Truth and Molinism[*]

Trenton Merricks

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According to Luis de Molina, God knows what each and every possible human would freely do in each and every possible circumstance. "Molinists" claim, among other things, that God knows this because there are true "counterfactuals of freedom." That is, for every possible agent *S* in every possible circumstance *C*, there are true propositions like *that if S were in C, S would freely do A*.[1] This paper begins by responding to a single argument against the Molinist claim that there are true counterfactuals of freedom. But this response will lead to positive conclusions about—and even a new characterization of—Molinism itself.

I. Hasker's Argument Against Molinism

William Hasker (1986; 1989, 39-52) defends a widely discussed argument against Molinism. In this section, I shall describe, but not evaluate, Hasker's argument. I find Hasker's argument easiest to understand when it is broken down into three "steps." So I shall begin by describing Hasker's defense of Step One. Then I shall describe his

[1] Some Molinists, including Thomas Flint (1998, 40), would say only that for every possible human *S* and for every possible *complete set of nondetermining circumstances C*, there are true propositions like *that if S were in C, S would freely do A*. My arguments in this paper are consistent with this sort of Molinism.

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defenses of Steps Two and Three. Then I shall show how these three steps, in combination, generate his argument against Molinism.

Step One: *S* does not "bring about" the truth of (1): if *S* were in *C*, *S* would freely do *A*.

Hasker's defense of Step One begins by assuming, ultimately for *reductio*, that an arbitrarily chosen counterfactual of freedom is true. So let us assume the truth of:

(1) If *S* were in *C*, *S* would freely do *A*. [2]

Hasker also assumes that *S* freely does *A* in *C*. This second assumption implies that (1)'s antecedent (as well as its consequent) is true. As a result, (1)'s antecedent is not contrary to fact. So it is perhaps infelicitous to label (1) a '*counter*factual of freedom'. But I shall follow standard procedure and apply that label to all of the Molinist's subjunctive conditionals, even those with true antecedents.

At any rate, Hasker assumes that (1) is true and that *S* freely does *A* in *C*. Hasker then gives two arguments for the claim that, given these two assumptions, (1) would have been true even if its antecedent had been false. As we shall see below, he thinks that that claim implies that Step One is true.

Hasker's (1989, 43-45) first argument for that claim turns on a thesis about judging "similarities" between "possible worlds." That thesis is that, in judging such similarities, the truth-value of each and every subjunctive conditional—including subjunctive conditionals having nothing to do with freedom—should be given a lot of weight. Indeed, they should be given so much weight that we should conclude that all

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[2] Hasker's (1989, 40) arbitrarily chosen counterfactual is not (1), but rather a counterfactual involving a graduate student accepting a grant. But I prefer to focus on (1). And for ease of exposition, I shall proceed as if Hasker discusses (1) and related propositions.

true subjunctive conditionals with true antecedents—including (1)—are true in the nearest worlds in which they have false antecedents.

Hasker (1989, 45-47) has a second argument for the claim that (1) would have been true even if its antecedent had been false. That argument begins with the idea that the truth-value of each counterfactual of (human) freedom is beyond God's control. Therefore, Hasker infers, the truth-value of a counterfactual of freedom is "considerably more fundamental" than the truth-value of any subjunctive conditional grounded by the laws of nature. Therefore, Hasker argues, every true counterfactual of freedom with a true antecedent—including (1)—would have been true, had its antecedent been false.

So Hasker has two arguments for the conclusion that (1) would have been true, had its antecedent been false. This conclusion implies that (1) would have been true even if S had not been in C. Obviously, if S had not been in C, then S would not have freely done A in C. Moreover, Hasker argues, if S had not freely done A in C, then S would not have been in C at all (1989, 42-48). All of this implies that Hasker's two arguments for the conclusion that (1) would have been true had its antecedent been false amount to two arguments for the thesis that (1) would have been true even if S had not freely done A in C. Hasker (1989, 41) then asserts—but does not argue—that that thesis implies that the truth of (1) was not *brought about* by S's freely doing A in C.[3]

Suppose that S does not bring about (1)'s truth by freely doing A in C. Then, Hasker concludes, S does not bring about (1)'s truth at all. (Recall that Step One just is

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[3] Hasker (1989, 39-52) might seem to argue briefly for this: he says that if (1) would have been true even if S had not been in C, then (1)'s truth is "independent" of S's doing A in C; and he asserts that it follows from this "independence" that S does not bring about the truth of (1) by doing A in C. But Hasker's claim that (1)'s truth is thus independent of S's doing A in C *just means* that even if S had not been in C, (1) would have been true. So Hasker's brief argument adds nothing to the assertion noted in the text.

this conclusion.) Hasker draws this conclusion because he assumes that the only way—if any—that S could bring about (1)'s truth is by freely doing A in C. Here is a representative remark:

> 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* for the agent to do this is to perform the action specified in the consequent of the counterfactual under the conditions stated in the antecedent (Hasker, 1989, 40-41, emphasis added; see also Hasker, 1986, 548 and 1999, 293).

Thus we have Hasker's argument for the claim that, given our two assumptions for *reductio*, Step One is true.

> *Step Two:* If S does A in C and S does not bring about the truth of (1), then S cannot bring about the truth of (1*): if S were in C, S would freely refrain from doing A.
>
> Suppose that Step One is true. Then S does not bring about the truth of:
>
> (1) If S were in C, S would freely do A.

But—recall one of our assumptions for *reductio*—S freely does A in C. So S performs the action specified in (1)'s consequent under the conditions stated in (1)'s antecedent. So S's performing the action specified in (1)'s consequent, under the conditions stated in (1)'s antecedent, does not thereby bring about the truth of (1). Nothing here turns on the particulars of this example. So we should conclude that, in general, performing the action specified in a counterfactual of freedom's consequent, under the conditions stated in that counterfactual's antecedent, does not thereby bring about the truth of that counterfactual.

Combine this conclusion with Hasker's claim that the only possible way—if any—to bring about the truth of a counterfactual of freedom is to perform the action specified in the consequent of the counterfactual under the conditions stated in the

antecedent. This combination implies that no one can bring about the truth of any counterfactual of freedom. And so of course S cannot bring about the truth of the following counterfactual of freedom:

(1*) If S were in C, S would freely refrain from doing A.

Thus we have Hasker's (1989, 49-52) defense of Step Two.

Step Three: If S cannot bring about the truth of (1*), then S cannot freely refrain from doing A in C.

Hasker thinks that Molinism implies (something like) "centering." Centering states that if the antecedent and consequent of a subjunctive conditional are true, then that conditional itself is true. (I return to centering below.) Centering implies that if S freely refrains from doing A in C, then (1*) is true. Thus centering implies that the proposition *that S freely refrains from doing A in C* entails (1*).

Presumably, 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 so, assuming centering for the sake of argument, if S were to freely refrain from doing A in C, S would bring about the truth of a proposition—namely, *that S freely refrains from doing A in C*—that itself entails (1*). And so it seems that if S were to freely refrain from doing A in C, then S would thereby bring about the truth of (1*).[4]

We have just seen that centering implies that if S were to freely refrain from doing A in C, S would bring about the truth of (1*). Molinism seems to imply (something like)

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[4] At least, S would thereby bring about the truth of (1*) according to Hasker's (1999) definition of 'brings it about.' I discuss that definition below (§IV).

centering.[5] So Molinism seems to imply that if *S* were to freely refrain from doing *A* in *C*,

S would bring about the truth of (1*). Suppose that *S* cannot bring about the truth of (1*).

Then it seems plausible that *S* cannot freely refrain from doing *A* in *C*.[6] And so we arrive

at Step Three: if *S* cannot bring about the truth of (1*), then *S* cannot freely refrain from

doing *A* in *C*.

Here is Hasker's argument against Molinism, which results from combining his

defenses of Steps One through Three:

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

(ii) *S* freely does *A* in *C*. (assume for *reductio*)

(iii) If (i) and (ii) are true, then *S* does not bring about the truth of (1). (Hasker's defense Step One)

(iv) If (ii) is true and *S* does not bring about the truth of (1), then *S* cannot bring about the truth (1*): If *S* were in *C*, *S* would freely refrain from doing *A*. (Hasker's defense of Step Two)

(v) If *S* cannot bring about the truth of (1*), then *S* cannot freely refrain from doing *A* in *C*. (Hasker's defense of Step Three)

(vi) *S* cannot freely refrain from doing *A* in *C*. (i through v)

(vii) It is not the case that *S* freely does *A* in *C*. (vi) [7]

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[5] Below (§III) I argue that Molinism implies "restricted centering"; and Molinism's implying restricted centering justifies every argumentative move discussed in this section that would be justified by Molinism's implying centering.

[6] Hasker (1989, 49-51) has an argument for the plausible claim that (roughly) if one cannot bring about a truth necessitated by the performance of an action, then one cannot perform that action. That argument, which features Hasker's "Power Entailment Principle," relies on nothing peculiar to Molinism.

[7] Some might object that, because of "Frankfurt cases," *S*'s not being free to refrain from doing *A* in *C* does not imply that *S* does not freely do *A* in *C* (see Frankfurt, 1969). But I shall not develop this objection to the move from (vi) to (vii) in Hasker's argument. Here is one reason I shall not develop it. Suppose one is convinced that, possibly, there are odd situations in which one freely does *A* even though one could not freely refrain from doing *A*. (Example: Black would have caused me to sit had I not freely sat.) Even so, one might still balk at the fully general claim that, necessarily, for all humans *S*, all actions *A*, and all circumstances *C*, if *S* freely does *A* in *C*, then *S* could not freely refrain from doing *A* in *C*. And it is this general claim that Hasker argues follows from Molinism.

So Hasker derives a contradiction—(ii) and (vii)—from the two assumptions for *reductio*.
So Hasker thinks that at least one of those two assumptions is false.

One of those assumptions is that S freely does A in C. If that assumption is false,
then—since S, A, and C are arbitrarily chosen—agents never act freely. If agents never
act freely, then Molinism is (at best) completely unmotivated. Nevertheless, Hasker does
not oppose Molinism by denying that S freely does A in C. For Hasker believes in free
will (but see §III). Of course, Hasker also thinks that at least one of the two assumptions
for *reductio* is false. So Hasker rejects (i). That is, he denies the truth of (1): if S were in
C, S would freely do A.

Hasker denies the truth of (1), and he does so on the grounds that (1)'s truth leads
to a contradiction. (1) is an arbitrarily chosen counterfactual of freedom with a true
antecedent and a true consequent. So Hasker concludes that all counterfactuals of
freedom with true antecedents and true consequents are false. If all such counterfactuals
of freedom are false, then Molinism is false as well.[8] So Hasker rejects Molinism. Thus
we have Hasker's argument against Molinism.[9]

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[8] Indeed, I think that Molinism implies that all counterfactuals of freedom with true antecedents and true
consequents are true (see §III). But even if I am wrong, surely Molinism implies that *some* such
counterfactuals are true. Thus I agree with Hasker that if all such counterfactuals are false, Molinism is
false as well.

[9] Hasker (1999) has a second argument against Molinism that differs from the argument under discussion
in this paper. That second argument assumes (for *reductio*) not the mere truth of counterfactuals of
freedom, but rather God's acting, in the past, in light of his knowledge of those true counterfactuals of
freedom. Hasker says that if God acted, in the past, in light of this knowledge, then those true
counterfactuals are "hard facts" about the past. And this, Hasker thinks, implies that one cannot now bring
about their truth. One way to resist Hasker (1999) would be to reject the distinction between hard facts and
soft facts that his argument presupposes; I myself am inclined to reject this distinction (see Merricks,
2009). Another way to resist Hasker (1999) would be to argue that we are able to bring about facts about
the past that are, according to Hasker, hard facts; this seems to be a route Plantinga (1986) would take.

II. More than Molinism at Stake

Set aside Molinism's distinctive thesis that, for every possible agent in every possible circumstance, there is a truth about what (if anything) that agent would freely do. Indeed, set aside the claim that there are, strictly speaking, any true *counter*factuals of freedom at all. That is, set aside the claim that there are true subjunctive conditionals that both have false antecedents and also assert what an agent would freely do if their antecedents were true. Suppose instead only, first, that *S* freely does *A* in *C*; and, second, that the following (so-called) counterfactual of freedom is true:

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

One need not be a Molinist to suppose that *S* freely does *A* in *C*. And if *S* freely does *A* in *C*, then *that S is in C* is true, and so is *that S freely does A*. The truth of *that if S were in C, S would freely do A* seems to follow. At least, this follows given centering. For recall that centering states that if the antecedent and consequent of a subjunctive conditional are true, then that conditional itself is true.

The account of subjunctive conditionals defended by David Lewis (1973, 28-29) implies centering. So too does the account defended by Robert Stalnaker (1968). Neither Lewis nor Stalnaker is a Molinist. So some non-Molinists endorse centering. And so some non-Molinists think that every (so-called) counterfactual of freedom with a true antecedent and a true consequent is itself true. And so some non-Molinists think that, since *S* freely does *A* in *C*, (1) is true.

We are considering the conjunction of two claims. The first is that *S* freely does *A* in *C*. The second is that this counterfactual of freedom is true:

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

The conjunction of these two claims is not Molinism. (Anyone who believes in free action can accept the first claim; anyone who believes in centering should think that the first claim implies the second claim.) But Hasker's argument refutes that conjunction if it refutes Molinism. After all, it is that conjunction that Hasker assumes for *reductio*. Moreover, as I shall show in the remainder of this section, in defending the conclusion that this conjunction implies a contradiction, Hasker never relies on anything peculiar to Molinism.

Hasker defends the conclusion that the above conjunction implies a contradiction. That defense consists entirely of his defenses of Steps One through Three. So if Hasker's defenses of Steps One through Three do not rely on anything peculiar to Molinism, neither does his defense of the conclusion that his starting assumptions (for *reductio*) imply a contradiction. I shall now argue that Hasker's defenses of Steps One through Three do not rely on anything peculiar to Molinism.

Recall that Hasker's defense of Step One begins with two arguments for the conclusion that (1) would have been true even if *S* had not been in *C*. His first argument for that conclusion turns on a claim about subjunctive conditionals in general and similarities between possible worlds. And his second argument turns on the claim that the truth-value of each counterfactual of (human) freedom, being beyond God's control, is "considerably more fundamental" than the truth-value of any subjunctive conditional grounded by the laws of nature. I say that neither of these two arguments—nor anything else in Hasker's defense of Step One—relies on Molinism. But I anticipate two objections.

According to the first objection, non-Molinists who accept (1)'s truth only because of centering could say that, necessarily, the only true counterfactuals of freedom are those with both true antecedents and also true consequents. Therefore, they could conclude that (1) would not have been true, had S not been in C. Molinists cannot endorse this reasoning for this conclusion. So, this objection concludes, Hasker's two arguments for the claim that (1) would have been true even if S had not been in C have no purchase on the above non-Molinists, even though those two arguments should be compelling to Molinists.

As this objection shows, some non-Molinists will endorse conclusions that are inconsistent with Hasker's defense of Step One, conclusions that are not endorsed by Molinists. But this does not suggest that Hasker's defense of Step One has no purchase on these non-Molinists. Compare: Molinists themselves endorse a conclusion—namely, the truth of Molinism—that is inconsistent with Hasker's argument against Molinism. But this does not suggest that Hasker's argument against Molinism therefore has no purchase on Molinists!

To show that Hasker's defense of Step One has no purchase on some non-Molinists, but nevertheless ought to compel Molinists, one would have to show, first, just where those non-Molinists think that Hasker's defense of Step One fails. Then one would have to show, second, that even if Hasker's defense of Step One fails in just this way, his defense would not fail in this way if Molinism (assume for *reductio*) were true. The objection just considered accomplishes neither of these tasks.

A second objection tries to accomplish these two tasks. It begins by claiming, first, that non-Molinists can say that Hasker's second argument in defense of Step One

fails. It fails because—so these non-Molinists can say—the truth of (1) is *not* beyond God's control. But if Molinism were true, this objection adds, Hasker's argument would not thus fail. For Molinism includes not only the claim that there are true counterfactuals of (human) freedom, but also the claim that the truth of each of those counterfactuals is beyond God's control (cf. Flint, 1998, 41-42).

My reply begins by considering non-Molinist incompatibilists who endorse (1)—*that if S were in C, S would freely do A*—only because of centering. That is, these non-Molinist incompatibilists think that (1) is true because of *S*'s freely doing *A* in *C*. Like all incompatibilists, these non-Molinist incompatibilists believe that it is not up to God whether *S freely* does *A* in *C*.[10] So these non-Molinist incompatibilists should conclude that the truth of (1) is not up to God. Thus it is false that only Molinists should say that the truth-value of each counterfactual of freedom is beyond God's control. All incompatibilists (who endorse centering) should say this.

Non-Molinist incompatibilists now face the question of what is implied by (1)'s truth not being up to God. If Hasker's reasoning in defense of Step One is valid, this implies that (1)'s truth is "considerably more fundamental" than the truth-value of any subjunctive conditional grounded by the laws of nature.[11] And so, if Hasker's reasoning is valid, non-Molinist incompatibilists should conclude that (1) would have been true even if *S* had not been in *C*. Of course, if Hasker's reasoning in defense of Step One is not

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[10] "Incompatibilism" is the thesis that it is not possible for an action to be both free and also necessitated by the state of the distant past combined with the laws of nature. It is, however, standard for incompatibilists to add that it is not possible for a human action to be both free and also up to God.

[11] In my opinion, the move from "not up to God" to "considerably more fundamental than subjunctive conditionals grounded by laws of nature" is invalid. (Flint (1998, 140-148) and Freddoso (1988, 75n.96) agree.) 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.

valid, non-Molinist incompatibilists should not conclude this. But if Hasker's reasoning is not valid, then Molinists should not conclude this either.

Step Two is the claim that if S does not bring about the truth of (1), then S cannot bring about the truth of (1*): if S were in C, S would freely refrain from doing A. Hasker's defense of Step Two builds on Step One. So suppose that Step One is correct. Suppose, that is, that S does not bring about the truth of (1), even though S does bring about the truth of (1)'s consequent in conditions specified by its antecedent. This implies that bringing about the truth of a counterfactual of freedom's consequent, in conditions specified by its antecedent, does not thereby bring about the truth of that counterfactual. Hasker infers from this conclusion that one cannot bring about the truth of any counterfactual of freedom. So S cannot bring about the truth of (1*). Thus Hasker's defense of Step Two. Obviously, this defense turns on nothing peculiar to Molinism.

Step Three claims that if S cannot bring about the truth of (1*)—(1*) says that if S were in C, S would freely refrain from doing A—then S cannot freely refrain from doing A in C. Hasker argues that Molinists must accept Step Three. The linchpin of that argument is Hasker's claim that Molinists must endorse the following thesis: if S were to freely refrain from doing A in C, S would thereby bring about the truth of (1*).

But Molinists ought to endorse that thesis only if they accept (something along the lines of) centering. For suppose that centering is false. Then, presumably, the following is possible: S freely refrains from doing A in C and (1*) is false. And if this is possible, then S's refraining from doing A in C would not thereby bring about the truth of (1*). If centering is true, on the other hand, it does seem that if S were to freely refrain from doing A in C, S would thereby bring about the truth of (1*). And so if centering is

true, Hasker's argument for Step Three seems to succeed. So Hasker's argument for Step Three does presuppose centering. But his argument presupposes nothing peculiar to Molinism.

Hasker's argument against Molinism does not purport to generate a contradiction from the claim that, for every possible agent in every possible circumstance, there is a truth about what (if anything) that agent would freely do. More generally, Hasker's argument does not purport to generate a contradiction from anything that Molinists alone would endorse. Instead, his argument purports to generate a contradiction from a pair of claims that would be accepted by any believer in free will who is also a believer in centering.

In deriving a contradiction from those two claims, Hasker relies on some controversial theses. For example, his defense of Step Three relies on centering, and one of two independent defenses of Step One relies on incompatibilism. But neither of these theses—nor anything else relied on by Hasker in his derivation of a contradiction—is peculiar to Molinism.

With all of this in mind, we should conclude the following. If Hasker's argument refutes Molinism, it also refutes the joint possibility of centering and free will, or at least the joint possibility of centering, free will, and incompatibilism. Put otherwise, Hasker has not really given us an argument against Molinism in particular. Instead, Hasker has given us an argument against centering and free will, or perhaps against centering, free will, and incompatibilism.[12] I suspect that all of this will make some non-Molinists, who

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[12] Hasker (1989) contains a number of objections to Molinism in addition to the argument that I focus on in this paper. One of those objections—see Hasker (1989, 28)—is a short argument based on the relation between 'might'-counterfactuals and the Molinist's counterfactuals of freedom (which are 'would'-

might otherwise have had no reservations about Hasker's argument, suspicious of that argument.

III. Maybe even Free Will at Stake

"Restricted centering" is the claim that, necessarily, if both the antecedent and the consequent of a counterfactual of freedom are true, then that counterfactual itself is true. So restricted centering implies that, for all agents *S* and all circumstances *C*, if *S* freely does *A* in *C*, then *that if S were in C, S would freely do A* is true.

Centering implies restricted centering. But restricted centering does not imply centering. To see this, suppose that a bird flew over London. And suppose that a tree died in my yard. Given these suppositions, centering implies that *that if a bird were to fly over London, then a tree would die in my yard* is true. But restricted centering does not.

Molinism says that, for every possible human in every possible circumstance, there is a true proposition about what that human would do in that circumstance. If *S* is actually in *C*, then it is possible for *S* to be in *C*. So if *S* is actually in *C*, Molinism says that there is a true proposition about what *S* would do, were *S* in *C*. If *S* actually freely does *A* in *C*, that true proposition is: *that if S were in C, S would freely do A*. This reasoning generalizes. I conclude that Molinism implies restricted centering. Moreover, I think that restricted centering is true. That is, I think that restricted centering is true for reasons having nothing to do with Molinism.

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counterfactuals). Kenneth J. Perszyk (1998) shows that that argument threatens the combination of centering, free will, and incompatibilism to the same extent that it threatens Molinism.

Suppose you ask me what Smith would have freely done, were he to have been offered a bribe at 3:00 p.m. on December 5 in Chicago. And suppose I know that, at that time and in that city, Smith was offered, and accepted, a bribe. I think the right thing for me to say is: "I know what he would have done, had he been offered a bribe then and there. He would have taken it. I know that is what he would have done, because it is what he actually did." (From the back of the room Smith loudly protests, "I would never have taken a bribe!" while adding, *sotto voce*, "even though I took one.") Those who agree that this is the right thing for me to say ought to join me in endorsing restricted centering.

I have just given a reason for endorsing restricted centering. I shall now a reply to the most likely objection to restricted centering. Suppose that a bird flew over London. And suppose that a tree died in my yard. As already noted, centering implies that the following subjunctive conditional is true: *that if a bird were to fly over London, then a tree would die in my yard*. We might deny this conditional—and so reject centering—on the grounds that a bird's flying over London is irrelevant to a tree's dying an ocean away. More generally, I think many who reject centering do so because they deny that there are true subjunctive conditionals whose antecedents are irrelevant to their consequents. Let us concede that they are right. So let us concede, for the sake of argument, that centering is false.

The falsity of centering does not imply the falsity of restricted centering, for—as already noted—restricted centering does not imply centering. Nevertheless, some might object that restricted centering should be rejected for the very reason that led us to reject full-blown centering. That is, some might object that restricted centering has the

unacceptable result that there are true subjunctive conditionals whose antecedents are irrelevant to their consequents.

I think that this objection is mistaken. I deny that restricted centering has the result that there are true subjunctive conditionals whose antecedents are irrelevant to their consequents. For take any counterfactual of freedom in particular (as opposed to just any subjunctive conditional) with a true antecedent and a true consequent. Its antecedent is relevant to its consequent in the following way: the antecedent states the circumstances in which the consequent is fulfilled. In general, and even given restricted centering, the antecedents of true counterfactuals of freedom are always relevant in just this way to their respective consequents. So, even given restricted centering, the antecedents of true counterfactuals of freedom are never irrelevant to their consequents.

I have no formula for deciding whether the antecedent of a conditional states the circumstances in which its consequent is fulfilled. (Other Molinists might have such a formula.[13]) But even without such a formula, I think we can often tell when the antecedent of a subjunctive conditional fails state such circumstances, and when it succeeds.

For example, suppose that a bird flew over London. And suppose that Smith freely accepted a bribe. *That a bird flew over London* does not seem to state the circumstances in which Smith freely accepted the bribe. So restricted centering does not

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[13] As noted earlier, some Molinists claim that all true counterfactuals of human freedom have antecedents that say that an agent is in a *complete set of nondetermining circumstances C*. If these Molinists are correct, then restricted centering implies only that, for all agents *S* and all *complete sets of nondetermining circumstances C*, if *S* freely does *A* in *C*, then *that if S were in C, S would freely do A* is true. And these Molinists could add that the antecedent of a conditional states the circumstances in which its consequent is fulfilled if and only if the consequent states that an agent freely performs an action and the antecedent says that that agent is in a complete set of nondetermining circumstances *C*. (Obviously, *that a bird flew over London* does not specify a complete set of nondetermining circumstances.)

imply the truth of *that if a bird were to fly over London, then Smith would freely accept a bribe*. On the other hand, *that Smith was offered a bribe at 3:00 on December 5 in Chicago* does seem to state such circumstances, if Smith freely accepted the bribe thus offered. So restricted centering implies the truth of *that if Smith were offered a bribe at 3:00 p.m. on December 5 in Chicago, he would freely accept that bribe*.

Again, I have no formula for deciding whether the antecedent of a conditional states the circumstances in which its consequent is fulfilled. But I can say this with confidence. Suppose that the antecedent of a subjunctive conditional really is irrelevant to the consequent. Then the antecedent fails to state the circumstances in which the consequent is fulfilled. And so restricted centering, unlike full-blown centering, does not imply that there are true subjunctive conditionals whose antecedents are irrelevant to their consequents.

I have not demonstrated the truth of restricted centering. But I have offered a positive reason for it. And I believe that I have blocked the most likely objection to it. So I conclude that restricted centering is true. Hasker's argument refutes Molinism only if it refutes the joint possibility of free will and centering, or at least the joint possibility of free will, centering, and incompatibilism (§II). Similarly, Hasker's argument refutes Molinism only if it refutes the joint possibility of free will and restricted centering, or at least the joint possibility of free will, restricted centering, and incompatibilism. I think that restricted centering is true. So I conclude that Hasker's argument refutes Molinism only if it refutes the possibility of free will, or at least the joint possibility of free will and incompatibilism.

As with the conclusions of the last section, I suspect that the conclusions of this section will cause some, who might otherwise have had no reservations, to be suspicious of Hasker's argument. (For example, the conclusions of this section ought to make Hasker—a supporter of both free will and incompatibilism—suspicious of Hasker's argument.) Of course, none of this demonstrates that Hasker's argument fails. But I shall argue in the next section that his argument does fail.

IV. Objection to Hasker's Argument

Truth depends on the world. That is, a proposition is true *because* things are how that proposition represents things as being. Again, what is true *depends on* what the world is like. Again, *that dogs bark* is true because dogs bark, *that there are no white ravens* is true because there are no white ravens, and so on.

That truth depends on the world is not the thesis that, for each truth, there is something in the world to which that truth "corresponds." Nor is it the thesis that every truth has a "truthmaker." Nor is it even the thesis that there is a *depends on* or a *because* relation that holds between each truth and (some part of) the world. For, as certain negative existentials readily show, every one of these theses is more controversial than the point that truth depends on the world.

For example, the proposition *that there are no white ravens* is true. Yet it is a matter of controversy whether there is some entity—such as the state of affairs of *the universe's lacking white ravens*—to which that truth corresponds. Likewise, it is controversial whether that truth has a truthmaker. Similarly, it is controversial whether

that truth stands in a *depends on* or a *because* relation to some relatum, a relatum like (again) the state of affairs of *the universe's lacking white ravens*. But even so, it should not be at all controversial that *that there are no white ravens* is true because there are no white ravens.

Suppose that when *S* freely does *A* in *C*, *S* brings about the truth of:

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

Suppose also—since truth depends on the world—that (2) is true because *S* freely does *A* in *C*. Then it seems as if we have two explanations of (2)'s truth: *S*'s bringing about (2)'s truth, and also *S*'s freely doing *A* in *C*. But I deny that *S*'s *bringing about* the truth of (2) competes with (or overdetermines, or preempts, etc.) (2)'s being true *because S* freely does *A* in *C*. Rather, I would say that *S* brings about (2)'s truth *by way of* causing it to be the case that *S* freely does *A* in *C*.

Perhaps you deny that *S*, by freely doing *A* in *C*, *causes* it to be the case that *S* freely does *A* in *C*. Fair enough. Maybe you are right. But then I think you must deny that *S* brings about—in Hasker's sense of 'bring about'—the truth of (2). For here is Hasker's preferred definition of 'bring it about':

> A brings it about that Y iff: For some X, A causes it to be the case that X, and (X&H)=>Y, and ~(H=>Y), where H represents the history of the world prior to its coming to be the case that X. (Hasker, 1999, 292)

Hasker's (1999) definition is meant to apply to bringing about the truth of a proposition, among other things. To bring about the truth of a proposition, given Hasker's definition

of 'bring about', is to cause something that metaphysically necessitates the truth of that

proposition, and which is in some sense required for the truth of that proposition.[14]

Suppose we combine Hasker's understanding of *bringing about the truth of a*

proposition with the above observations about truth's dependence on the world. Then I

think we should conclude that if *S* brings about the truth of (2), then *S* does so in the

following way: *S* causes it to be the case that *S* freely does *A*, which necessitates the truth

of (2).

Again, you might deny that *S*, by freely doing *A* in *C*, *causes* it to be the case that

S freely does *A* in *C*. And so you might deny that *S*, by freely doing *A* in *C*, brings

about—in Hasker's sense of 'brings about'—the truth of (2). Maybe you are right. But if

you are right, then the following conditional is surely false: 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. But—as we saw in Section I—Hasker's defense of Step Three relies on the truth

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[14] The claims about the "history of the world" in Hasker's definition are meant to ensure that what is caused is appropriately required for the necessitation of what is brought about. Hasker (1999) defines 'history of the world' partly in terms "hard facts." But I am dubious of the distinction between hard facts and soft facts; see Merricks, 2009. That is one reason I do not like Hasker's definition. Another reason is that it quantifies over the "X" that is caused to be the case by the agent, and that necessitates what the agent brings about. But suppose that God causes it to be the case that there are no white ravens. I would say that God thereby brings about the truth of the proposition *that there are no white ravens*. But I would deny that there is some X that is the entity that there are no white ravens. Nevertheless, in prosecuting my objection to Hasker's argument, I shall ignore my objections to Hasker's definition of 'brings it about'.

Some will say that causation is always a matter of the causal relation holding between cause and effect. And they will take this to imply that if God causes there to be no white ravens, then there is a causal relation holding between God and the entity that is there being no white ravens. I disagree with them, and my disagreement has nothing to do with God or with negative existential facts in particular. For they should also insist that if Smith moves the desk, and so causes the desk to move, there is a causal relation holding between Smith and the entity that is designated by 'the desk to move'. But I think that Smith can move the desk—and so can cause the desk to move—even if there is no entity designed by 'the desk to move' or even 'the moving of the desk', but instead only Smith, who does some pushing, and the desk, which does some moving. In light of this, I would resist the claim that "*A* causes B," if true, always amounts to a causal relation holding between the entity designated by '*A*' and the entity designated by 'B'.

of that conditional. So if that conditional is false, then Hasker's defense of Step Three fails. And if his defense of Step Three fails, then his argument as a whole fails.

Let us assume that Hasker's argument does not fail in this way. (If you think it does, then you have your own objection to Hasker's argument.) So let us suppose that S brings about—in Hasker's sense of 'brings about'—the truth of:

(2) S freely does A in C.

Then S brings about (2)'s truth by way of causing it to be the case that S freely does A in C. I think this illustrates a general point: An agent brings about a proposition's truth by way of causing what the proposition's truth depends on—in the sense of 'depends on' in which truth depends on the world. This is my account of *bringing about the truth of a proposition*, an account motivated both by Hasker's definition of 'brings about' and the fact that truth depends on the world.

Consider once again:

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

Suppose that (1) is true. Then if S were in C, S would freely do A. So—at least given our assumption that S brings about (2)'s truth—if S were in C, S would cause it to be the case that S freely does A. So if S were in C, S would cause it to be the case that S freely does A in C. So if S were in C, S would cause it to be the case that: if S were in C, S would freely do A.[15]

In light of the above, I conclude that if both (1) is true and also S is in C, then S causes it to be the case that: if S were in C, S would freely do A. That is, if both (1) is true and S is in C, then S causes that on which (1)'s truth depends. So—given my account of

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[15] 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.

what it is to bring about the truth of a proposition—I conclude that if both (1) is true and also S is in C, then S brings about the truth of (1).

Recall that Hasker (1989, 40-41) said that the only way—if any—for an agent to bring about the truth of a counterfactual of freedom is to perform the action specified in the consequent of the counterfactual under the conditions stated in the antecedent. With this in mind, consider this comparatively familiar account of how S brings about the truth of (1): S freely does A in C. One might wonder just how much my conclusion about what is sufficient for S to bring about the truth of (1) differs from this more familiar account of how S brings about the truth of (1).

They do not differ too much. After all, given restricted centering, S freely does A in C if and only if both (1) is true and also S is in C. But the main point here is not the *novelty* of my conclusion that if both (1) is true and also S is in C, then S brings about the truth of (1). Rather, the main point here is the *argument* for that conclusion. For, as we have seen, my conclusion is implied by my account of *bringing about the truth of a proposition*. And, as already noted, my account is itself is implied by truth's dependence on the world plus Hasker's own definition of 'brings about'.

So one can reject my conclusion only if one makes one of two moves. First, one could deny truth's dependence on the world. Second, one could reject Hasker's account of 'brings about'. The first move is not plausible. The second might be plausible; but it is not a move Hasker should advocate, since—as we saw above—it would undermine Hasker's own argument. So Hasker at least cannot reject my conclusion: if both (1) is true and also S is in C, then S brings about the truth of (1).

Given this conclusion, Hasker's argument against Molinism fails. For recall the first three premises of Hasker's argument:

> (i) The following counterfactual of freedom is true: (1) if S were in C, S would freely do A. (assume for *reductio*)
>
> (ii) S freely does A in C. (assume for *reductio*)
>
> (iii) If (i) and (ii) are true, then S does not bring about the truth of (1). (Hasker's defense Step One)

The first assumption for *reductio* is that (1) is true. The second assumption for *reductio* implies that S is in C. So if those two assumptions for *reductio* are true, then S brings about the truth of (1). Therefore Hasker's third premise is false. And so Hasker's argument fails.

According to Kenneth J. Perszyk (2003), Hasker's argument against Molinism can be recast in terms of *having a choice about* a counterfactual of freedom's truth, as opposed to *bringing about* its truth. Here is Perszyk's version of Hasker's argument:

> (X) S has no choice about: (1)—that is, *that if S were in C, S would freely do A*—is true.
>
> (Y) S has no choice about: S is in circumstance C.
>
> Therefore,
>
> (Z) S has no choice about: S freely does A.

Perszyk thinks that (X) follows from Hasker's arguments in defense of (what I have called) Step One, which arguments assume for *reductio* that (1) is true. Perszyk's (Y) assumes that the antecedent of (1) is not only true, but also—and here Perszyk's assumptions for *reductio* go beyond Hasker's—that S has no choice about the truth of that antecedent.

Perszyk's argument purports to show that a true counterfactual of freedom (namely, (1)), leads to an absurd conclusion (namely, (Z)). Perszyk's argument, like Hasker's, assumes for *reductio* the truth of a counterfactual of freedom with a true antecedent and a true consequent. Thus Perszyk's argument, like Hasker's, is a threat not only to Molinism, but also to the combination of free will and restricted centering. If restricted centering is true, then Perszyk's argument, like Hasker's, is a threat to free will.[16]

Perszyk's argument focuses on having a choice about the truth of a proposition, as opposed to bringing about the truth of a proposition. I think that if an agent has a choice about that which a proposition's truth depends on—in the sense of 'depends on' in which truth depends on the world—then an agent has a choice about that proposition's truth. This is my account of *having a choice about the truth of a proposition*. (I defend this account in Merricks, 2009.) For reasons parallel to those above regarding bringing about the truth of (1), I would say that if (1) is true and S is in C, then S has a choice about the truth of (1).

(Y) is the claim that S is in circumstance C, and has no choice about this. So if (Y) is true, then S is in C. And if S is in C and (1) is true, then—given my account of having a choice about (1)'s being true—S has a choice about (1)'s being true. As a result, if (Y) is true, then (X) is false. (That is, (X) is false even though (1) is true.) But the truth of both (X) and (Y), given the assumption that (1) is true, is required to generate the absurd (Z).

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[16] As Perszyk points out, his argument resembles the well-known consequence argument for incompatibilism about freedom (see, e.g., van Inwagen, 1983). Some compatibilist critics (e.g., Slote, 1982) think that the consequence argument is invalid. These same critics will think that Perszyk's argument is invalid. So perhaps we should say that Perszyk's argument threatens free will, or free will plus restricted centering, only given the validity of the consequence argument.

In this way, my account of having a choice about (1)'s being true undermines Perszyk's

version of Hasker's argument.

V. A New Look at Molinism

David Lewis (2000, 117) says that the only way to bring about the truth of a

counterfactual of freedom is to perform the action specified in its consequent under the

conditions stated in its antecedent.[17] Then Lewis claims:

> …there can be nothing that makes unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom true.
> They just *are* true, and that's that. (Lewis, 2000, 118)

"Unfulfilled" counterfactuals are counterfactuals with false antecedents. So Lewis's

claim here is that true counterfactuals of freedom with false antecedents "just *are*" true.

I disagree. Consider:

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

We have been supposing above not only that (1) is true, but also that its antecedent is

true. But let us now suppose that, although (1) itself is true, its antecedent is false. Thus

(1), we are now supposing, is an "unfulfilled" counterfactual. Even so—and here is my

disagreement with Lewis—I deny that (1) "just *is*" true. Instead, (1) is true because, if *S*

were in *C*, *S* would freely do *A*. Whether or not *S* is in *C*, the truth of every true

proposition depends on the world, including the truth of (1).

Robert Adams (1977) and others have raised the "grounding objection" to

Molinism. As I have argued elsewhere (Merricks, 2007, 146-151), this objection assumes

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[17] Lewis (2000) talks of 'rendering true' and 'making true'; I assume here that Lewis's 'rendering true' and 'making true' are equivalent to each other, and also to Hasker's 'bringing about the truth of'.

that (1) is true only if there is some object or objects whose existence necessitates (1), or some property or properties whose exemplification necessitates (1). I want to make it clear that my disagreement with Lewis does not result from this assumption.

I shall make this clear by way of the following comparison. It is false that *that there are no white ravens* "just is" true. Instead, it is true because there are no white ravens. But, as was pointed out above (§IV), this is not to say that *that there are no white ravens* has a truthmaker. Similarly, this does not imply that *that there are no white ravens* is necessitated by the mere existence of some entity (or entities) or by the exemplification of some property (or properties). And the same goes for (1)'s being true because of what *S* would do in *C*.[18]

Molinism's distinctive thesis is that there are truths about what each possible agent would do in each possible circumstance. So Molinism's distinctive thesis is about true propositions. But I do not think that a thesis about true propositions is Molinism's most fundamental commitment. Rather, as I shall argue in this section, Molinism's most fundamental commitment concerns the world, propositions and their truth-values aside.

That there are no white ravens is true. It is true because of how the world is. Specifically, it is true because there are no white ravens. Of course, many other negative existentials are also true. Their truth, like all truth, depends on the world. With this in mind, we might say that the world has a particular "negative existential aspect."

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[18] I deny that there are objects or properties that "make true" true counterfactuals of freedom; see Merricks, 2007, Ch. 7. (Others have denied this as well; see, e.g., Plantinga, 1985, 374). I defend a similar denial regarding *that there are no white ravens*; see Merricks, 2007, Chs. 3 and 4. More generally, in Merricks, 2007, I oppose both the correspondence theory of truth and also the claim that every truth has a truthmaker. But in Merricks, 2007 I defend the claim that truth depends on the world in the way noted at the start of §IV.

The idea here is not that every negative existential has a truthmaker, much less a truthmaker denoted by 'the world's negative existential aspect' (cf. §IV). Nor is the idea here that there are no white ravens *because* the world has the sort of negative existential aspect that it has. Rather, to say that the world has a particular negative existential aspect just is to say that there are no white ravens, and there are no hobbits, and there are no carnivorous cows, and so on.

Return, once again, to our stock example of a true counterfactual of freedom:

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

(1) is true because of how the world is. In particular, (1) is true because if S were in C, S would freely do A. This is how things are even if—as we are now supposing—(1) is unfulfilled. Of course, Molinists believe that there are many other true counterfactuals of freedom. The truth of each of these other counterfactuals, like the truth of (1), depends on the world; again, the truth of each and every true counterfactual of freedom, regardless of the truth-value of its antecedent, depends on the world. With this in mind, Molinists might say that the world has a particular "subjunctive aspect."

The idea here is not that every true counterfactual of freedom has a truthmaker, much less a truthmaker denoted by 'the world's subjunctive aspect'. Nor is the idea here that S would do A in C *because* the world has the sort of subjunctive aspect that it has. Rather, to say that the world has a particular subjunctive aspect just is to say that if S were in C, S would do A; and if S^* were in C^*, S^* would do A^*; and so on.

Someone might object that—whatever 'subjunctive aspect' means—a true counterfactual of freedom can depend on the world only to the extent that there are truthmakers for that counterfactual. But I reply that—even setting Molinism aside—the

world has a subjective aspect that outstrips its truthmakers for subjunctive conditionals. In other words, I reply that—even setting counterfactuals of freedom aside—there are many true subjunctive conditionals that lack truthmakers but depend on the world. If my reply is correct, then to demand truthmakers for counterfactuals of freedom would be to endorse an unmotivated and unjustifiable double standard.

My defense of this reply begins by assuming that glass *G* is fragile. Now consider the following conditional, which is the sort of thing that would usually be true of a fragile glass:

(3) If *G* were struck, then *G* would shatter.

And pretend, for just a moment, that this story from David Lewis is true:

> *A* sorcerer takes a liking to a fragile glass, one that is a perfect intrinsic duplicate of all the other fragile glasses off the same production line. He does nothing at all to change the dispositional character of his glass. He only watches and waits, resolved that if ever his glass is struck, then, quick as a flash, he will cast a spell that changes the glass, renders it no longer fragile, and thereby aborts the process of breaking. So his finkishly fragile glass would not break if struck... (1999, 138)

Suppose *G* is the glass beloved of the sorcerer. Then although *G* is fragile, (3)—if *G* were struck, then *G* would shatter—is false. What is true, instead, is that if *G* were struck, our sorcerer would keep *G* from shattering.

Of course, Lewis's story is false. (And let us assume that (3) is true.) But that false story reveals to us a true conditional. That conditional is that if that story is true, then (3) is false. That is, (3) is true only if there is no sorcerer disposed to keep *G* from shattering. Therefore (3) entails the following negative existential:

(4) There is no sorcerer who would keep *G* from shattering, were *G* to be struck.

If (3) has a truthmaker, then that truthmaker, by its mere existence, necessitates the truth of (3). But (3) entails (4). So (3)'s truthmaker, by its mere existence, must also necessitate the truth of (4).

Now there are fairly obvious potential truthmakers for (3), such as the state of affairs of *G's being fragile* or the state of affairs of *G's having such and such a microstructure*. But I think that no potential truthmaker for (3), by its mere existence, necessitates (4). If I am right, then we must conclude that (3) has no truthmaker at all. For, again, any truthmaker for (3) must necessitate the truth of (4).

In general, that *A* would manifest a disposition *D* in condition *C* entails that there is no sorcerer who, if *A* were in *C*, would keep *A* from manifesting *D*. And so all dispositional conditionals—not just (3)—entail negative existentials. Moreover, the obvious candidates for being the truthmakers for those dispositional conditionals—things like the fragility or solubility of the relevant entities—fail to necessitate the negative existentials that those conditionals entail. Thus the above argument surrounding (3) and (4) generalizes. In general, dispositional conditionals lack truthmakers.[19] But some dispositional conditionals are true. (For more on these issues, see Merricks, 2007, Ch. 7.)

The following is true:

(3) If *G* were struck, then *G* would shatter.

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[19] For all *p*, *p* entails *that there is no sorcerer who keeps p from being true*. So every truth entails some negative existential or other. I focus on dispositional conditionals in particular because not every negative existential entailed by a truth gives us a reason to think that that truth lacks a truthmaker. What we need is a negative existential that is not only entailed by that truth, but that also *fails to be necessitated by every potential truthmaker for that truth*. Dispositional conditionals do entail such negative existentials, which is why I am focusing on them here. Contrast dispositional conditionals with, for example, *that there is no wizard who has kept Merricks from ever existing*. This negative existential is entailed by *that Merricks exists*. But I not only seem to be a truthmaker for *that Merricks exists*, I also, by my mere existence, necessitate that negative existential.

(3) is true, of course, because if *G* were struck, then *G* would shatter. That is, (3)'s truth depends on the world. But (3) is not necessitated by any object or any object's having a property. So this part of the world's subjunctive aspect—if *G* were struck, then *G* would shatter—outstrips the world's truthmakers for subjunctive conditionals.

Molinists say that the world's subjunctive aspect includes more than what would happen, were glasses struck. They add that the world's subjunctive aspect includes what (if anything) each possible agent would freely do in each possible circumstance. That is the fundamental commitment of Molinism. And if the world is the way that the Molinist says it is, then a variety of counterfactuals of freedom are true—and true because of how the world is.

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