint follows Plantinga in suggesting that similarity between possible worlds is determined, in part, by which *counterfactuals* are *shared as true*.^{xix[20]} Thus if it's true that James would freely accept your offer to wash his Packards, then all the offer-acceptance worlds are thereby edged closer to the actual, since they also affirm that counterfactual. The offer-refusal worlds are likewise distanced, and the similarity semantics verify the acceptance counterfactual as true.

However, while it *displays* the truth of counterfactuals of freedom, if proposed as a *ground* this position is obviously circular. For similarity between worlds cannot determine the truth-value of counterfactuals of freedom, if that similarity is in turn determined by which counterfactuals of freedom are true.^{xx[21]} Indeed, I think any attempts to ground freedom counterfactuals in similarities between possible worlds are doomed to fail, given the problem raised above. I agree with O'Connor that,

is putatively true [counterfactuals of freedom] cannot be grounded through features of qualitative similarity between worlds.^{xxi[22]}

Sensitive to this response, Flint also forwards a version of Alfred Freddoso's view, as an alternative to arguing along Plantingan lines. Freddoso defends freedom counterfactuals, but rejects the assumption that their truth-values are posterior to similarities among worlds.^{xxii[23]} He attempts to ground the truth of counterfactuals of freedom in a different kind of correspondence. According to Freddoso, an agent would freely perform some action--the propositional description of which performance, he calls *p*--at some stipulated time *t* in some hypothetical situation *H*, is just in case there would be adequate grounds at *t* for the truth of present-tense proposition *p* on the condition that *H* should obtain at *t*.^{xxiii[24]} That is, a counterfactual of freedom is (and shall have been) true, if, should its antecedent obtain, its consequent also obtains. Moreover, since any conditional can remain true when its antecedent is false, the fact that many freedom counterfactuals' antecedents never obtain constitutes no obstacle.^{xxiv[25]}

Unfortunately, this view provides no real help. O'Connor charges Freddoso with employing a vicious regress of grounds. The counterfactual supposedly has grounds *now*, because it *would* have grounds should its antecedent obtain; but that 'would have' claim needs grounding, too, and so will its grounds, etc.^{xxv[26]} Actually, though, Freddoso does not appeal to a regress, but rather to the counterfactual's truth as a *brute, ungrounded fact*. His phrase, 'there would be adequate grounds,' seems flatly to assert that the antecedent-consequent connection holds. The counterfactual is *now* true, because the consequent *would* follow the antecedent, *period*. Even as he cautiously endorses Freddoso's view (while oddly still trying to fit it into the possible worlds semantics), Flint acknowledges that the counterfactuals of freedom are in some sense, is basic, primitive ungrounded facts about the way things are.^{xxvi[27]} Flint's view, then, ultimately seems to *deny* the grounding objection that sparked his defense in the first place. So clearly, if the objection has any basis at all, Flint's (and Freddoso's) scheme fails.

The Idea-Model Response

However, I think Freddoso is correct to reject the possible worlds semantics for counterfactuals of freedom (later I shall further defend this point). Moreover, while I grant that the grounding objection cannot simply be denied, I think it *can* successfully be sidestepped. To do that, I shall propose a way to collapse 'pure' counterfactuals of freedom into semifactuals; that is, even counterfactuals describing possible but non-actual creatures or otherwise having false consequents turn out to ground their truths in events that *do actually happen*. In my construal, a counterfactual of freedom can be true just in case the action its consequent describes does actually occur *in some way*.

But what kind of event-occurrence could this be, since we're considering counterfactuals for which the specified agent never performs the action, or even a close facsimile of it? indeed, isn't that part of the very nature of being *counterfactual*? My proposal builds upon an idea originally presented as a way in which God could *know* counterfactuals of freedom before having to see them physically instantiated: suppose God forms ideas of free creatures and then puts these ideas through their paces in various experiential scenarios, as if running a simulation on a model--like, for instance, testing a model plane in a wind tunnel. God could know what an idea-model does, and that could constitute the hypothetical middle knowledge, prior to (or without ever) creating and watching the creaturely agent.^{xxvii[28]}

Now, to apply this conception specifically to our present problem, I argue that not only could God *know* counterfactuals of freedom through such modeling, the very modeling process itself provides the actually occurring states of affairs needed to make those counterfactuals *true* in the first place. If anyone could create an accurate model of a free creature, it would be God; God would know every relevant detail, including the content of the agent's character, dispositions, quirks, odd impulses, and so on (much of this known, of course, because it's God's choice to include them). Suppose further that God puts this model through an ideal scenario, this ideal situation being accurate in every corresponding phenomenological detail to physical-world experience (being again a matter essentially up to God). Further, if God's model *really is* accurate, what it does in its ideal-scenario state of affairs should correspond exactly to what the real agent does do--or even would do--in its physical-world state of affairs. The truth of what the model does can be prior to what the creature does without the former entailing or determining the latter, because what makes the actions correspond is not some relation

spreading from whomever acted "first," but rather the essential similarity between the two doers. The model, if accurate, would not perform a given action unless the creature would, and vice versa.

To ground our example counterfactual, then, we could say that, "if you offered to wash James' fleet of priceless Packards, he would freely accept and hand you a bucket and soft cloth," is true just in case there *are* adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of model-James' freely accepting and handing over the items when, in the simulated situation, model-James is offered the Packard wash. God, of course, being always prepared for every contingency, will certainly have run such a simulation; thus the needed grounds of all true counterfactuals of freedom *actually obtain*.

Let me try to clarify this proposal. I am supposing that God observes what the model actually does in each situation in which it's placed. The model is exactly similar, at least in all respects relevant to action-performance in this situation, to the agent it represents. So in our example of James, the model-James thinks, reacts, views itself, and so on, in just the same way James himself does. I don't mean that the model is an actual *embodied* person wandering through an actual physical state of affairs, which is somehow causally *unconnected* to James'. I am thinking of the model as a kind of "consciousness in a vat", possessing self-will and thought, but still itself only an *idea* in God's mind. For that reason, the model need not have access to some form of physical reality, but could exist in an *idealistic* state of affairs. I know that sounds odd, but don't we ourselves have ideas--such as, say, characters in dreams--which operate outside our conscious control? Along the same lines, then, it does not seem impossible for God's much more powerfully creative mind to have a thought which *really does* freely think and operate for itself. Also, given God's cognitive abilities, He would seem able to run such models through the infinite varieties of states of affairs required to constitute robust middle knowledge.

The Response Defended

Further, I realize that such a modeling process commits me to some kind of temporality regarding God's existence. God's knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom takes on a before-and-after quality, since He gains it by observing the models. That

goes beyond the traditional view; Flint, for example, distinguishes only *logical moments* in God's knowledge.^{xxviii[29]} At first glance, this presents a problem. Part of the attraction of counterfactuals of freedom lies in their contribution to God's ability to make, know and guide the universe from eternity, not through tinkering and playing *catch-up* as time unfolds. The loss of that use then would constitute a significant drawback to any construal of freedom counterfactuals.

Yet that is not the case, here. The proposed temporality doesn't necessarily require that God be *in time with us*. It seems possible that God could still be atemporal with respect to *our* space-time universe. Upon completion of the modeling, God can create, know and govern our universe (perhaps as a time-space *block*) from a perspective atemporal to the passage of time within it.

Moreover, I don't propose that the modeling process itself be sequential--testing a model in one action, then another, then another, etc. Rather, I submit that God's intensively infinite intellectual capacities would conduct *all* the modeling scenarios *at once*. That is, James has not one idea-model generating counterfactuals of freedom for him, but *indefinitely many* tested *concurrently*. This set-up avoids two potential problems: First, it infinite span of temporal moments involved in putting one model (for each possible free agent) through all its possible paces. God's temporality need not be consumed with endlessly testing models. Second, it means that each model exists not as a true person perduring from one event to the next, but as a *person-slice* covering one action-event. That is, the models themselves are less than full agents. God's love then need not prompt Him to offer salvation to models that perform sinful acts, nor His justice require a model heaven and hell.

It might seem a problem that each free agent now needs to be effectively identical not to one model, but to indefinitely many. However, that problem dissolves, given an *essential core* of exact similarity shared by agent and all models alike. In other words, each agent possesses a multitude of characteristics--for example, being short, female, right-handed, living in 20th Century America, etc. Some of those characteristics are merely *accidental*, and could change without altering who the agent is (*pace* Leibniz). Other characteristics are *essential* and collectively determine that agent as who he or she is; if those characteristics change, so does the person.^{xxix[30]} If I had not

learned the Pythagorean theorem, I would no longer possess the accidental characteristic of knowing that theorem, but I would remain the same person. On the other hand, if I had been omniscient, not only would I no longer possess the characteristic of a finite intellect, I would be a different person--my finite intellect is essential to being me. Aside from a few obvious characteristics, I don't know myself well enough to know what's essential to being me; but God knows. God could thus ensure that my models--while certainly *not* numerically identical to me or each other, for none is indiscernible in *all* characteristics from me or from the others--would be (as far as phenomenological experience could tell) *essentially alike* both me and each other. That essential likeness provides a basis for regarding their actions as virtually mine, for regarding what is true of them by their actual actions as being counterfactually true of me.

However, I must stress that a model's actions can still only *counterfactually* be attributed to the represented creature. James and his models are *not* meant to be identical in that the James Jeffers I know is *same one* as the models. If they were, it seems like the model-scheme would violate the law of non-contradiction; it would be both true and false that *this* James Jeffers has done whatever action that some model-James performs but that agent-James doesn't.^{xxx[31]} Rather, I understand agent and model both to be a James Jeffers, but not both to be *this* James Jeffers.

That sounds odd, but I don't think the underlying distinction strays from common sense. As an illustration, first suppose that James had made some radically different decisions in his education, so that he had gone into cosmetology instead of engineering. Of course, the person becoming a hairstylist remains recognizable as James Jeffers. But James-as-hairstylist has such different priorities, such different experiences, etc., from James-as-engineer that the former no longer seems like the *same* James as the latter. They seem to be *different persons*. But now suppose James's education were changed only to this extent: he missed one thermodynamics class that he otherwise hadn't. The resultant James does differ from the one I know--the latter has some knowledge the former lacks--but they seem to remain the same person. Finally, suppose a much more radical change in James's life: conception occurred differently so that James was born female. The new 'Jamie' Jeffers no longer can be recognized as James. Not only is Jamie a different person from the James I know, she is not even a

James Jeffers. The three cases illustrate the distinction at work, here: they show that some changes will alter both essence and personal identity; some changes don't alter either; and some changes will *not* alter an essence, but *will* alter personal identity.

Thus, delineating an essence is not sufficient to identify a particular person. With that in mind, we can see that the essential likeness between models and agent does not produce contradictions about which actions are/are not performed. The models differ sufficiently from the agent in ontology, in life-history, etc. such that they cannot be the same person as the agent. So James' models exhibit what James Jeffers, in such-and-such circumstances, freely does, but they *don't* make it the case that agent-James has *actually* done those things. Nevertheless, the differences between models and agent have nothing to do with the factors relevant to which action is performed in a given situation. Therefore, the model-James' experiences correspond phenomenologically so exactly with what agent-James' would be in those circumstances, that the model's actions are *counterfactually true* of agent-James.

However, this distinction between the identities of agent and models may make it seem less likely that the model's free actions will definitely correspond with the agent's. And based on such a charge, several libertarian critics have objected to counterfactuals of freedom. Objectors might complain that, if the model and agent differ enough not to be the same person, doesn't that provide good reason to expect that their free actions would diverge? For several reasons, I think not.

First, while libertarian freedom excludes causal determinism, libertarianly free actions are not normally characterized as occurring without reason or cause. Judging solely from temporally prior states of affairs, we cannot predict what action a free creature will perform in a given circumstance; yet when the creature *has* performed an action, examination *can* tell us *why*. We can produce a rational account to explain the creature's acting as it did. Now, take the case of the transition between model and agent: all the relevant factors concerning a given action's performance--beliefs, desires, memories of past experiences, perceptions of the surrounding circumstances, etc.--do *not* meaningfully alter in the changeover. Given that the model performs a particular action, and that we can rationally account for why it does so, it seems we have good reason to expect the same action from the agent in the essentially similar situation.

This initial response, though, will not satisfy libertarian critics. As William Hasker has observed, nearly all the supporting examples of supposedly true counterfactuals of freedom gain their plausibility from psychological and character traits that would point an agent to a certain action.^{xxxii[32]} Yet short of attributing causally deterministic force to character, habits, and so on, those traits could not render counterfactuals of freedom definite and certain, but only probable. Such "might" counterfactuals could not serve as the needed sort of knowledge--whether for God or anyone else. Even middle knowledge opponents like Adams could endorse such weakened counterfactual claims.

On the other hand, if character, etc., were supposed to have causally determining force, that would apparently leave agents less than libertarianly free. Adams, for example, complains that real libertarian freedom should enable an agent to act out of character.^{xxxiii[33]} Indeed, Molinists like Flint and Freddoso--libertarians who strongly affirm counterfactuals of freedom--admit that freedom seems to require not only that an act not be performed because of a "necessity of nature," but also that aside from the *immediate* in-agent motivation, "the total causal activity" *at the time of the action* be "compossible" with the action's not occurring.^{xxxiii[34]}

Therefore, to avoid impugning libertarian freedom--and rendering trivial the whole question of counterfactuals of freedom--we must not suppose that the character state, shared by model and agent, is sufficient to determine what action will be performed. The force of character must be admitted as inadequate to ground anything stronger than "probably" or "might" counterfactuals. But in that case, Hasker concludes, psychological and character traits are insufficient to guarantee the truth of definite counterfactuals of freedom. It then seems that supporting examples like mine, which emphasize similarities of experience, beliefs, etc., should be highly suspect.^{xxxiv[35]}

Yet we can now respond to Hasker's objection, for we do not ground the counterfactual of freedom merely on psychological and character traits present in the agent--all of which the model shares--but we also can appeal to the fact that from those traits, in the specified situation the model *does do* the action counterfactually ascribed to the agent. Moreover, I want to stress again that the similarity between model and agent must reside in their *exact, essential similarity*, as determined by God. That is, God--who

makes both agent and model--ensures their similarity to such a degree that the model's actions, for all relevant considerations, exactly represent the agent's actions. Upon observing the model freely doing x in situation y , we can justifiably regard that as effectively observing the *agent* freely doing x in situation y . Again, it is not that the model's actions *entail* the agent's through some *causal* priority; the model's and agent's actions are not causally connected at all. Rather the actions of both *exactly correspond* to each other, because the model and agent are for the purposes of assessing action in a given scenario *effectively* (though not actually) *the same person in the same circumstances*.

Thus, my solution seems to dissolve all true counterfactuals of freedom into semifactuals. That is, these counterfactuals now have effectively true consequents and may be true as conditionals because the antecedents are relevantly unchanged in the transition from model to agent. It seems to me, then, that the burden of proof lies on objectors to the model-agent similarity-relation, to show reason why the agent's action should be *different*.

However, objectors might continue to try to shift that burden by maintaining that libertarian freedom either requires, or at least produces, a certain amount of unpredictability. Perhaps being free involves an irreducibly chaotic or random element. If that should be the case, a free creature's idea-model could be essentially similar and *still* behave differently from the real agent, through some sort of random divergence. Therefore, the certainty of the similarity relation, and thus of the counterfactual of freedom, would not obtain.

This objection could utilize examples like Twin Earths, and so on, but let us suppose this: James, while soundly sleeping one night, is abducted by aliens. The aliens possess a device like the *Star Trek* transporter, and simply *beam* James directly from bed to their ship. This device analyzes the transportee's physical makeup down to the atomic level, thus the aliens now have an exact blueprint of James's being. They then use a replicating device to produce a second person exactly like James, physically. Let us assume, for the sake of the example, that memories, feelings and thoughts correspond exactly to brain states and neural activity, so that the duplicate matches James in memories, experience, etc. also. The aliens further construct an exact

duplicate of the interior of Jamesí house, complete with windows looking out onto an indistinguishable-from-real view. They finally beam the still-sleeping and none-the-wiser James back into his real bed, and place the duplicate into the duplicate bed in just the same bodily position. The moment the transfers are complete, the alarm clocks buzz, and both Jamesí awaken. The aliens relax and observe the Jamesí in enacting their morning routines. Will both Jamesí act in exactly the same way? I believe our sense is, that they will *not*. The Jamesí may act *somewhat alike* (doing the same activities), but *won't act exactly alike* (perhaps doing them in different order, or in different ways). Yet by stipulation in the example, the Jamesí and their situations are exactly the same. If they can't be counted on to act exactly alike, how could we expect the idea-models and corresponding agents to do so?

Yet I am not convinced that such divergences prove that freedom, itself, involves randomness. Rather, I propose that the divergences would result from non-freedom-related factors. When I reach for my coffee mug, my hand contacts the ceramic at certain points. If I repeat the action, from the same position, with the mug in the same position, my hand always seems to contact the ceramic at different points (even when I intentionally try for the same spot). In short, even if I freely perform the same action, the "how" of the performance changes each time; yet that change emerges not from my freedom, but from other factors, like the extent (or lack thereof) of my fine motor control.

Further, those changes may *sometimes alter the course of my freely taken actions*. As OíConnor puts it, ìÖ it is undoubtedly the case that under even slightly different circumstances, agents would (as a matter of brute fact) act differently on occasion.^{xxxv[36]} Suppose I rise and turn to the door, in order to leave my office. In facing the door, I may or may not catch a glimpse of my triceratops poster that hangs just to its left. But if I do, it reminds me that the posterís painting conceals glow in the dark ìbonesî of the dinosaur portrayed. With the skeleton in mind, I decide first to turn out the lights and to pause and enjoy the poster, before opening the door and exiting. My decision was free, but it wouldnít have occurred if I hadnít glimpsed the poster as I turned. That glimpse, and the memory it prompted, contributed to my changing my course of action from simply opening the door and turning off the lights as I passed.

Moreover, any example like the Jamesí, above, teems with such potential random divergences in performance that could result in different courses of free action. Indeed, for any scenario other than the absolute knowledge and control of God, those divergences between agent and model seem irremovable. I contend, then, that those non-freedom-dependent divergences drive our skepticism about the exact correspondence of free action between model and agent. However, God could factor out those divergences, so Godís idea-models could still ground counterfactuals of freedom for their corresponding agents.

However, critics have proposed yet another reason to think the model-agent action-similarity relation would not hold. This objection asserts that if a free action were ìreplayedî over and over, different options would--at least eventually--be realized.^{xxxvi[37]} That follows from considering events in other possible worlds like replays of the actual world; all the possible action-options show up in the range of available worlds, so they would eventually show up in actual replays. That is, if we think of the relative frequencies of the optionsí occurrences among the closest worldsó according to the Stalnaker-Lewis semantics of counterfactualsó as a measure of the likeliness of any given option, we are committed to *every* option eventually occurring in an actual replay, since *none* has *no* likelihood to occur. replayed the *same* way, that would show that no other options exist in the closest possible worlds, and thus that the action must have been *determined*, and *not free*.^{xxxvii[38]} If this picture were correct, it would render the idea-models useless as grounds for definite counterfactuals of freedom. Not only would the agents *possibly* act differently from the models, we would expect that the agents *probably would* do so, at least sometimes. The opponents would then have provided what I earlier challenged them to produce: a positive reason to suppose the similarity relation between model and agent would not lead to their freely performing the same actions.

However, this ìdiffering replaysî objection does *not* stand, because it forces its adherents to some deeply irrational conclusions. For instance, my belief that, ìif I were to drop my pen (with an unobstructed downward path), it would fall to the floor,î is an obvious piece of knowledge. Yet, if--as current physical theories hold--the laws of nature operate in a fundamentally *indeterministic* manner, the objectors would have to characterize my belief as false, on the same reasons that they denied definite

counterfactuals of freedom. For, given indeterministic laws of nature, there must be *some* possible world in which the pen does *not* fall; and because the divergence in outcome is indeterministic, that world will be *just as close* as the myriad worlds in which the pen does fall. Thus, Peter van Inwagen admits, 'There is' at least a formal possibility that [p (the pen's being dropped, etc.) definitely counterfactually implies q (the pen's falling to the floor)] might be false even if the probability of q , given p , is 1.^{xxxviii[39]} I don't fault van Inwagen's logic. Rather, I reject the 'differing replays' position that produces such a conclusion. Does any of us really believe that, even given indeterministic laws of nature, if I repeatedly dropped my pen, *eventually* (after a *lot* of trials) it *actually* would not fall? No. Does that uniform dropped-and-falls result preclude the laws of nature from being indeterministic? Apparently not.

I think the case of free actions should be treated analogously. Even if they are indeterministically performed, that does not preclude their being performed the same way in every *actual* replay. As John M. Fischer and Mark Ravizza have observed,

'the fact that someone never *will* act [in a certain fashion]' does not entail that she *cannot* do so. For surely there is nothing incoherent about a person having a power which she never exercises.^{xxxix[40]}

In other words, the indeterministic freedom, itself, of an action does not commit us to thinking that, if the action were multiply replayed, different actions would be performed (eventually) in the replays. Considered this way, indeterministic freedom fits with the picture of freedom counterfactuals offered by the idea-model theory. If an action 'replays' identically, in the identity of free action between models and agents, that in no way impugns the freedom of the action.^{xl[41]} Therefore, I think my idea-model view has the resources to rebut libertarian critics' objections against the possibility of true counterfactuals of freedom.^{xli[42]}

Further Implications

With the basic strengths now clear, I want briefly to explore some interesting additional implications of my account. First, as I indicated before, if counterfactuals of freedom are grounded in the actual activities of idea-models, then the Stalnaker-Lewis

possible worlds semantics of counterfactuals of freedom are mistaken. That scheme might still *display* the truth of freedom counterfactuals, if the "closest" worlds would be ones where the models act in the same ways as occurred in the actual world. But it would not *ground* or *determine* those truths.

Second, the idea-model theory may help close the gap between two prominent views of counterfactuals of freedom. Flint explains how Thomists (after Aquinas) object to Molinists that if counterfactuals of freedom are *independent* of God's will, it makes Him *passive* and *dependent* with respect to their truth--which is *unfitting* and *imperfect* for an absolute Creator in relation to contingent truths.^{xlii[43]} But, of course, Molinists respond that if God's will determines the counterfactuals' truths, it no longer makes sense to call the implied actions free; and Flint firmly asserts the Molinist position that counterfactuals of freedom must *not* [be] under God's control.[^] That is, true freedom counterfactuals must be *explanatorily* prior both to God's knowledge of [them] and to any creative decision he makes;^{xliii[44]} those counterfactuals would have been true in spite of *every* creative act of will that God has the power to perform.^{xliv[45]}

However, we can now see that the Thomists may be granted at least part of their point. On the idea-model construal, it is *not* the case that the counterfactuals of freedom are true prior to, or independently of or in spite of, God's creative will. Apart from God's decision to create and *test* the idea-models, *no* counterfactuals of (creaturely) freedom *could* be *true*. On the other hand, Molinists need not be alarmed, since God's will alone still does *not*--and *could not*--determine *which* counterfactuals of freedom are *true*. Those true counterfactuals are grounded in *free actions*, and successfully remain counterfactuals of *freedom*. Therefore, I think my view has another point in its favor, since both the initial Thomist and Molinist concerns are plausible.

Third, the idea-model construal solves an epistemic accessibility problem raised by both Adams and O'Connor. Adams acknowledges that semifactuals can be true,^{xiv[46]} and O'Connor affirms "counterfactuals of freedom whose antecedents and consequents actually, eventually occur."^{xvi[47]} Yet both objectors maintain that such truths could *not* constitute God's needed middle knowledge. In O'Connor's words, true counterfactuals of freedom are:

Ö intrinsically unknowableÖ unless and until their antecedentsÖ have been realized in the (concrete) world. Given that this condition has not been satisfied for any [counterfactuals of freedom]Ö prior (in the order of explanation) to Godís creation decision, it follows that his decision was not informed by knowledge of any such propositions.^{xlvii[48]}

After all, since Godís infallible knowledge of a proposition involves or consists in an ìimmediate acquaintaince with its grounds;î and since those grounds donít exist for a freedom counterfactual until *after* an agent is created, placed in specified circumstances, and freely acts; even God canít be ìÖ directly acquainted with what is not `there`--there simply are no `grounds` in the case of [creaturely counterfactuals of freedom] of which Godís prevolitional intellect might be aware.^{xlviii[49]} Adams echoes this complaint that true semifactuals would be unknowable until it was too late for them to do any work in Godís creative and providential decisions.^{xlix[50]}

However, in the idea-model scheme, that problem dissolves. As noted above, all true counterfactuals of freedom emerge as semifactuals; they seem to fulfill OíConnorís truth-demands, too, since their antecedents and consequents do, *effectively*, actually obtain. Yet those counterfactuals *could* be used for Godís middle knowledge. No, God could not know the true freedom counterfactuals prior to His creation and observance of the idea-models. But, yes, He *could know* them prior to His creation and governance of the physical universe, and thatís all a middle knowledge defender needs. For that preserves the consistency of Godís foreknowledge and sovereignty with *our* libertarian freedom, which is the point.

Fourth, Hasker has attacked true, definite counterfactuals of freedom as contradicting the freedom of the action in question. Hasker argues that given a true counterfactual of freedom about an agent, the agent no longer has the power to bring about some option other than the implied action. But that contradicts the notion of libertarian freedom.^{li[51]} As Flint has pointed out, though, Haskerís argument depends crucially on the claim that counterfactuals of freedom are more ìfundamental features of the worldî than are particular facts, like event-occurrences.^{lii[52]} If that were the case, it would be beyond the ability of agents to bring about the truth or falsity of freedom counterfactuals concerning them--similar to the way the truth of laws of nature is beyond

our control. So, Hasker charges, if there were true counterfactuals of freedom, they would negate the very freedom they purportedly describe, because the implied actions could no longer *not* be performed in the specified circumstances, since that would falsify the counterfactuals, which is beyond the agents' abilities to do.

Obviously, Flint thinks, a defender of true counterfactuals of freedom needs to reject Hasker's Hypothesis about their fundamental place in the world.^{liii[53]} Happily, the idea-model theory offers good reason to do so. Whichever freedom counterfactuals are true *cannot* be more fundamental than particular facts are, because *particular facts*--the event-occurrences of the idea-models' actions--*ground their truth*. Hasker's argument then fails, and the idea-model construal again emerges unscathed.

Finally, therefore, I *think* I have presented a successful scheme in which counterfactuals of freedom can be true. However, my account does have some further, controversial implications, which I can only note, before closing: first, there can be no true counterfactuals of freedom regarding the idea-models, which are themselves a kind of free being (unless either the agent somehow has been placed in a situation the model hasn't, or the models have a regress of prior models). Second--as mentioned above--apart from observing them in the models, even God could not know counterfactuals of freedom. Third, if God didn't create idea-models for them, free creatures could exist for whom no counterfactuals of freedom could be true. Fourth, without God's modeling activity, there could be no true counterfactuals of freedom at all; so naturalistic ontologies cannot support true counterfactuals of freedom. Fifth, even if counterfactuals of freedom are not more fundamental to the world than particular events, it remains the case that their truth is set prior to an agent's actions. Yet many libertarians (including myself) hold that moral responsibility requires an agent to have a certain minimal level of *causal* control over her action-options, even in the notorious Frankfurt-type cases; and it isn't clear yet how this model of freedom counterfactuals affects that position.^{liii[54]}

In summary, then, in our search for adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of counterfactuals of freedom, we proceeded from the requirement that the counterfactuals need actual occurrences for their truth-grounds. To respond to that requirement, I tried to show how counterfactuals of freedom may collapse into semifactuals and may be grounded in actual states of affairs constituted by the activities

of idea-models in God's mind. I further supported this construal by demonstrating how it successfully responded to objections and possessed a number of advantageous consequences. Perhaps, then, in returning to my opening question, of how it could be true that I *freely would* refrain from sending an angry letter to curtail receipt of junk-mail, an answer has emerged: because my idea-model refrained, in the tests God ran before the universe was made.

Acknowledgement

A number of people have contributed helpful suggestions and criticisms to various versions of this paper. I am grateful to all of them, but especially to Thomas P. Flint, to Trenton Merricks, to the audience for the presentation at the 1999 Pacific meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, and to the members of and staff for the 1999 Calvin College Pew Seminar on God and Evil.

^{i[1]}It may be that only counterfactuals of freedom which contain complete antecedents--that is, antecedents which include a comprehensive world-description and history--are candidates for truth (in this case, that would certainly involve information such as whether you drive a Ford or can be trusted around fine Chevrolet automobiles, whether James has time to observe you to ensure that the job is done right, etc.). I do not think that makes a difference for my current purposes. So if the reader endorses that requirement, he or she is welcome to consider such "completeness" tacitly attached to my examples.

^{ii[2]}Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, [NY: Clarendon Press, 1989]: 180.

ⁱⁱⁱ*ibid.*, p. 180.

^{v[5]} Timothy O'Connor, "The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge," *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 66 no. 2, (1992): 162.

^{vi[6]} Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998] 42.

vii[7] Ibid., p. 44.

viii[8] Plantiga, *The Nature of Necessity*, p. 177.

ix[9] Robert M. Adams, , iMiddle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,i *The Problem of Evil*, M.M. Adams and R.M. Adams, eds. [Oxford: UP, 1990] 121.

x[10] Robert M. Adams, iAn Anti-Molinist Argument,i *Philosophical Perspectives 5: Philosophy of Religion, 1991*, James E. Tomberlin, ed. [Ridgeview, Pub. Co., 1991]: 345.

xi[11] Jonathan M. Strand, *The Semantics of Conditionals*, Dissertation for Dept. of Philosophy, University of Notre Dame (1991): 252.

xii[13] Adams, iAn Anti-Molinist Argument,i p. 345.

xiii[14] Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998]: 122.

xiv[15] Ibid., p. 133.

xv[16] O'Connor, iThe Impossibility of Middle Knowledge,i p. 139.

xvi[17] Peter Van Inwagen, iAgainst Middle Knowledge,i *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Volume XXI: Philosophy of Religion*, Peter A. French, *et al*, eds., [Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1997]: 227.

xvii[18] Ibid., p. 230.

xviii[19] Ibid., p. 230.; O'Connor, iThe Impossibility of Middle Knowledge,i p. 144.

xix[20] Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, pp. 135-136.

xx[21] Strand, *The Semantics of Conditionals*, pp. 262-263.

xxi[22] O'Connor, iThe Impossibility of Middle Knowledge,i pp. 149-150.

xxii[23] Freddoso, in Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, p. 74.

xxiii[24] Ibid., p. 72.

xxiv[25] Ibid., p. 73.

xxv[26] O'Connor, iThe Impossibility of Middle Knowledge,i pp. 155-156.

xxvi[27] Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, p. 137.; cf. pp. 132-137 for Flint's defense of Freddoso.

xxvii[28] Calvin Normore, iDivine Omniscience, Omnipotence, and Future Contingents: An Overview,i *Divine Omniscience and*

Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy, T. Rudavsky, ed., [D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1985]: 3-22; pp. 15-16. In addition to my adaptation from

knowledge-basis to truth-ground, my view differs from Normore's in this crucial respect: Normore's construal endorses and depends upon the law of Conditional Excluded Middle [CEM], and *mine* does *not*. This law asserts that if a disjunction (x or y) is truly counterfactually implied, then either the counterfactual implication of x , or the one of y , has to be true (for more information on CEM, cf. Robert C. Stalnaker, 'A Defense of Conditional Excluded Middle,' *Ifs*, W.L. Harper, *et al*, eds., [Boston: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1981]: 87-104). Normore's portrayal utilizes CEM, so that one freedom counterfactual *must* be true for every performance vs. avoidance situation for every possible free agent. Then God *knows* which one is the case by viewing the models (Normore, 'Divine Omniscience, Omnipotence, and Future Contingents: An Overview,' p. 15). However, I believe CEM is false, although I don't have space to defend that in this paper (for arguments against CEM, cf. Strand, *The Semantics of Conditionals*). On that account, I try to show how counterfactuals of freedom may be true, regardless of whether CEM is.

xxviii[29] Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, p. 43.

xxix[30] This notion owes a debt to Plantinga's concept of an essence expressible across individuals in different possible worlds through 'transworld identity' (cf. Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 72-77, 88-98).

xxx[31] I owe this objection to Matthew K. Lakkard.

xxxi[32] William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989]: 31.

xxxii[33] Adams, 'Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,' p. 117.

xxxiii[34] Freddoso, in Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, p. 27.

xxxiv[35] Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, p. 31. In conversation, Tom Flint suggested this initial reply to Hasker: even if character cannot ground or guarantee the truth of counterfactuals of freedom, force of character can still *justify* our believing such counterfactuals. However, since such justification is compatible with falsity--as, for example, in situations like those of the notorious Gettier Problems--should we stand on justified belief in counterfactuals of freedom while we still lack *any* understanding of *how* those counterfactuals *could* be true? We may not be able to prove the truth of our justified perceptual beliefs, but we can at least theorize plausible grounds that *would* make them true. So Hasker's objection seems to stand unless we can postulate plausible, possible grounds for counterfactuals of freedom.

xxxv[36] O'Connor, 'The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge,' p. 157.

xxxvi[37] Van Inwagen, 'Against Middle Knowledge,' p. 227.

xxxvii[38] *Ibid.*, p. 228; O'Connor, 'The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge,' p. 162.

xxxviii[39] Van Inwagen, 'Against Middle Knowledge,' p. 236, footnote 14.

xxxix[40] John Fischer and Mark Ravizza, 'When the Will Is Free,' *Philosophical Perspectives, 6: Ethics, 1992*, James E. Tomberlin, ed., [Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1992]: 423-451; p. 442.

xl[41] On a tangential note, I agree with Fischer and Ravizza that this point counts against 'restrictivist' construals of incompatibilist freedom, like van Inwagen's. Van Inwagen thinks free actions must be quite rare, since he holds that the *at-most* extent of our freedom occurs in cases either of motivational *struggle*, or of *indecision* between significant and incommensurable goals (Peter van Inwagen, 'When Is the Will Free?' *Philosophical Perspectives, 3: Philosophy of Mind and Action Theory*, James E. Tomberlin, ed., [Ridgeview Pub. Co., 1989]: 399-422; pp. 404, 417). His view of freedom makes it obvious why he would affirm that free actions would 'replay' differently, as they must be cases of strong motivational conflict in which no option has a strong likelihood of occurring. Indeed van Inwagen probably would have objected to my opening example, regarding the junk-mail; if I'm sure that I wouldn't write the angry response letter, my not-writing must not be free (*Ibid.*, pp. 412, 414). But now we can see that the example *can* count as legitimate, since we have reason to regard van Inwagen's restrictions as too strict.

xli[42] Michael McKenna has pointed out to me a further possibility for libertarian critics of the idea-model theory: on some libertarian views, the actual *state* itself of the *agent* is undetermined, prior to the free action which only then makes the agent's state determinate. This is apparently Robert Kane's position, which he says is 'more radically indeterminist' than the standard notion of determined events and states sometimes 'forking' at undetermined events (Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will*, [NY: Oxford UP, 1998]; p. 173). He thinks the agent's whole neural network is undetermined until the agent makes the decision to act. He writes,

One does not therefore merely have indeterminism *followed* by a determinate [decision-making] effort, or a determinate effort *followed* by indeterminism. Rather, the indeterminism and the effort are *fused*: the indeterminacy is a property of the effort and the effort is indeterminate (*Ibid.*, p. 151).

Prior to acting, then, the agent's state is like Schrodinger's paradoxical cat (neither live nor dead inside the unopened box). In that case, God could *not* construct the idea-models as exactly similar to the agent-creatures in the needed respects, because of their indeterminate states. Indeed, *nothing* could be exactly like *o* or even definitely different from *o* an agent in the process of making a free decision (*Ibid.*, pp. 171-172). My construal would then face a major objection against its crucial similarity relation between model and agent; it would be inescapable that models and agent could not be exactly alike in the relevant action-producing characteristics, and so we would not have reason to expect their actions to correspond, either. Honestly, I'm not sure how to respond here--largely because I don't know what to

make of the central contention that the agent's pre-act state is indeterminate. Even Kane admits that his picture of free action involves elements that are 'pretty mysterious'; but he thinks that mystery stems from our confusions about consciousness and quantum indeterminacy, in general (Ibid., pp. 150-151). Maybe so, but I *am* still confused; I simply don't grasp the possibility of Kane's position. So I must leave addressing his objection for another (and more enlightened) time.

xlii[43] Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, p. 85.

class=MsoEndnoteReference>xliii[44] Ibid., p. 160.

xliiv[45] Ibid., p. 42, footnote 9.

xliv[46] Adams, 'Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,' p. 121.

xlvi[47] O'Connor, 'The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge,' pp. 157-158.

xlvii[48] Ibid., p. 158.

xlviii[49] Ibid., pp. 158-159.

xlix[50] Adams, 'Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,' p. 122.

[51] Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, pp. 39-52.

li[52] Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, p. 157; Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, pp. 45-47.

lii[53] Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, p. 157.

liii[54] Cf. Keith Wyma, 'Moral Responsibility and Leeway for Action,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1997): 57-70; p. 66.