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A PROBLEM FOR HASKER: FREEDOM WITH RESPECT TO THE PRESENT, HARD FACTS, AND THEOLOGICAL INCOMPATIBILISM

Michael Rota

In *God, Time, and Knowledge*, William Hasker presents a powerful argument against “theological compatibilism,” which, in this context, refers to the view that divine foreknowledge is compatible with libertarian free will. In this paper I show that Hasker’s views on free will, as expressed in *God, Time, and Knowledge*, are inconsistent with his own account of hard facts. I then consider four ways to remove the inconsistency and argue that the first two are untenable for the libertarian, while the remaining two leave the theological compatibilist in a good position to respond to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge. Along the way, I attempt to defuse Hasker’s argument that Anselmian eternalism is “fatal to libertarian free will.”

I. Introduction

In several recent publications,¹ Katherin Rogers has argued that God’s timeless knowledge of actions that are future with respect to us is perfectly compatible with some of those actions being free, in the libertarian sense. Her strategy for making this argument involves asking whether the past or eternity is any more fixed than the present. In this paper I use a related strategy to reveal an inconsistency between William Hasker’s views on free will and his own account of hard facts. I then consider four ways to remove the inconsistency and argue that the first two are untenable for the libertarian, while the remaining two leave the theological compatibilist in a good position to respond to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge. Along the way, I attempt to defuse Hasker’s argument that Anselmian eternalism is “fatal to libertarian free will.”²

¹Katherin Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapter 9; K. Rogers, “Anselmian Eternalism: The Presence of a Timeless God,” *Faith and Philosophy* 24.1 (January 2007), pp. 3–27; and K. Rogers, “The Necessity of the Present and Anselm’s Eternalist Response to the Problem of Theological Fatalism,” *Religious Studies* 43.1 (March 2007), pp. 25–47.

²William Hasker, “The Absence of a Timeless God,” in *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 197.



II. The Problem

In *God, Time, and Knowledge*, Hasker employs a robust libertarian notion of free will, providing the following as a “formal definition of this notion”:

- (FW) N is free at T with respect to performing A =_{df} It is in N’s power at T to perform A, and it is in N’s power at T to refrain from performing A.³

In the course of clarifying this definition, Hasker notes that

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. (The tied hands *prevent* Thomas from performing on the parallel bars; he is *precluded* from marrying Edwina at T by the fact that at that time she is already married to someone else.)

In a footnote, Hasker raises the question of what counts as a circumstance. His answer: “the circumstances that obtain at T include all and only the *hard facts* with respect to T.”⁴

The third sentence in the block quotation above implies that

- (1) If it is in N’s power at T to perform A, then there is nothing in the circumstances that obtain at T which precludes N’s performing A at T.

So Hasker is committed to (1). But anyone committed to (1) is surely also committed to:

- (2) If it is in N’s power at T to refrain from performing A, then there is nothing in the circumstances that obtain at T which precludes N’s refraining from performing A at T.

Now, suppose that at a time T an agent N freely performs the act of choosing to get out of bed. (That’s not to say that N gets out of bed at T—that takes some time. Rather, it’s N’s choice that occurs at T.) Since Hasker himself thinks that humans do have libertarian free will, he should grant that this is a possible situation.

Letting A refer to the act of choosing to get out of bed, then, we are supposing that at T, N freely performs A. In Hasker’s turn of phrase, N is free at T with respect to performing A. By his definition of free will, (FW), it follows that

³William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 66.

⁴Hasker, *GTK*, p. 67, n. 4, italics in original.

(3) It is in N's power at T to refrain from choosing to get out of bed and

(4) It is in N's power at T to choose to get out of bed.

Next, let P be the proposition that N chooses at T to get out of bed. On the account of hard facts that Hasker gives in *God, Time, and Knowledge*, P counts as a hard fact with respect to T. That is, it is a hard fact with respect to T that N chooses at T to get out of bed. Proof: What Hasker calls "elementary propositions" include those "propositions that say of some individual that it has a certain property. . . . These propositions may be tensed, or they may be tenseless propositions indexed to a time."⁵ So "N chooses at T to get out of bed," i.e., "at T, N chooses to get out of bed" is an elementary proposition; it is a tenseless proposition indexed to a time that says of N that N has the property of choosing-to-get-out-of-bed at that time.

Next, Hasker asserts that

(H1) An elementary proposition is future-indifferent IFF it is conceptually consistent with there being no times after the present, and also with there being times after the present.⁶

"N chooses at T to get out of bed" is therefore a future-indifferent proposition. And, by our supposition, it is true. But according to Hasker, "(H5) Any future-indifferent proposition that is true is a hard fact,"⁷ so "N chooses at T to get out of bed" is a hard fact, according to Hasker's account.⁸

Note further that, *at T*, it can be truly asserted that P is a future-indifferent proposition that is true. That is: at T, P is a true future-indifferent proposition. It follows that at T, P is a hard fact. So P is a hard fact *with respect to T*.

Since the circumstances that obtain at T include all and only the hard facts with respect to T, it follows that the circumstances that obtain at T include P.

And now for the problem: P, the proposition that N chooses at T to get out of bed, logically precludes N's refraining from choosing at T to get out of bed. (It is logically impossible that both P and the proposition "N

⁵Hasker, *GTK*, p. 84.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁷Hasker, *GTK*, p. 89. In the 1998 paperback edition of *God, Time, and Knowledge*, Hasker makes one correction to his account of hard facts (note 15 on p. 88), but that correction (which has to do with the classification of truth-functional propositions as future-indifferent) does not affect any of his claims which I've reproduced here. And, indeed, all the quotations from *GTK* which I include in this paper are present in the 1998 edition as well as the 1989 edition.

⁸It may be worth noting that when Hasker first mentions the category of future-indifferent propositions, he describes them as "propositions that are wholly about the past and the present [perhaps he means the past *and/or* the present—MR], and that are such that their truth or falsity cannot be affected by anything that happens in the future" (p. 83). On this description we also get the result that "N chooses at T to get out of bed" is at T a future-indifferent proposition, and thus a hard fact.

refrains from choosing at T to get out of bed" are true.) So there is something in the circumstances that obtain at T (namely, P) which precludes N's refraining from choosing at T to get out of bed. With (2), this implies that

- (5) It is not in N's power at T to refrain from choosing to get out of bed.

But (5) contradicts (3). So Hasker's own views, together with plausible assumptions, entail a contradiction.

Let me put things in another way: I contend that Hasker's views as expressed in *God, Time, and Knowledge* are inconsistent. Why so? Because Hasker's statements in *God, Time, and Knowledge* commit him to the following four propositions:

- (FW) N is free at T with respect to performing A =_{df} It is in N's power at T to perform A, and it is in N's power at T to refrain from performing A
- (2) If it is in N's power at T to refrain from performing A, then there is nothing in the circumstances that obtain at T which precludes N's refraining from performing A at T
- (6) If an agent N performs A at T, then "N performs A at T" is included in the circumstances that obtain at T

and,

- (7) For some human agent N, some act A, and some time T, N performs A at T, and N is free at T with respect to performing A.

But these four propositions jointly entail a contradiction. For FW and (7) imply that

- (8) It is in N's power at T to refrain from performing A.

And since (7) implies that "N performs A at T," (7), (6) and (2) jointly imply that

- (9) It is not in N's power at T to refrain from performing A.

I said above that Hasker's statements commit him to (FW), (2), (6), and (7), but I've not yet provided support for my claim that Hasker is committed to (7). Let me do so now. Being a libertarian of the most robust sort, Hasker is of course committed to the view that,

- (10) For some human agent N, some act A, and some time T, N is free at T with respect to performing A.

Surprisingly, though, (10) by itself is not enough to entail (7). For (7) requires that N is free at T with respect to an action done *at T*, whereas (10)'s claim that "N is free at T with respect to performing A" *could* be satisfied, one might think, merely by its being the case that "N is free at T with respect to an action A performed at a later time T2." Suppose, for example, that it is in N's power at T to perform A at T2 (for example, it is in my

power now to raise my hand in a moment), and it is within N's power at T to refrain from performing A at T2. Then, (FW) could be read as implying that N is free at T with respect to performing A at T2. (FW, as formulated, does not require that T be the time at which A is performed.)

So, for all I've shown so far, Hasker's view of freedom could be this: (7) is false, but

- (7)* For some human agent N, some act A, and times $T_1 < T_2$, N performs A at T2, and N is free at T1 with respect to performing A at T2

is true; and it's merely in virtue of (7)* that (10) is true.

On this view of libertarian freedom, we can be free before we do an act, but not while we are doing that act.

In fact, however, some of Hasker's clarificatory statements show that this isn't his view, and that he does accept (7). For example, after introducing (FW) he writes, "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."⁹ Here we are asked to conceive of a situation in which N has a power at T to perform A, and we are told that in such a situation nothing prevents N from performing A at T, that very same time at which N is said to have the power. So Hasker is using the phrase "it is in N's power at T to perform A" in a context where T is also the time at which A is to occur. Given this, it's fair to assume that when Hasker uses the same phrase "It is in N's power at T to perform A" in (FW), just one page earlier, he is thinking of a case (or at least will allow a case) in which the act A is performed at that very time, T, and not some later time. So Hasker's statements in *God, Time, and Knowledge* do seem to imply (7).

III. Ways of Removing the Inconsistency by Adjusting the Account of Freedom

Hasker could remove the inconsistency in his views by adjusting his account of freedom in such a way as to deny either (7) or (FW). To consider the plausibility of these approaches, I'll begin by considering some questions about the precise time at which one has a power to do or not do some action. Suppose an agent N does A at T, and consider the following line of thought:

While doing A at T, N doesn't have the power (at T) to refrain from doing A at T. For by the time T is present, N is doing A. But given this, N cannot at T exercise a power to refrain from doing A—it's just too late for that. And if N cannot exercise at T a power to refrain from doing A at T, then (given what is meant by 'power' in this discussion)¹⁰ N does not have at T a power to refrain from doing A at T.

⁹Hasker, *GTK*, p. 67, italics mine.

¹⁰Ibid. Nothing of consequence hangs on this choice of what is meant by 'power.' If a different definition of power were used (one on which a person can be said to have at a given

Suppose one accepted the conclusion of this argument: for any human agent *N* doing any act *A* at a time *T*, *N* does not have *at T* the power to refrain from doing *A* at *T*. Then one might go either of two ways with respect to the question, "Is *N* free at *T* with respect to doing *A* at *T*?" One might take the view that, since freedom is present only when the power to do otherwise is present, *N* is not free at *T* with respect to doing *A* at *T*. This would be to deny (7), and on this view freedom would extend only to the future, and not to the present. Or, one might take the view that even though *N* does not have at *T* the power to refrain from doing *A* at *T*, *N* could still be free at *T* with respect to doing *A* at *T*, so long as some appropriate condition obtained, e.g., so long as just prior to *T*, it was in *N*'s power to not do *A* at *T*, and the fact that *N* did do *A* at *T* rather than not was due to *N* (i.e., up to *N*, in *N*'s control). This would involve accepting (7), but would require an adjustment to (FW). I'll now explore both of these options as ways one might approach the inconsistency between (FW), (2), (6), and (7).

III.A. Denying (7)

Take first the view that no human agent *N* is free at *T* with respect to an act *A* performed at *T*, that is, $\sim(7)$. To my mind, the strategy of removing the inconsistency in Hasker's views by denying (7) is intuitively implausible. For to deny (7) is to assert that no human being has ever done anything at any time, such that he or she was free with respect to it (the something done) *when* he or she was doing it. If (7) is false, then for every act *I* have ever performed, it is false that *I* was free with respect to that act *while* *I* was performing it.

Still, this way of understanding libertarian freedom is not without precedent in the history of thought. Suarez considers the question, "Does a free cause have actual freedom *while* it is operating or *before* it operates?" and reports that

Ockham, Gabriel, and other nominalists teach that with respect to an act that it is already exercising, the will is not free at the very instant at which it exercises that act, except either in the sense that (i) the act proceeds from the freedom and indifference that the will had immediately before that instant or in the sense that (ii) at the instant in question the will has the power to desist from the act in the time immediately following that instant, even if all the other conditions or causes that concur for the act persist. . . . The Master [Peter Lombard] seems to embrace this position in *Sentences* 2, dist. 25, chap. 2, where he says that free choice has to do not with the present or the past but with the future.¹¹

time a power which he or she can't exercise at that time), then the focus of the larger discussion would simply shift *from* the question of whether God's knowledge of the future rules out our ability to do otherwise, *to* the question of whether God's knowledge of the future rules out our ability to exercise a power to do otherwise.

¹¹Francisco Suarez, *On Efficient Causality: Metaphysical Disputations* 17, 18, and 19 (hereafter *DM*), trans. A. J. Freddoso (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), disputation 19.9.1. Suarez cites Ockham's *Sentences* commentary, book one, distinction 38.

For those who don't agree that denying (7) is intuitively implausible, I'll now give an argument in support of (7), inspired by Suarez.¹² The argument is an argument by cases, and I should like to begin with the disjunction: either presentism is true or presentism is false. But to avoid issues concerning the question of whether divine eternity is compatible with presentism, I'll instead start with this: either (a) nothing created exists except what is temporally present, or not (a). Now, assume for *reductio* that $\sim(7)$, i.e., that

- (11) For any human agent N who performs an act A at some time T, N is not free at T with respect to doing A at T.

Next, if N is not free at T with respect to doing A at T, then it seems that we should say that A is not a free act *at T*. (If A were a free act at T, then N would be performing a free act at T, and it would make little sense to say that N was not free at T with respect to the free act he or she was performing at T.) So we have

- (12) For any act A which N performs at T, A is not a free act at T.

Suppose now that (a) is true. Since no non-existent act has any properties, no non-existent act has the property of being a free act. So if there is a free human act, it must be an act that exists. But, since—given (a)—the only existing human acts are acts occurring at the present, a free human act will exist only if there is a presently occurring human act that is free. But from (12) we have it that no human act occurring at T can be a free act at T. So no presently occurring human act is a free act at the present. And no presently occurring human act can be free at some other time, for that other time exists only when it is the present time, and when it is the present time, the act will not be free (on the view under consideration).¹³ Thus, given (a), (11) appears to imply that there are no free human acts.

Second, suppose (a) is false. Then, for some human act A that occurs at T₂, there is no reason not to say that at T₁ (a time before A is occurring), A exists. This is not to say that A exists-at-T₁, it's just to say that at T₁ it can be truly asserted that A exists *simpliciter*. (Compare: In Minnesota, "California exists" is true, but that's not to say that "California exists-in-Minnesota.") So we are supposing that human acts occurring at many times all exist *simpliciter*, though they don't all exist *now*.

From (12), it follows that A is not free at T₂. Might it be free at some other time? Anyone who denies that an act can be free *while* it is occurring will also deny that an act is free *after* it has occurred. So the question to consider is whether A might be free at a time before it is occurring, T₁. Towards answering this question, consider that A doesn't exist-at-T₁. It seems to me that this implies that A doesn't have properties-at-T₁, even

¹²DM 19.9.1 and 19.9.3.

¹³This line in the argument is included to close off the possibility that while no act A occurring at T is a free act at T, it might be (at T) a free act-at-T₂.

if, as on $\sim(a)$, it can be truly said at T1 that A has properties *simpliciter*. My funeral exists, on $\sim(a)$, but it doesn't exist *now*, and, I would think, it doesn't have properties now, even if it does have properties *simpliciter*. My funeral, for example, is not sad now, even if it is sad, period. But if that's right, then neither would A have the property of being free at T1. So it appears that there is no time T such that A is free-at-T.

Could it be that A is nonetheless free *simpliciter*? That would be strange, given that there is no time at which A is free at that time. Relying on the assumption that a temporal event cannot have a property *simpliciter* unless it has that property at some time, I conclude that A could not be free in any sense. So, given $\sim(a)$, (11) seems to imply that there are no free human acts.

Thus, either way, (11) seems to imply that there are no free human acts, period. And that, on the face of it, is something a libertarian cannot accept. This is a reason for libertarians to reject this view, and to accept (7).¹⁴

I'll now argue that those who believe that God is timelessly eternal have a second reason to be dubious about (11).¹⁵ Suppose, as do many traditional Christian theists, that God is timelessly eternal and that God is free with respect to the act of willing creatures to exist. (God might not have created the world.) But if God can be free with respect to His act of willing creatures to exist, then the nature of freedom as such does not prohibit that an agent be free with respect to an act *while* doing that act. For God is free with respect to willing creatures to exist while (in the eternal present) He is willing creatures to exist. And if the nature of freedom does not prohibit that an agent be free with respect to an act while performing that act, then the person who asserts (11) will be left with the question of why this is prohibited in the human case. In the absence of a satisfying answer to this question or a good argument for (11), the proponent of divine eternity should, it seems to me, affirm (7), because of the analogy with the divine case, and should be unimpressed by any arguments against theological compatibilism that rely on a denial of (7).

As for the argument offered in support of (11), the proponent of divine eternity will find at least one of its inferences dubious. That argument had the following structure (where N does A at T):

(13) At T, N is already doing A.

Thus (14) At T, N cannot go back and undo the fact that she or he is doing A at T.

¹⁴There are replies that a libertarian of Ockham's sort could give here. Perhaps framing the issue in terms of whether or not there are free acts is misguided—perhaps the right way to think about libertarian freedom is not in terms of whether or not a given actual act has the property of being free, but in terms of whether or not an agent has the power to do some act at the next instant and the power to refrain from doing it at the next instant. On this way of framing things, one might say that while there are no free human acts (if one insists on speaking in that way), this is not a problem for the libertarian. For it could still be the case that, for example, N was, at a time before T, free to do A at T. I'll leave it to others to work out how this view might go.

¹⁵My argument here is also modeled on an argument of Suarez's, at DM 19.9.5.

Thus (15) For any human agent N who performs an act A at some time T, N does not have at T the power to refrain from doing A at T.

Thus (11) For any human agent N who performs an act A at some time T, N is not free at T with respect to doing A at T.

The divine eternalist will reject the inference from (14) to (11), because he will reject this parallel reasoning:

(14)* In the eternal present, God cannot go back and undo the fact that He is willing creatures to exist.

Thus (15)* God does not have in the eternal present the power to refrain from willing creatures to exist.

Thus (11)* God is not free in the eternal present with respect to willing creatures to exist.

To sum up this sub-section: (i) denying (7) will require the libertarian to deny that there are any free human acts, and (ii) the denial of (7) is unmotivated for the divine eternalist.

III.B. *Modifying (FW)*

A second option is to take the view that, where N does A at T, even though N does not have at T the power to refrain from doing A at T, N could still be free at T with respect to doing A at T. This would be to retain (7), but deny that

(16) For some human agent N, act A, and time T, N performs A at T, and N has the power *at T* to refrain from performing A at T.

This will require a modification of

(FW) N is free at T with respect to performing A =_{df} It is in N's power at T to perform A, and it is in N's power at T to refrain from performing A.

For, by retaining (7), we are accepting that there is an N who performs A at T and is free at T with respect to performing A. But if N is free at T with respect to performing A then, if (FW) is true, it is in N's power at T to refrain from performing A (which, recall, was done at T). And to deny (16) is precisely to deny that such a situation ever occurs. So if we accept (7) and deny (16), we need a definition of free will other than (FW).

If we can find a suitable replacement for (FW), it is possible that the inconsistency in Hasker's views could be removed. But what exactly should (FW) be replaced with? Given that free will plays such a crucial role in the arguments over theological compatibilism, Hasker will need *some* account of free will to work with. In the course of his arguments against theological

compatibilism, Hasker relies on claims like this one: Clarence is free with respect to his act of eating an omelet only if Clarence has a power to refrain from eating that omelet.¹⁶ In *God, Time, and Knowledge*, it is (FW) that supplies such claims. So to make his arguments work in the absence of (FW), Hasker will need some other general claim of the form "If an agent is free with respect to A, then _____," where the _____ makes some reference to powers.

An initial suggestion might be this:

(FW.a) If N is free at T with respect to performing A at T, then there is some continuous time interval from T_0 up to but not including T such that (a) It was in N's power at all those times (in the interval) to perform A, and (b) It was in N's power at all those times (in the interval) to refrain from performing A.

This is inadequate, however, because the clauses (a) and (b) do not specify the time of the performance of A. Our replacement of (FW) needs to accommodate $\sim(16)$, the claim that no one who does A at T can have a power at T to refrain from doing A at T. But anyone who denies that it is possible for someone who does A at T to have a power at T to refrain from doing A at T would also have to deny that it is possible for someone who refrains from doing A at T^* to have a power at T^* to do A at T^* . Let T^* be in the interval from T_0 up to but not including T. Then, given that during the interval in question N is not yet doing A, the person who denies (16) will have to hold that N does not have the power at any given time in the interval to do A at that time. So the person who denies (16) cannot interpret clause (a) to mean "It was in N's power at each time T^* in the interval to perform A at T^* ." Thus, the person who denies (16) will have to interpret clause (a) to mean "It was in N's power at each time T^* in the interval to perform A at T." We might therefore replace (FW.a) with:

(FW.b) If N is free at T with respect to performing A at T, then there is some continuous time interval from T_0 up to but not including T such that (a) It was in N's power at all those times (in the interval) to perform A at T, and (b) It was in N's power at all those times (in the interval) to refrain from performing A at T.

On this account, the following can all be true: N performs A at T, N is free at T with respect to performing A at T, and it is not the case that N has the power at T to refrain from performing A at T. Hasker could thus retain (7), deny (16), and adopt (FW.b). And if he did so, he would avoid the inconsistency outlined in section II. This is so because, while (FW) and (7) imply that (8), (FW.b) and (7) do not. On this view, we accept (9), but are under no compulsion to accept the contradictory proposition (8).

¹⁶As in the final inference of Hasker's main argument for incompatibilism: "(B7) Therefore, it is not in Clarence's power to refrain from having a cheese omelet for breakfast tomorrow. (From 5,6) So Clarence's eating the omelet tomorrow is not an act of free choice" (GTK, p. 69).

But let's take a close look at (FW.b). According to (FW.b), one can be said to have a power now to do something in the future—one can have forward-looking powers, so to speak. What are the conditions necessary for having such a forward-looking power? Suppose at $T^* < T$, some antecedent condition necessary for N 's doing A is absent, e.g., suppose N is unconscious at T^* . But suppose also that N will in fact be conscious by T (or, more generally, that the missing condition will be present at T). Does N have at T^* the power to do A at T ? It seems to me that the answer should be yes. What's more, the defender of (FW.b) *needs* to say that the answer is yes, since otherwise we can construct a counterexample to (FW.b): Suppose we answer no, and say that if at T^* an antecedent condition necessary for N 's doing A is absent, then N lacks at T^* the power to do A at T (even if the condition will be present at T). Now suppose¹⁷ I'm deliberating about a choice from 10 minutes before T until 1 millisecond before T . God then freezes my intellect, from 1 millisecond before T up until (but not including) T , so that in the interval from 1 millisecond before T up until (but not including) T , an antecedent condition necessary for my doing A is absent. Then we will have to say that I do not have at T^* the power to do A at T . But suppose God unfreezes me at T (so that T is the first moment of my being unfrozen), and I freely engage in an act of choice at T . This seems possible, but it is a counterexample to (FW.b), because it is a situation in which I am free at T with respect to performing A at T , without there being a continuous time interval preceding T of the sort required by (FW.b).

So it appears that when it comes to the question of whether or not a person N has at $T^* < T$ a power to do A at T , what matters is (at least mainly) how things are at T .¹⁸ Let's now consider another case. Suppose that at T^* all is well with N 's faculties, but that God wills that N lose consciousness at T , so that at T God causes it to be the case that N cannot do A at T (by causing it to be the case at T that N lacks an antecedent condition necessary for N 's doing A at T). Shall we say that N has at T^* a power to do A at T ? No, for N will not in fact be able to do A at T , so we should not say that N has a power to do A at T . If what matters when it comes to the question of whether or not N has at T^* a power to do A at T is how things are at T , and things at T are such that N is unable to do A at T , then we should say that N does not have at T^* a power to do A at T . More generally, if an antecedent condition necessary for N 's doing A at T will in fact be absent at T , then we should say that N does not have at T^* a power to do A at T .

And now we reach a problem for (FW.b). The absence at T of an antecedent condition necessary for N 's doing A at T implies that N doesn't have the power at $T^* < T$ to do A at T . By parity of reasoning, the absence at T of an antecedent condition necessary for N 's refraining from doing A at T should imply that N doesn't have the power at T^* to refrain from doing

¹⁷I thank Tom Sullivan for pointing me in this direction.

¹⁸I insert "at least mainly" because N would at least have to exist at T^* in order to have at T^* a power to do A at T . So something about how things are at T^* will matter for the question of whether or not N has at T^* a power to do A at T .

A at T. But surely N's having at T the power to refrain from doing A at T is an antecedent condition necessary for N's refraining from doing A at T. And the denier of (16) holds that N does not have at T the power to refrain from doing A at T. So the denier of (16) must hold that a certain antecedent condition necessary for N's refraining from doing A at T is absent at T. Thus, accepting (FW.b) has left the denier of (16) with the conclusion that N doesn't have the power at T* to refrain from doing A at T. But since T* was a time in the interval from T₀ to T, this conclusion implies that no agent N who does A at T can satisfy clause (b) of (FW.b). So, (16) together with (FW.b) imply that no one is ever free.

In the absence, then, of a plausible alternative to (FW) which (i) is compatible with a denial of (16), and (ii) still allows Hasker's arguments against theological compatibilism to go through, this second way of removing the inconsistency will not work.¹⁹

IV. An Implication for Hasker's Argument against Anselmian Eternalism

Given the difficulties involved in denying either (7) or (FW), I think a libertarian should retain both of these propositions. I'll now argue that doing so gives us a reason to reject Hasker's argument that Anselmian eternalism is "fatal to libertarian free will."²⁰ In the next section, I'll return to the inconsistency between (FW), (2), (6), and (7).

Let "Anselmian eternalism" refer to a theory of divine timelessness according to which all times (and their contents) are equally real, and are all equally present to God.²¹ On this view, no one time is ontologically privileged (as presentists think that the present time is ontologically privileged).

In "The Absence of a Timeless God," Hasker asserts that Anselmian eternalism

destroys libertarian freedom by negating the existence of 'alternative possibilities' to the actions that are taken. Remember that [on Anselmian eternalism] the future events of the world, including your and my future actions, *always exist* in the timeless eternity of God.²²

¹⁹An anonymous referee for *Faith and Philosophy* has suggested that an alternative account of free will might help Hasker's case, namely the account that x is free to do A at t only if (i) there is an interval T ending at t during which x has the power to do A, and (ii) there is an interval T' ending at t during which x has the power to refrain from doing A, and (iii) for every obstacle or impediment O to doing A, if x has O during some interval T'' containing t, then T'' ends at t. This suggestion was included along with an account of time according to which (a) every action takes place over an interval of time, (b) intervals of time are ontologically prior to moments, and (c) it is indeterminate whether an action is occurring at the first moment of the time interval over which that action takes place.

I think this suggestion is worth careful consideration, but I also think that one can show that it will not help Hasker's case. Unfortunately, length constraints prohibit me from presenting my argument for this conclusion here.

²⁰Hasker, "The Absence of a Timeless God," p. 197.

²¹The name "Anselmian eternalism" is due to Katherin Rogers. See her piece by that title, cited in note 1.

²²Hasker, "The Absence of a Timeless God," p. 197. Italics in original.

After asserting that the existence of one's future actions is incompatible with there being a possibility that one will not engage in those very actions, Hasker continues:

Why, it will be asked, does the fact that my actions are already present in the divine eternity entail that those acts are causally determined? The answer is that it does not. But causal determination is not the issue. Causal determinism is inimical to freedom because it eliminates alternative possibilities for the action that is taken. But alternative possibilities can be eliminated in other ways as well, not least by the fact that the act to be done already exists—and exists, let us recall, in its full concrete particularity—in eternity.²³

Up to the point in his argument which I have just quoted, Hasker's key contention is that

- (17) If a human agent *N*'s future action exists (in its full concrete particularity) in the divine eternity, then alternative possibilities for *N*'s action at that future time have been eliminated.

Hasker attempts to strengthen his argument with the following observation:

Previously I pointed out that divine timelessness can be reconciled with libertarian freedom only if the following proposition is true: *there are things that God timelessly believes which are such that it is in my power, now, to bring it about that God does not timelessly believe those things*. Given Anselm's Solution, we may add another necessary condition: *there are future actions of my own which timelessly exist in the divine eternity which are such that it is in my power, now, to bring about that those actions do not exist in eternity*. Does anyone seriously believe that these requirements are satisfied?²⁴

Given the context, the point of the rhetorical question at the end of this paragraph is to suggest that these requirements are *not* satisfied. Hasker's argument that Anselmian eternalism destroys libertarian free will depends, then, on three things: the claim I have labeled (17), and the denial of the following two propositions:

- (18) There are things that God timelessly believes which are such that it is in my power, now, to bring it about that God does not timelessly believe those things.
- (19) There are future actions of my own which timelessly exist in the divine eternity which are such that it is in my power, now, to bring it about that those actions do not exist in eternity.

²³Ibid. pp. 197–198. In his earlier *GTK*, Hasker had come to the quite different conclusion that “divine timelessness does enable us to explain how it is possible that God has comprehensive knowledge of our future and yet we ourselves freely determine what, in certain respects, that future shall be” (p. 177). By the time of his writing “The Absence of a Timeless God,” however, he seems to have changed his view. The difference is probably due to the distinctive elements of Anselmian eternalism, which Hasker addresses explicitly only in “The Absence of a Timeless God.”

²⁴Hasker, “The Absence of a Timeless God,” p. 198.

However—and now for the main argument of this section—if one accepts (7) and (FW), one should not accept (17) or deny (18) or (19). Argument: (7) asserts that there is some human agent *N*, some act *A*, and some time *T*, such that *N* performs *A* at *T*, and *N* is free at *T* with respect to performing *A*. From (FW) it follows that it is in *N*'s power at *T* to refrain from performing *A* (which was done at *T*). So (7) and (FW) imply that

- (16) For some human agent *N*, act *A*, and time *T*, *N* performs *A* at *T*, and *N* has the power *at T* to refrain from performing *A* at *T*.

Notice that (16) implies that it is in *N*'s power at *T* to do something (*viz.*, refrain) such that, if *N* were to do it, the proposition “*N* performs *A* at *T*” would be false. And note further that, if *N* were to refrain, the proposition “*N* performs *A* at *T*” would be false *because* *N* refrained. So (16) implies that

- (20) For some agent *N* who performs *A* at *T*, it is in *N*'s power at *T* to do something (*viz.*, refrain) such that, if *N* were to do it, then, *as a consequence*, the proposition “*N* performs *A* at *T*” would be false.

Why all this fuss about “because” and “as a consequence”? Because these are Hasker's own ways to describe what he means by the locution “*N* brings it about that ____.”²⁵ In the sense in which Hasker uses ‘brings about,’ (20) implies that

- (21) *N* performs *A* at *T*, and yet it is in *N*'s power at *T* to bring it about that “*N* performs *A* at *T*” is false.

I will now argue that Hasker cannot coherently accept (21) but deny (18) and (19). Consider the proposition that “*N* performs *A* at *T*.” On Hasker's own assumption that God is in time, when would God know this? Presumably, “*N* performs *A* at *T*” is something that an omniscient temporal God would know *at T*. Making the plausible assumption that a temporal God would know at *T* everything that is occurring at *T*, it follows that the proposition “*N* performs *A* at *T*” is something God believes at *T*. But by (21), *N* has the power at *T* to bring it about that that proposition is false. Of course, if “*N* performs *A* at *T*” is false in some possible world, then God never believes “*N* performs *A* at *T*” in that possible world. So (21) implies that *N* has the power at *T* to bring it about that God does not at *T* believe “*N* performs *A* at *T*.” But then, when *T* is the present moment, it is true that:

- (22) Something which God believes in the present (*viz.*, “*N* performs *A* at *T*”) is such that it is in *N*'s power, at the present moment, to bring it about that God does not believe that thing at the present moment.

²⁵Hasker, *GTK*, p. 101: “The core idea in the notion of ‘bringing about’ is the notion of something's being the case *in consequence* of what an agent does. . . .” See also pp. 107–108, where Hasker focuses on the fact that a certain proposition “was true *because of* what” an agent did. (Italics in original.)

But if Hasker accepts (22), then he must also accept that there are times at which the following proposition is true:

- (18)* There are things that God believes in the temporal present which are such that it is in my power, now, to bring it about that God does not now believe those things.²⁶

And he must also accept that there are times at which

- (19)* There is a present act of my own which exists in the present which is such that it is in my power, now, to bring it about that that act does not exist in the present.

Now, on what grounds could someone who accepts (18)* and (19)* plausibly deny (18) and (19)? To accept (18)* is to accept that I now have a certain sort of power over what God actually and in fact now believes. If I can have that power but could not have an analogous power over what God actually and in fact timelessly believes, then it must be that what an eternal God timelessly believes about what I'm now doing would be less up to me (less in my control) than what a temporal God now actually believes about what I'm doing now. But I see no reason to think this is so. Until such a reason is provided, it seems to me that one who accepts (7) and (FW) cannot plausibly deny (18) and (19).

What of (17)? I'll now argue that Hasker cannot plausibly accept (17), if he accepts (7) and (FW). We saw earlier that (16) follows from (7) and (FW). It also follows from (7) and (FW) that it is in N's power at T to perform A at T. Thus, anyone accepting (7) and (FW) accepts that the following propositions are all true: N performs A at T; it is in N's power at T to perform A at T; it is in N's power at T to refrain from performing A at T. Now, the truth of "it is in N's power at T to perform A at T and it is in N's power at T to refrain from performing A at T" is sufficient for there being alternative possibilities for N's action at T. So anyone accepting both (7) and (FW) should accept that

- (23) There are alternative possibilities for N's action at T.

When is (23) true? At the least, Hasker should admit that it is true at some time before T. And perhaps Hasker will allow that (23) is true at T. Let's take each case in turn.

If one admits that (23) is true *at T*, then one should admit that even when N's action A presently exists (when T is the present moment), alternative possibilities for N's action at T have not been eliminated. But then one is accepting that

- (24) A human agent N's present action can exist (in its full concrete particularity) in the temporal present without its being the case that alternative possibilities for N's action at that present moment have been eliminated.

²⁶This point is due to Katherin Rogers; see her "Anselmian Eternalism," p. 18.

And if one accepts this, it's hard to see how one could plausibly insist that

- (17) If a human agent *N*'s future action exists (in its full concrete particularity) in the divine eternity, then alternative possibilities for *N*'s action at that future time have been eliminated.

For, presumably, the main reason to accept (17) is the intuitive appeal of the thought that if some act *A* already exists, then it is fixed in a way that rules out the real possibility of its non-occurrence. But someone who accepts (24) should reject this thought. For to accept (24) is to accept that it is possible for some act *A* to already exist (what is present already exists at the present), even though it is not fixed in such a way that the alternative possibility of its not occurring has been ruled out.

So, on this first case, Hasker can no longer appeal to (17), and his argument fails.

On the second case, we suppose that Hasker admits only that (23) is true at some time before *T*, and allows that, when *T* is the present moment, alternative possibilities for *N*'s action at *T* *have* been eliminated. But recall that, by (7), *N* is free at *T* with respect to performing *A*. (*N* is just a name we picked for an agent who is free at *T* with respect to some action *A*.) So if Hasker is to deny that there are alternative possibilities for *N*'s action at *T*, he has to hold that it is possible for *N* to be free at *T* with respect to performing *A*, despite the fact that, at *T*, there are no alternative possibilities for *N*'s action at *T*. And if Hasker accepts that, then he is accepting that the elimination of alternative possibilities need not take away freedom. But then he can no longer use the proposition

- (17) If a human agent *N*'s future action exists (in its full concrete particularity) in the divine eternity, then alternative possibilities for *N*'s action at that future time have been eliminated

to reach the conclusion that if a human agent *N*'s future action exists in eternity, then that action must not be free. So, on this second case, too, Hasker's argument will fail.

It appears, then, that Hasker's argument against Anselmian eternalism does not establish its conclusion.

V. Ways of Removing the Inconsistency by Focusing on Hard Facts or Logical Preclusion

I return now to the inconsistency between (FW), (2), (6), and (7). I'll now examine the prospects for a theological incompatibilist who denies either (6) or (2).

Proposition (6) claims that (where *N* does *A* at *T*), "*N* performs *A* at *T*" is included in the circumstances that obtain at *T*. Since the circumstances that obtain at *T* are precisely the hard facts with respect to *T*, (6) is equivalent to the claim that, if *N* does *A* at *T*, then "*N* does *A* at *T*" is a hard fact with respect to *T*.

To make the denial of (6) plausible, one would need to be able to offer *some* explanation of why such a fact as “N does A at T” should not count as a hard fact at T. How could one do this?

It won’t help to start with the claim that the past is real (while the future is not), since the present is just as real as the past (or more real than the past) on any theory of time. Nor will it help to start with the claim that the past is ontologically determinate (whereas the future is not), since the present is just as ontologically determinate as the past. The world is exactly one particular way at the present, and I take it that ‘being ontologically determinate’ is just another way to say ‘being one particular way.’²⁷

What might help is to focus on the distinction between facts that are now fixed, in the sense that they are no longer in anyone’s control, and those that are not now fixed, in the sense that they are now in someone’s control. We consider the fact that Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo to be a paradigm hard fact precisely because we believe that nothing any of us can now do can affect whether or not “Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo” is a true proposition. Whether or not Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo is not now up to you, me, or any other human being. But all this suggests a reason to think “N does A at T” is not a hard fact at T: N’s doing A at T *is* up to someone (namely N), and this is so even at T. (If N could speak instantaneously, N could say right at T, “I’m doing A, and it’s up to me that I’m doing A.”) So, since “N does A at T” is up to N (i.e., is in N’s control) at T, “N does A at T” is not a hard fact at T.

I find this line of thought²⁸ very plausible, and Hasker could adopt it to remove the inconsistency in his views. But it is grist for the theological compatibilist’s mill, not for Hasker’s. The preceding line of thought relied on the claim that if something is up to N at T, then that something is not a hard fact at T. But if this is right, then there’s good reason to think that “God eternally knows that N does A at T” is not a hard fact at T, either—as I’ll now argue.

Suppose that N does A at T, that God is timelessly eternal, and that it is *because* N does A at T that God eternally knows that N does A at T. Then, since N’s doing A at T is up to N at T, the state of affairs of God’s eternally believing that N does A at T should also be up to N at T. For if a second state of affairs depends on a first, and one has control over the first, then one has control over the second.²⁹ And the state of affairs consisting in

²⁷In another context, Hasker approvingly quotes Marilyn Adams’s observation that “if the necessity of the past stems from its ontological determinateness it would seem that timeless determinateness is just as problematic as past determinateness.” [Hasker quotes this statement of Adams at “The Absence of a Timeless God,” p. 198. The quotation is from Marilyn Adams, *William Ockham* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), p. 1135.] To the extent that Hasker endorses the view that the necessity of the past *does* stem from its ontological determinateness, he should also endorse the view that the present shares in the necessity of the past—for the present is just as ontologically determinate as the past. But then all present facts should count as hard facts.

²⁸Inspired by a comment of Thomas Flint’s.

²⁹I’m helped here by Trenton Merricks, “Truth and Freedom,” *Philosophical Review* 118.1 (2009), p. 42.

God's eternally believing that N does A at T *does* depend on the state of affairs consisting of N's doing A at T. Since N's doing A at T is up to N at T, it follows that God's eternally believing that N does A at T is also up to N at T.³⁰

The most plausible way of denying (6), then, implies that "God eternally knows that N does A at T" is not a hard fact at T. But then the observation that N's not doing A at T is logically precluded by "God eternally knows that N does A at T" should not make us doubt N's freedom. Even if logical preclusion (of our doing otherwise) by *hard* facts is a problem for our freedom, it can't be that logical preclusion by facts over which we now have control is as such a problem for our freedom. I conclude that the denial of (6) leaves the divine eternalist in a good position to respond to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge.³¹

The denial of (2), for its part, is equivalent to giving up on the intuition that:

- (25) If some fact which is a hard fact long before T logically precludes N's refraining from doing A at T, then N cannot very well have the power to refrain from doing A at T.

Anyone denying (2) will therefore think that the following situation is epistemically possible: long ago, God believed that N would do A at T, this fact precludes N's refraining from doing A at T, but N still has the power to refrain from doing A at T. (That is, mere logical preclusion of alternatives is not in itself a bar to having the power to do otherwise.) But anyone who grants that this situation is epistemically possible can respond to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge as follows:

In the situation just described, it is possible that N still has the power to refrain from doing A at T. But if N still has the power to refrain from doing A at T, then N has the power to do something (*viz.*, refrain) such that, if N were to do it, then God would not have long ago believed what He did in fact long ago believe. Therefore, it is possible that N has the power to do something such that, if N were to do it, then God would not have

³⁰Given divine eternity, I think we should say something similar about the case of a prophet's long-ago revelation that N will do A at T. It is up to N whether N does A at T. Whether an eternal God reveals to a prophet at an earlier time that N will do A at T depends on God's seeing that N does A at T, which in turn depends on N's doing A at T. So it is up to N whether a prophet long ago revealed that N would do A at T. This view requires that we could (depending on what prophecies God has revealed) have counterfactual power over genuine past events. (It does not, however, require that we have the power to change the past.) It seems to me that, of objections to the eternity solution to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge, the most serious is one raised by questions about our counterfactual power over the past. Although this is a worthy topic, length constraints prohibit me from discussing it here.

³¹Much the same could be said about the person who believes God is in time—my arguments in the preceding two paragraphs would apply equally well to the proposition "God knew, long before T, that N would do A at T," so long as God knows what will occur *because* it will occur. The divine eternalist has an advantage, however, in being able to explain how it could be true at a time that God infallibly knows what will occur in what is the future with respect to that time (without causally determining that it occur).

long ago believed what He did in fact long ago believe. Thus, the person who denies (2) should think that it is epistemically possible that we have counterfactual power over the past. But this is sufficient for defusing the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge.

VI. Conclusion

I draw two conclusions from the foregoing. First, the account of free will and hard facts given in *God, Time, and Knowledge* is inconsistent, and needs to be repaired if Hasker's arguments for theological incompatibilism are to be successful. Second, the most plausible repairs—denying (6) and denying (2)—leave the theological compatibilist in a good position to respond to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge.³²

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