

WHERE HASKER'S ANTI-MOLINIST ARGUMENT GOES WRONG

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This paper is a response to William Hasker's "bring about" argument (1999, reiterated in 2011) against the Molinist theory of divine providence. Hasker's argument rests on his claim that God's middle knowledge must be regarded as part of the world's past history; the primary Molinist response has been to resist this claim. This paper argues that even if this claim about middle knowledge is granted, the intended *reductio* does not go through. In particular, Hasker's claim about middle knowledge is shown to undermine his proof of the "power entailment principle." The paper closes with a critical examination of ideas about free will and the past history of the world that might be supposed to support Hasker's conviction that Molinism is incompatible with a libertarian view of free will.

1. Introduction

William Hasker presents his "new anti-Molinist argument" as a *reductio* of the Molinist theory of divine providence.¹ The argument centers on the question of whether human beings have a certain sort of power over the counterfactuals of freedom that characterize their own actions: is it in our power to *bring about* the counterfactuals of freedom about ourselves, in a special sense of "bring about" that Hasker defines?² He argues that, on the one hand, it is a consequence of Molinists' acknowledged views about counterfactuals of freedom that, insofar as we human beings have the power to act otherwise than as we do, we *do* have the power to bring about the truth of certain counterfactuals of freedom about ourselves. On the other hand, Molinists affirm that God's creative decision to actualize a particular world is informed by his knowledge of the counterfactuals of freedom; Hasker argues that this feature of Molinism has a previously unrecognized implication, namely that "the counterfactuals of freedom are, or are entailed by, part of the causal history of the world."³ But if they are entailed by the world's history, then given Hasker's definition

¹Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist Argument." Hasker restates the argument in "The (Non-) Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals."

²When I use the term "counterfactuals of freedom" in this paper, I am referring exclusively to counterfactuals of *creaturely* freedom (as opposed to counterfactuals of *divine* freedom).

³Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist Argument," 291.



of "bring about," no one could possibly bring about the truth of any of these counterfactuals. And so Molinism involves a contradiction: human agents both do and do not have the power to bring about the truth of the counterfactuals of freedom about themselves.

I argue that this attempted refutation of Molinism fails. By Hasker's own lights, the linchpin of the argument is his claim that if Molinism is true, *the counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the world's past history*. He goes so far as to say that Molinism is refuted if and only if this claim is true. But this is a mistake. The claim in question is essential to the argument for one half of Hasker's intended contradiction. But what neither Hasker nor his Molinist interlocutors have realized, and what I will show here, is that the same claim is fatal to his argument for the other half of the intended contradiction. The result is that whether the counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the world's past history or not, Hasker's argument fails to yield a genuine contradiction for the Molinist.

2. *Why Bringing about a Counterfactual of Freedom is Impossible*

Hasker considers a case in which an agent A freely does *z* in circumstances *c*. He argues that the Molinist is committed to a pair of contradictory statements:⁴

(7) It is in A's power to bring it about that $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$.

(9) It is not in A's power to bring it about that $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$.

Here " $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$ " symbolizes the counterfactual of freedom *if A were in circumstances c, then A would (freely) not do z*. (The symbol " $\Box \rightarrow$ " symbolizes the subjunctive conditional.)

I will examine Hasker's argument for (7) in the next section, but here is the basic rationale behind it. Suppose that A is in circumstances *c*, and that A is just about to choose, freely, whether to do *z* or not. According to the libertarian view of free will that Molinists adhere to, this means that both of the alternatives—doing *z*, and refraining from doing *z*—are genuinely in A's power. But that which she does determines which of two contrary counterfactuals of freedom, $(C \Box \rightarrow Z)$ or $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$, is true of her; hence in having both the power to do *z* and the power to refrain she has the power to determine which of these counterfactuals is true. Now by hypothesis A chooses to do *z*, so $(C \Box \rightarrow Z)$ is true of her; nevertheless, she has the (unexercised) power to refrain and thereby to ensure the truth of the opposed (and in fact false) counterfactual $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$. The burden of Hasker's argument for (7) is to show that A's having the power to act so as to ensure the truth of $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$ really does entail that A has the power to *bring it about* that $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$, in Hasker's stipulated sense of "bring about." I will show in section 3 below that his argument does not succeed.

⁴Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist Argument," 292; "The (Non-)Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals," 32, 34.

My task in this section is to examine Hasker's case for (9). This can be divided into two stages. The first stage consists of an argument that, given the Molinist theory of middle knowledge, the counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the world's past history; the second stage is an argument for (9) with this alleged consequence of Molinism as its key premise.

The argument of the first stage is based on the Molinist theory of middle knowledge and its role in creation. According to Molinism, God's middle knowledge, which includes knowledge of the counterfactuals of freedom, plays an essential role in guiding the divine decision about precisely which world to actualize. Given that Molinist thesis, Hasker argues, God's middle knowledge must be regarded as part of the past history of the world. He invokes as a premise here the "extremely plausible" assumption that "*a fact is a part of the world's history if it has had causal consequences prior to the present time.*"⁵ According to this assumption, God's creative decision must be classified as part of the world's past history; so too, Hasker implies, must God's middle knowledge, in virtue of the crucial role this knowledge plays in that decision. So assuming that the Molinist thesis is true, God's knowledge of the counterfactuals of freedom is part of the past history of the world. And therefore all true counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the world's history, since God's knowledge of these counterfactuals entails that they are in fact true. Hasker concludes that it is a consequence of Molinism that the counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the past history of the world.⁶

The significance of this alleged consequence of Molinism has to do with the way it interacts with Hasker's definition of what it is for an agent to *bring about* a given state of affairs. He defines this notion as follows:

- (BA) *A brings it about that Y* iff: For some X, A causes it to be the case that X, and $(X \& H) \Rightarrow Y$, and $\sim(H \Rightarrow Y)$, where 'H' represents the history of the world prior to its coming to be the case that X.⁷

⁵Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist Argument," 294 (italics in original).

⁶In an earlier article, Hasker argues that the Molinist thesis that *God's creative decision is informed by his knowledge of the counterfactuals of freedom* is, if true at all, necessarily true. See Hasker, "Middle Knowledge," 235n14. Presumably he would say the same for the two other premises that figure in the argument sketched in this paragraph (namely, that a fact is part of the world's history if it has had causal consequences prior to the present time, and that God's knowing that some proposition is true entails that it is true). There is then some basis for regarding each of these premises as having an implicit "necessarily" attached to it. But what follows validly from necessarily true premises is itself necessarily true; hence there is some basis for regarding the *conclusion* Hasker draws here, that all true counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the past history of the world, as also having an implicit "necessarily" attached to it. This is significant because, as we will see, Hasker's argument for (9) requires the conclusion he draws here to be understood precisely as having that modal operator attached to it.

Let me note that, in advocating this strategy for upgrading the modal force of the conclusion he draws here, I am merely reading into Hasker's latest "bring about" argument a strategy he himself has used, in connection with one of his earlier arguments, to close a gap in his reasoning similar to one that threatens here. See *ibid.*, 226–227.

⁷Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist Argument," 291 (italics added); restated in "The (Non-) Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals," 31. Hasker adds in a footnote that "the symbol ' \Rightarrow ' expresses strict (broadly logical, or metaphysical) necessitation."

To adapt a statement from Hasker,⁸ the idea is that an agent brings about a given state of affairs just in case she performs an action such that her performing that action, together with the world's past history, entails the state of affairs in question, whereas the world's history by itself does *not* entail that state of affairs.

We are now in a position to state the second stage of the argument for (9). As Hasker notes,

According to (BA), if the agent is to bring about the truth of a counterfactual ($C \Box \rightarrow X$), it must not be the case that ($H \Rightarrow (C \Box \rightarrow X)$). That is to say, the counterfactual must not be entailed by the world's past history.⁹

But as we have just seen, Hasker maintains that it is a consequence of Molinist views about middle knowledge that all (true) counterfactuals of freedom *are* entailed by the past history of the world. So assuming the truth of Molinism,

*'H' does entail 'C $\Box \rightarrow X'$, where ' $C \Box \rightarrow X'$ is a true counterfactual of freedom. But if this is so, then we created free agents do not bring about the truth of counterfactuals of freedom about us; there is *no possible world* in which we do this. Now what we do in no possible world, is impossible for us to do, and does not lie within our power to do.¹⁰*

Therefore, it is not in an agent's power to bring about the truth of any counterfactuals of freedom about her. And from this, (9) follows.

Hasker's reasoning here reveals something important about the precise content of the crucial premise in it, the premise *the counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the past history of the world*. From this premise and the definition (BA), Hasker concludes in the passage quoted above not only that we created free agents do not *in fact* bring about the truth of counterfactuals of freedom about ourselves, but that "there is *no possible world* in which we do this." It is this impossibility claim that licenses the further conclusion that we *lack the power* to bring about the truth of any counterfactual of freedom about us. But this impossibility claim does not follow from (BA) and a premise which asserts only that the past history of the *actual* world entails every counterfactual of freedom that is *in fact* true. (All that follows from that combination is that no agent does *in fact* bring about any counterfactual of freedom.) On the other hand, the desired impossibility claim does follow from (BA) together with the premise that *in every possible world* the world's history entails all true (in that world) counterfactuals of freedom.

The point is that, in order to close what would otherwise be a gap in Hasker's argument, we must understand the crucial (allegedly Molinist) premise *the counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the past history of the world* as the metaphysical principle

⁸Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist Argument," 293.

⁹Hasker, "The (Non-)Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals," 32.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 33.

(PAST) *Necessarily*, all true counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the past history of the world.¹¹

We may restate (PAST), somewhat more perspicuously, as follows:

For any counterfactual of freedom ($C \Box \rightarrow X$) and any possible world W , if ($C \Box \rightarrow X$) is true in W then $[H_W \Rightarrow (C \Box \rightarrow X)]$,

where " H_W " represents the history of W . Since the converse of this second formulation is trivially true—i.e., if $[H_W \Rightarrow (C \Box \rightarrow X)]$, then ($C \Box \rightarrow X$) is true in W —a third formulation is logically equivalent to the preceding two:

For any counterfactual of freedom ($C \Box \rightarrow X$) and any possible world W , ($C \Box \rightarrow X$) is true in W if and only if $[H_W \Rightarrow (C \Box \rightarrow X)]$.

If, as I will henceforth assume, (PAST) is the proper construal of Hasker's crucial (allegedly) Molinist premise, we can reformulate his argument for (9) in such a way as to leave no doubt about its validity. Let ($C \Box \rightarrow X$) be an arbitrary counterfactual of freedom, either true or false. Given (PAST), together with Hasker's definition of "brings about," it follows immediately that it is *impossible* that agent A should bring about the truth of ($C \Box \rightarrow X$):

- (1*) For every possible world W , A brings it about that ($C \Box \rightarrow X$) in W only if: ($C \Box \rightarrow X$) is true in W , and H_W does not entail ($C \Box \rightarrow X$).
(from definition (BA))¹²
- (2*) For every possible world W , ($C \Box \rightarrow X$) is true in W if and only if H_W entails ($C \Box \rightarrow X$).
(PAST)
- (3*) There is no possible world in which A brings it about that ($C \Box \rightarrow X$).
(from (1*) and (2*))

The next premise expresses a necessary condition for attributing to an agent the *power to bring about* the truth of a counterfactual of freedom:

- (4*) If there is no possible world in which A brings it about that ($C \Box \rightarrow X$), then it is not in A 's power to bring it about that ($C \Box \rightarrow X$). (premise)
- (5*) It is not in A 's power to bring it about that ($C \Box \rightarrow X$).
(from (3*) and (4*))

¹¹Hasker himself uses an exactly parallel strategy to close what he acknowledges is a gap in one of his earlier "bring about" arguments against Molinism. See note 6 above.

¹²According to Hasker's definition (BA), A brings it about that Y is true in world W if and only if for some X ,

- (i) A causes it to be the case that X in W ,
- (ii) $(X \ \& \ H_W) \Rightarrow Y$, and
- (iii) $\sim(H_W \Rightarrow Y)$,

where " H_W " represents the history of W prior to its coming to be the case that X . If conditions (i) and (ii) are jointly satisfied for some X and W , then: by (i), X is true in W ; therefore $(X \ \& \ H_W)$ is true in W ; therefore, by (ii), Y is true in W . And so, if A brings it about that Y in W , then by (i) and (ii), Y is true in W , and by (iii), $\sim(H_W \Rightarrow Y)$.

This conclusion holds for any counterfactual of freedom, true or false; therefore it certainly holds for the (false) counterfactual of freedom ($C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z$) at issue in Hasker's argument. Hence

(9) It is not in A's power to bring it about that ($C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z$).

The argument is plainly valid, and the two non-Molinist premises (1*) and (4*) are above suspicion. (1*) follows directly from Hasker's stipulated definition of "brings about." And (4*) seems incontrovertible:¹³ it could hardly make sense to attribute to an agent the *power to bring about* a given counterfactual of freedom unless there is a possible action on her part by which, were she to perform it, she *would* bring about the counterfactual of freedom in question.¹⁴ So I think this argument establishes conclusively that if (PAST) is a consequence of Molinism, as Hasker argues, then so is (9).

Of course, this leaves open the question whether (PAST) is, in fact, a consequence of Molinist commitments. This is contestable. As we have seen, Hasker's case for (PAST) depends on the assumption that "a fact is a part of the world's history if it has had causal consequences prior to the present time." Hasker assumes, in other words, that if the causal consequences of some fact have existed prior to the present time, then that fact itself belongs to the past history of the world. However plausible it might seem at first glance, this assumption is hardly uncontroversial. Hasker himself acknowledges that proponents of backwards causation will be inclined to reject it; more to the point, I think, is that *adherents of the view that God is timelessly eternal* will reject it. Adherents of eternalism have a ready counterexample: on the eternalist view, (the fact of?) God's creative act of will does not belong to the past history of the world since this act does not take place in time at all, yet effects of this act have existed prior to the present time. Now since many Molinists—including Molina himself—hold that God is timelessly eternal, many Molinists have principled reasons, reasons not based on the Molinist theory of divine providence, for rejecting the assumption in question.¹⁵ The same reasons will lead

¹³Thomas Flint formulates a possible Molinist objection to a principle that is quite similar to premise (4*). I discuss Flint's objection in note 35 below.

¹⁴Hasker says something to this effect in one of his earlier "bring about" arguments against Molinism. It is, he says, an accepted principle that "It is in an agent's power to bring it about that a given counterfactual of freedom is true, only if its truth would be brought about by the agent's performing the action specified in the consequent of the conditional under the conditions specified in the antecedent" (Hasker, "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge," 548–549). Of course, the agent must also have the *power* to perform the relevant action.

¹⁵Thomas Flint raises a different objection, on specifically Molinist grounds, to what he characterizes as Hasker's assumption "that something which has had causal consequences in the past is ipso facto a hard, fixed, settled fact about the past." See Flint, "A New Anti-Anti-Molinist Argument," 302ff. For his response, see Hasker, "Are Alternative Pasts Plausible?" I think it is preferable to avoid using the terminology of "hard facts" about the past, since discussions employing that terminology not infrequently run together two distinct issues, namely, (a) whether a given fact belongs to the world's past history, strictly speaking, and (b) whether any agent might now have the power to perform an action such that, were he to perform it, the given fact would never have been a fact at all. Hasker and Flint agree that

them to deny Hasker's conclusion that *God's middle knowledge* in particular belongs to the world's past history. This provides some basis, at least, for thinking that Molinism does not entail (PAST).¹⁶

But suppose we do not challenge Hasker on this point. Let us simply grant, for the sake of argument, that God's middle knowledge is part of the world's past history, so that (PAST) is true and with it (9). Does Hasker's *reductio* of Molinism go through? Hasker thinks so: he says that his argument "succeeds if and only if the counterfactuals of freedom are a part of, or are entailed by, the world's history."¹⁷ But clearly this is correct only if his argument for (7), the other half of the contradiction he intends to pin on Molinism, is successful. To that argument I now turn.

3. Where Hasker's Argument Goes Wrong

Hasker makes it clear that in his judgment, it is virtually incontestable that

(7) It is in A's power to bring it about that ($C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z$)

is a consequence of Molinist assumptions. His chief Molinist interlocutor, Thomas Flint, concurs: "it has never been in dispute that, given Hasker's final account of 'bringing about' . . . the Molinist is committed to (7)."¹⁸ The agreement between Hasker and Flint on this point explains why their debate over the success of the anti-Molinist argument has been confined to a debate over Hasker's case for (9). But I aim to show that, contrary to what both Hasker and Flint suppose, Hasker does *not* succeed in showing that the Molinist is committed to (7).

Before we turn to the details of Hasker's argument for (7), let me point out a reason for viewing the argument with suspicion. As we have seen, it follows directly from (PAST) that no one could possibly bring about a counterfactual of freedom, in Hasker's sense of "bring about." (This is the thrust of (1*)–(3*) in section 2 above.) Given that general conclusion, it is hard to see how an argument for the conclusion *A has the power to bring about the counterfactual of freedom* ($C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z$) could go through. Even if A were to

these issues should not be run together. Hasker notes, "It is one thing to claim that we have counterfactual control over some past facts; it is another matter to claim that, in virtue of this, those facts are *not part of our history*" (Hasker, "The (Non-)Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals," 34). Flint makes a similar point: "We can indeed view facts that have had causal consequences as part of our history. . . . But why think that, because something *is* part of our history in *this sense of history*, it *would have been* part of our history no matter what we might do?" (Flint, "Whence and Whither the Molinist Debate," 44n13)

¹⁶Hasker could respond by saying that by "past history" he means the *causally prior* history of the world rather than its *temporally* prior history. He could then offer his "extremely plausible" assumption not as an assumption but instead as a *stipulation* about what the causally prior history of the world includes. This would allow him to sidestep both the backwards causation and the eternalism objections to that assumption. He would, however, still have to make the case that God's middle knowledge is causally prior to events in the created order, even though it does not actually contribute causally either to God's creative act or to events in the created order.

¹⁷Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist Argument," 296.

¹⁸Flint, "Whence and Whither the Molinist Debate," 40.

ensure the truth of $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$, by refraining from doing z in circumstances c , she would not qualify as *bringing about* the truth of this counterfactual of freedom. For were she to do this, God would always have known that $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$ was true of her, and in that case—since we are supposing that God's middle knowledge is part of the world's past history—the past history of the world would entail $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$. But according to definition (BA), *A brings it about that* $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$ can be true only if the world's past history does *not* entail $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$. Therefore, even if A were to do the sole thing by which she could conceivably ensure the truth of $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$,¹⁹ she still would not qualify as *bringing about* its truth, in Hasker's sense. This makes the prospects for an argument that A has the power to bring about $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$ look pretty dim.

Of course, we must remember that Hasker aims to provide a *reductio* of Molinism. That (7) is incompatible with the reasoning just outlined might simply serve to highlight the absurdity of Molinism—if the argument for (7) goes through. So we cannot conclude that the case for (7) is hopeless without examining the details of Hasker's argument.

Here is how Hasker states the argument for (7):²⁰

- (1) Agent A is in circumstances c , the counterfactual of freedom ' $C \Box \rightarrow Z$ ' is true of her, and she freely chooses to do z . (Molinist premise²¹)
- (2) A is in c , and it is in A's power to refrain from doing z .
(From (1) and definition of libertarian freedom)
- (3) It is in A's power to bring it about that: A is in c , and A refrains from doing z . (From (2))
- (4) If it is in A's power to bring it about that P, and 'P' entails 'Q' and 'Q' is false, then it is in A's power to bring it about that Q.
(Power Entailment Principle)
- (5) $(A \text{ is in } c \text{ and refrains from doing } z) \Rightarrow (C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$. (Molinist premise)
- (6) If it is in A's power to bring it about that A is in c and refrains from doing z , and ' $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$ ' is false, then it is in A's power to bring it about that $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$. (From (4), (5))
- (7) It is in A's power to bring it about that $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$. (From (1), (3), (6))

There are two steps in this argument that I wish to challenge. One is premise (4); the other is the inference from (2) to (3). Hasker offers a justification for both steps, but I will show that neither justification succeeds.

¹⁹"How might it be possible for the agent to bring it about that a given counterfactual of freedom is true? It would seem that the only possible way in which the agent might do this is by performing the action specified in the consequent of the conditional under the conditions specified in the antecedent" (Hasker, "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge," 548).

²⁰Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist Argument," 292.

²¹This is a Molinist premise (as Hasker labels it) in the following sense: Molinists hold that human beings have free will, and that corresponding to each freely performed action is a true counterfactual of freedom. Therefore, Molinists hold that some actions are freely performed, and for each such action a premise of this form is true for some A, c , and z .

Consider first premise (4), Hasker's "power entailment principle." Hasker contends that this principle is demonstrable, given his definition of "bring about," and he offers the following proof:

According to (BA), if A, by causing it to be the case that X, were to bring it about that P, and 'P' entails 'Q', then *by that very same action* A would bring it about that Q, provided that $\sim(H \Rightarrow Q)$. But if 'Q' is in fact false, it cannot be entailed by H, so ' $\sim(H \Rightarrow Q)$ ' is true. So if A by causing it to be the case that X would bring it about that P, and $P \Rightarrow Q$ and $\sim Q$, then A by causing it to be the case that X would bring it about that Q.

Now suppose that A *has the power* to bring it about that P by causing it to be the case that X. It follows, trivially, that A does have the power to cause it to be the case that X. But it was shown above that A's causing it to be the case that X would bring it about that Q—always assuming, of course, that $P \Rightarrow Q$ and $\sim Q$. Which is to say: If it is in A's power to bring it about that P and 'P' entails 'Q' and 'Q' is false, then it is in A's power to bring it about that Q. *Q.E.D.*²²

The bit of reasoning to scrutinize here occurs within the first half of the proof, where Hasker says,

But if 'Q' is in fact false, it cannot be entailed by H, so ' $\sim(H \Rightarrow Q)$ ' is true.

Now taken by itself, this reasoning seems perfectly legitimate: supposing that "H" represents the history of the actual world, H is factual, and so whatever H entails is true. However, in the first half of the proof, where this bit of reasoning occurs, it is not a factual but a *counterfactual* scenario that is under consideration. The aim of this portion of the proof is to show that *if A were to bring it about that P*—something that, by hypothesis, A does not actually do²³—*A would thereby also bring it about that Q*. Establishing the truth of this counterfactual requires showing that A *brings it about that Q* is true, not in the actual world, but in the nearest possible world W^* in which A brings it about that P.²⁴ And that of course requires showing that the conditions specified in definition (BA) for the truth of *A brings it about that Q* are satisfied in W^* , rather than in the actual world.

According to (BA), one necessary condition for the truth of *A brings it about that Q* is that *the past history of the world by itself does not entail Q*. Obviously this is what Hasker takes himself to be showing in the line presently under scrutiny. But here is the crucial point: to show that this condition is satisfied in W^* , Hasker must show that *the history of W^* does not entail Q*. That is to say, what Hasker needs to establish is *not* that $\sim(H \Rightarrow Q)$, where "H" represents the history of the *actual* world, but rather that $\sim(H^* \Rightarrow Q)$,

²²Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist Argument," 292n5.

²³According to the hypothesis of the proof, Q is in fact false, and P entails Q. Hence P is in fact false. Since an agent brings it about that P only if P is true, A does not in fact bring it about that P.

²⁴For the sake of simplicity, I frame my argument in terms of the simple case where there is a unique nearest possible world in which A brings it about that P.

where " H^* " represents the history of W^* . Hasker purports to show that the condition in question is satisfied by pointing out that in the actual world—where H is true— Q is false; as noted above, it does follow that $\sim(H \Rightarrow Q)$, but this is not to the point, since what he needs to show is that $\sim(H^* \Rightarrow Q)$. And *that* cannot be demonstrated by means of a parallel strategy: if A were to bring it about that P , Q would be true, since P entails Q ; hence, in world W^* both H^* and Q are true, a combination of truth values compatible with $(H^* \Rightarrow Q)$. So Hasker's stated reasoning does not establish what he sets out to prove.²⁵

What is more, we can show that, given (PAST), the required condition $\sim(H^* \Rightarrow Q)$ is not true in general. In fact, it is definitely *false* in just the sort of case that matters for Hasker's purposes, namely the special case in which Q is a counterfactual of freedom.²⁶ We are assuming, for the sake of argument, the truth of (PAST):

For any counterfactual of freedom ($C \Box \rightarrow X$) and any possible world W , ($C \Box \rightarrow X$) is true in W if and only if [$H_W \Rightarrow (C \Box \rightarrow X)$].

We know that Q is true in W^* (since A brings it about that P in W^* , and P entails Q). Let us assume that Q is a counterfactual of freedom; then by (PAST), the history of W^* entails Q , i.e. $(H^* \Rightarrow Q)$.²⁷ So in this case A brings it about that Q is false in W^* (since A brings it about that Q is true in a world only if that world's history does *not* entail Q). And since W^* is the nearest possible world in which A brings it about that P , we can conclude: if A were to bring it about that P , thereby ensuring the truth of Q , A would *not* thereby bring it about that Q , if Q is a counterfactual of freedom.

The upshot of all this is that Hasker's proof of the power entailment principle (4) fails. To summarize, the proof hinges on establishing the following intermediate conclusion:

If P entails Q and Q is false, then the counterfactual conditional *if A were to bring it about that P , A would thereby bring it about that Q* is true.

But as I have just shown, there is a lacuna in Hasker's argument for this conclusion. Furthermore, in the case of interest, where Q is a counterfactual of freedom, it follows directly from (PAST) that no matter what A might do, A would *not* qualify as *bringing it about that Q* , in Hasker's sense. Therefore Hasker's argument for the intended intermediate conclusion fails, and so his proof of (4) does not go through.

Let us now turn our attention to the inference from

²⁵The argument would go through if $H^* = H$. But, given (PAST), this is not true in general. See note 27 below.

²⁶Hasker introduces the power entailment principle (4) in his argument precisely in order to instantiate, at step (6), to a case where " Q " is the counterfactual of freedom ($C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z$).

²⁷This shows that $H^* = H$ is not true in general. For as noted above, given the assumptions of the proof, H does not entail Q . But as we have just established, H^* *does* entail Q , if Q is a counterfactual of freedom. So in this case H and H^* have different entailments, and hence they are not identical.

- (2) A is in c , and it is in A's power to refrain from doing z .

to

- (3) It is in A's power to bring it about that: A is in c , and A refrains from doing z .

Hasker briefly indicates his justification for this inference in a footnote:

Given (BA) and the fact that A is in c , A's refraining from doing z simply is A's bringing it about that: A is in c , and A refrains from doing z . It follows that A's power to do the former, is also A's power to do the latter.²⁸

Now by hypothesis A does *not*, in fact, refrain from doing z ; so "A's refraining from doing z " must be understood as a reference to a counterfactual scenario. In other words, what Hasker is really saying in the first sentence above is: given (BA) and the fact that A is in c , if A *were* to refrain from doing z , A *would* thereby bring it about that ($C \ \& \ \sim Z$).

To evaluate this statement, consider a nearby possible world W^* in which A is in c and A refrains from doing z . Does A, by refraining, bring it about that ($C \ \& \ \sim Z$) in that world? According to (BA), A brings it about that ($C \ \& \ \sim Z$) in W^* if and only if, for some X ,

- (i) A causes it to be the case that X ,
- (ii) $(X \ \& \ H^*) \Rightarrow (C \ \& \ \sim Z)$, and
- (iii) $\sim[H^* \Rightarrow (C \ \& \ \sim Z)]$,

where " H^* " represents the prior history of W^* . For present purposes, $\sim Z$ can serve as our " X ." In refraining from doing z (we may suppose), A causes it to be the case that $\sim Z$, so (i) is satisfied. Assuming that the circumstances c that A is in just before her "act" of refraining belong to the prior history of the world, H^* entails C , hence $(\sim Z \ \& \ H^*) \Rightarrow (C \ \& \ \sim Z)$, and so (ii) is satisfied. What about condition (iii), which says that H^* by itself does not entail ($C \ \& \ \sim Z$)? Hasker doesn't say why he thinks this condition is satisfied. Clearly the history H of the *actual* world does not entail ($C \ \& \ \sim Z$), since $\sim Z$ is in fact false. But this is irrelevant, since it is H^* and not H that matters here.²⁹ And H^* *does* entail ($C \ \& \ \sim Z$), given (PAST). Here is why: in W^* , where A refrains from doing z in c , the counterfactual of freedom ($C \ \Box \rightarrow \sim Z$) is true. By (PAST), then, H^* entails ($C \ \Box \rightarrow \sim Z$). As just noted in connection with (ii), H^* also entails C . Taking those results together, H^* entails ($C \ \& \ \sim Z$), so that condition (iii) is definitely *violated*.³⁰ This shows

²⁸Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist Argument," 292n4.

²⁹If we were to assume that $H^* = H$, the proof would go through. But that assumption is false; given (PAST) we have: H^* entails ($C \ \& \ \sim Z$) but H does not, so H^* is *not* the same as H .

³⁰ H^* entails both ($C \ \Box \rightarrow \sim Z$) and C , so every H^* world is one in which both ($C \ \Box \rightarrow \sim Z$) and C are true. And if both of those are true in a world, then so is $\sim Z$. So every H^* world is a $\sim Z$ world, i.e., H^* entails $\sim Z$.

Some readers might suppose that it is a problem for Molinists if H^* entails $\sim Z$, as this means that what is allegedly a free action, A's refraining from doing z , is entailed by the past

that A does *not* bring it about that $(C \ \& \ \sim Z)$ in W^* , or indeed in *any* world in which A refrains from doing z in c . It is therefore just *false* that "A's refraining from doing z simply *is* A's bringing it about that: A is in c , and A refrains from doing z ." And Hasker's justification of the inference from (2) to (3), which rests on that statement, fails.

I conclude that Hasker's derivations of (3) and (4) are flawed, and hence his argument for (7) fails to establish that Molinists are committed to this half of the intended contradiction. The reason for the failure of the argument is just as anticipated at the beginning of this section: A has the power to bring about the truth of $(C \ \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$ and of $(C \ \& \ \sim Z)$ only if it is true that if A were to refrain from doing z in c , she would bring about the truth of those propositions. However, if A were to refrain from doing z in c , although she would thereby ensure the truth of both $(C \ \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$ and $(C \ \& \ \sim Z)$, she would not *bring about* the truth of either one. For in that case God would always have known that $(C \ \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$ was true of her; hence by Hasker's own lights, there would be something in the past history of the world that entails $(C \ \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$. And that, in conjunction with C (itself a fact about the history of the world prior to A's action), entails $(C \ \& \ \sim Z)$. Since both of the truths in question would be entailed by the prior history of the world, A would not, by refraining, *bring about* either of these truths, in Hasker's sense. Hence A's *power to refrain* from doing z in c does not amount to a power on her part to *bring about* the truth of $(C \ \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$ or of $(C \ \& \ \sim Z)$.

4. Flint to the Rescue?

The problems with Hasker's proofs for (3) and (4) are serious; but before we conclude that they doom his anti-Molinist argument, let us consider a hint that Thomas Flint provides about how we might rehabilitate Hasker's argument for (7). Flint affirms that the Molinist is committed to (7), and in support of this he specifies a way of understanding the notion of *power to bring about a state of affairs* that makes the case for (7) direct and incontestable.³¹ If we understand "power to bring about" as Flint does, the power entailment principle (4) admits of a trivial proof, and (3) is straightforwardly derivable from (2). And in that case any shortcomings in Hasker's

history of the world. (It turns out that given (PAST) this is generically true for all human actions, in all possible worlds.) But consider that according to Molinism, everything that ever happens in the created order is entailed by the combination of God's middle knowledge and his creative decision. Molinists do not regard the fact that all human actions in particular are entailed by this combination as having any adverse implications for human free will; certainly the fact of this entailment does *not* imply that all human actions are causally determined (which the Molinist *would* regard as incompatible with human free will). It is difficult to see why Molinists should change their assessment of the situation if God's middle knowledge and God's creative decision are classified as *belonging to the world's past history*, for it seems that this is merely a change in classification and not a substantive modification of their views. See the end of section 5 for further discussion of this point.

³¹Flint, "A New Anti-Anti-Molinist Argument," 300. Flint suggests that this construal of "power to bring about" follows from (BA). I disagree, for reasons I explain below. The construal of "power to bring about" that I think does follow naturally from (BA) is the one I tentatively attribute to Hasker in note 33 below.

own attempts to derive (3) and (4) are irrelevant. Here is the notion of “power to bring about” implicit in Flint’s remarks:

- (PBA) *A has the power to bring it about that Y* if and only if: for some *X*,
- (i) *A* has the power to cause it to be the case that *X*,
 - (ii) $(X \ \& \ H) \Rightarrow Y$, and
 - (iii) $\sim(H \Rightarrow Y)$,

where “*H*” represents the prior history of the world.

The crucial feature here is that according to (PBA), what *A* actually has the power to bring about is a function of the past history of the actual world;³² considerations regarding counterfactual scenarios and hence other possible worlds (and their histories) are irrelevant.

Hasker’s own reasoning about “power to bring about” represents a different approach, insofar as counterfactual scenarios figure centrally in his reasoning. His proof of the power entailment principle and his justification for the inference from (2) to (3) both involve the following pattern of reasoning, where “ ϕ ” represents something *A* does not in fact do:

A has the power to ϕ .

If *A* were to ϕ , *A* would thereby bring it about that *Y*.

Therefore, *A* has the power to bring it about that *Y*.³³

In both proofs, Hasker’s attempt to establish the truth of the relevant counterfactual conditional (“If *A* were to ϕ , *A* would thereby bring it about that *Y*”) is the weak link. For as I have shown, in each case Hasker fails to establish that “*A* brings it about that *Y*” would be satisfied in the relevant counterfactual scenario.

This is where (PBA) could come to the rescue. If we stipulate that (PBA) gives necessary and sufficient conditions for “power to bring about,” then counterfactual scenarios are irrelevant when determining whether

³²I owe this way of putting the point to Thomas Flint.

³³Hasker’s reasoning about “power to bring about” suggests a commitment to the following (to my mind, very reasonable) pair of conditions:

- A has the power to bring it about that Y* if and only if: for some *X*,
- (a) *A* has the power to cause it to be the case that *X*, and
 - (b) if *A* were to cause it to be the case that *X*, *A* would thereby bring it about that *Y*.

Unpacking the second condition and retaining the first yields the following (compare with (PBA)):

- A has the power to bring it about that Y* if and only if: for some *X*,
- (i) *A* has the power to cause it to be the case that *X*,
 - (ii) $(X \ \& \ H^*) \Rightarrow Y$, and
 - (iii) $\sim(H^* \Rightarrow Y)$,

where “*H**” represents the history, prior to its coming to be the case that *X*, of the nearest possible world *W** in which *A* causes it to be the case that *X*. (That is, *H** is the history of the world as it would have been if *A* were to cause it to be the case that *X*.)

an agent has the *power to bring about* a given state of affairs. For example, there would no longer be any need for Hasker to show, in his proof of the power entailment principle (4), that $\sim(H^* \Rightarrow Q)$, where H^* is the history of the nearest possible world in which A brings it about that P. Instead, at the relevant point in his proof he would need only show that $\sim(H \Rightarrow Q)$, where H is the history of the actual world—and that is easily done, as we have seen. I leave it to the reader to confirm that, given (PBA), both the power entailment principle (4) and the inference from (2) to (3) admit of obvious proofs. Indeed, given (PBA), (7) itself is easily established by a far more direct argument than Hasker's (1)–(7), as Flint shows.³⁴ So why not just read (PBA) into Hasker's argument, and declare that the Molinist's commitment to (7) is beyond question?

The problem with this strategy is that the notion of *power to bring about* a state of affairs, as specified by (PBA), does not coincide with the notion of power to *bring about* a state of affairs, as specified by (BA). Let me frame the point this way: an agent can have the (PBA)-*power-to-bring-it-about* that Y, even if the agent does not have in her power any action such that were she to perform it, she would thereby (BA)-*bring-it-about* that Y. (This is precisely why it is advantageous to adopt (PBA) in the argument for (7).) But unless an agent is able to do something whereby she *would* (BA)-bring-it-about that Y, we cannot reasonably attribute to her the *power* to (BA)-bring-it-about that Y. Therefore: an agent can have the (PBA)-*power-to-bring-it-about* that Y *without* having the power to (BA)-bring-it-about that Y, which shows that the two notions do not coincide. And so adopting (PBA) in order to make the argument for (7) go through amounts to changing the subject in a subtle way. The conclusion of the resulting argument would be

(7') It is in A's *power to bring it about*, in the sense of (PBA), that $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$.³⁵

³⁴Flint, "A New Anti-Anti-Molinist Argument," 299–300.

³⁵Since Flint employs what I am calling (PBA) in order to show that the Molinist is committed to (7), what he *actually* establishes is that the Molinist is committed to (7'), not (7). This subtle equivocation undermines one of Flint's replies to Hasker. See Flint, "Whence and Whither the Molinist Debate," 40–43. In effect, Flint argues that even if the Molinist grants (PAST), Hasker's argument for (9) does not go through. More precisely, Flint argues that a Molinist who grants that the counterfactuals of freedom belong to the world's history has grounds for rejecting the assumption

(a) If it's not possible that A brings it about that X, then it's not possible that A has the power to bring it about that X

on which Hasker's argument for (9) depends. But Flint's case against (a) rests explicitly on the premise that the Molinist is committed to (7)—a premise that, as I have shown, is undermined by (PAST). And if we replace that premise with the similar one that Flint has actually succeeded in establishing, namely that the Molinist is committed to (7'), Flint's argument against (a) does not go through. (If his argument *did* go through, it would also serve to undermine the similar premise

(4*) If there is no possible world in which A brings it about that $(C \Box \rightarrow X)$, then it is not in A's power to bring it about that $(C \Box \rightarrow X)$

from section 2 of this paper.)

But (7'), combined with

- (9) It is not in A's power to *bring it about*, in the sense of (BA), that $(C \Box \rightarrow \sim Z)$,

does not yield a genuine contradiction. (Here I have just made explicit the sense of "bring about" in the original (9).)

One might hope to eliminate the equivocation by employing (PBA) rather than (BA) in the argument for (9), but there seems little chance of making this work. What makes the argument for (9) tick is the precise way in which (BA) interacts with (PAST); there is no similar interaction between (PBA) and (PAST) that an argument for the negation of (7') might exploit. I conclude that the need for the sort of counterfactual reasoning that Hasker employs when arguing in support of steps (3) and (4) cannot simply be sidestepped by recasting the argument in terms of (PBA), since that maneuver would be fatal to the intended *reductio*. And so my objections to (3) and (4) cannot be dismissed in this way.

5. Middle Knowledge and the World's History: What's Really at Stake

I have shown that if the counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the past history of the world—that is, if (PAST) is true—then Hasker's argument that the Molinist is committed to (7) fails. On the other hand, if (PAST) is false, then Hasker's argument that the Molinist is committed to (9) collapses. Either way, Hasker fails to show that the Molinist is committed to both halves, (7) and (9), of the intended contradiction.

Although Hasker's stated case against Molinism does not go through, it would not be entirely satisfactory to conclude this discussion without addressing the conceptual concerns that motivate his argument. Hasker thinks that because God's middle knowledge has already made a difference to the world's causal history, by informing God's creative decision, this middle knowledge must be counted as part of the settled past history of the world. This means, in particular, that God's knowledge of the counterfactuals of freedom about me is part of the world's past history and hence *unalterable*. That may seem difficult to reconcile with the Molinist's convictions (i) that I sometimes act freely, (ii) that when I act freely, it is in my power to do otherwise (in the same circumstances), and (iii) that were I to do otherwise, a true counterfactual of freedom about me would be false, and God would never have known a counterfactual of freedom about me that he has in fact always known. Supposing that God's middle knowledge does genuinely and strictly belong to the world's past history, these three Molinist convictions entail that I have the power to act in such a way that the past history of the world would have been otherwise. To be more precise, these Molinist convictions entail that

- (POW) It is in my power to act in such a way that were I so to act, the past history of the world would have been different from the actual past, in that God never would have known a particular

counterfactual of freedom about me which he has in fact always known.

Hasker's concern seems to be that insofar as Molinists really are committed to (POW) or something like it, their position is shown to be absurd. Why? The reasons that Hasker and others tend to give cluster around three related objections:

1. (POW) implies a denial of the evident truth that the past is fixed and unalterable.
2. (POW) implies that I have an absurd or objectionable sort of power over the past.
3. (POW) is incompatible with the libertarianism that Molinists profess.

I contend that all three of these objections are misguided; I will explain this assessment for each one in turn. Once again, I will assume that God's middle knowledge is part of the world's past history, strictly speaking, since (POW) and the three objections to it depend on this assumption.

First, does (POW) imply a denial of the evident truth that the past is fixed and unalterable, as objection 1 asserts? Certainly not. The past *is* unalterable, without a doubt. After all, a genuine *alteration* of the past is strictly impossible; there is no possible world in which an event or state of affairs that was once part of the world's past history is subsequently *not* part of the world's past history. But precisely because it is strictly impossible that the past should undergo any alteration, we may conclude that the past is unalterable, and would be unalterable, no matter what actions I might perform, and no matter what actions I might have in my power.

In particular, to say of a given action that *were I now to perform it, the past history of the world would be different from the actual past* is to contrast an actual and a counterfactual scenario—that is, to contrast the history of the actual world (in which I do not perform the specified action) with that of a different possible world (in which I do perform it). To describe an action in such terms does not imply that my performing the action would *effect a transition* from the one situation or history to the other (that is, a change within a single world from one to the other). In fact, it is clear that I would *not* alter the past were I to perform an action of the given description; in that counterfactual scenario the world's past history would be just as fixed and unchanging as in the actual world. Hence there is no reason at all to think that my having the power to perform such an action implies that the past admits of alteration or that I am capable of altering it. I conclude that a commitment to (POW) in no way implies that the past is anything but fixed and unalterable, and that objection 1 is misplaced.

Second, does (POW) imply that I have an objectionable sort of power over the past, as objection 2 asserts? No; in fact it does not imply that I have any genuine power over the past at all. Consider that in the actual

world, I exercise no power over the past. The history of the world prior to my existence, which includes God's knowledge of the counterfactuals of freedom about me, was settled before I ever existed, and I do not influence that prior history by my actions. (This is particularly evident in the case of God's middle knowledge; that knowledge is logically prior even to God's decision to create me, and so it is clearly not influenced by what I do.) Because I do not influence the past by my actions, we may conclude that *my power to perform the actions I do in fact perform* does not amount to *power over the past* on my part. But now notice that something similar can be said for the power that (POW) attributes to me—the power to act in such a way that were I so to act, God's middle knowledge and hence the world's past history would have been different. If I were to exercise the power in question, would I thereby influence the past? No, for in that counterfactual scenario, just as in the actual world, the prior history of the world (including God's middle knowledge) would have been settled before I ever arrived on the scene, and my actions would not influence that prior history. It follows that even if I were to exercise the power that (POW) attributes to me, I would not thereby influence the past; hence the power that (POW) attributes to me cannot rightly be called power over the past. Thus objection 2 is mistaken.

Hasker himself has formulated a line of argument that is similar to objection 2, in the context of the problem of free will and divine foreknowledge. He argues that so-called "counterfactual power over the past,"³⁶ like that which (POW) attributes to me, would imply power on my part to *bring about* the past.³⁷ The idea is that even if "counterfactual power" over God's past knowledge is not objectionable in its own right, it implies a further sort of power over the past that *is* objectionable. But his argument that "counterfactual power" over the past implies a genuine *power to bring about the past* rests on the power entailment principle (4)—which he affirms on basis of the very proof I have already shown to be flawed.

Finally, I turn to objection 3, which asserts that the power that (POW) attributes to me, the power to act in such a way that something in the past history of the world would be otherwise, is incompatible with libertarianism. Why are these supposed to be incompatible? Well, (POW) sounds exactly like the sort of thing that *compatibilists* are apt to say in response to the Consequence Argument:

It is in my power to act in such a way that were I so to act, the past history of the world would have been different from the actual past.

³⁶"Counterfactual power over the past" is just shorthand for "power to perform an action such that, were I to perform it, the past would have been different"—and as I have pointed out above, this does not amount to *power over the past* at all, properly speaking. Hasker himself notes that "'counterfactual power' with respect to some state of affairs need not involve *power* over that state of affairs at all" (Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*, 101).

³⁷Hasker, "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom," 46.

If a textbook compatibilist line like this is a consequence of Molinism, it might be tempting to conclude that Molinists cannot consistently maintain their libertarian credentials.

But that conclusion would be too hasty. Just consider how starkly different the contexts are in which compatibilists and Molinists will affirm the above "compatibilist line." Compatibilists are apt to assert it when responding to the Consequence Argument—which is to say, precisely in the context of an assumption that determinism is true. In that context, the compatibilist line really is an expression of compatibilism, since to assert it in that context is to say that I have the power to do something other than what I will in fact do, *even supposing that determinism is true*. Molinists, by contrast, will affirm the compatibilist line only on the supposition that my actions are *not* causally determined. Given *that* assumption, the line has no compatibilist implications. Hence the idea that the Molinist's affirmation of it is inconsistent with libertarianism is unfounded.

It might be replied that even if (POW) is not flatly inconsistent with libertarianism, there is at least a serious tension here; insofar as they are committed to (POW), Molinists cannot endorse an argument to which libertarians are wont to appeal as the grounds for their incompatibilism, namely, the Consequence Argument.³⁸ For if they accept (POW), Molinists must reject the general principle *no one has the power to perform an action such that, were he to perform it, the remote past would have been otherwise*. And this principle is a premise (or it underwrites a premise) in typical formulations of the Consequence Argument.

Should it cause Molinists any anxiety to reject the principle in question? Hardly. Molinists are incompatibilists; they accept the conclusion of the Consequence Argument. But they should endorse this particular argument for that conclusion only if there are good reasons for affirming all of its premises. If one of these premises is a principle to the effect that no one has the power to perform an action such that, were he to perform it, the remote past would have been otherwise, then the question is: are there good reasons for affirming that principle? I don't think there are. There are good reasons for denying that I can *affect* or *alter* anything in the remote past. And there are good reasons for denying that I have any kind of *genuine power over* events in the remote past. But I see no basis for supposing that those reasons support the principle in question. Defenders of such a principle are apt to characterize it as "a statement of the familiar principle that no one can change the past"³⁹ or as "capturing the intuitive idea that the past is fixed."⁴⁰ Indeed, it is typically on the basis of just such characterizations that a principle like the one in question is held up as obviously true or as rationally defensible. But as I have already explained in my responses to objections 1 and 2, the sort of power at issue—power to perform an action

³⁸See Perszyk, "Molinism and the Consequence Argument."

³⁹van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*, 92.

⁴⁰Fischer, "Foreknowledge, Freedom and the Fixity of the Past," 464.

such that, were I to perform it, something in the remote past would have been otherwise—is *not* rightly characterized as genuine power over the past, and the assertion that I have such power does *not* imply a denial of the evident truth that the past is fixed and unalterable. So the characterizations on the basis of which the principle in question is typically affirmed are in fact *mischaracterizations*. Quite apart from Molinism, then, there is some reason for thinking that the principle in question is unfounded, that (at least insofar as it relies on this principle) the Consequence Argument is on shaky ground, and hence that incompatibilists ought not to regard that argument as the basis for their incompatibilism.

This brings to an end my response to the three objections against (POW). For all their surface plausibility, all three turn out upon closer examination to be misplaced. As far as I can see, there are no grounds for regarding (POW) as a serious liability for Molinism.

There is still one additional consideration that might seem to call into question the Molinist's libertarian credentials. It can be stated quite simply: according to Molinists, God's middle knowledge and God's complete creative act taken together entail every fact about the complete history of the created universe, past, present, and future. If God's complete creative act and his middle knowledge belong to the world's past history, as Hasker contends, then *the past history of the world entails the entire future history of the created universe, including every fact about what any created agent will ever do*.⁴¹ That is to say, the (unalterable) past history of the world entails a unique future. But this is incompatible with libertarianism—so the argument goes—because it is an essential commitment of libertarianism that for at least some actions that I perform, the prior history of the world neither entails that I will, nor that I will not perform the action.

⁴¹It follows that no one ever brings about the truth of any fact at all, in Hasker's stipulated sense of "bring about"—even if agents freely cause all sorts of things. (Recall that according to Hasker's definition, "A brings it about that Y" is true only if the world's past history by itself does not entail Y.) This observation provides a quick and simple way to show that Hasker's argument for (7) fails. If we suppose that God's complete creative act and his middle knowledge belong to the world's past history in all possible worlds, as Hasker's argument for (9) requires, then no agent ever *brings about* any facts at all, in any possible world. It follows that no agent has the *power to bring about* any state of affairs at all, in any possible world, regardless of what actions the agent has the power to perform (since no one has the power to *bring about* a given state of affairs unless there is a possible action on her part by which, were she to perform it, she *would* bring about the state of affairs in question—again, something Hasker's argument for (9) requires). But if no one has the power to bring about any state of affairs at all, no matter what actions one has the power to perform, then Hasker's inference from

- (2) A is in *c*, and it is in A's power to refrain from doing *z*

to

- (3) It is in A's power to bring it about that: A is in *c*, and A refrains from doing *z*

is invalid. Since "it is in A's power to bring it about that *P*" is necessarily false, the power entailment principle

- (4) If it is in A's power to bring it about that *P*, and '*P*' entails '*Q*' and '*Q*' is false, then it is in A's power to bring it about that *Q*

is true, but only in the trivial sense that it has a necessarily false antecedent (and consequent).

Here we have as simple and direct an argument as could be desired for the very thing that Hasker says his own "bring about" argument is intended to establish—namely, that "if we assume the existence of CCFs [counterfactuals of creaturely freedom], we can derive the result that the agents in question are not free (in the libertarian sense)."⁴² But I think this simple argument is mistaken on a crucial point. So far as I can see, it is *not* an essential commitment of libertarianism that, for some of my actions, the prior history of the world neither entails that I will nor that I will not perform that action. What *is* an essential commitment of libertarianism is that at least some of my actions are not *causally determined* by events or factors that are not under my causal control. (Libertarians share with other incompatibilists the conviction that if some action of mine is causally determined, then it is not in my power to do otherwise; they also hold that, on at least some occasions, it is in my power to do otherwise, i.e., to do something other than what I actually do on that occasion.) The difference is significant, because even if the world's past history entails that I will perform a given action on a given occasion, it does not follow that my action is causally determined.⁴³ Hence a libertarian may accept the following: the past history of the world entails that I will perform a specific action on a specific occasion, and yet I have it in my power to do otherwise on that very occasion. The rational Molinist who grants that God's middle knowledge and God's creative act really do belong to the world's past history will say exactly this about every free action I ever perform.

In fact, the theory of middle knowledge provides a nice illustration of the point that entailment by the past does not imply that an action is causally determined. Suppose God knows that as a result of his complete creative act and the contributions prior to time *t* of indeterministic created causes (including me), I will be in circumstances *c* at *t*. Suppose further that God knows that the counterfactual of freedom ($C \Box \rightarrow Z$) is true of me. Then, given Molinist principles: (i) God's middle knowledge and his complete creative act, both of which (we are supposing) are part of the world's past history, entail that I will do *z*, and that I will do it freely; (ii) my doing *z* is not causally determined—by God's middle knowledge and his creative act or by anything else; and (iii) I have the power not to do *z*, on that very occasion and in the very same circumstances *c*.⁴⁴ Hasker

⁴²Hasker, "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom," 51.

⁴³If some definition of *causal determinism* should have the consequence *causal determinism is true if the past history of the world by itself entails a unique future*, then that definition is absurd; for on such a definition, causal determinism could be true even in a world where the laws of nature are indeterministic as you please, and indeed even if there are no laws of nature at all.

⁴⁴Note that God's middle knowledge is not part of the circumstances that figure in the counterfactuals of freedom as Molinists think of them. And this seems intuitively right—a bit of divine knowledge that is (logically) prior to God's creative act is not in any meaningful sense part of the situation that I find myself in. No matter what guiding role a bit of divine knowledge may have played in God's decision to contribute causally to my being in a particular situation, that bit of knowledge does not itself comprise part of my situation.

seems to think that (iii) is untenable; he seems to think that if God knows that I would do *z* in *c*, then when I find myself in *c*, I must be unable to do otherwise. But he does not explain how God's knowledge of what I would do in those circumstances is supposed to impose or imply such a limitation on my abilities.

I realize that many libertarians would be dissatisfied with the position that I am suggesting the Molinist could rationally adopt. Many libertarians—including Hasker—would insist that, if I really do have the power to do otherwise, then it must be true not only that my doing *z* is not causally determined, but also that the prior history of the world does not entail (logically) that I will do *z*. This additional requirement is for many libertarians a deeply-held conviction about free will. But it is not clear why a requirement to this effect should be thought to be a *sine qua non* of libertarianism, as opposed to being an additional commitment that, although shared by many libertarians, is not essential to libertarianism as such. Furthermore, it is not clear just what the grounds for the requirement are supposed to be. Suppose the past history of the world entails that I will do *z*; it follows, of course, that I *will not* do otherwise. But why think that it follows, in addition, that I *lack the power* to do otherwise?

Obviously the issues here are complex, and this is not the place for a thorough treatment of them. I will simply point out that the Molinist position I have described seems to be perfectly consistent. Some libertarians will regard it as unsatisfactory by their own lights. But I see no reason to think that the position is inconsistent with the essential core of libertarianism, which is that human beings have free will—that is to say, they sometimes have both the power to perform a given action and the power not to perform it—and that an agent can have such two-way power with respect to a given action only if his action is not causally determined. It seems to me that a libertarian may consistently and reasonably hold that even if facts that are genuinely and strictly part of the world's past history entail that I *will* perform a given action, it does not follow that my action is causally determined or that I *lack the power* to do otherwise. Hence even if it follows from Molinism that God's complete creative act and his middle knowledge belong to the world's past history, and hence that the world's past history entails a unique future, this does not by itself invalidate the Molinist's libertarian credentials.

6. Conclusion

My primary aim in this paper has been to show that the "bring about" contradiction that Hasker tries to pin on the Molinist does not materialize, whether God's middle knowledge belongs to the past history of the world or not. If God's middle knowledge *is* part of the world's history, then Hasker's argument that *we created free agents have the power to bring about the counterfactuals of freedom about ourselves* fails, as I have shown. On the other hand, if God's middle knowledge is *not* part of the world's past history, then Hasker's argument that *we do not have the power to bring about*

the counterfactuals of freedom about ourselves never gets off the ground, by his own admission. Either way, the intended contradiction does not arise for the Molinist. Hence, Hasker's attempt to provide a rigorous *reductio* of Molinism does not succeed.

I will close with a suggestion. In discussions of freedom and foreknowledge, philosophers have frequently taken it for granted that if the unalterable past history of the world entails a unique future, then libertarianism is false. It seems to me that the same assumption about what "libertarian free will" requires is at least lurking around the edges of Hasker's "bring about" arguments against Molinism. I think that this assumption is where the real philosophical meat of these issues lies, and that consequently philosophers who wish to make headway on these issues would do well to bring this assumption to the fore—and to articulate and evaluate reasons for and against it. In particular, philosophers (including libertarians) should critically evaluate this assumption in the light of the doctrine of divine foreknowledge and the Molinist theory of middle knowledge. It would not be surprising if a broad assumption about free will and "the past history of the world," an assumption that may seem evident enough in contexts where it is really *the past history of the physical universe* and its *causal bearing* on our future actions that we have in mind, should turn out not to be quite so evident in the context of theological doctrines about *divine knowledge* and its *logical* relation to our actions. The point is this: debates about free will and divine foreknowledge, and about free will and Molinism, provide opportunities for philosophers to critically reexamine and *refine* their ideas about the nature of free will—not just to deploy predetermined and inflexible commitments. Therefore, when they approach these theological issues, philosophers ought not simply to *assume* that principles that libertarians are apt to affirm in the context of discussions of free will and causal determinism are non-negotiable elements of a libertarian position on free will; that would be missing an opportunity to let work in philosophical theology inform and guide our views about just what principles libertarians should, or must, accept.⁴⁵

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⁴⁵I would like to thank Thomas Flint for helpful discussion.

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