LOTTERY PUZZLES AND JESUS' RETURN

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This paper is about a puzzle--I'll call it 'the Return'--that puts considerable pressure upon Christians to accept a very robust scepticism about the future. Those familiar with work on so-called 'lottery puzzles' will notice much similarity between those puzzles and the Return. However, there is an important difference that renders the Return an especially difficult problem for a Christian who believes that he has much knowledge about the future. After introducing the Return, I'll argue that it is immune to the most promising non-sceptical approaches to more familiar lottery puzzles.

1. Introduction

This paper is about a puzzle--I'll call it 'the Return'--that puts considerable pressure upon Christians to accept a very robust scepticism about the future. (More precisely, the Return puts pressure upon Christians who believe in a literal second coming of Jesus Christ. The arguments of this paper don't apply to anyone who adopts a metaphorical gloss on the second coming of Jesus. For readability, I will henceforth suppress the qualification 'who believe that there will be a literal second coming of Jesus Christ' when speaking of Christians.) Those familiar with work on so-called 'lottery puzzles' will notice much similarity between those puzzles and the Return.[1] However, there is an important difference that renders the Return an especially difficult problem for a Christian who believes that he has much knowledge about the future. After introducing the Return, I'll argue that it is immune to the most promising non-sceptical approaches to more familiar lottery puzzles.

It may be tempting to react to the Return by embracing a wide-ranging scepticism about what will happen in the future while trying to minimize this by claiming to know much about what will *probably* happen in the future. I have some sympathy for this sort of reply with regard to familiar lottery puzzles. We should, though, exercise some caution given our inclination to make what seem to be sincere pronouncements about what will flat-out, and not just probably, happen in the future.[2] More importantly, however, we shall see that the Return--unlike other familiar lottery puzzles--places just as much pressure upon Christians to deny that they know very much about what will *probably* happen in the future.

In the end, I think the Return should lead Christians to adopt a rather robust and thoroughgoing scepticism with regard to claims about the future. I do not, however, think that this is ultimately bad news for Christians. I will conclude by suggesting that the scepticism the Return recommends should be regarded by Christians as entirely healthy.

2. Lottery Puzzles and the Return

It will be useful to begin with a sample lottery puzzle:[3]

The Aneurysm: Suppose I claim to know that I will dine with my wife this evening. Suppose also that I'm aware of sobering information about unexpected and fatal brain aneurysms that strike over 15,000 people a year in the United States alone.[4] It's plausible that I'm not able to know that I won't suffer a sudden and fatal brain aneurysm before this evening—even though it's likely I won't. However, if I do know that I will dine with my wife this evening, then I am able to know that I won't suffer a sudden and fatal brain aneurysm before then. For I'm able to deduce that I won't suffer a sudden and fatal brain aneurysm before this evening from the proposition that I will dine with my wife this evening. And given my ability to make this deduction from my alleged knowledge that I will dine with my wife this evening, I am able to know that I won't suffer a fatal brain aneurysm before this evening. For the following closure principle, what John Hawthorne calls 'Single Premise Closure', is very plausible:

> SPC: Necessarily, if S knows p, and competently deduces q from p and thereby comes to believe q while retaining knowledge of p throughout, then S knows q.[5]

Lottery puzzles, such as the Aneurysm, have the following general structure: (a) There is an ordinary proposition that we are inclined to take ourselves to know, (b) there is a lottery proposition that we aren't inclined to take ourselves to be able to know *even though the proposition is probable*, and (c) the lottery proposition can be competently deduced from the ordinary proposition thereby, via SPC, putting us in a good position to come to know the lottery proposition. Here now is the Return:

The Return: Suppose I claim to know that I will mow my lawn this afternoon. The proposition that I will mow my lawn this afternoon entails the proposition that Jesus will not return before then.[6] So, I'm able to competently deduce that Jesus won't return before this afternoon from the proposition that I will mow my lawn this afternoon. Given SPC, and my alleged knowledge that I will mow my lawn this afternoon, I can come to know that Jesus will not return before this afternoon. But, suppose I am a Christian. Then, on the basis of Jesus' teaching on the subject, I should deny that I can come to know that Jesus won't return before this afternoon.[7]

The structure of the Return, though obviously similar to the structure of the Aneurysm, differs in at least one significant respect. Given the prominent role this difference plays below, I should draw attention to it immediately. The important difference is between the proposition that Jesus won't return before this afternoon and standard lottery propositions. As (b) states, a standard lottery proposition is *probable*; I may not know that I won't suffer from a fatal brain aneurysm anytime soon, but it's likely that I won't. This is not, however, how a Christian should think about the proposition that Jesus won't return before this afternoon. Let me explain.

Suppose I believe that Jesus will return and he will do so on a day and hour that is unknown to me. What should I make of the probability of Jesus' returning before this afternoon? I shouldn't judge the probability to be high. But you might think that, even though I don't know the day and hour of Jesus' return, I can still plausibly judge the probability of Jesus' returning before this afternoon to be low. You might, for instance, think that this is relevantly analogous to my being able to plausibly judge the probability

of my lottery ticket being a winner to be low even though I cannot know what ticket will win. The analogy, however, is not a good one. This is because a Christian should believe that God (the Father) had reasons for choosing the particular day and hour of Jesus' return. A Christian shouldn't believe, for instance, that God selected the day and hour of Jesus' return by randomly selecting that day and hour out of a divine hat full of possible combinations of days and hours. So, a Christian shouldn't believe that the procedure God used to select the day and hour of Jesus' return is relevantly similar to the mechanisms involved in selecting a winning ticket in a fair lottery. The following better analogy, however, does reveal what a Christian should say about the probability of Jesus' returning before this afternoon.

Suppose tomorrow morning I wake to find this note on my pillow:

> We have chosen a day and hour for your future abduction; on that you can be certain. We shall not reveal the reasons behind our choice; nor would you be able to understand all of these reasons if we did; nor, even if you could understand some of these reasons, would you be able to discern whether these reasons had come to fruition. See you … sometime!
> Yours truly,
> The Infallible Abductors

Suppose that I believe this note. What probability should I be willing to assign to the proposition that the Infallible Abductors will be coming before lunch? Given my belief that the time of my abduction was chosen on the basis of reasons I'm deeply ignorant about, the only sensible thing for me to do is to be entirely agnostic and to simply refrain from assigning any probability to the proposition that the Infallible Abductors will come before lunch. That is, the probability that the Infallible Abductors will return before lunch, given my belief that the time of my abduction was chosen non-randomly on the basis of reasons I'm deeply ignorant about, is absolutely inscrutable for me. And likewise, the probability that the Infallible Abductors *won't* return before lunch is absolutely inscrutable for me.

(Just to be clear, as I'm understanding 'the probability that p is absolutely inscrutable for me', to say that the probability that p is absolutely inscrutable for me is not merely to say that the precise probability that p is very difficult to estimate. There are lots of propositions the precise probability of which is difficult to estimate without being absolutely inscrutable for me. For instance, it's difficult to estimate the precise probability of my being visited by intelligent extraterrestrial life in my lifetime. Nevertheless, it's plausible that it's unlikely that I'll be visited by intelligent extraterrestrial life in my lifetime. That the probability that p is absolutely inscrutable for me implies that I cannot sensibly make even a rough estimate of the probability that p; that is, I cannot sensibly estimate the probability that p to be likely, I cannot sensibly estimate the probability that p to be unlikely, and I cannot sensibly estimate the probability that p to be just as likely as not.)

A Christian, it seems to me, is in exactly the same situation with respect to the proposition that Jesus will return before this afternoon as I would be in the above case with respect to the proposition that the Infallible Abductors will come before lunch. A Christian should believe that the day and hour of Jesus' return has been chosen by God

on the basis of reasons she (the Christian) is deeply ignorant about. And given this, a Christian should say that the probability of Jesus' returning before this afternoon is absolutely inscrutable for her; and likewise, a Christian should say that the probability of Jesus' *not* returning before this afternoon is absolutely inscrutable for her.

(Someone may try to resist the claim about a Christian's deep ignorance of God's reasons for selecting the day and hour of Jesus' return by maintaining that the apocalyptic book of Revelations teaches that Jesus' return date is fixed by the day on which God's targeted number of saved human beings has been reached. This won't, however, help make a Christian's ignorance about the day and hour of Jesus' return any less deep. For surely those who think that God has chosen a targeted number of saved human beings, should think that they are deeply ignorant about what that number is; *a fortiori*, they should think that they are deeply ignorant about how close that number, whatever it is, is to being reached. In order to remove the deep ignorance (or make it less deep) a Christian needs not only to identify God's reasons for choosing the day and hour of Jesus' return but also to be able to discern when the conditions that figure in those reasons are to obtain. Let me say by way of understatement that the prospects for accomplishing this feat are dim, not to mention that Jesus' own remarks about his return strongly suggest that no one can do it.)

So, unlike the lottery propositions that figure in familiar lottery puzzles, the proposition that Jesus won't return before this afternoon should not be judged to be probable. Again, its probability, for a Christian at least, is absolutely inscrutable. (There is nothing special here about the chosen time of this afternoon. Similar reasoning would show that for any future time, t, a Christian should judge the probability that Jesus won't return before t to be absolutely inscrutable.) The significance of this point will be seen when I assess potential non-sceptical responses to the Return and when I extend the Return to alleged probable knowledge of the future.

Before I begin discussing possible non-sceptical replies to the Return, let me identify one that I won't discuss, viz., denying SPC. Denying closure is always a possible reply to any closure-based sceptical argument.[8] There isn't, as far as I can tell, any relevant asymmetry between adopting that solution to the Return and adopting that solution to any other lottery puzzle. That fact is the primary reason why I'm ignoring closure-denying solutions in this paper. For what strike me as most interesting are the asymmetries between adopting other non-sceptical approaches to the Return and adopting those same non-sceptical approaches to familiar lottery puzzles such as the Aneurysm.[9] The reader is free to conditionalize and take me to be arguing that if SPC is true, then such-and-such is the case. I now move on to other non-sceptical approaches to lottery puzzles, which I divide into the simple and sophisticated.

3. Simple Non-Scepticism

Simple non-sceptical replies to lottery puzzles maintain that contrary to initial appearances we are able to know lottery propositions. This reply to lottery puzzles is the extension of so-called 'Moorean' replies to sceptical arguments based on more traditional sceptical scenarios, e.g. vivid dreaming, brain in vat, and evil genius scenarios. The Moorean maintains that he can know propositions such as that he is not a brain in a vat, the analogue of a lottery proposition. I won't discuss the merits and demerits of simple

non-sceptical replies here.[10] I am interested only to show that whatever the virtues of a simple non-sceptical reply to familiar lottery puzzles are, a Christian is in no position to adopt such an approach to the Return. Recall that the probability that Jesus won't return before this afternoon is absolutely inscrutable for a Christian. It follows from this that a Christian isn't able to know that Jesus won't return before this afternoon, the "lottery" proposition in the Return. (Indeed, assuming a Christian can know something on the basis of Jesus' teachings, he should take himself to *know* that he cannot know that Jesus won't return before this afternoon.) Can a Christian looking for a non-sceptical way out of the Return get help from more nuanced non-sceptical approaches to lottery puzzles? I don't think so.

4. Sophisticated Non-Scepticism

According to sophisticated non-sceptical replies to a lottery puzzle such as the Aneurysm, a person fails to know both the ordinary proposition and the lottery proposition. The Aneurysm involves a context in which my inability to know that I won't suffer a fatal brain aneurysm before this evening precludes my ability to know that I will dine with my wife this evening. These are *non-sceptical* replies because they maintain that there are other more epistemically-friendly contexts in which I know the ordinary proposition that I will dine with my wife this evening.

Sophisticated non-sceptics recognize a variety of contextual parameters that determine (at least partly) whether a subject knows some proposition in some particular context. Contextualism and so-called 'sensitive moderate invariantism' constitute the main families of competing sophisticated non-sceptical approaches. Devotees of contextualism and sensitive moderate invariantism could in principle agree on the relevant varying contextual parameters. They need only disagree on *what* those varying contextual parameters affect. In short, a contextualist will say that the varying contextual parameters--some combination of things such as attention, interests, stakes, practical environment, etc.--determine whether a "high standards" or "low standards" relation is expressed by '… knows that …'. A sensitive moderate invariantist, on the other hand, will take '… knows that …' to be invariant across contexts but to express a relation that depends in part upon some combination of such things as the subject's attention, interests, stakes, practical environment, etc.[11]

Further details about sophisticated non-sceptical approaches won't matter for my purposes here. This is because every sophisticated non-sceptical approach is committed to the following two claims: (1) A lottery puzzle such as the Aneurysm, involves a context in which the proposition that I will die of a sudden fatal brain aneurysm before this evening is, although unlikely, a *relevant counter-possibility* to the ordinary proposition that I will dine with my wife this evening; in that context, it is a counter-possibility that I cannot properly ignore. (2) There are other contexts in which, due to some relevant difference in contextual parameters, the proposition that I will die of a sudden brain aneurysm before this evening is not a relevant counter-possibility so that, in such a context, I'm able to know that I will dine with my wife this evening. As with simple non-scepticism, my aim isn't to assess the adequacy of sophisticated non-sceptical approaches to lottery puzzles. Again, my aim here is to show that a sophisticated non-

sceptical approach, whatever its virtues as a reply to familiar lottery puzzles, will not help a Christian secure a plausible non-sceptical reply to the Return. To that aim I now turn.

Employing a sophisticated non-sceptical approach to the Return requires accepting that there is a context, C, in which I know that I will mow my lawn this afternoon *only if* in C, the proposition that Jesus will return before this afternoon fails to be a relevant counter-possibility. The problem, however, is that the relevance of the counter-possibility that Jesus will return before this afternoon should not vary from context to context for a Christian, i.e., the relevance of that counter-possibility should be invariant for a Christian. Whatever the full account of relevant counter-possibilities turns out to be, I cannot see how a counter-possibility the probability of which is absolutely inscrutable for me could fail to be a *relevant* counter-possibility. I submit that the following (implicitly universally quantified) principle expresses a sufficient condition for a proposition's being a relevant counter-possibility in a context:

> (The Inscrutability Condition) If in a context, C, the probability of a counter-possibility, P, is absolutely inscrutable for S, then in C, P is a relevant counter-possibility, i.e., in C, S cannot properly ignore P.

I offer the following argument for anyone who fails to find the Inscrutability Condition as initially plausible as I do. Consider some proposition, P, and suppose that the probability of P's being true is absolutely inscrutable for me.[12] Further, suppose I assert, 'P is false even though the probability of P's being true is absolutely inscrutable for me'. Such an assertion would clearly be epistemically inappropriate. (Some concrete examples of such assertions may help illustrate their epistemic impropriety: 'It's false that my shirt is red, even though the probability that my shirt is red is absolutely inscrutable for me'; 'It's false that my faculties are unreliable, even though the probability that my faculties are unreliable is absolutely inscrutable for me'; 'It's false that she loves another, even though the probability that she loves another is absolutely inscrutable for me'.) Given that the probability of P's being true is absolutely inscrutable for me, it would be epistemically inappropriate for me to attribute falsity to P. But if I could properly ignore P, then it wouldn't be epistemically inappropriate for me to attribute falsity to P. So, given that the probability of P's being true is absolutely inscrutable for me, I cannot properly ignore P.

We can now see why the relevance of the counter-possibility that Jesus will return before this afternoon is invariant for a Christian. In any context, C, the probability that Jesus will return before this afternoon is absolutely inscrutable for a Christian. And this and the Inscrutability Condition entail that for a Christian, there is no context in which the counter-possibility that Jesus will return before this afternoon fails to be relevant. That is, there is no context in which a Christian can properly ignore the counter possibility that Jesus will return before this afternoon.

It should be noted that the above line of reasoning *does not* apply in familiar lottery puzzles. That this is so is also due to the key difference between standard lottery propositions and the "lottery" proposition in the Return. Again, standard lottery propositions are probable, and so their negations—which represent the relevant counter possibilities—are improbable, not absolutely inscrutable. Also, note that the above line of reasoning doesn't apply to sceptical arguments based on more traditional sceptical

scenarios. Even if the Moorean is mistaken to think that I can know that I'm not a brain in a vat, every non-sceptic should think that the probability that I am a brain in a vat is low, not absolutely inscrutable. It is also worth noting that the above line of reasoning *does* apply in the Infallible Abductors case. Suppose I wake up, read the note about my impending abduction and believe it. Then the probability of the proposition that I will be abducted in the next hour is absolutely inscrutable for me and by the Inscrutability Condition, that proposition is a relevant counter possibility, a counter possibility I cannot properly ignore. Moreover, this is the intuitively correct result.

I can think of but one way for someone to reply to my argument for the invariant relevance of the counter possibility that Jesus will return before this afternoon. The reply I'm imagining begins by saying that my argument shows only that there is no context in which (i) I can properly ignore the counter-possibility that Jesus will return before this afternoon *and* in which (ii) I continue to believe that Jesus will return on a day and hour that is unknown to me. So, my imagined objector continues, for all my argument shows, provided there is a context, C, in which I don't believe that Jesus will return on a day and hour that is unknown to me, I may very well, in C, be able to properly ignore the counter-possibility that Jesus will return before this afternoon.

This imagined reply will be of little consolation to a Christian. If the reply is to be of use in securing that in some context, C, I know that I will mow my lawn this afternoon, then I also have to say that in C, I don't (moreover, *shouldn't*) believe that Jesus will return on an unknown day and hour. The price of my gaining a bit of knowledge about my future in a particular context comes at the cost of recognizing that that is a context in which I don't and shouldn't believe a central component of Christianity. Surely, that is a price a Christian should not be willing to pay. Nor do I think this price could be offset by focusing on a more practically significant piece of alleged future knowledge such as that my wife and I will celebrate our anniversary tomorrow. Even though that proposition is about something of far greater importance than whether I mow my lawn this afternoon, its significance will still pale in comparison to those propositions that a Christian takes to be central to Christianity.

I conclude that a sophisticated non-sceptical approach cannot help save the alleged knowledge that the Return calls into question. Moreover, the above non-SPC denying replies exhaust, as far as I can tell, the available non-sceptical approaches to lottery puzzles. I conclude, then, that a Christian cannot develop a plausible non-sceptical reply to the Return. Accordingly, a Christian should simply take the Return to show that I don't know that I will mow my lawn this afternoon. Of course, there is nothing special about either me or the proposition that I will mow my lawn this afternoon. I shall assume that it is clear how the Return can be generalized so as to apply to a wide variety of claims about what will happen in the future.

5. Extending the Return

I claimed earlier that the Return can be extended to show that a Christian doesn't know very much about what will *probably* happen in the future. I should now like to make good on that claim. Suppose that the probability of a proposition, P, is absolutely inscrutable for me. Then I should be agnostic about whether P is probably true, about whether P is probably false, and about whether P is just as likely to be true as to be false.

So, if the probability of a proposition, P, is absolutely inscrutable for me, then I don't know that P is probably true, and I don't that P is probably false, and I don't know that P is just as likely to be true as to be false.

It follows from the above remarks that since the probability that Jesus will return before this afternoon is absolutely inscrutable for me, I don't know that *probably*, Jesus will return before this afternoon, and I don't know that *probably*, Jesus won't return before this afternoon, and I don't know that it's just as likely to be true as to be false that Jesus will return before this afternoon. However, if I know that *probably*, I will mow the lawn this afternoon, then I am able to come to know that *probably*, Jesus won't return before this afternoon. For I would be able to competently deduce that *probably*, Jesus won't return before this afternoon from the proposition that *probably*, I will mow the lawn this afternoon given that (as I've been assuming) my mowing the lawn this afternoon entails that Jesus won't return before then. But as we've just seen, due to the probability of Jesus' not returning before this afternoon being absolutely inscrutable for me, I'm *not* able to come to know that *probably*, Jesus won't return before this afternoon. Therefore, I don't know that *probably*, I will mow my lawn this afternoon.

For the very same reasons as provided in sections 3 and 4, neither simple nor sophisticated non-sceptical approaches will help the Christian avoid the conclusion that I don't know that *probably*, I will mow the lawn this afternoon. Here too I trust it is clear how the argument generalizes so as to apply to a wide variety of claims about what will *probably* happen in the future.

In addition, similar reasoning seems to show that a Christian doesn't know whether the current laws of nature will hold later this afternoon. For not only is the day and hour of Jesus' return unknown to a Christian but so are many details of what the world will be like when Jesus does return. If anything, perhaps a Christian should *expect* an alteration in the laws of nature upon Jesus' return. At any rate, a Christian has no reason *not* to expect it. So, it seems that Jesus could very well return before this afternoon in such a way that our current laws of nature no longer hold. And a Christian is in no better epistemic position with respect to assessing the probability of Jesus' returning before this afternoon *in such a way as to alter the current laws of nature*; she should regard that probability as absolutely inscrutable for her as well.

(I'm not suggesting that a Christian should question whether *any* laws of nature will hold in the future. It's plausible to think it a very good thing that our world is governed by natural laws and a Christian can plausibly claim that the world will continue to be law-like even after Jesus' return. My claim is only that whether the post-return world will be governed by our *current* laws of nature is something a Christian is unable to know; for all a Christian knows, superluminal motion shall be the preferred method of travel in a post-return world.)

There is, then, a very formidable case to be made for the conclusion that a Christian should accept a wide-ranging scepticism with respect to claims about the future. The scepticism in question extends not only to flat-out claims about what will happen in the future but also to claims about what will *probably* happen in the future and to claims about our current laws of nature, which amounts to a very robust and thoroughgoing scepticism. That said let me conclude by suggesting that a Christian need not be troubled by the scepticism that I've argued she should endorse.

Note that the arguments of this paper put no pressure on a Christian to adopt an absolutely *unrestricted* scepticism about the future. Indeed, my main argument exploits a claim about the future that a Christian will surely take himself to know. That claim of course is the proposition that Jesus will return on an unknown day and hour. Nothing I've said here calls a Christian's putative knowledge of Jesus' impending return on an unknown day and hour into question. And there are other claims about the future that a Christian will take himself to know, as well as take to be among the most fundamental and significant truths that can be known about the future. Here is an incomplete but fairly representative list of such claims: God will continue to providentially direct whatever future course of events occurs; the *ultimate* future, whatever it turns out to be, will be very good, better than any future we are capable of imagining; we will continue to be subject to divine directives such as loving God and loving other people including our enemies, praying to God and praying for other people including our enemies, worshiping God, etc.; there will be a general resurrection of the dead after Jesus' return; etc. The arguments of this paper also fail to call into question a Christian's putative knowledge of the above claims. In general, the arguments here don't disturb a Christian's most fundamental beliefs about the future.

At this point, someone might say that the scepticism I say a Christian should endorse remains objectionable for the following reasons. If I'm right, then provided that knowledge is the norm of assertion--an assumption I won't question here--it's never epistemically appropriate for a Christian to assert such things as 'I will mow my lawn this afternoon', 'I will dine with my family later this evening', etc; indeed, it's never epistemically appropriate for a Christian to assert, 'I will *probably* dine with my family later this evening'. Also, if I'm right, then a Christian is committed to denying the cogency of certain apparently acceptable pieces of practical reasoning. Suppose I'm a Christian and reason thus: I will dine with my family at 6p this evening; so, I ought to leave the office by 5p. If the main argument of this paper is right, then the above argument is arguably unacceptable since I don't know the premise that I will dine with my family at 6p this evening; again I don't even know that *probably*, I will dine with my family this evening.[13]

I don't think a Christian should be terribly bothered by these implications. As far as the arguments of this paper are concerned, a Christian is able to know that I will mow my lawn this afternoon *provided that Jesus doesn't return before then*. It would then be epistemically appropriate for a Christian to assert, 'I will mow my lawn this afternoon provided that Jesus doesn't return before then'. Indeed, the New Testament book of James suggests that this is all one is entitled to assert in the first place:

> Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. … Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'.[14]

At any rate, there are nearby truths that a Christian can, epistemically speaking, properly assert. Moreover, if pressed on the matter, I suspect a Christian would be happy to retreat to asserting that she will mow the lawn this afternoon *provided that Jesus doesn't return before then*. Furthermore, I think a Christian can plausibly say that there can be contexts

in which due to various practical reasons it's all things considered acceptable, even if epistemically unacceptable, to assert 'I will mow the lawn this afternoon' without the qualification 'provided Jesus doesn't return before then'.

A Christian can, I think, take a similar tack in response to the above piece of apparently acceptable practical reasoning. For starters, she can plausibly say that there is a nearby proposition I do know that supports the conclusion that I ought to leave the office by 5p this evening, e.g., the proposition that I've made plans with my family to have dinner at 6p. Moreover, even ignoring the proposition that I've made plans with my family to have dinner 6p, there is still the conditional claim that I will dine with my family at 6p *provided that Jesus doesn't return before then*. Again, as far as the arguments of this paper are concerned, a Christian can claim to know such a conditional claim, and he can then proceed to base his decision to leave by 5p upon it. And it seems to me that a Christian should be able to extend this strategy to other similar apparently acceptable pieces of practical reasoning.

Indeed, far from disturbing a Christian's most fundamental beliefs about the future, I'm inclined to think that the arguments of this paper could serve to reinforce them. Let me close with a tentative suggestion about how that may be. I can imagine a Christian, while reflecting on his wide-ranging ignorance about the future, finding himself remembering, appreciating anew, being comforted by, and acting upon (perhaps by re-ordering his priorities) those deeply important truths about the future that he takes himself to know: that his Lord shall return, that the day of his Lord's return shall usher in a glorious future, and that in the meantime, he is to organize his life in such a way that he and those around him, are well-prepared to lovingly enjoy together the fruits of this ultimate future. It seems to me that a Christian should regard scepticism that promotes such things as these as healthy indeed.[15]

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[1] I've learned a great deal about lottery puzzles from John Hawthorne's immensely instructive and engaging book *Knowledge and Lotteries* (Oxford University Press, 2004). The book is also chock-full of references to the expansive literature surrounding lottery puzzles. Rather than simply duplicating a list of references, I'll leave it to the reader to peruse *Knowledge and Lotteries* and the references therein.

[2] When asked, 'What are you doing this afternoon?', my initial inclination is to flat-out say, 'I'll be mowing the lawn for the better part of it.' Cf. *ibid*., 135-136.

[3] This puzzle is simply a variant of cases discussed *ibid*., 1-7; my remarks about this puzzle and its structure draw heavily from the discussion there.

[4] See www.brainaneurysm.com.

[5] Hawthorne *Knowledge and Lotteries*, 34.

[6] It won't help to quibble about the supposed entailment. It is true that some views about Jesus' second coming would seem to allow for the possibility that I mow my lawn this afternoon and Jesus returns before then. According to so-called 'pre-tribulation' views, Jesus will return and take only some people with him leaving behind others. Given such a view, it seems possible for Jesus to return, for me to be left behind, and for me to still mow my lawn this afternoon. If you are bothered by this, then in the sentence that expresses what you take to be the problematic entailment, simply substitute 'Jesus will not return before then in such a way as to preclude my mowing my lawn this afternoon' for 'Jesus will not return before then'. Doing so will not affect the main arguments to follow and so, for ease of exposition, I will stick with the original entailment claim.

[7] As Jesus is recorded as saying,

No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner

of the house will come back--whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!' (The Gospel of Mark 13:32-37, New International Version).

See also The Gospel of Matthew 24:36-44.

[8] Fred Dretske and Robert Nozick have defended this reply to skeptical arguments. See Fred Dretske 'Conclusive reasons', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 49 (1971), 1-22 and 'Epistemic operators' in *Perception, Knowledge and Belief* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Robert Nozick *Philosophical Explanations* (Oxford University Press, 1981).

[9] Moreover, I find denying SPC implausible. See Hawthorne *Knowledge and Lotteries*, 36-46 to see how costly denying SPC turns out to be.

[10] See *ibid*., 144-156 for a thorough assessment of simple non-skepticism, what Hawthorne calls 'simple moderate invariantism'.

[11] See *ibid*., chapters 2 and 4, for a thorough discussion and assessment of contextualism and sensitive moderate invariantism as well as an interesting development of the role of practical environment.

[12] Recall: To say that the probability of P's being true is absolutely inscrutable for me is not merely to say that the probability of P is difficult to estimate. That the probability of P's being true is absolutely inscrutable for me implies that I cannot sensibly say that it's likely that P is true, or that it's unlikely that P is true, or that it's just as likely as not that P is true.

[13] I am grateful to Tom Crisp for raising and pressing me on both of these points.

[14] James 4: 13-15, my emphasis added.