

## **Having a Choice about Counterfactuals of Freedom\***

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Luis de Molina thought that God could not determine free human actions. Even so, Molina argued that God knows what each and every possible human would freely do in each and every possible situation. God knows this because, according to “Molinists,” there are true “counterfactuals of freedom.” That is, for every possible human *S* in every possible situation *C*, there are true propositions like *that if S were in C, S would freely do A*.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I shall begin by responding to a single objection to Molinism. But, as we shall see, my response will lead to positive claims about Molinism, including a new way to understand what is at the heart of the Molinist position.

### **I. Hasker’s Argument Against Molinism**

William Hasker (1986; 1989, 39-52) assumes for *reductio* that an arbitrarily chosen counterfactual of freedom is true. He also assumes that that counterfactual has a true antecedent and a true consequent. He then argues that these twin assumptions have an absurd implication. If his argument is successful, then no counterfactual of freedom with a true antecedent and a true consequent is true. This alone would undermine

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Flint (1998, 40) would say that Molinism requires 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*. It would make no difference to the arguments of this paper if we understood Molinism in Flint’s way.

Molinism. Moreover, it suggests that no counterfactual of freedom, whatever the truth-values of its antecedent and consequent, is true. For counterfactuals of freedom with true antecedents and true consequents are typically seen to be the least objectionable of all allegedly true counterfactuals of freedom.

So let us assume—for *reductio*—that the following is a true counterfactual of freedom.

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

And, second, assume that the antecedent and consequent of (1) are true. *Step One* of Hasker's argument says that—given our two assumptions—*S* does not bring about the truth of (1). *Step Two* of Hasker's argument says that if *S* does not bring about the truth of (1), then *S* cannot bring about the truth of this actually false, but possibly true, counterfactual:

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

*Step Three* of Hasker's argument says that if *S* cannot bring about the truth of (1\*), then *S* is not free to refrain from doing *A* in *C*.

Putting these three steps together, Hasker concludes that our two assumptions imply that *S* is not free to refrain from doing *A* in *C*. So Hasker further concludes that they imply that *S* does not do *A* freely in *C*.<sup>2</sup> But the truth of the antecedent and the consequent of (1) imply, all by themselves, that *S* freely does *A* in *C*. So the implication that Hasker derives from our two assumptions is not consistent with one of those

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<sup>2</sup> 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 do *A* freely in *C* (see Frankfurt, 1969). But I shall not develop this objection to 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*. (Such an odd situation: 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 situations *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.

assumptions, and so not consistent with both of them. So at least one of those assumptions must be rejected. Hasker rejects the truth of (1). Thus Hasker's *reductio* argument against (1), and, by extension, against Molinism.

The bulk of Hasker's argument is devoted to defending Step One. And we shall consider that defense in full. But first, let me describe his defenses of Steps Two and Three.

Step Two: If  $S$  does not bring about the truth of (1), then  $S$  cannot bring about the truth of (1\*).

Hasker's (1989, 51) defense of Step Two begins with the idea that there is (at most) only one way to bring about the truth of any counterfactual of freedom: bring about the truth of its consequent in the conditions specified by its antecedent. But, Hasker argues, even bringing about the truth of a counterfactual of freedom's consequent, in conditions specified by its antecedent, fails to bring about the truth of that counterfactual of freedom. So there is no way to bring about the truth of any counterfactual of freedom. So  $S$  cannot bring about the truth of (1\*).

I shall not say much about Hasker's defense of Step Two. For there is nothing significant in his defense of Step Two that is not also in his defense of Step One. (This goes, most importantly, for Hasker's arguments about bringing about the truth of a counterfactual of freedom.) And I shall examine all the crucial moves that occur in Step Two in the context of Hasker's defense of Step One. To examine them also in the context of his defense of Step Two would be needlessly redundant.

Step Three: If  $S$  cannot bring about the truth of (1\*), then  $S$  is not free to refrain from doing  $A$  in  $C$ .

In his defense of Step Three, Hasker assumes that if *S* were freely to refrain from doing *A* in *C*, *S* would thereby bring about the truth of (1\*): *that if S were in C, S would freely refrain from doing A*. So, since Hasker thinks that *S* cannot bring about the truth of (1\*), he concludes that *S* cannot freely refrain from doing *A* in *C*. Thus his defense of Step Three.

Step One: *S* does not “bring about” the truth of (1).

Recall that Hasker’s argument assumes, for *reductio*, that the following is in fact true:

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

His argument also assumes that (1)’s antecedent and consequent are both true, which implies that *S* does *A* freely in *C*. Hasker’s defense of Step One begins by arguing for the claim that (1) would have been true even if *S* had not done *A* in *C*. In fact, Hasker has two different arguments for this claim.

The first argument (Hasker, 1989, 43-45) turns on the idea that, in judging “similarities” between “possible worlds,” the truth of counterfactuals in general should be given a lot of weight. Indeed, they should be given so much weight that we should conclude that actually true counterfactuals with true antecedents are true in the nearest worlds in which they have false antecedents. This implies that (1) would have been true even if *S* had not been in *C*.

Hasker’s (1989, 45-47) second argument claims that counterfactuals of freedom in particular should be given a lot of weight. This second argument begins with the idea that counterfactuals of (human) freedom are beyond God’s control. Therefore, Hasker infers, they are “considerably more fundamental” than counterfactuals grounded in the

laws of nature. Therefore, Hasker argues, if a true counterfactual of freedom has a true antecedent, then that counterfactual would have been true even if it had had a false antecedent.

So Hasker has two arguments for the claim that (1) would have been true, even if *S* had not been in *C*. Hasker (1989, 41) then asserts—but does not argue—that it follows from this claim that the truth of (1) was not brought about by *S*'s freely doing *A* in *C*.<sup>3</sup>

Suppose that *S* does not bring about (1)'s truth by freely doing *A* in *C*.<sup>4</sup> Then, says Hasker, *S* does not bring about (1)'s truth at all. Hasker draws this conclusion because he assumes that the only way *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).

We have just seen how Hasker defends each of Steps One through Three. Before that we saw the role that those three steps play in his argument against Molinism. Thus we have Hasker's argument against Molinism.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Hasker (1989, 39-52) might seem to argue for this: he says that if (1) would be true whether or not *S* were 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* were not in *C*, (1) would be true. So the argument just given adds nothing to the assertion noted in the text.

<sup>4</sup> Hasker's defense of Step Three relies on the claim that if *S* were to freely refrain from doing *A* in *C*, *S* would thereby bring about the truth of (1\*): If *S* were in *C*, *S* would freely refrain from doing *A*. Hasker's defense of Step One, however, is a defense of the claim that if *S* were to freely do *A* in *C*, *S* would *not* thereby bring about the truth of (1): If *S* were in *C*, *S* would freely do *A*. So perhaps we have here the makings of a second *reductio* argument in Hasker, with the absurd result being that performing an action in a situation both does, but also does not, bring about the truth of the proposition that if one were in that situation, one would perform that action.

## II. More than Molinism At Stake

Set aside Molinism's distinctive thesis that, for every possible agent in every possible situation, 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 *counterfactuals* 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 that, first, *S* freely does *A* in *C*; and, second, *that if S were in C, S would freely do A* is true.

One need not be a Molinist to suppose this. After all, 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*. Given these two truths, it seems to follow that *that if S were in C, S would freely do A* is true. At least, this follows given the thesis about subjunctive conditionals known as “centering.”

Centering states that if the antecedent and consequent of a subjunctive conditional are true, then that conditional is true. And centering, while controversial, is an implication not only of the account of subjunctive conditionals defended by David Lewis

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<sup>5</sup> 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's argument turns on the idea that if God did indeed act, 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, forthcoming). 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.

(1973, 28-29), but also of the account defended by Robert Stalnaker (1968). So one need not be a Molinist to endorse centering.

We have, for the moment, set Molinism aside. We are considering instead the conjunction of two claims. The first is that *S* freely does *A* in *C*. The second is that this (so-called) counterfactual of freedom is true:

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

Our conjunction is not Molinism. But Hasker's argument refutes that conjunction if it refutes Molinism. For, first, it is this conjunction—to be precise, it is the conjunction of (1)'s truth and the truth of both its antecedent and consequent—that Hasker assumes for *reductio*. And, second, in arguing that this conjunction has an absurd consequence, Hasker never relies on anything peculiar to Molinism.

I shall return to defend this second point, which needs to be defended. (The first point should be uncontroversial.) But suppose, just for a moment, that my defense of this second point succeeds. Then Hasker's argument, if it succeeds at all, shows that the following two claims imply that *S* does not freely do *A* in *C*: first, *S* freely does *A* in *C*; second, *that if S were in C, S would freely do A* is true. This argument has nothing to do with *S*, *A*, and *C* in particular; it generalizes to every agent, every act, and every situation. So I think that many—including everyone who endorses centering—will join me in seeing this not as an argument against Molinism, but rather as an argument against the possibility of free will.

Of course, if Hasker's argument has shown that free will is not possible, he has undermined Molinism. But I have just charged that—contrary to the way he and others

(e.g., Perszyk, 2003) present that argument—Molinism is merely one bit of collateral damage, rather than that argument's sole target.

In order for my charge to stick, I must establish that Hasker does not rely on Molinist assumptions while arguing that an absurd consequence follows from the combination of the truth of (1) and the claim that both the antecedent and also the consequent of (1) are true. And to establish this, I need to show only that Hasker's defenses of Steps One through Three do not themselves rely on Molinist assumptions.

I shall carefully focus on Step One below. But I shall skip over Step Two. For, as already noted (§I), Hasker's defense of Step Two contains nothing of significance not also in his defense of Step One. So if his defense of Step One does not turn on Molinist assumptions, neither does his defense of Step Two.

Step Three is a claim about what follows from *S*'s being unable to bring about the truth of the following proposition:

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

Hasker thinks that what follows is that *S* cannot freely refrain from doing *A* in *C*. He thinks that this follows because he assumes that *S*'s freely refraining from doing *A* in *C* would have two implications (Hasker, 1989, 51). The first is that (1\*) would be true. The second is that (1\*)'s truth would be brought about by *S*'s freely refraining from doing *A* in *C*.

Again, Hasker assumes that *S*'s freely refraining from doing *A* in *C* would imply the truth of (1\*). This assumption presupposes centering. (If centering is false, it might be that in the nearest world in which *S* refrains from doing *A* in *C*, (1\*) is not true.) So, unless Hasker is entitled to rely on centering in prosecuting his argument against

Molinism, this assumption—and therefore Hasker’s argument as a whole—is undermined. Needless to say, this point reinforces, rather than blocks, my claim that Hasker’s argument against Molinism is also an argument against free will and centering.<sup>6</sup>

Hasker’s defense of Step One begins with two arguments for the conclusion that (1)—*that if S were in C, S would freely do A*—would be true even if *S* were not to do *A* in *C*. Recall that his first argument turned on a claim about the amount of weight that counterfactuals in general should be given in judging similarities between possible worlds. And recall that his second argument turned on the claim that counterfactuals of (human) freedom, being beyond God’s control, are “considerably more fundamental” than counterfactuals grounded in the laws of nature. Neither argument seems to presuppose anything having to do with Molinism in particular. And so both arguments ought to compel everyone who initially accepts the truth of (1) as much as (or as little as) they compel Molinists.

One might object that those who accept (1)’s truth only because they endorse centering could say that, necessarily, the only true counterfactuals of freedom have both true antecedents and also true consequents. Therefore they could conclude that (1) would not be true, were *S* not to be in *C*. Molinists cannot endorse this reasoning for this conclusion. So, this objection concludes, Hasker’s two defenses here target Molinism in particular.

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<sup>6</sup> One might say that Molinism (and Molinism only) implies that (1\*)’s truth would be brought about by *S*’s freely refraining from doing *A* in *C*. But I do not think that Molinism implies this unless centering implies it as well. Besides, I shall offer an alternative way for the Molinist to understand bringing about (or, better, *having a choice about*) claims like (1\*) below (§V).

As this objection shows, some non-Molinists have a reason to reject the conclusion of Hasker's defense of Step One, a reason not shared by Molinists. But this objection does not show that Hasker's argument threatens Molinism in particular. Compare: Molinists themselves have a reason reject the conclusion of Hasker's defense of Step One—the reason being that this conclusion threatens Molinism—a reason not shared by non-Molinists. But this does not show that Hasker's argument threatens non-Molinists in particular!

To show that Hasker's argument threatens Molinism in particular, one would have to show, first, just where non-Molinists think that Hasker's defense of Step One goes wrong. Then one would have to show, second, that even if Hasker's defense of Step One fails in just this way, his argument would not fail in this way if Molinism (assume for *reductio*) were true. The objection just considered accomplishes neither of these tasks.

Nor do I think that these tasks could be accomplished. For example, consider non-Molinist incompatibilists who endorse (1)—*that if S were in C, S would freely do A*—only because of centering. They think (1) is true because of *S*'s freely doing *A* in *C*. All incompatibilists—not just Molinists—believe that it is not up to God whether *S* freely does *A* in *C*.<sup>7</sup> So our non-Molinist incompatibilists should conclude that the truth of (1) is not up to God. Now they face the question of what that counterfactual's not being up to God implies.

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<sup>7</sup> “Incompatibilism” is the thesis that it is not possible for an action to be both free and also determined by the state of the distant past combined with the laws of nature. It is, however, standard for incompatibilists—including Hasker—to assume that it is not possible for a human action to be both free and also up to God whether it occurs.

The truth of *that S freely does A*, when *S* freely does *A*, is—if Hasker's reasoning in defense of Step One is valid—“considerably more fundamental” than the truth of a counterfactual grounded by a law of nature. But the truth of *that S freely does A* does not seem to me particularly fundamental, since *S* had a choice about whether it was true. So I suspect Hasker's reasoning in defense of Step One is not valid. (Flint (1998, 140-148) and Freddoso (1988, 75n.96) also deny that Hasker's reasoning here is valid.)

If Hasker's reasoning in defense of Step One is valid, it implies that (1)'s truth is "considerably more fundamental" than that of counterfactuals grounded by laws of nature. And so our non-Molinist incompatibilists should then conclude—again, if Hasker's reasoning is valid—that (1) would be true even if *S* were not in *C*. Of course, they should not draw this conclusion if Hasker's reasoning is not valid. But if Hasker's reasoning is not valid, then Molinists should not draw this conclusion either.

Hasker's argument against Molinism begins by assuming something other than Molinism for *reductio*. It assumes the conjunction of two claims. The first claim is that the following is true:

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

The second claim is that (1) has both a true antecedent and also a true consequent. I think that Hasker's argument refutes that conjunction if it refutes Molinism. For in deriving an absurd conclusion from those two claims, his argument does not seem to rely on anything peculiar to Molinism. Thus anyone who thinks that Hasker's argument succeeds in refuting Molinism ought also to think that it succeeds in refuting centering plus the claim that agents act freely. After all, if *S* does *A* freely in *C*, then (1) will have a true antecedent and a true consequent and, given centering, (1) itself will be true.

Hasker wants not only to endorse his argument against Molinism, but also to claim that agents act freely. It might seem—even given the argument of this section—that Hasker can have all that he wants: he can simply reject centering. For then he could grant that the conjunction of free will and centering leads to absurdity—as does Molinism—while insisting that we are nevertheless free. And, in fact, Hasker (1989, 51n.50) explicitly rejects centering.

(Indeed, Hasker must do more than reject centering. He must deny that there are any true subjunctive conditionals, with true antecedents and consequents, that assert that an agent would freely do some action if that agent were in a certain situation. For any such conditional will—if his argument is successful—lead to the conclusion that the agent did not freely do the action after all.)

Here is a bad objection to Hasker's rejection of centering: Hasker's defense of Step Three relies on centering, as do his defenses of Steps One and Two (see §III); so, without centering, those defenses fail; and, as a result, so too does Hasker's overall argument against Molinism. This is a bad objection because Molinism itself seems to imply centering (or something close enough). Thus centering, being an implication of Molinism, can fuel Hasker's *reductio*. That is, it can fuel that *reductio* even if Hasker himself rejects centering and even if centering is just plain false.

This reply to the “bad objection” succeeds because Molinism really does imply centering—or at least “restricted centering.” Restricted centering says 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. According to Molinism, for every possible human *S* in every possible situation *C*, there are true propositions like *that if S were in C, S would freely do A*. If *S* is actually in *C*, then it is possible that *S* be in *C*. So Molinism requires there to be a true counterfactual about what *S* would do. So Molinists should endorse restricted centering. And restricted centering is all Hasker needs for his *reductio*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> If restricted centering is false, then, possibly, *S* does *A* in *C*, but *that if S were in C, S would do A* is false. Of course, it cannot be that, in such as case, *that if S were in C, S would not freely do A* is true—that would get us a contradiction, since, given that *S* is in *C*, we could discharge the antecedent of that conditional. So that conditional too would have to be false.

But it is not only Molinists who should accept restricted centering. I think that everyone should accept it. To begin to see why I say this, let us consider why we might reject full-blown centering. So suppose, for example, that a particular bird *B* flew over London. And suppose that John freely accepted a bribe in New York. Full-blown centering implies that the following counterfactual is true: *that if bird B were to fly over London, then John would freely accept a bribe in New York*. We might deny this counterfactual—and so reject full-blown centering—on the grounds that bird *B*'s flying over London was irrelevant to John's accepting the bribe.

Those who reject full-blown centering for this reason might well accept restricted centering. For contrast bird *B*'s flying over London and John's accepting a bribe in New York with John's freely accepting the bribe in New York in the circumstances in which he was offered the bribe, circumstances which included John's needing the money. Supposing that John did accept the bribe in these circumstances, the conditional *that if John were offered a bribe in New York (and needed the money), he would freely accept the bribe* seems to me to be true. This seems true partly because the antecedent is relevant to the consequent.

And look at it this way. Suppose you are wondering what John would freely do, were he faced with the temptation of a bribe. And suppose I know that John was offered, and did accept, a bribe. And suppose I then say: "I know what would have happened, had he been offered a bribe (in New York, and had needed the money). He would have taken it. I know that is what he would have done, because it is what he actually did!" I think

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Some Molinists, such as Flint (1998), say that the only true counterfactuals of human freedom are counterfactuals that have fully specified antecedents. Such Molinists need to endorse only a version of centering that is restricted to claims about what an agent would do, were the agent to be in such-and-such fully specified circumstance. This too would be enough for Hasker's *reductio* to proceed.

this is the right thing to say here. More generally, I think everyone, Molinists and non-Molinists alike, should endorse restricted centering.

The most controversial implications of Molinism—such as the truth of counterfactuals of freedom involving what would happen in situations that never actually occur, or involving agents that never actually exist—play no role at all in Hasker’s argument against Molinism. In fact, free will and restricted centering are the only implications of Molinism that play a role. This is why Hasker’s argument refutes Molinism only if it refutes the possibility of free will plus restricted centering. And if restricted centering is true, as I have suggested, then Hasker’s argument refutes Molinism only if it refutes the possibility of free will.

### **III. *Bringing About versus Having a Choice***

Recall that in defending his argument against Molinism—specifically, in defending Steps One and Two of that argument—Hasker simply assumes that the only way an agent can bring about the truth of a counterfactual of freedom is by fulfilling the consequent when its antecedent is fulfilled.

Hasker is not alone in simply assuming that the only way an agent can bring about the truth of a counterfactual of freedom is by fulfilling its consequent in a situation specified by its antecedent. Here is David Lewis.

...when Judas betrayed Christ, he thereby rendered true the counterfactual of freedom [*that if Judas had the chance, he would betray Christ*].

Unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom are very different. They’re not rendered true by the free choice of the agent, since they concern choices that never actually take place. Some of them even concern agents who never actually exist....

What makes unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom true?

...there can be nothing that makes unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom true. They just *are* true, and that's that. (Lewis, 2000, 117-118)

I suppose that Lewis's "render true" and "make true" are equivalent to each other, and also to Hasker's "bring about the truth of." And so I conclude that Lewis joins Hasker in simply assuming, without argument, that the only way an agent could bring about the truth of a counterfactual of freedom is by fulfilling the consequent when its antecedent is fulfilled. All other true counterfactuals of freedom, Lewis adds, "just *are*" true.

Lewis's and Hasker's shared assumption is not obviously true.<sup>9</sup> And I shall offer a different account of when an agent brings about—or, better, *has a choice about*—the truth of a counterfactual of freedom. Consider:

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

My account says that *S has a choice* about the truth of (1) just in case, first, (1) is true and, second, *S* is in situation *C*.

My account differs from the shared assumption of Lewis and Hasker. For example, my account does not require restricted centering in order for *S* is to have a choice about (1)'s truth, but Lewis's and Hasker's assumption does require restricted centering. Of course my account is consistent with restricted centering, lest it fail to be consistent with Molinism. But my account's not requiring restricted centering illustrates that it differs from Lewis's and Hasker's shared assumption. Moreover, I shall not merely assume my account, but shall argue for it (§§IV-V).

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<sup>9</sup> Nor does it seem to be an implication of Molinism in particular.

I shall also part ways with Lewis, and perhaps Hasker, by denying that if there are true but unfulfilled counterfactuals of freedom, then these counterfactuals *just are* true. And, as we shall see, all of this will both provide the resources to block Hasker's argument against Molinism (§V) and also lead to a new way of looking at Molinism itself (§VI).

I have three reasons for shifting from *bringing about* to *having a choice about*. The first is that, in spite of Hasker's (1989, 96-115) elucidations, I do not fully understand what he means by 'bringing about the truth of a proposition'. On the other hand, I do understand, and shall make clear below (§§IV-V), what I mean by 'having a choice about the truth of a proposition'.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, making sense of Hasker's argument requires us to make sense of *having a choice about* the truth of a proposition. This is because *bringing about* the truth of a proposition does the work Hasker needs it to do only if being able to bring about the truth of a proposition is necessary for being able to *have a choice about* that proposition's being true. To begin to see why I say this, suppose that *S* cannot bring about the truth of this counterfactual:

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

Then, Hasker concludes, if *S* is in *C*, *S* cannot freely refrain from doing *A*. (Recall Step Three of Hasker's argument.)

Again, Hasker thinks that if *S* cannot *bring about* the truth of (1\*), then *S* cannot freely refrain from doing *A* in *C*. But Hasker's thought is correct only if *S*'s not being

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<sup>10</sup> Hasker's (1999, 291) definition of 'A brings it about that Y' makes use of the idea of what is necessitated by "the history of the world." As Hasker's (1999) discussion makes clear, we can understand what he means by 'the history of the world' only to the extent that we understand the idea of a "hard fact."

able to *bring about* the truth of (1\*) implies that (1\*)'s being true cannot be *up to S*. Again, it is correct only if (1\*)'s being true is not something with respect to which *S* can be *free*. Or, as I prefer to say, it is correct only if *S* cannot *have a choice* about (1\*)'s being true.

So the claim that *S* cannot *bring about* (1\*)'s truth does the work Hasker needs it to do only if that claim implies that *S* cannot have a choice about (1\*)'s being true. So, in order to keep our focus on what matters most to Hasker's argument, I shall not focus on whether *S* can bring about the truth of (1\*), or whether *S* brings about (1)'s truth. Instead, I shall focus on whether *S* can have a choice about the truth of (1\*) and whether *S* does have a choice about the truth of (1). This is my second reason for shifting from *bringing about* to *having a choice about*.

My final reason for this shift is that *having a choice about* has been put to work in the well-known consequence argument for incompatibilism about freedom (see, e.g., van Inwagen, 1983). And Ken Perszyk (2003) argues that a similar argument captures the essentials of Hasker's attack on Molinism. Perszyk focuses on examples in which the antecedent of a counterfactual of freedom is fulfilled, but not as a result of the relevant agent's own choices:

(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 situation *C*.

Therefore,

(Z) *S* has no choice about: *S* freely does *A*.

This argument purports to show that a true counterfactual of freedom (namely, (1)) leads to an absurd conclusion (namely, (Z)). And this argument, like Hasker's, purports to

target Molinism, but really threatens much more, such as, for example, the combination of free will and restricted centering. As we shall see, my claims about *having a choice about* a counterfactual of freedom will provide a ready rebuttal to Perszyk’s argument.<sup>11</sup>

#### IV. A Truism About Truth

Here is perhaps the least contentious thing one can say about truth: a claim or statement or belief or proposition is true *because* things are how that claim (etc.) represents things as being—and not the other way around. Again, what is true *depends on* what the world is like—but not vice versa.<sup>12</sup>

This point about truth’s depending 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.

*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*—

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<sup>11</sup> Compatibilists are likely to say that Perszyk’s argument is invalid. So probably Perszyk’s argument threatens free will plus restricted centering only given incompatibilism. Hasker’s argument, on the other hand, seems to threaten free will plus restricted centering whether or not incompatibilism is true.

One *caveat*: If the idea that counterfactuals of freedom are “considerably more fundamental” than counterfactuals grounded by laws of nature (see §§I and II) is essential to Hasker’s argument, then his argument probably threatens free will plus restricted centering only given incompatibilism. But that idea might not be essential to his argument, since he relies on that idea in only one of two arguments for the same conclusion; the other such argument does not rely on incompatibilism.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the idea that truth depends in this way on the world, see Merricks (2007) and Merricks (forthcoming).

to which that truth corresponds. Likewise, it is controversial whether that truth has a truthmaker.<sup>13</sup> 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. That is, it should not be at all controversial that that truth depends on the world, and in particular on there being no white ravens.

Despite the many controversies surrounding truth, it should be uncontroversial that a claim, if true, is true because the world is the way that claim represents the world as being, and not vice versa. Again, it should be uncontroversial that *that there are no white ravens* is true because there are no white ravens, *that dogs bark* is true because dogs bark, and so on.

Recall that Lewis says that true but “unfulfilled” counterfactuals of freedom “just *are*” true. But I disagree. For suppose that the following is true:

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

Suppose, further, that (1) is “unfulfilled”; that is, suppose that *S* is not in *C*. Even so, it is false 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 proposition depends on the world, including the truth of (1).

Robert Adams (1977) and others have raised the “grounding objection” to Molinism. This objection assumes that (1) is true only if there is some object or objects whose existence necessitates (1), or some property or properties whose exemplification

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<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere (Merricks, 2007), I argue against both the correspondence theory of truth and also the claim that every truth has a truthmaker.

necessitates (1). I want to make it clear that my disagreement with Lewis does not result from this assumption.<sup>14</sup>

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 just pointed out, this is not to claim 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*.

## V. Having a Choice About a Truth

Consider a truth about a present free action:

(2) *S*\* freely does *A*.

Now consider two claims. First, *S*\* has a choice about freely doing *A*. (After all, *S*\* freely does *A*.) Second, (2) is true *because S*\* freely does *A*. (Recall our truism about truth.) I think these two claims together imply that *S*\* has a choice about the truth of (2).

I think they imply this because I endorse this entirely general thesis about having a choice about a proposition’s truth: If an agent has a choice about that which a proposition’s truth depends on—in the sense of ‘depends on’ in which it is a truism that truth depends on the world (§IV)—then an agent has a choice about that proposition’s truth. Indeed, this is my account of *having a choice about a proposition’s truth*, an

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<sup>14</sup> I have argued elsewhere that this assumption is false (see Merricks, 2007, ch. 7).

account I promised to provide back in Section III. (This account is defended in Merricks (forthcoming).)

With this account in hand, I shall now argue for my account of *S*'s having a choice about the truth of the following true counterfactual:

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

If *S* were in *C*, *S* would *freely* do *A*. So if *S* were in *C*, *S* would have a choice about freely doing *A*. So if *S* were in *C*, *S* would have a choice about freely doing *A* in *C*. So if *S* were in *C*, *S* would have a choice about: if *S* were in *C*, *S* would freely do *A*. That is the first claim.

The second claim is that (1) is true because if *S* were in *C*, *S* would freely do *A*. (Recall our truism.) Together the first and second claims imply—given my general account of having a choice about the truth of a proposition—that if *S* were in *C*, *S* would have a choice about (1)'s truth. So I conclude that if both (1) is true and also *S* is in *C*, then *S* has a choice about the truth of (1).

If *S* is in situation *C*, then *S* has a choice about (1)'s truth. This blocks Hasker's argument against Molinism. The easiest way to see this is to reconsider the condensed-and-recast-into-the-language-of-having-a-choice version of Hasker's argument presented by Perszyk. Here it is again:

(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 situation *C*.

Therefore,

(Z) *S* has no choice about: *S* freely does *A*.

This argument purports to show that a true counterfactual of freedom (namely, (1)) leads to an absurd conclusion (namely, (Z)). We can now show that this argument fails. (Y) is the claim that *S* is in situation *C*, and has no choice about this. So if (Y) is true, then *S* is in situation *C*. And if *S* is in situation *C* and (1) is true, then—so I have just argued—*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).

Turn now to Hasker's own formulation of his argument. In his defense of Step One, Hasker claims that it follows from the fact—if it is a fact—that (1) would be true even if *S* were not in *C*, that *S* does not “bring about” the truth of (1) by doing *S* in *C*. This claim is essential to Hasker's defense of Step One, and so essential to his argument as a whole. But, given what I have said above, this claim is false.

More carefully, given what I have said above, the claim that (1) would be true even if *S* were not in *C* does not undermine the claim that *S* has a choice about (1)'s truth. After all, my argument above for the claim that if *S* is in *C*, *S* has a choice about (1)'s truth never turned on the claim that (1) would not have been true, had *S* not been in *C*. As far as my argument goes, (1)'s truth, had *S* not been in *C*, is neither here nor there.

So suppose that if *S* is in *C*, *S* has a choice about (1)'s truth. Then Hasker has no grounds to argue that *S* cannot have a choice about the truth of:

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

And so Hasker cannot conclude that *S* cannot refrain from doing *A* in *C*. So I conclude that Hasker's argument against Molinism fails.

We saw that Hasker's argument targets not just Molinists, but also targets all believers in free will who endorse restricted centering. Indeed, his arguments target every believer in free will who thinks that any subjunctive conditionals like (1) are true when both the antecedent and consequent are true. So the failure of Hasker's argument is good news not just for Molinists, but also for believers in free will. Believers in free will can now allow the possibility of at least one true subjunctive conditional—with a true antecedent and a true consequent—of the form *that if S were in C, S would freely do A*.

## VI. A New Look at Molinism

Molinism's distinctive thesis is that, for every possible agent *S* and every possible situation *C*, there are true propositions saying what (if anything) that agent would do in that situation. This thesis concerns certain *true propositions*. But I do not think this thesis is Molinism's most fundamental commitment. Rather, its most fundamental commitment is how the world is, propositions and their truth-values aside.

Recall that the Molinist should not say that counterfactuals of freedom *just are* true (§IV). Consider, for example:

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

The Molinist should say that this is true because if *S* were in *C*, *S* would freely do *A*. In this way, (1)'s truth, like the truth of every proposition, depends on the world, which world, given Molinism, includes ways that things would be. So Molinists might say that the world has “a rich subjunctive aspect.”

This “rich subjunctive aspect” need not be reduced to actual properties, or actual objects, that necessitate the truth of the various true counterfactuals of freedom. Nor need it include truthmakers for those counterfactuals. Indeed, I would deny that there are objects or properties that necessitate, or “make true,” counterfactuals of freedom. (See Merricks, 2007, Ch. 7.)

Perhaps a comparison will clarify my idea that the world has a rich subjunctive aspect, but need not include truthmakers for counterfactuals of freedom (or include objects or exemplified properties that necessitate counterfactuals of freedom). Consider, for example, *that there are no white ravens*. That is true because of how the world is. Specifically, it is true because there are no white ravens. But this does not mean that that negative existential has a truthmaker (or that there are actually exemplified properties that necessitate it, etc.).<sup>15</sup> This means only that there are no white ravens. Since many negative existentials are true, we might say that the world has a “rich negative existential aspect.”

The idea here is not, of course, that there are no white ravens *because* the world has a rich negative existential aspect. Rather, talk of the “rich negative existential aspect” of the world just is a way to say that there are no white ravens, and there are no hobbits, and there are no carnivorous cows, and so on. Nor does any of this imply that there are truthmakers of any sort for negative existential truths, much less a truthmaker referred to by the expression ‘the world’s rich negative existential aspect’.

We can make sense of *that there are no white ravens*’s being true because there are no white ravens, even if there are no truthmakers (etc.) for negative existential

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<sup>15</sup> I argue that it does not have a truthmaker. See Merricks, 2007, chs. 3 and 4.

propositions. This alone shows us that it also makes sense to say that the world has a rich subjunctive aspect even if there are no truthmakers (etc.) for counterfactuals of freedom and other subjunctive conditionals. It is just 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.

Some might worry that the world's rich subjunctive aspect somehow determines what an agent would do, and thus robs the agent of his or her freedom. This is a confusion, akin to the confusion that 'the world's rich subjunctive aspect' refers to a truthmaker for all subjunctive conditionals. Instead, the world's rich subjunctive aspect is *nothing other than* its being the case that if *S* were in *C*, *S* would do *A*, and so on. The world's rich subjunctive aspect could no more determine what *S* would do in *C* than could *S*'s freely doing *A* determine *S*'s freely doing *A*.

Nevertheless, one might object to the claim that the world has a rich subjunctive aspect. More to the point, one might object to the claim that the world has both a rich subjunctive aspect and also lacks truthmakers (etc.) for subjunctive conditionals. That is, one might object to the claim that the world has a "non-reified" rich subjunctive aspect. The objection here should not be that such a subjunctive aspect makes no sense. Nor should it be that such a subjunctive aspect would undermine freedom. For given the reasoning of the preceding two paragraphs, neither of these objections gets off the ground. But even so, one might still insist that it is false that the world has a non-reified subjunctive aspect. And, so one might add, if Molinism implies that the world has a non-reified subjunctive aspect, then Molinism is false.

I reply that if the world has a non-reified negative existential aspect—that is, if it has a negative existential aspect but lacks truthmakers (etc.) for negative existentials—

then it follows that the world has a non-reified subjunctive aspect. That is, this follows no matter what we say about Molinism. To begin to see why I say this, assume that glass *G* is fragile. And, let us also 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.

But now I am going to suppose, for the sake of argument, this story from David Lewis:

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. Lewis uses this example to oppose a certain theory of dispositions. But I think this example has a more interesting application.

Lewis's example shows that (3) is true only if there is no sorcerer disposed to keep *G* from shattering. (For if there were such a sorcerer, (3) would be false.) 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 (etc.).<sup>16</sup> 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.

It is true, of course, because if *G* were struck, then *G* would shatter. 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—is “non-reified.”

The Molinist says that the non-reified subjunctive aspect of the world is not limited to what would happen, were glasses struck. The Molinist adds that it includes what (if anything) each and every possible agent would do if he or she found himself or herself in each and every possible circumstance. That is the fundamental thesis of

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<sup>16</sup> 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.

Molinism. And if the world is the way the Molinist says it is, then a variety of counterfactuals of freedom are true—and true because that is the way the world is.

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