

REJOINDER TO HASKER

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In "Zagzebski on Power Entailment" William Hasker responds to the three sets of counterexamples to Power Entailment Principles given in my book, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge*. In this rejoinder I answer Hasker's objections to the first two examples, and agree with him that the third example is defective, although for a different reason than the one Hasker presents.

In my book, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge*, I present three types of counterexamples to the most well-known Power Entailment Principles. William Hasker has challenged all three, focusing on their application to (PEP 1). Such a principle is threatening to most attempts to show divine foreknowledge and human free will compatible according to which God is in time and backwards causation is impossible. Since I defend theological compatibilism for the case in which God is in time as well as for the case in which God is not in time, and since I do not attempt to defend backwards causation, it is important for me to challenge this principle.

My first set of counterexamples is based on the idea that if any necessary truths and their negations can be brought about by anybody while others can be brought about by nobody, all of the proposed PEPs are false. As a suggestion for a proposition in the first category I propose (11) *If there is a Fall, God sends his Son to redeem the world*. I suggest that (11) may be a necessary truth, yet one *chosen* to be a necessary truth by God. To this Hasker objects (1) that my example requires a non-standard view of modal logic, but I have not given reason to think there is anything wrong with the standard view, and (2) I operate within the standard theory for most of the book. In particular, I accept three principles according to which my own counterexample fails. I will respond to the first point first.

This counterexample rests on the idea that there are alternative complete sets of possible worlds, so even though (11) is true in all possible worlds (we'll suppose), it is not true in worlds which would have been possible had there been a different set of possible worlds. This makes sense only if modal structure itself could have been different. It requires making a distinction within the class of the necessary between those propositions which are necessarily necessary and those which are not necessarily necessary. As I remark in my book, this way of looking at modality requires a modal system weaker than S4 (p. 112). Without commenting on the relative merits of stronger and



weaker modal systems, Hasker says that in order for the view I propose to be taken seriously, I must (1) elaborate in detail an alternative modal theory, and (2) show that the standard theory is inconsistent or incoherent, and therefore the PEPs which presuppose this theory are inadmissible (p. 252).

But the degree to which the rejection of S4 is non-standard is questionable. As noted in the book, Nathan Salmon and Hugh Chandler have both argued on independent grounds that S4 must be rejected anyway.¹ As Hasker knows, weaker modal systems exist, and there is no need for me to elaborate a new one in detail. Nevertheless, I proposed a brief metaphysical argument that S4 must be rejected, which I will summarize.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason is often interpreted in such a way that a reason is required for the truth value of a proposition, but not for its modal status. If some proposition is contingent, a reason is required for its truth, but if a proposition is necessary, the fact that it is necessary is sufficient reason for its being true. But why, we may ask, is some particular necessary proposition necessary? What *explains* its necessity? Modal theories as strong as S4 take the position that every necessary proposition is necessarily necessary, and, indeed, necessarily necessarily necessary, and so on. But if the modal status of a proposition is a fact, and the Principle of Sufficient Reason requires an explanation for every fact, there must be an explanation of the fact that a proposition is necessary as well as for the fact that it is true. To claim that every necessary proposition is necessarily necessary, then, cannot be such an explanation. The view Hasker supports, while a common one, takes the position that there is nothing to be said outside of modal structure to explain why it is what it is. It is this position that I am challenging.

Hasker is right that the stronger modal systems are more entrenched, and I do not claim that they are demonstrably incoherent. What I do claim is that anyone proposing the truth of one of the PEPs is relying on the background assumption of a modal system at least as strong as S4. But not only are there signs that these modal systems are under attack on technical grounds, I suggest there are metaphysical grounds for questioning them as well. Since anyone proposing that a Power Entailment Principle is a universal truth has the burden of proving this is the case, these considerations lead to the conclusion that PEP has not been demonstrated.

Hasker's second objection to the first counterexample rests on three principles which, he says, partially stipulate the meaning of "necessary proposition," "essential property," and "possible world," and which he believes to be incompatible with my example:

- i) A proposition is necessarily true if and only if it is true in all possible worlds.
- ii) A property is essential to an individual if and only if the individual has the property in every possible world in which the individual exists.

- iii) God, God's states, and God's attributes are included in the possible worlds rather than outside them.

These principles are plausible standard modal principles and Hasker is right that I use them myself. As stated, however, the principles appear to be non-committal on the issue of whether there are alternative complete sets of possible worlds. If they are interpreted in a way that permits alternative sets of worlds, there is no incompatibility between my example and the principles. On the other hand, if they are intended to rule out such alternatives, this needs to be stated plainly in their formulation and defended. Hasker cannot rely on the claim that it is part of the *meaning* of such terms as 'necessary proposition' and 'possible world' that there is a unique set of possible worlds. To make such a claim is to say that the weaker modal systems are mistaken about the meaning of these terms. Hasker has not made such a claim, and I doubt that he intends to do so.

Rather than to address the issue of alternative sets of worlds, Hasker misrepresents his own principle on essential properties. As he correctly points out, it follows by principle (ii) that the property of decreeing that (11) is true is one of God's essential properties. "But," says Hasker, "it's not in God's power to shed one of his essential properties any more than it is in my power to divest myself of my own essential properties." And so, he says, the example fails. The question, though, is not whether God can *shed* one of his essential properties, but whether one of God's essential properties is best explained as the result of his choice, a choice which it is true to say he could have made differently, even though it is also a choice which God makes in all possible worlds—i.e., all worlds possible relative to the actual world. The idea that God wills an essential property of his is not without precedent, and if it is ruled out it cannot simply be on the basis of principles such as (i)-(iii), much less on the basis of a stipulation of the meaning of modal concepts.

Hasker's final point about my first counterexample is that it will not help in the case in which *p* is contingent. My second counterexample was devised in anticipation of this objection. Suppose that *A* is something I can choose to do or not to do, and that God decides to do *B* in all and only those worlds in which I do *A*. If so, the propositions *I do A* and *God does B* would be strictly equivalent, and their strict equivalence would be brought about by God, not me. In this case, I claimed, I have the power to bring it about that *I do A* is true, and I have the power to bring it about that *I do A* is false, *I do A* entails *God does B* and *It is not the case that I do A* entails *It is not the case that God does B*, yet I do not have the power to bring it about that *God does B* is true. The truth of that proposition is brought about by God. We have, then, a counter-example to (PEP 1).

In reply Hasker claims that in the case described *I do* bring about the truth of *God does B*, and he thinks that I have misunderstood the sense of "bring

about" intended in (PEP 1). He suggests that in my counterexample I make the assumption that "bring about" means "consciously and intentionally bring about," yet I make no such assumption and agree with Hasker that one can bring about something without doing so consciously or intentionally. My reason for saying that it is God who brings about the truth of *God does B* is simply that God does all the *work* of bringing about the truth of that proposition.

To see why this is so, consider an analogy. Suppose that I decide that when and only when Joe apologizes to Mary, I will build my house. Joe apologizes to Mary and I build my house. Does Joe bring about the building of my house? I control the house-building, both in its timing (I am the one who decided to begin when Joe makes the apology), and in carrying out the entire project. Joe no more brings about my house building than the moon does if I were to decide to wait for a new moon. In the theistic case it is part of God's essence that he does *B* if and only if I do *A*, and so we are back to the question of the relation between God's will and his essence, but in any case it is *God*, whether by his will or his essence, who brings about *B*, not I.

My third set of counterexamples proceeded from the assumption that there are some true counterfactuals of freedom whose truth is brought about by the human agents named in the counterfactuals. As an example I suggested *If my son asked me for an apple, I would not give him poison* ($A > -P$). The idea was to reduce counterfactuals to strict implications based on similarity of worlds in roughly the manner discussed by David Lewis. If a counterfactual of freedom is brought about by a human agent, its equivalent strict implication would be brought about by the human agent as well. Since clearly not all necessary truths can be brought about by such an agent, we can formulate a counterexample to PEP1.

I now believe that the attempt to reduce counterfactuals to strict implications will not work, but that is not the objection Hasker gives. Instead, his response is to claim that there is a true strict implication of freedom which has nothing to do with the agent's power corresponding to every *false* counterfactual of freedom as well as to every true one. Such a response suggests that it was not clear in my book that my proposal was to find a strict implication *equivalent* to the counterfactual. But then, Hasker's move is not relevant if only because no necessarily true proposition can be equivalent to a false one.

A better formulation of the intent of the third counterexample is as follows: Take the counterfactual of freedom

- (1) $A > -P$.

Necessarily, (1) is true in the actual world just in case

- (2) There is at least one $A/-P$ world more similar to the actual world than any A/P world.

As long as 'the actual world' names the world that is in fact the actual world and the similarity relations among worlds are necessary, then (2) is a necessary truth. If it is reasonable to say that since by hypothesis I can bring about (1), I can bring about (2), we have a counterexample to PEP1 by substituting (2) for p and $2+2=4$ for q .

The claim that if I can bring about (1) I can bring about (2) would be supported if (1) and (2) are equivalent. However, Edward Wierenga has led me to doubt that (1) and (2) are equivalent and that the moral to be drawn is that the statement of the truth conditions for some proposition p in the semantics may not be equivalent to p . Still, even in the absence of logical equivalence it may nonetheless be the case that if I can bring about the truth of a proposition, I can bring about the truth of the proposition expressing its truth conditions. But I am now convinced that this will not work either. To see why not, consider a simpler example. Suppose I can bring about the truth of

(1) I drink a cup of tea at t .

(1) is true in the actual world just in case

(2) Proposition (1) is true in the actual world.

But I cannot bring about the truth of (2) since I do not have the power to make the actual world the actual world. Therefore, the example fails, and I withdraw my third counterexample to the PEPs.

I thank Bill Hasker for his comments and welcome further thoughts from him and others on these examples.

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NOTE

1. Hugh Chandler, "Plantinga and the Contingently Possible," *Analysis* 36 (1976), pp. 106-9; Nathan Salmon, *Reference and Essence* (Princeton University Press, 1981), section 28, pp. 229-59; and Nathan Salmon, "The Logic of What Might Have Been," *Philosophical Review* 98, #1 (January 1989), pp. 3-34.