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*God, Time, and Knowledge*. WILLIAM HASKER. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989. xi, 209 p. Cloth \$24.95. And *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes*. EDWARD R. WIERENGA. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989. ix, 238 p. Cloth \$28.50.

William Hasker explores God's knowledge of the future. He is particularly interested in the relationship between such knowledge and human freedom. This is a clear book, filled with subtle and provocative argumentation. Hasker provides an argument against the possibility of "middle knowledge" and hence he rejects "Molinism." He offers an ingenious argument that "simple divine foreknowledge" has no point—it would be useless with respect to God's providential activity. Hasker also argues that various responses to incompatibilism about God's foreknowledge and human freedom (associated with Aquinas and Ockham) are inadequate. Finally, Hasker offers an alternative picture according to which the future is "open" in the sense that statements about future actions need not be true or false now. Although God knows the *possibilities* of the future and also the likelihoods that these will be realized, he cannot know about future free actions (insofar as there are no truths here to be known).

In this review, I cannot undertake to discuss various of Hasker's arguments. In particular, I shall not discuss his argument against the possibility of middle knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Also, I shall not discuss Hasker's claim that there is no coherent difference between "counterfactual power over the past" and "bringing about the past," and thus that a certain sort of compatibilism is incoherent.<sup>2</sup> I shall take issue instead with the following claims of Hasker: (1) the compatibilist must implicitly be operating with the notion of a "general power" rather than "the power to perform a particular act under given circumstances," and thus the compatibilist and incompatibilist are talking past each other; (2) the compatibilist cannot coherently affirm "lib-

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Molinism, see Alfred J. Freddoso, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, Luis de Molina, trans. (Ithaca: Cornell, 1988). Also, see the exchange between Hasker and Thomas P. Flint: Flint, "Hasker's *God, Time, and Knowledge*," *Philosophical Studies*, LX (1990): 103–16; and Hasker, "Response to Thomas Flint," *Philosophical Studies*, LX (1990): 117–26.

<sup>2</sup> I criticize this claim in "Introduction: God and Freedom," in my, ed. *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom* (Stanford: University Press, 1989), pp. 18–23. For a discussion of this issue in the context of the argument for the incompatibility of causal determinism and freedom, see Carl Ginet, "In Defense of Incompatibilism," *Philosophical Studies*, XLIV (1983): 391–400; and my "Freedom and Miracles," *Nous*, XXII (1988): 235–52, esp. no. 5, p. 251.

ertarian free will”—the claim that we sometimes have genuine alternative possibilities of choice and action.

I shall first lay out some of the considerations in virtue of which Hasker concludes that the compatibilist about God's foreknowledge and human freedom must be operating with the notion of a "general power." Note that one can have a generalized power while lacking the ability to exercise this power: I may be able (in the general sense) to play the piano but be temporarily paralyzed or tied down, and so forth. It would be highly damaging to compatibilism if it required this general notion of a power, since it is widely acknowledged that it is the notion of the power to perform a particular act in given circumstances (rather than the general power) that is relevant (in a straightforward way) to free will (and moral responsibility).

Hasker alludes to the distinction between hard and soft facts about times. He points out that there are two "moments or aspects" of the notion of a hard fact: first, a hard fact is "really about the past," and second, if a proposition expresses a hard fact, then it cannot be in anyone's power (at the relevant time) to render that proposition false (82).<sup>3</sup> Although Hasker describes these two "moments or aspects" of the notion of a hard fact, he *defines* hard facts as "true propositions, such that, with respect to a given time, it is impossible that anyone at or after that time should have the power to render them false." Given this definition of hard facts, Hasker explicates hard facts in terms of the notion of "future-indifference" and a number of other analytical hypotheses (84ff).

Having explicated the notion of a hard fact, Hasker argues that facts about God's prior beliefs about future actions are *hard* facts about the relevant past times (91–5). This turns out to be the case, on Hasker's approach, even though God's beliefs are not *temporally indifferent* (*nonrelational*) facts; since fixity and temporal indifference are different moments or aspects of hardness, a fact can be fixed even though it is not temporally indifferent.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> I do not believe that "really about the past" captures the relevant temporal aspect, because a fact can be really about the past without being *solely* about the past: the conjunctive fact, "Jack sits at  $T_1$  and Molly stands at  $T_3$ " is really (but not solely) about the past with respect to  $T_2$ . Thus, the notion of being really about the past does not capture the idea of being "fully accomplished and over-and-done-with," which is the appropriate notion.

<sup>4</sup> In a previous paper, Hasker distinguished two kinds of facts that correspond to the two moments or aspects of fixity and temporal nonrelationality: "Hard Facts and Theological Fatalism," *Nous*, XXII (1988): 419–36, repr. in Fischer, ed. This previous approach is, in my judgment, much preferable insofar as confusions are engendered by the "aspects" approach. For example, having defined hard facts as those which cannot be rendered false, Hasker says, "But even if the

Consider now Hasker's definition of the power to perform a particular act under given circumstances:

In general, if it is in *N*'s power at *T* to perform *A*, then there is nothing in the circumstances [fn. 18: It will be recalled that the circumstances that obtain at *T* comprise all and only the hard facts with respect to *T*] that obtain at *T* which *prevents* or *precludes* *N*'s performing *A* at *T*. Here 'prevent' applies especially to circumstances that are *causally* incompatible with *N*'s performing *A* at *T*, and 'preclude' to circumstances that are *logically* incompatible with *N*'s doing so (134).

On the basis of this account and his argument that God's beliefs are hard facts, Hasker concludes that the compatibilist must have in mind the general notion of power (and thus that the compatibilist and incompatibilist are talking past each other).

But Hasker's argument here is clearly unfair. He has produced an argument for the conclusion that God's beliefs are hard facts, but it is unfair to suppose that the compatibilist accepts this argument (or even knows of it). Indeed, the argument is controversial,<sup>5</sup> and its conclusion is precisely what is at issue in the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists. Thus, the claim that God's beliefs are hard cannot simply be taken for granted when one is trying to see what notion of power the compatibilist is employing. Given this point, the compatibilist can embrace Hasker's account of the power to perform a particular act under given circumstances.

And there are other perfectly reasonable accounts of such power open to the compatibilist. *Any* theorist will want to adopt certain constraints on an adequate account of the "particular" notion of power. The compatibilist, it seems to me, can adopt the constraint that, in ascribing such power to perform *A*, one holds fixed all temporally nonrelational facts about the past and all present circumstances that prevent (in Hasker's sense) the agent's performing *A*. Thus, the compatibilist (who claims that facts about God's beliefs are temporally relational) can embrace a "particular" notion of power. Thus, Hasker has not given us reason to think that the com-

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claim that God's beliefs are soft facts must be given up, it would be overly optimistic to expect the compatibilist at this point to fold his tents and steal silently away. For compatibilists have also made claims about powers we have over the past—claims that need not depend on the distinction between hard and soft facts . . ." (95). This remark makes sense if Hasker is talking about hard facts in the sense of the first moment or aspect—temporal indifference (or better, being "over-and-done-with," i.e., being solely about the past). But, given the official approach of the book, I do not see how it makes sense at all: if facts about God's beliefs are hard (on the current definition), tent folding seems in order for the compatibilist.

<sup>5</sup> See Hasker's comments on 92–3, esp. fn. 19.

patibilist is committed to an implausible conception of power or that the compatibilist and incompatibilist are talking past each other.<sup>6</sup>

Hasker claims that the compatibilist cannot consistently affirm what he calls "libertarian free will." (By this he means the sort of free will that requires genuinely open alternative possibilities; this might be contrasted with an "actual-sequence" approach to free will and moral responsibility.) This claim allegedly follows from an account of libertarian free will conjoined with Hasker's claim that the compatibilist is committed to the general notion of power.

Here is Hasker's account of libertarian free will:

(FW') N is free at *T* with respect to performing *A* = df. It is in N's power at *T* to perform *A* and it is possible at *T* for N to exercise that power, and it is in N's power at *T* to refrain from performing *A*, and it is also possible at *T* for N to exercise *that* power (138).

If one accepts (FW') and also the claim that the compatibilist is committed to the general notion of power, then one must conclude that the compatibilist cannot affirm libertarian free will. This is because an agent's having the general power is compatible with its not being possible that he exercise it and, indeed, if God holds the relevant belief it is (allegedly) not possible for the agent to exercise the relevant power.

Hasker says:

It is clear . . . that a compatibilist . . . is claiming that Peter can *have* the power to refrain from sinning *even though it is logically impossible that he should exercise that power under the existing circumstances*. But if one has the "power to do otherwise" only in that sense—the sense in which *having* the power does not guarantee that it is possible for the power to be *used*—then the central idea of libertarianism . . . has been lost (141).

But we saw above that the compatibilist need not embrace the general notion of power; rather, he can adopt a particularized notion. Also, the compatibilist can adopt a notion of possibility that permits the possibility of agents' exercising their powers, even if God exists. On the relevant notion of possibility, God's beliefs are not held fixed; but this is entirely appropriate (on the compatibilist's picture)

<sup>6</sup> William P. Alston also believes that the compatibilist and incompatibilist are talking past each other; cf. "Divine Foreknowledge and Alternative Conceptions of Human Freedom," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, XVIII (1985): 19–32; repr. in Fischer, ed. Alston's view is, however, slightly different from Hasker's. Alston does not attribute to the compatibilist the general notion of power; rather, he distinguishes between a compatibilist and incompatibilist "sense" of the particular notion of power.

insofar as God's beliefs are neither temporally nonrelational facts about the past nor present facts which are causally relevant to the agent's action.

Let us suppose that Peter sins at  $T$ . Is it possible for him to exercise his power to refrain from sinning? It is certainly impossible for him to exercise this power if *all* the "existing circumstances"—*including his sinning*—are held fixed. Thus, even an incompatibilist cannot hold such a stringent requirement. And when the requirement is relaxed (presumably employing the notion of soft facts), it seems that there is room for the compatibilist to assert that it is indeed possible for Peter to exercise this power. Thus, contrary to Hasker, there is no inconsistency in the compatibilist's affirming libertarian free will.

Wierenga systematically undertakes to give formulations of the various divine attributes, such as omnipotence, omniscience, perfect goodness, and so forth. He carefully sets out the accounts, and then evaluates them in the light of objections. In contrast to Hasker, Wierenga argues that God's omniscience is robust and includes foreknowledge of future free actions and middle knowledge.

In this review, I shall focus on Wierenga's discussion of the relationship between God's omniscience and human freedom. Whereas this discussion contains much that is of merit, I believe that it is vitiated by a problem similar to the one isolated above: Wierenga treats temporal nonrelationality (or being genuinely about the past) and fixity as different aspects of the generic notion of "accidental necessity." As with Hasker, this approach leads to certain confusions.

Here is a particularly glaring example of this sort of confusion. Wierenga criticizes a whole class of accounts of what he calls "accidental necessity," because they have as a consequence that certain facts such as "Socrates drank hemlock at  $T$ " turn out to be accidentally necessary. The problem, according to Wierenga, is that Alvin Plantinga has shown that there are possible circumstances in which such facts must not be considered accidentally necessary (99–100; 108).

I should point out, first, that the accounts in question (Freddoso, Widerker and Zemach, Fischer) all are putative accounts of temporal nonrelationality, not fixity *per se*. That is, they are all attempting to give accounts of hardness in the sense of temporal nonrelationality or being genuinely and solely about the relevant times. And facts such as "Socrates drank hemlock at  $T$ " are precisely this sort of fact. Now, whether all temporally nonrelational facts about the past are *fixed* is quite another matter, and Plantinga's examples

pertain to this issue; thus, it is unfair to adduce these examples as part of a criticism of various accounts of temporal nonrelationality.

Further, let us consider Plantinga's examples more carefully. Plantinga<sup>7</sup> suggests that

perhaps you will be confronted with a decision of great importance—so important that one of the alternatives is such that if you were to choose *it*, then the course of human history would have been quite different from what in fact it is. Furthermore, it is possible that if God had foreseen that you would choose *that* alternative, he would have acted very differently. Perhaps he would have created different persons; perhaps, indeed, he would not have created [Socrates]. So it is possible that there is an action such that it is within your power to perform it and such that if you were to perform it, then God would not have created [Socrates] (*ibid.*, p. 257).

Wierenga concludes that it is possible that a fact such as "Socrates drank hemlock at *T*" is not accidentally necessary (after *T*). Plantinga draws a similar conclusion. But even if we are considering the notion of "fixity" rather than temporal nonrelationality, this is dialectically unfair. For the dialectical context is one in which we are considering whether God's foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom. Thus, it is inappropriate to adduce in the manner of Plantinga and Wierenga an example in which it is alleged that some agent is free despite God's foreknowledge. Plantinga's examples, as far as I can see, make essential use of a foreknowing God (or at least some individual with relevantly similar attributes); but then they should not be invoked in a context in which it is controversial whether God's foreknowledge is compatible with human freedom. So, even if we restrict our focus to accidental necessity in the sense of fixity, the use of such examples is dialectically inappropriate.

Another worry. Wierenga points out that none of the accounts of accidental necessity he considers offers any reason to classify God's beliefs at a time as accidentally necessary. Thus, he concludes that the argument for incompatibilism based on the fixity of the past "must be judged to be a failure" (113). But I believe that Wierenga is too quick to leap to the compatibilistic conclusion. I believe that, even if God's beliefs at times are temporally relational facts about those times, they have a certain internal structure; further, this structure may include a temporally nonrelational or *hard* element. It may be that falsifying facts about God's beliefs requires affecting

<sup>7</sup> Plantinga develops these examples in his "On Ockham's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy*, III (1986) 235–69; repr. in Fischer, ed. Cf. Wierenga, 99.

the hard internal component. Thus, there might be a perfectly good argument employing the fixity of the past to the conclusion that God's foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom, even if God's beliefs are deemed soft facts.<sup>8</sup>

Wierenga considers the response to the incompatibilist's argument that posits that God is atemporal. On this approach, His omniscience is not foreknowledge, and the argument from the fixity of the past cannot get off the ground. Wierenga argues against this atemporalist strategy that facts such as "God timelessly knows that Jones mows his lawn at *T*" obtain at times prior to *T* and can be considered hard facts about the times in question. (This point is also made by Plantinga (*op. cit.*, p. 239).)

But it seems to me that the facts in question are not hard facts about the relevant times. A hard fact about a time (in the sense of a temporally nonrelational fact about that time) is both *genuinely* and *solely* about that time. Some soft facts are genuinely but not solely about the times in question. Facts about God's timeless beliefs are not even genuinely about the relevant times: they do not allege that anything "really happens" at the relevant times. The distinction between hard and soft facts presupposes what Freddoso has called the "primacy of the pure present"; hard facts assert that something happens in the pure present, but facts about God's timeless beliefs make no such assertion. Thus, it is implausible to suppose that the Boethian strategy can be blocked in this fashion.

Finally, I remind the reader that, whereas Hasker argues that compatibilism (with a "particular" notion of "power") is incoherent, Wierenga defends it as true. For what it is worth, I disagree with them both: I believe that such compatibilism is coherent but false.

Both books are rigorous and contain many worthwhile and provocative arguments. They both apply sophisticated analytical tools to the subject matter. Despite the flaws noted above, I believe that they are enlightening and useful books. They constitute worthy additions to Cornell University Press's series, *Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*.

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<sup>8</sup> I develop this sort of position in my "Hard-Type Soft Facts," *The Philosophical Review*, XCV (1986): 591-601.