

Divine foreknowledge and the libertarian conception of human freedom *

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I will begin by reminding the reader of two simple definitions found in recent literature on the problem of omniscience and human freedom. A *compatibilist on foreknowledge* (CF) is a person who thinks that human freedom is compatible with divine foreknowledge. A *compatibilist on determinism* (CD) is a person who thinks that human freedom is compatible with a thoroughgoing determinism. Williams Hasker and Alston have argued independently that anyone who wishes to be a compatibilist on foreknowledge must also be a compatibilist on determinism.¹ That is, according to both of these philosophers, one may reconcile divine foreknowledge and human freedom only by embracing an account of human freedom that fails to meet the constraints of libertarianism. More specifically, both Hasker and Alston have argued that the compatibilist on foreknowledge is committed – whether wittingly or not – to what is often referred to as the conditional analysis of human freedom.

In what follows, I consider the arguments of both Hasker and Alston and isolate what appears to be the common theme that serves as the core of what we may then refer to as the Hasker-Alston objection. I then argue that they are partly right. That is, certain compatibilists on foreknowledge have taken positions that are vulnerable to the sorts of objections raised by Hasker and Alston. But there is nothing essential to compatibilism on foreknowledge that should lead the CF to take such a vulnerable position. Thus, I go on to offer a defense of the compatibility of foreknowledge and freedom that I take to be free of the faults that Hasker and Alston claim to have discovered.

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1.

In the course of his discussion, Hasker considers a recent paper by George Mavrodes, in which Mavrodes argues that agents have it within their power to affect the past.² Exactly how are we to understand such a power? A review of Hasker's overall discussion yields three possible meanings:

- (1) *Actually exercised power to affect the past*: An agent S may be said to have actually exercised power over the past just in case either (a) some past event E has occurred and E's past occurrence is due to something that S does freely at some later time or (b) E has *not* occurred and E's non-occurrence is due to S's free action at some later time which has prevented E's occurrence.
- (2) *Counterfactual power to affect the past*: An agent S may be said to have counterfactual power over the past just in case either (a) E has in fact occurred but it is within S's power to do something such that, were S to do it, then E would not have occurred, or (b) E has not occurred but it is within S's power to do something such that were S to do it, E would have occurred.
- (3) *Power to change the past*: An agent S may be said to have the power to change the past just in case either (a) W is the actual world, W includes some event E's occurring at some past time t, and it is within S's power to bring it about that W does not include E's occurrence at t or (b) W is the actual world, W does not include the occurrence of E at t, but it is within S's power to bring it about that W does include E's occurrence at t.

Clearly, when Mavrodes speaks of the power to bring about the past, he does not have in mind anything that even remotely resembles (3). The kind of power described there would be such that it would be within one's power to bring it about that E both did and did not occur at t. This leaves (1) and (2).

Hasker argues that the power described in (1) requires the truth of a certain theory of the nature of time. Briefly, Hasker's argument is that the power described in (1) amounts to a species of backwards causation, and backwards causation is possible only if time is symmetrical in that there is no "moving *now*"³ that successively picks out moments as the privileged and absolute present. On this "B-theory" of time, each moment is present unto itself and there is no further sense in which a moment may be said to be *the* present. Thus, there is always a kind of strict egalitarianism – ontologically speaking – with regard to the moments of time. Backwards causation requires this B-Theory because in order for any causal arrows to be able to travel from present to past, the past must still be there to receive them. But the common sense view of time is that there is a privileged present so that, for any time t, only those entities that exist at t have full

ontological status. On this view, whatever has existed or has yet to exist relative to t is not included in the world's ontological furnishings at t .

Now all of this is relevant to the question of the compatibility of divine omniscience and human freedom because one might think to reconcile the two by claiming that God's past beliefs are in some way dependent upon one's present or future actions. And Hasker claims that such a relation of dependence of God's past beliefs on one's present actions amounts to a species of backwards causation. But Hasker defends the common sense view of the asymmetry of time, and thus concludes that such backwards causation is not possible.

If all of this is correct, then anyone who affirms the common sense view of the nature of time ought not to count on the kind of power that is specified in (1). This leaves the power described in (2). By way of distinguishing the powers in (1) and (2), Hasker writes,

It is one thing to say "X has occurred and the reason it occurred is something that I am going to do right now." It is something altogether different to say "X has occurred, and there is something I can do right now that would have the effect of *preventing* its occurrence."⁴

One might claim to have the power either to bring about past events that have not, in fact, occurred, or to prevent some of those that actually have. But in order to distinguish this sort of power from that described at (3), one must add that this is a power that necessarily is never exercised. For, clearly, to say that the performance of some action A would prevent the occurrence of some past event X , and then to add that A has been performed, is to imply that X has been prevented. The power in (2), like the rowing machine in my basement, is possessed but never used.

But Hasker argues that a power that is necessarily unexercised is not sufficient to satisfy the libertarian account of freedom. That account holds out for something like the following criterion for saying that an agent is significantly free:

- (L) For all agents S , actions A and times t , S is free with respect to doing A at t only if it is within S 's power either to do A at t or refrain from doing A at t .

Thus, Hasker writes that the power described in (2)

... is not sufficient for compatibilism [on foreknowledge]. For on the libertarian view of free will, which compatibilists accept, in order to be free with respect to a particular action one must have *both* the power to perform the action and the power to refrain from performing it.⁵

The problem for the compatibilist on foreknowledge, it seems, is that, given the past belief of an essentially omniscient being, there is a constraint upon what one may do. Consider Hasker's example of God's always having believed that Clarence will have a cheese omelet tomorrow. Given the fact that God has always had this belief, it may be within Clarence's power to have a cheese omelet. But it is not always within Clarence's power to *refrain* from having a cheese omelet. Why not? Hasker explains in another place:

The answer is that there is a circumstance that obtains (namely, God's always having believed that Clarence would eat the omelet) which logically *precludes* Clarence's refraining from omelet eating, and since it is not possible for Clarence to *refrain* from eating the omelet, it is also not possible for him to be *free* with respect to eating it.⁶

Given the libertarian account, Clarence is not to be blamed if his cholesterol level soars. He could do no other than eat the omelet. If he is free at all in this respect, it is a freedom different from that which is cherished by all red-blooded libertarians. The libertarian is likely to say that a power that, for one reason or another, is necessarily never exercised, is not a power at all. Hasker draws the distinction between the libertarian account of one's having the power to perform a given action and the account to which he believes Mavrodes to be committed.

The power in question is the *power to perform a particular act under given circumstances*, and not a *generalized* power to perform acts of a certain kind. (Thus, if Thomas has the skill to perform on the parallel bars, but at T1 his arms are tied behind his back, we shall say that he *lacks* the power at T1 to perform on the parallel bars.) In general, if it is in N's power at T to perform A, then there is nothing in the circumstances 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.⁷

According to Hasker, in the case of Clarence and his breakfast, there is indeed something in the relevant obtaining circumstances that logically precludes Clarence's refraining from eating the omelet. Since this is the case, Clarence does not have the power to perform the particular act of refraining from eating the omelet. At best, Clarence, like Thomas, may be described as having a generalized power.

Hasker argues further that if the "power" referred to in our criterion at (L) is interpreted in this generalized way, that criterion no longer yields a libertarian conception of freedom. Since this interpretation allows for

power to be ascribed to an agent even when that agent cannot possibly exercise that power, the result would be that an agent may be said to meet the criterion at (L) and thus be free though it is not actually open for him to do otherwise. With some supplementation, this interpretation yields an account of freedom that would cheer the heart of the compatibilist on determinism.

2.

William Alston agrees with Hasker's assessment here and offers an extensive critique of those compatibilists on foreknowledge who appeal to the notion of counterfactual power over the past. According to Alston, this "counterfactual power" will be sufficient for freedom only on the CD's account of freedom. As he opens his discussion, Alston writes,

Rather than attempt to follow all the twists and turns in the free will literature, I will focus on the crucial distinction between a "libertarian" and a "compatibilist" understanding of terms like "within one's power." I will not attempt a full characterization of either interpretation. Instead I will focus on one basic respect in which they differ, viz., on whether its being within one's power to do A at t requires that it be "really possible" that one do A at t. What is *really possible* at t is what is "left open by what has happened up to t; it is that the non-occurrence of which is not necessitated by what has happened up to t."⁸

Alston goes on to note that there are various ways in which past states of affairs preclude certain other states of affairs from obtaining at later times. This prevention may be construed *causally* so that some states of affairs are "causally necessitated." A state of affairs S is causally necessitated if and only if there is some past state of affairs R and some causal law or laws L such that the conjunction of R and L entails S, and neither conjunct alone entails S.⁹ And thus, a state of affairs S is causally possible if its non-occurrence is not causally necessitated.

On the other hand, there may be states of affairs that are entailed by other states of affairs alone. That is, in some cases it may be that the obtaining of some past state of affairs R is logically sufficient for the obtaining of S. Alston refers to this sort of necessitation as "situationally logical necessitation" (or *S-logical necessitation*). A state of affairs S is S-logically possible only if its non-occurrence is not S-logically entailed by some previously obtaining state of affairs. Then to say that some event E is "really possible" is to say that it is not the case that not-E is either causally necessitated or S-logically necessitated. And, again, this is just to say that no prior conditions obtain that prevent or preclude the occurrence of E.

Now Alston links this discussion up to the constraints of libertarianism.

Since the basic claim of the libertarian is that I am not really free to do X at t if doing X is ruled out by what has already happened, she will want to make it a necessary condition of being free to do E (having it within one's power to do E) that E is neither causally nor S-logically necessitated by past events.¹⁰

Thus, before the libertarian will be willing to say that someone is free to do X, there must be no prior conditions that either make it necessary that one does X or necessary that one does not do X. It must be wholly up to the individual whether she does the act in question.

Contrast the libertarian account of freedom with that of the compatibilist. As Alston understands it, the compatibilist's claim is that the following is a sufficient account of its being within one's power to do something:

- (C) It is within S's power to do A = df. If S were to will (choose, decide, ...) at t to do A, S would do A.

This account of its being within one's power to do something appears to be perfectly compatible with causal determinism. Alston observes,

Even if my choice and action were causally necessitated by antecedent factors, it would still be the case that *if* I had chosen to do otherwise that choice would have been implemented. That counterfactual could be true even if it were causally impossible for me to choose to do anything else.¹¹

Thus, the compatibilist offers a *counterfactual* analysis of what it is to say that some action is within one's power.

Alston argues that a number of philosophers who have attempted to reconcile divine foreknowledge with human freedom have, whether wittingly or not, assumed a compatibilist rather than a libertarian construal of what it means for it to be *within one's power* to perform a given action.

Consider the exchange between Alvin Plantinga and Nelson Pike over Pike's provocative argument for the incompatibility of divine omniscience and human freedom.¹² Pike had argued that if Jones will mow the lawn on Saturday and God is essentially everlasting and omniscient, then God has always believed that Jones will mow the lawn on Saturday. Hence, when Saturday rolls around, Jones is faced with a choice: (i) Jones may mow the lawn on Saturday, or (ii) Jones may do something bringing it about that God had a false belief or (iii) Jones may do something bringing it about that God had always had a different belief about Jones' weekend activities

or (iv) Jones may do something bringing it about that God had never existed. But alternatives (ii) through (iv) are impossible. Alternative (ii) is ruled out by God's essential omniscience. The rest are ruled out by a variety of factors ranging from the impossibility of changing the past to the doctrine of God's necessary existence. It appears, then, that Jones' options are quite limited and one is certain to see Jones and his mower come Saturday morning.

The heart of Plantinga's reply to Pike was to point out that there is an ambiguity in the statement of alternative (iii) above. Necessarily, neither Jones nor anyone else has the power to do something bringing it about that God both did and did not always believe that Jones would mow the lawn. No one can change the past. But (iii) need not be interpreted in this way. Instead, Plantinga offers what he regards as a "perfectly innocent" interpretation of alternative (iii):

It was within Jones' power at t_2 to do something such that if he had done it, then God would have held a belief that in fact he did not hold.¹³

The idea here is the now familiar point that, at the time in question, Jones is free either to mow or not to mow. Because God is essentially omniscient, there is a guaranteed correlation between what Jones does and what God believes. Thus, although Jones *actually* chooses to mow the lawn, had he selected his golf bag over his lawn mower, God would always have had the appropriate belief with respect to how Jones spent his Saturday.

But Alston argues that Plantinga has here betrayed his libertarian convictions which are made very clear in other contexts. For example, Alston cites a passage from Plantinga in which Plantinga is quite explicit in laying down libertarian constraints for freedom.

If a person is free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain from performing it; no antecedent conditions and/or causal laws determine that he will perform the action or that he won't. It is within his power, at the time in question, to take or perform the action and within his power to refrain from it.¹⁴

Now it appears that Plantinga has got himself into a predicament. For, on the one hand, he has insisted that one is free with respect to a given action only if there are no antecedent conditions that determine either that he will perform that action or refrain from performing it. But, on the other, Plantinga has claimed both that *God has always believed* that Jones will mow his lawn and that *it is within Jones's power to refrain from mowing his lawn*.

Now consider Plantinga's defense of the compatibility of God's past belief and Jones's power to refrain. Consider first the following proposition which is numbered by Plantinga as (51):

- (51) God existed at t_1 , and God believed at t_1 that Jones would do X at t_2 and it was within Jones's power to refrain from doing X at t_2 .

Plantinga defends (51) as follows:

For suppose that (51) is true, and consider a world W in which Jones refrains from doing X. If God is essentially omniscient, then in this world W He is omniscient and hence does not believe at t_1 that Jones will do X at t_2 . So what follows from (51) is the harmless assertion that it was within Jones's power to do something such that if he had done it, then God would not have held a belief that in fact (in the actual world) He did hold.¹⁵

Now Alston asserts that "there is something wrong with a libertarian's taking this line."¹⁶ And his aim is to show this by drawing a parallel between Plantinga's defense of the compatibility of omniscience and freedom and a similar defense of the compatibility of causal determinism and human freedom. Thus, consider the following proposition, intended by Alston to be analogous to Plantinga's (51):

- (51A) Causal factors obtained prior to t_2 that determined Jones to do X at t_2 and it was within Jones's power to refrain from doing X at t_2 .

And consider the analogous defense:

Suppose that (51A) is true, and consider a world W in which Jones refrains from doing X. If causal determinism holds in this world W then either causal laws in W are different from what they are in the actual world or some of the causal factors that affect what Jones does at t_2 are different from what we have in the actual world. So what follows from (51A) is the harmless assertion that it was within Jones's power to do something such that if he had done it, then (assuming causal determinism still holds) either causal laws or causal factors would have been different from what they are in the actual world.¹⁷

Alston's point here, obviously, is to claim that we have a perfect parallel between the two cases, so that if Plantinga thinks that his defense of the compatibility of omniscience and freedom to do otherwise goes through, then he should think the same of the compatibilist's defense of the compatibility of determinism and one's freedom to do otherwise. In both

cases the freedom to do otherwise is construed counterfactually, and necessarily so. For in both cases there are prior conditions that obtain in the actual world such that their obtaining precludes one's doing other than one has actually done. To use Alston's own terminology, the difference between the two cases is simply that one involves S-logical necessity while the other involves causal necessity.

But the important property shared by both arguments is that they both employ some version of the so-called *conditional analysis* of freedom to do otherwise which is represented above at (C). Even if determinism is true so that even one's basic choices are determined by the laws of nature conjoined with the past history of the world, it may still be true that *were* one to choose to do otherwise, then one would be able to do otherwise. It simply follows that in that case the set of all antecedent conditions would be in some way different from the set that actually obtains. And even if God is essentially omniscient so that he has always had a full knowledge even of the basic decisions made by all agents, it may still be true that *had* one chosen to do otherwise one would have been able to carry out one's intentions. Here, too, it would follow that the set of antecedent conditions would be different from the actual set. Minimally, it would involve a difference in the set of those propositions believed by God.

Given this apparent parallel between the two arguments, Alston goes on to argue that Plantinga and other compatibilists on foreknowledge can consistently affirm that one is free to do otherwise in spite of God's foreknowledge only if they are willing to employ this conditional analysis of human freedom. But to embrace this analysis of freedom is to abandon libertarianism and opt for some brand of compatibilism on determinism.

3.

Thus, both Hasker and Alston have noted that the standard way of reconciling omniscience and human freedom that is taken by the compatibilist on foreknowledge (CF) is to appeal to a counterfactual power to do other than what one has done. And both have charged that this appeal constitutes an implicit abandonment of certain of the most crucial constraints of libertarian freedom. Hasker has claimed that the only "freedom" that may be ascribed to an agent given certain constraining antecedent conditions is a sort of dispositional freedom. But this dispositional analysis, when conjoined with the libertarian's criterion at (L) yields what is essentially a traditional compatibilist account of human freedom. Alston has been more explicit in identifying the move to counterfactual power as an appeal to the conditional analysis of freedom. And an acceptance of this analysis is, at

the same time, an abandonment of libertarianism.

It appears that the two criticisms amount to the same thing. For in order to explain what it is for an agent to have dispositional freedom, one must refer to a set of counterfactuals stating what that agent is able to do given different antecedent conditions. Hasker's criticism will then amount to the complaint that an appeal to what an agent can do in some world other than the actual world will not satisfy the libertarian who is concerned to know what is open to the agent in the *actual* world. The bottom line of the Hasker-Alston critique is that one cannot be both a libertarian and a compatibilist on foreknowledge.

4.

It seems to me that the apparent parallel between Plantinga's defense of the compatibility of foreknowledge and freedom and Alston's defense of the compatibility of determinism and freedom is *merely* apparent. Recall the context of Plantinga's move to counterfactual freedom. In that context, he was distinguishing the incoherent notion of power to change the past from the harmless notion of counterfactual power with regard to the past. I believe that this distinction may be sharpened up in such a way as to show that the compatibilist on foreknowledge who appeals to counterfactual power over the past may satisfy the basic constraints of libertarianism.

Consider the following claim about an agent and her power to affect the past:

- (4) A has the power to bring it about that some past state of affairs S that *is* included in the actual world is *not* so included.

Now (4) *might* be taken in such a way as to be asserting that someone has the power to change the past. But actually, (4) admits of more than one reading. Compare these:

- (4') A has the power to bring it about that some past state of affairs S that is included in W is not included in W.
 (4*) A has the power to bring it about that some past state of affairs that is included in whatever-world-is-actual is not included in whatever-world-is-actual.

(4') is necessarily false. The general observation to be made is that all true world-indexed propositions are necessarily true. While the proposition asserting that *S obtains* may be contingently true (assuming that "S" does indeed stand for some contingent state of affairs), the proposition asserting

that S obtains in W is necessarily true if true at all and necessarily false if false. (4'), then, is necessarily false because it designates a unique possible world, W, which, by stipulation does include some state of affairs S, and then goes on to assert that some agent may have it within her power to bring it about that W does not include S.

But what of (4*)? It seems to me that (4*) is possibly true. Unlike (4'), (4*) does not designate a unique world and thus does not commit itself to the claim that some true world-indexed proposition might have been false. Rather, (4*) just says that some agent has it within her power to act in such a way that some other world *would* have been the actual world. It is just that this power is never actually exercised. (Had it been, then *that* world would be the actual world!).

Consider how this looks with any ordinary state of affairs. Suppose that I scratch my nose at some time t. Now to say that I actually scratch my nose at t is to say (redundantly) that the actual world includes my scratching my nose at t. But as I exercise this power to scratch my nose, do I also have it within my power to bring it about that the actual world includes my *refraining* from scratching my nose at t? The answer, I believe, is yes and no. The answer will depend upon how we understand the reference to "the actual world." If this is meant to refer to the world that we designate as W, and we then claim that I have it within my power to make it the case that W includes something other than what W includes, then, necessarily, I have no such power. But, on the other hand, if this just means that I have it within my power to bring it about that *whatever-world-is-actual* includes my refraining from scratching my nose at t, then, if libertarianism is true, it seems that I do have just such a power. For this is just to say that, out of the domain of all possible worlds, there is a proper subset of worlds that include my refraining from scratching my nose at t, and that it is within my power to bring it about that one of *those* worlds from *that* subset is the actual world.

We should be clear about how this relates to libertarianism. The libertarian construal of freedom insists upon the freedom to do *otherwise*. But the very notion of a freedom to do *otherwise*, or to do other than what one has actually done, is, by definition, a notion that involves a counterfactual power. But as we have seen, there is more than one way in which to describe freedom to do otherwise.

Suppose that I scratch my nose at t and that there are causal factors that have determined me to scratch my nose at that time. The compatibilist who offers the conditional analysis of freedom might claim that I could have done otherwise because, had I chosen to refrain from scratching my nose at t, I would have refrained. This may be translated into the claim that there is a world W in which I choose to refrain from scratching my nose,

W is relevantly similar to the actual world and, in W, I refrain. But if I am causally determined so to scratch, then, necessarily, W must be a world in which the causal antecedents of t are different from those in the actual world.

Now consider what the libertarian means by his insistence upon freedom to do otherwise. Here, too, to say that although I actually indulge I could have refrained is to say that there is a world W* in which I choose to refrain and succeed. But the libertarian will deny that one is free to do otherwise if there are any causal antecedents that determine one's choice. Thus, for the libertarian, W* need not differ *at all* in terms of the causal antecedents of my decision at t.

The difference between these two construals of what it means to say that I *could have done otherwise* becomes clear at this point. In both cases, the counterfactual power in question requires some other possible world to accommodate that power. But the difference is that the libertarian will claim that *the very actuality of that other world would be the result of my free decision at t*.¹⁸ It does not appear that this is a viable position for the compatibilist to hold. That is, it is not a viable position unless she is willing to say that which causal antecedents obtain prior to my choice *depends* upon the very choice that I make. But I do not know of any compatibilist who would be willing to embrace such a circular account of causation.

It is for this sort of reason that a number of philosophers have argued that freedom to do otherwise is not given adequate explanation on the conditional analysis. For example, Peter van Inwagen¹⁹ offers considerations that would seem to show that *I could have refrained from scratching my nose* is not equivalent to *If I had chosen I would have refrained from scratching my nose*. For suppose that I am a compulsive nose-scratcher (at least with respect to my own nose). Then it does not appear that I have any choice in the matter. Certain conditions are such that (a) they are themselves out of my hands and (b) they determine that my nose is *not*. Given the fact that such conditions obtain, I can choose to refrain only if I can, at the same time, choose for those conditions not to obtain.

In order to say that I am free to do otherwise, it does not appear to be sufficient simply to note that there is a world in which I choose to do otherwise and do so. It must also be the case that, had that world been actual, *its actuality would have been the direct result of my decision at the time in question*. But where this world contains certain causal antecedents distinct from those which we find in the actual world, it is just implausible to suppose that it is ever in my power to bring it about that that world is actual.

So on the libertarian's criterion at (L), an individual is free with respect

to some action at some time only if that individual could either perform that action or refrain from performing that action at that time. And this entails that whenever I am free with respect to a given action, I am free to bring it about that a different possible world is the actual world.

Now it seems to me that, in the spirit of Alston's objection, we might offer a parallel argument to show that *libertarianism itself* must be committed to the conditional analysis of freedom to do otherwise. Recall Alston's notion of "S-logical necessity." Again, to say that some state of affairs S is S-logically necessary is to say that some prior state of affairs R obtains and that R's obtaining entails S's obtaining. Now suppose that Jones actually scratches his nose at t. Then we may say that

- (5) The actual world includes Jones's scratching his nose at t.

Presumably, there is an infinite set of possible worlds in which Jones scratches his nose at t. For example, there are some in which Jones and his nose exist but Mozart does not. We can quite readily generate a great number of variations on the nose-scratching theme just by varying Jones's fellow inhabitants, and so forth. There is also an infinite set of possible worlds in which Jones *refrains* from scratching his nose at t. We will call the set of all nose-scratching worlds R and the set of worlds in which Jones mends his manners Q. So from (5) we know that

- (6) The actual world is a member of R.

On the standard account, a possible world is defined as a logically maximal consistent set of states of affairs. For every possible world W and every possible state of affairs S either W includes S or W includes $\sim S$. There is no possible state of affairs S* such that W is indeterminate with respect to the inclusion or exclusion of S*. Thus, the contents of a given possible world constitute the identity conditions of that world. Suppose that some world W includes states of affairs S¹, S², S³, ... Sⁿ. Then W just is the set {S¹, S², S³, ... Sⁿ}. Were one member different, this would constitute a set that is not identical to W.

Now if all of this is the correct account of possible worlds, then we have several important entailments. For, one thing, it is a necessary truth that one and only one world is actual. If a possible world just takes in everything that ever obtains then there can be no more than one such world precisely because there can be no more than everything that there is. Further, the maximality property of worlds entails that *which* world is the actual world is not and never has been indeterminate. We may say, with Leibniz, that "the present is big with the future." And thus, necessarily,

possible worlds do not acquire their members successively over time. To say that some world *W* acquires its members over time would be to suppose that at any given time *t*, *W* is determinate only with respect to those states of affairs that obtain prior to and including *t*. But this would just be to deny the maximality property of worlds in a way that is identical to the claim that future contingent propositions lack truth value. The maximality property of worlds entails that the actuality of a given world is an all or nothing affair.

But then, given (6), combined with an understanding of the nature of possible worlds, we know that

- (7) Necessarily, if Jones scratches his nose at *t*, then the actual world is and always has been a member of *R*.²⁰

Further

- (8) Necessarily, Jones can refrain from scratching his nose only if the actual world is and has always been a member of *Q*.

But given our knowledge that the actual world is a member of *R* (and assuming that being a member of *R* is sufficient for being excluded from *Q*) it appears that there is some state of affairs, namely, *the actual world's being a member of R* that makes it S-logically impossible for Jones to refrain from scratching his nose.

Obviously, what we have here is an argument for fatalism that just rules out libertarianism altogether. Since there is some state of affairs that obtains and is such that its obtaining S-logically necessitates everything entailed by that state of affairs, it appears that no one ever has freedom to do otherwise. That is, there is no such freedom unless this is construed conditionally.

From my reading of both Hasker and Alston I suspect that neither would endorse this argument. They might want to argue that the antecedent conditions that obtain, according to this argument, "prior" to what Jones does at *t* do not really *constrain* Jones in the way that certain causal conditions might constrain him. Why think this? Because while it does seem plausible to suppose that it is up to Jones whether the world that is actual is a member of *R* or *Q*, it does not seem at all plausible to suppose that it is ever up to Jones that the actual world is one in which certain laws are operative and certain past events have occurred. Thus, there is a certain disanalogy between the two arguments.

Indeed, one may note that my fatalistic argument commits the same fallacy that may be detected in the more standard forms of the argument for logical fatalism. For my argument has taken the form *Necessarily, if W*

then not- W^* ; W ; therefore, *Necessarily, not- W^** .²¹ That W is actual is contingent. And since W 's being actual is contingent, then, apart from some independent reason that may be introduced, we have no reason for accepting the conclusion that it is a necessary truth that W^* is not the actual world.

But the argument for causal necessity does not commit any such fallacy. There, one simply argues that if certain causal antecedents obtain then so will their consequences. The observation is then made that they have, indeed, obtained, and, therefore, so do the consequences.

But if there is a disanalogy between my possible worlds argument for *logical* fatalism and the argument for causal necessity, it seems to me that the same disanalogy may be seen between the latter of these and the argument for *theological* fatalism. For I see no reason to suppose that the fact that God has always believed that Jones would scratch his nose “S-logically necessitates” that Jones do anything any more than does the fact that the actual world has always been a world in which Jones scratches his nose. And this is just to say that there does not appear to be any substantial difference between the arguments for logical and theological fatalism.

Suppose that libertarianism is true, so that Jones *really* has it within his power either to scratch or not to scratch. As we have said, this entails that Jones really has it within his power to bring it about that the actual world is a member of R or a member of Q . And, again, suppose that Jones has chosen to scratch. Then this just entails that the actual world is a member of R .

But now suppose that God is essentially omniscient. It follows that God believes that the actual world is a member of R . But why should the fact that God *believes* that the actual world is a member of R pose any more of a constraint on Jones than the fact that it has always been *true* that the actual world is a member of R ? It seems to me that, in both cases, to say that the state of affairs in question – on the one hand, God’s past belief, and on the other, a given world’s always having been actual – “S-logically necessitates” some other state of affairs ought not to amount to any more than the claim that the range of states of affairs that are logically compossible with what has already occurred is restricted. But compossibility is one thing; logical possibility is quite another. The confusion of these two logical concepts is simply one interesting way of committing an old and familiar fallacy. For the argument is essentially:

- (10) Necessarily, for all worlds W , if W includes God’s believing that S does A at t , then S does A at t .
- (11) The actual world includes God’s believing that S does A at t .

Therefore,

(12) Necessarily, S does A at t.

(12) simply does not follow because (11) is contingently true. All that follows is

(12') S does A at t (or, The actual world includes S's doing A at t.)

Taking into account one last time the ambiguity in our references to "the actual world" we might note that there is a reading of (11) that *is* necessarily true:

(11*) Necessarily, W includes God's believing that S does A at t.

But then, of course, all that would follow is

(12*) Necessarily, W includes S's doing A at t.

But this in no way stands in the way of the contingency and freedom of S's action at t. For we have no reason to suppose that W's being the actual world is necessary.

5.

Recall that Hasker identified three possible ways in which one might understand the claim that some agent has it within her power to affect the past. We have noted that the notion of changing the past is just obviously incoherent. And we have spent some time trying to understand the notion of counterfactual power over the past. What we have not considered in any detail is the kind of power that I have called *actually exercised power over the past*. This, once again, is the power to do something in the present that has actual effects in the past. Or, as Hasker has put it, one might say "X has occurred and the reason it occurred is something that I am going to do right now." Hasker argued against anyone's having such a power over the past by noting that one may do something in the present that has effects in the past only if the past still exists relative to the present. If causal arrows are to hit their mark in the past the mark must still *be* there. But such a view seems to entail the truth of the so-called "B-theory" of time. Anyone who holds the A-theory is not entitled to the claim that backwards causation is possible. But it appears that the power to bring it about that God has always had a certain belief is a species of backwards causation. And so the

“A-theorist” does not have the option of attributing such a power to human agents.

Certain philosophers seem to feel the force of such an argument, and have thus avoided saying that an agent may have it within his power to *bring about* God’s past beliefs. Hasker observes that Plantinga deliberately avoids attributing this power to agents because such language describing the power to *bring about* events has “a strong causal association.”²² Indeed, as Hasker notes, the central idea involved in one event’s bringing about another event is that the latter occurs *in consequence of* or *as the result of* the former. Plantinga is not prepared to speak of anyone’s *causing* some past state of affairs. Instead, Plantinga claims that one may have the power to do otherwise in spite of God’s past belief because one has the “power to do something such that, were one to do it, then God would have had a different belief.” Hasker calls such a relationship between one’s actions and God’s beliefs the *relation of counterfactual dependence*.

It seems clear that there is a difference between one event E’s *bringing about* another event E*, and E and E* standing in a relation of counterfactual dependence. Suppose that it is true that Williams will hit a home run only if Feller pitches him low and away. Now suppose that Williams sends one into the center field bleachers. It follows that Feller has pitched Williams low and away. Williams has thus “done something such that, were he to do it, Feller would have pitched him low and away.” But clearly (barring any shady business transactions) Williams has not *brought it about* that Feller pitched him low and away. Similarly, as Plantinga notes in a different paper ²³, no one has the power to bring it about that any necessary truth is the case. But if one were to say that S has the power to bring about P just in case S has the power to do something such that, were S to do it, then P would be true, then, where P is a necessary truth, S has it within S’s power to bring about some necessary truth.

If this distinction between the relation of counterfactual dependence between two events and one event’s bringing about another is valid, then this may seem to provide Plantinga the room he needs to allow freedom to do otherwise in spite of God’s past beliefs and without committing him to the notion of actually exercised power over the past.

But Hasker offers an argument to show that Plantinga is, in fact, committed to the view that one may have the power to bring about certain past events or states of affairs. To facilitate this argument, Hasker introduces the notion of a *power entailment principle*. As the name suggests, a power entailment principle is a principle establishing that if some person A has the power to bring about some state of affairs S, and S is related in some specified way to some other state of affairs R, then A has the power

to bring about R as well. Consider the following power entailment principle:

(PEP) If (a) it is within S's power to bring it about that "P" is true and (b) it is within S's power to bring it about that "P" is false and (c) "P" entails "Q" and "not-P" entails "not-Q", then it is within S's power to bring it about that "Q" is true.

Now consider the application of this principle that is directly relevant to the case at hand. If it is within Jones's power to bring it about that *Jones mows his lawn at t* is true or that *Jones mows his lawn at t* is false, and if it is the case that Jones mows his lawn at t only if God will always have believed that Jones will mow his lawn at t, and if it is the case that Jones will refrain from mowing his lawn only if God will always have had a different belief about Jones's activity at t, then if Jones has the power to bring about the truth of *Jones mows his lawn at t* he also has it within his power to bring it about that God has always believed that Jones would mow his lawn at t.

Given (PEP), Hasker draws the following conclusion:

And since, given Plantinga's assumption that God is a logically necessary, essentially omniscient being, "P" is equivalent to "God has always believed that "P", it follows that (PEP) shows that Plantinga's position is wrong.²⁴

That is, if (PEP) is sound and Plantinga claims that Jones has the power to refrain from mowing his lawn, then he seems also to be committed to the view that it is within Jones's power to bring it about that God has always had certain of his beliefs. Plantinga's own view is committed to something stronger than the relation of counterfactual dependence.

Another way of seeing the force of this portion of Hasker's argument is to note that if (PEP) is sound and Plantinga persists in denying that anyone may bring about past states of affairs, then Plantinga's position is left vulnerable to the Hasker-Alston objection above. For if (PEP) is sound, then so is the following principle, which we might follow John Fischer in calling the *Principle of Transfer of Powerlessness*:²⁵

(TP) If it is not within S's power to bring it about that "Q" is false and "Q" entails "P" then it is not within S's power to bring it about that "P" is false.

If this principle is sound and Plantinga insists upon holding that no one has it within their power to bring about past states of affairs, then it appears that either he must admit that God's foreknowledge of what an

agent will do rules out the possibility of that agent's doing otherwise, or he must construe the requisite freedom along the lines of the conditional analysis. In that case, Alston has succeeded in drawing a parallel between Plantinga's defense and that which might be offered by the compatibilist on determinism.

Now it seems to me that (PEP) is indeed a sound principle, and I regard Hasker's several proofs of this and even stronger principles as conclusive. And I am inclined to think the same of (TP). Thus, it seems to me that Hasker has indeed shown that Plantinga is committed to a view that attributes the power to bring about certain past states of affairs to all agents who enjoy libertarian freedom. But if this is so, then it appears that Plantinga can avoid the force of the Hasker-Alston objection only by admitting the possibility of actually exercised power over the past. And as we have seen, Hasker has offered an argument that would seem to rule this out.

Further, it should be clear that the argument that I have developed in earlier sections also commits me to the possibility of such a power over the past. For if I scratch my nose at t but really have it within my power to refrain from scratching my nose at t , then, on my view, I really have it within my power to bring it about that some other possible world, W , is actual. But W 's being actual entails God's always having believed that I refrain from scratching my nose at t . And so, by (PEP), I have it within my power to bring it about that God has always believed what he has, in fact, believed. And this view also maintains that my *actual* choice to scratch my nose at t has, *as a consequence*, God's always having believed that I do scratch my nose at t . And so it appears that I am committed to the claim that I have at least a limited amount of power to bring about the past. My own position, then, claims that agents have *both* actually exercised and counterfactual power over the past.

But what of Hasker's argument against the former of these two powers? Does this ultimately count against my view? I think not. On the one hand, it does seem correct to say that backwards causation may be accommodated only in a world where time is symmetrical. Further, so far as I can see, there is no very good reason to accept the B-theory of time, but there are very good reasons for rejecting it. But on the other hand, neither do I see any reason for thinking that the kind of power that would reconcile libertarian freedom with omniscience requires the truth of the B-theory. My reason for saying this is just that it is not at all clear that the kind of power in question need be construed as a species of backwards causation.

At one point in his discussion, Hasker discusses approvingly the argument of a paper by Jaegwon Kim, in which Kim argues that there are

many cases of bringing about that are not causal.²⁶ In applying the results of Kim's paper, Hasker himself offers an example of an instance of *bringing about* that is not causal, and it seems to me that the very example he uses is precisely what the compatibilist needs to avoid a commitment to backwards causation.

If we hold to the omnitemporality of truth, then there seems to be no alternative to saying that in performing an action today I make it the case that certain propositions were true in the past, that someone who expressed those propositions spoke truly, and the like. It would be perverse to speak of this as causation, thus assimilating these very ordinary cases to the highly dubious case of *exerting causal influence* in the past. Yet the relation between my action and the past truth of your words is not mere counterfactual dependence, for this, as we have seen, fails entirely to capture the fact that what you said was true *because* of what I later did, and not vice versa. Once again, we have a case of bringing about which is not causal.²⁷

If, in the case of a proposition that was true in the past, we have an instance of bringing about that is not causal, what is the obstacle that stands in the way of the compatibilist's arguing as follows?

- (13) For every state of affairs S and time t, if S obtains at t, there is some proposition P such that P truly states that S obtains at t and for all earlier times t-n, either P is true at t-n or it can be truly asserted at t-n that P.

Hence,

- (14) If Jones brings about some state of affairs S* at t, then there is some proposition P* such that P* truly states that Jones brings about S* at t and for all earlier times t-n, either P* is true at t-n or it can be truly asserted at t-n that P*.
- (15) Jones brings it about that S* obtains at t if and only if P* is true.

Now suppose that

- (16) Jones has it within his power to bring about S* at t.

Given Hasker's (PEP) it follows that

- (17) Jones has it within his power to bring it about that P* is true.

If God is everlasting and essentially omniscient, and since P* is an omnitemporal truth, then of course the following is true:

- (18) P* is true if and only if God has always believed that P* is true.

And again, by (PEP)

- (19) Jones has it within his power to bring about S* at t if and only if Jones has it within his power to bring it about that God has always believed that P* is true.

But the power described in (19) is, according to Hasker himself, a power to *bring about* that is not causal. And if it is not causal, then it appears to require the B-theory no more than does the claim that propositions may be true in the past in virtue of something that someone does in the present.

It seems to me that the correct reply to Hasker's argument at this point is simply to acknowledge the validity of (PEP) and to regard it as harmless for the compatibilist's overall position. Hasker's argument has shown Plantinga's position to be "wrong" only to the extent that it has shown that if Plantinga wants to attribute to Jones the power to refrain from mowing his lawn then he should also attribute to Jones the power to bring it about that God has always had a different belief from the one that he, in fact, has had. If omnitemporally true propositions are within the scope of such a power, then it seems to me that whatever is entailed by those propositions also falls within that scope. At best, then, Hasker has performed the service of pointing out that Plantinga and others should not be reluctant to claim that it is within someone's power to bring about some past states of affairs.

Notes

1. William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 96–143; William Alston, "Divine Foreknowledge and Alternative Conceptions of Human Freedom," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 18 (1985): 19–32; reprinted in John Martin Fischer, ed., *God, Foreknowledge and Freedom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).
2. George Mavrodes, "Is the Past Unpreventable?" *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1983): 131–46.
3. This useful terminology is borrowed from Paul Horwich, *Asymmetries in Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1987).
4. Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*, p. 118.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 118–119.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
8. Alston, "Divine Foreknowledge," p. 259.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
12. Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," *Philosophical Review* 74 (January 1985): 27–46.
13. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 70–71.
14. Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, p. 29, quoted by Alston, "Divine Foreknowledge," p. 271.
15. Alston, "Divine Foreknowledge," pp. 271–272.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 272.
17. *Ibid.*
18. A word of explanation is in order here, for this claim is easily misunderstood. In saying that it is up to me which world is actual, this is just short for saying that I have a range of choice of worlds within the set of worlds that are "feasible" for me, given everything else the actual world is bound to include. I do not have the power to choose a world that lacks John Calvin and Thomas Hobbes. Let *W* be a world that includes these two characters plus my scratching my nose at *t*. And let *W** be a world that includes these two plus my minding manners at *t*. *W* and *W** are distinct possible worlds and it is up to me whether the actual world is *W* or *W** (or some other world that includes Calvin and Hobbes).
19. Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: University Press, 1983), pp. 94–105.
20. Once again, one may deny this only if one is also willing to deny that future contingent propositions have truth value, thus also denying the maximality property of possible worlds.
21. This is sometimes referred to as "Sleigh's Fallacy," not, I take it, due to any propensity on Professor Sleigh's part to commit it, but, rather, because of his skill in detecting it.
22. Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*, p. 101.
23. Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (July 1986): 253–269.
24. William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*, p. 109.
25. John Martin Fischer, ed., *Moral Responsibility* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 9–61.
26. Jaegwon Kim, "Noncausal Connections," *Nous* 8 (1974).
27. Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*, pp. 107–108.