Replies to Hasker and Zimmerman

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I. Hasker

Here is how arguments by *reductio* work: you show that if a thesis is true, then an absurdity is true; so you conclude that that thesis is false. Here is how arguments by *reductio* fail: you fail to show that if a thesis is true, then an absurdity is true.

William Hasker's (1986; 1989, 39-52) argument by *reductio* against Molinism fails. This is because Molinism implies "restricted centering." So if Molinism is true, Molinism and restricted centering are true. But I show that if Molinism and restricted centering are true, Hasker fails to show that Molinism has an absurd result. So Hasker fails to show that if Molinism is true, then an absurdity is true.

Hasker says: "my argument is said to have been refuted…*on the basis of a premise, restricted centering, which I have rejected and have given arguments against*…Merricks' refutation becomes a classic textbook example—an example, that is to say, of the fallacy of begging the question."

But I do not beg the question. Instead, as noted above, I rely on what Molinism implies in order to show that Molinism does not imply an absurdity. So it does not matter

that Hasker rejects restricted centering. What matters is, first, that Hasker's argument assumes Molinism for *reductio* and, second, that Molinism implies restricted centering.[1]

I am partly to blame for the confusion. For consider the passage in "Truth and Molinism" that most offends Hasker: "Opponents of restricted centering should resist this last move. So my Molinist-friendly argument here is good only if restricted centering is true. That is fine: Molinism implies restricted centering anyway." This footnote is poorly worded.

My idea in that footnote is better stated as: "Opponents of restricted centering should think that this last move is invalid. But that does not matter. For Molinism implies restricted centering, and so Molinism implies that this move is valid. So, assuming Molinism for *reductio*, this move is valid."

Again, as far as my response to Hasker's argument against Molinism goes, it does not matter that Hasker rejects restricted centering. But he does reject restricted centering. Indeed, he says that he has given arguments against restricted centering. So I recommend that he defend the following pithy argument against Molinism: Molinism implies restricted centering; restricted centering is false; therefore, Molinism is false.

Hasker's argument against Molinism can be recast as Perszyk's XYZ argument. Hasker says that showing that the XYZ argument fails "*completely misses the point* of Perszyk's introduction of the XYZ argument." But showing that Hasker's argument still

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[1] I do not say that restricted centering is true at the part of "Truth and Molinism" now under discussion, but only that restricted centering is implied by Molinism. But even if I had assumed restricted centering in that part of the paper, Hasker's charge of begging the question would still have been confused. This is because merely endorsing a premise that one's opponent rejects is not begging the question. (Instead, one begs the question when one argues for a conclusion using a premise that assumes that conclusion.)

fails, even when recast in Perszyk's terms, was exactly the point of my introduction of the XYZ argument. Perszyk has his projects and I have mine.

II. Zimmerman 1

Suppose that *S* freely does *A* in *C*. Then non-Molinists who endorse restricted centering will endorse:

(1) If *S* were in *C*, *S* would freely do *A*.

If these non-Molinists are incompatibilists, they should deny that God can make *S* freely do *A* in *C*. So they should conclude that the truth of (1) is not up to God. In part because of this, I argue that Hasker's *reductio* undermines Molinism only if it undermines every view that includes free will, incompatibilism, and restricted centering.

Again, incompatibilist non-Molinists who accept (1) because of restricted centering should conclude that (1)'s truth is not up to God. More carefully—and in light of Dean Zimmerman's comments—these non-Molinists should conclude that God could not have made (1) true. Here these non-Molinists agree with Molinists.

But God could have kept *S* from being in *C*. So, Zimmerman notes, non-Molinists who think that (1) is true only because of restricted centering should conclude that God could have made (1) false. And here, Zimmerman correctly says, these non-Molinists disagree with Molinists. Immediately after making this interesting point, Zimmerman concludes: "So Merricks has failed to show that Hasker's argument has any force against those who accept conditionals like (1) merely because they find centering doctrines plausible."

But Zimmerman's point does not imply that I fail to show that, if Hasker's argument undermines Molinism, then Hasker's argument undermines the position of non-Molinist incompatibilists who accept restricted centering. For I shall now argue that, even given Zimmerman's point, Hasker's reasoning still implies that these non-Molinists should conclude that (1)'s truth is "more fundamental" than the truth of a counterfactual grounded by the laws of nature. (And therefore, as I showed in "Truth and Molinism," Hasker's argument proceeds with equal force against Molinists and the relevant non-Molinists alike.)

God could make a counterfactual grounded by the laws of nature false. And God could make that same counterfactual true. God could do this, in either case, by bringing about the appropriate laws. But, as we saw above, the relevant non-Molinists hold that while God could have made (1) false, God could not have made (1) true. So these non-Molinists should say that (1)'s truth-value is less under God's control than the truth-value of a counterfactual grounded by the laws of nature.

Hasker's reasoning assumes that if the truth-value of a first true counterfactual is less under God's control than is the truth-value of a second true counterfactual, then the truth of the first counterfactual is more fundamental than the truth of the second. So, given Hasker's reasoning, the non-Molinist incompatibilist who accepts (1) should conclude that (1)'s truth is more fundamental than the truth of a counterfactual grounded by the laws of nature. Zimmerman's interesting point does not undermine this result.

On the contrary, Zimmerman's reasoning with regard to his interesting point supports this result. God can neither make the Molinist's counterfactuals true nor make them false. By contrast, while God cannot make the relevant non-Molinist's

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counterfactuals true, God can make them false.[2] This contrast is Zimmerman's only

reason for his conclusion that the truth of a Molinist's counterfactual of freedom is more

fundamental than the truth of a counterfactual of freedom of the sort endorsed by the

relevant non-Molinist.[3]

Thus Zimmerman (along with Hasker) seems to assume that if the truth-value of a

first true counterfactual is less under God's control than is the truth-value of a second true

counterfactual, then the truth of the first counterfactual is more fundamental than the truth

of the second. As we saw above, the relevant non-Molinists hold that (1)'s truth-value is

less under God's control than the truth-value of a counterfactual grounded by the laws of

nature. So Zimmerman's assumption implies that these non-Molinists should say that the

truth of (1) is more fundamental than the truth of a counterfactual grounded by the laws

of nature.

III. Zimmerman 2

Recall Hasker's assumptions for *reductio*:

(i) The following counterfactual of freedom is true: (1) if S were in C, S would freely do A.

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[2] We could inflate the rhetoric by saying that the Molinist's counterfactuals of freedom are "absolute limitations" on God and are true "independently of God's will." But these expressions, when used by Hasker and Zimmerman, mean only that God cannot make the Molinist's counterfactuals of freedom true and God cannot make them false. So these expressions add nothing to the substance of the contrast noted in the text.

[3] Zimmerman defends Hasker's claim that the truth of the Molinist's counterfactuals of freedom are more fundamental than the truth of counterfactuals grounded by the laws of nature. And Zimmerman denies that the truth of the relevant non-Molinist's counterfactuals of freedom are more fundamental than the truth of counterfactuals grounded by the laws of nature. I assume that 'more fundamental than' is transitive. So I take Zimmerman to conclude that the truth of the Molinist's counterfactuals are more fundamental than the truth of the counterfactuals of the relevant non-Molinist.

(ii) *S* freely does *A* in *C*.

Hasker argues that if (i) and (ii) are true, *S* does not bring about the truth of (1). Hasker then argues that if *S* does not bring about the truth of (1), *S* does not freely do *A* in *C*. *S*'s not freely doing *A* in *C* contradicts one of the assumptions for *reductio*. So Hasker concludes that we must reject (i) or (ii). He rejects (i).

I demonstrate that, given Molinism and (i) and (ii), *S* brings about the truth of (1).[4] It was this demonstration I had in mind when I said above (§I) that I show that if Molinism and restricted centering are true, Hasker fails to show that Molinism has an absurd result. But—as Zimmerman's comments show—I need to be clearer than I was in "Truth and Molinism" about *how* this demonstration undermines Hasker's argument for Molinism's having an absurd result.

I need to be clearer about this because, as Zimmerman rightly objects, showing that Molinism and (i) and (ii) imply that *S* brings about the truth of (1) does not *by itself* prove that Hasker's argument by *reductio* fails. For it might still be that Molinism and (i) and (ii) also imply that *S* does not bring about the truth of (1). (Recall how arguments by *reductio* work.)[5]

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[4] My demonstration presupposes Hasker's account of *bringing about* the truth of a proposition. I think that the only reasonable way to resist my demonstration is to reject Hasker's account. But those who reject Hasker's account should—as I noted in "Truth and Molinism"—deny that if *S* were to freely refrain from doing *A* in *C*, then *S* would bring about the truth of *that S freely refrains from doing A in C*. And if that claim is false, Hasker's argument fails.

[5] I have just noted a good objection that Zimmerman raises, which I respond to in the text. He also raises some less good objections. Zimmerman repeats Hasker's charge that I beg the question; this charge is confused (see §I). Zimmerman also seems to think that it matters whether non-Molinists (those in his groups (b), (c), and (d)) will think that (i) and (ii) jointly imply that *S* brings about the truth of (1); but all that matters at this point in my argument (again, see §I) is whether, assuming Molinism for *reductio*, (i) and (ii) jointly imply that *S* brings about the truth of (1).

I shall respond to Zimmerman's objection by clarifying just how my demonstration undermines Hasker's *reductio* argument against Molinism. My response begins by noting that Hasker's argument moves from the claim that God cannot bring about the truth of (1) to the conclusion that the truth of (1) is more fundamental than the truth of a counterfactual grounded by the laws of nature.

I think that this move is invalid. Here is how I put this (in a footnote) in "Truth and Molinism":

> In my opinion, the move from "not up to God" to "considerably more fundamental than subjunctive conditionals grounded by laws of nature" is invalid… Even Hasker, who is an incompatibilist, should think that the truth of *that S freely does A* is not up to God. Yet this truth does not seem particularly "fundamental"; but for the free action of *S*, it would have been false.

So I assert that Hasker's argument against Molinism makes an invalid move. Alas, my assertion will not impress Hasker. He will simply assert that this move is valid. But we are not at an impasse. For I can defend my assertion, and thus defend the claim that Hasker's argument makes an invalid move.

If *S* brings about the truth of a proposition, then that proposition's truth is not more fundamental than the truth of a counterfactual that is grounded by the laws of nature.[6] So suppose—just for the moment—that *S* brings about the truth of (1). Then the truth of (1) is not more fundamental than the truth of a counterfactual that is grounded by the laws of nature. But God cannot bring about the truth of (1). So the following is false: if God cannot bring about the truth of (1), then the truth of (1) is more fundamental than

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[6] If this conditional is false, then Hasker's argument makes an invalid move other than the one I am focusing on here. For Hasker's argument moves from (1)'s truth being more fundamental than a law of nature to the conclusion that *S* does not bring about the truth of (1).

the truth of a counterfactual grounded by the laws of nature. And so Hasker's argument makes an invalid move. And so Hasker's argument fails.

Of course, to really show that Hasker's argument fails in this way—and to really defend my above assertion that it makes an invalid move—we have to do more than *suppose* that S brings about the truth of (1). We have to *show* that S brings about the truth of (1). More carefully, we have to show only that, given Molinism and (i) and (ii), S brings about the truth of (1). For once we show that, we must conclude that—assuming Molinism and (i) and (ii) for *reductio*—Hasker's argument makes an invalid move.

In "Truth and Molinism," I showed that, given Molinism and (i) and (ii), S brings about the truth of (1). So I showed that Hasker's original argument by *reductio* against Molinism makes an invalid move, and so fails. Moreover, the *reductio* suggested by Zimmerman—namely, that Molinism implies both that S brings about the truth of (1), and also that S does not bring about the truth of (1)—fails as well. This is because Hasker makes his invalid move while defending the claim that S does not bring about the truth of (1).