

Katherin A. Rogers, Freedom and Self-Creation: Anselmian Libertarianism

Pećnjak, Davor

Source / Izvornik: **Croatian Journal of Philosophy, 2016, 16, 459 - 462**

Journal article, Published version

Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:261:658827>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-01-07**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[Repository of the Institute of Philosophy](#)

Book Reviews

Katherin A. Rogers, *Freedom and Self-Creation: Anselmian Libertarianism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 248 pp.

This is a thoroughly splendid book on a splendid topic of free will! In a novel and very interesting way, St. Anselm's (of Canterbury) theory of free will is (re)formulated and put amidst ultra-contemporary debate; not only this, Katherin Rogers, in her version of Anselmianism about freedom of the will, strives to show how this kind of theory has certain advantages over other theories of freedom of the will and, accordingly, freedom of action. Almost needless to say, Rogers's, following St. Anselm, put forward the theory from the theistic Christian perspective. I consider her exposition of St. Anselm very clear and her (re)formulated arguments on the basic foundation of St. Anselm's theory very persuasive, as well as her own development of additional arguments for the agent-causal libertarianism. According to Rogers's, agent-causal libertarianism derived from St. Anselm, and supplemented with some contemporary tools that retain Anselmian spirit, can have more explanatory power with less theoretical entities. In other words, Anselmian agent-causal libertarianism, Rogers claims, is more parsimonious than other contemporary versions. St. Anselm put forward his theory and arguments about the freedom of the will and responsibility in the most explicit way in the texts *De libero arbitrio*, *De casu diaboli*, and *Cur Deus homo*.¹

Let's take theory and arguments in order of the Kathrin Rogers's book. It begins with two arguments that are aimed to undermine compatibilism, showing that notion of the freedom is incompatible with notion of determinism. The first is so-called "The Divine Controller" argument and the other is "Wager" argument.

The Christian doctrine holds that everything that is different from God depends on God, so there can be nothing that has existence independent of God. God is also omnipotent. So we can imagine the following scenario. Though we can analyse the attribute of omnipotence in different ways, it is certainly possible that God can cause human beings' choices. If that would be so, then choices that human beings make are not their own choices, they do not make them on their own, but they are made by somebody else, namely God. If so, then each and every choice is fully determined by God.

¹ Katherin Rogers uses her own translations from Latin from *Anselmi Opera Omnia*, edited by F. S. Schmitt, Rome and Edinburgh: Friedrich Fromann Verlag, 1936–1968.

So, human beings' choices, and accordingly, actions that follow, would be fully determined by the factor other than them and on which they would have no control. Their choices would not be "up to them". We could also say that these choices would only "happen" to them (even if from the subjective point it would seem, but it would only seem, that the choices in question are their own); and if something just happens to me without any possibility that I have any kind of control or influence on that what happens, then this what happens is not free at all from the point of mine as an agent. If that would be the situation, then corollary is that human beings would not be responsible for these choices and actions. Rogers stresses parallels of this argument with other contemporary "controller" or "manipulation" arguments, but differences also. So, compatibilists, which embrace determinism, could not at the same time consistently claim that though actions and will of agents are fully determined, they can still be morally responsible and could have done otherwise than they in fact did.

Wager argument for libertarianism parallels in form, but just in form, Pascal's wager argument for the existence of God. Assume that a compatibilist, accepting determinism, considers that what happens, happens inevitably, so has a relaxed attitude towards morality. Let's suppose that you have to choose either compatibilism or libertarianism. You score +1 for your benefit, you score -1 for suffering harm. Believer in compatibilism scores +1 if compatibilism is true, but being tempted to moral laxness he scores -1, so score is 0; Believer in compatibilism scores -1 if compatibilism is false and -1 for being tempted to moral laxness, so in this case score is -2. Believer in libertarianism scores -1 if libertarianism is false, and scores +1 for not being prone to moral laxness, so the score is in this case 0. Believer in libertarianism scores +1 if libertarianism is true, and scores +1 for not being prone to moral laxness, so the score is in this case +2. Overall, it is better to bet on libertarianism than on compatibilism. This is not a definitive argument for libertarianism but points strongly in favour of libertarianism according to Rogers.

After relatively briefly reviewing event-causal and agent-causal libertarianism and setting stage for Anselm's view and Anselmianism, Rogers continues and warns us that we have to differentiate three meanings of *voluntas* in st. Anselm's writings. These are: *voluntas* instrumentally conceived as a faculty of the soul; *voluntas* in the second sense is that what moves will of an agent to what is a suitable object for an agent; third sense of *voluntas* is the *actual use* of the will.

In chapter three, Rogers explicates Anselm's and Anselmian libertarianism. It is a sort of agent-causal libertarianism. Agent makes, when freely deciding, so-called *a se* choices. How does he do it? First of all, everything that is different from God is created by God and depends on God. So how can genuine and free choice and following this choice, an action be free and dependent on subject, e.g. human being which is created by God and different from Him? It can be in the following way. God created human beings, and God created all motivating states, processes and elements that precede the choice of human beings. But human beings are created as (more or less) rational beings. So, they can come in the situations that are such that only one action can be made at time *t*, but there is a possibility for executing

at least two mutually exclusive actions at t , at the same time: so, only one can be performed—human being, as a rational being, must decide which action will be performed at t . This situation is called a “torn condition”. It is a necessary condition for making *a se* choice. Especially significant situations are moral situations—where agents are torn between different morally significant options. So, libertarian request is fulfilled, there are alternate possibilities facing an agent. They “set the stage” for an agent and they are produced by God. But the choice an agent makes is something that the agent truly makes by himself. Choice itself is not imposed or made or influenced by God. Choice is an operating of the agent, so it is agent-causal. However, Anselmian variant of agent-causation is different from contemporary agent-causation. In contemporary versions, an agent causes choice—choice is caused, but agent, as a cause of a choice, is not caused. An agent is “uncaused cause”, as a substance, in most contemporary versions of agent-causation. St. Anselm and Anselmians as Rogers is, do not require this or any other special sort of causation. Though it is up to the agent what he will choose, he does this choosing by “per-willing” one of the options that is created by God. “Per-willing” means that an agent is aware of both or several opposing motives, options, and possibilities which are open for him and what to do at t , but he wills one “through to the point of intention”. Rogers adds that per-willing for one option entails overriding all the other options. In this way, an agent causes indetermined choice but no special powers or causation are required.

Chapter four explicates three consequences of such kind of libertarianism. The ontological status of choice is that it has a structure of an event; it is not neither state, nor a “thing”. The grounding principle requires that true proposition about the choice which is made by an agent is grounded in the very choice itself, in its making by an agent. By making *a se* choices an agent makes his or her own character; *a se* choices enable us that we can make our personal characters by ourselves.

Chapter six considers Frankfurt-style counterexamples to the Principle of alternate possibility in assessing responsibility and how Anselmianism can fare here, and so it provides some interesting solutions; however, since literature on this topic is enormously vast, I shall skip it and I shall focus on chapters seven and eight which deal with the problem of luck for libertarianism. The problem can have several instances, but mainly consists in the following: since it is the case that noone has control over random events, then an agent does not have any control over that what happened randomly, so random events cannot be freely done events. If something just pops up in the consciousness of an agent randomly, then, even if it has a form of an intention or looks like a decision, it is an event over which an agent does not have any control and so is not done freely. It is just sheer luck that it happened (to the agent). In the language of possible worlds, it seems that libertarianism is committed to the following: If in world w_1 an agent—say Catherine, deliberates between A and B, and, freely in libertarian sense, decides in favour of action A at time t , so it was not determined which decision Catherine will make until time t , then there is a possible world w_2 in which, under the same circumstances until time t , Anne freely decides in favour of B (instead of A) at time t . What explains the difference between two possible

worlds—why Catherine decides for A in w_1 , and why Catherine decides in favour of B in w_2 in otherwise completely the same worlds until time t ? It seems that there is nothing which can explain this difference—it can be said that these decisions are due to sheer luck. It is just luck in one world that there is a decision in favour of A and just the same holds for B. But if it is so, then decisions for A and B are not freely made because what happens by luck, no one has in control and if someone is not in control of something, then someone does not have freedom over that. Some of the libertarians try to resolve the problem by invoking the probabilistic causation. For them, we can assign probabilities (ranging from at least a little bit more from 0 to at least a little bit less from 1) to making decision for A or B or for any number of possible decisions that can be made in some condition. Rogers tries, pretty much successfully, to show that assigning probabilities, in both interpretations (propensities or relative frequencies) is in fact inapplicable to explain libertarian decisions and choices. Regarding possible worlds, she shows that possible world apparatus do not add anything new to the luck objection classically posed already by, say, St. Augustine or Hobart.

To recapitulate, Anselmian *a se* choice is made by the agent by per-willing one of the options available to him or her simultaneously and an agent is thus responsible for that choice and for acts that follow the choice. Choice is truly done by an agent and not by anyone or anything else, not even by his or her previous desires; there are no any necessitating factors or causes. It is up to the agent to choose A instead of B, simply by per-willing A; in other words, this per-willing agent causes choice of A, but itself it is not caused by anything. So, the agent that makes a choice in that way is fully responsible for the choice. There is no any kind of luck in making *a se* choice by “per-willing”.

This kind of making choices is self-creation of an agent, which means that they build their characters on their own. So, Rogers considers that those who advocate the luck objection against libertarianism do not properly grasp choices, character and responsibility and their connections explained by libertarianism, in this case Anselmian libertarianism. Luck objection has no force, at least against Anselmian libertarianism.

My recommendation is that you have to read this book by your free will, (make *a se* choice to read it) and, if you are not already a libertarian, to become one, because libertarianism is the one and only, and by necessity, the right solution to the problem of free will.

DAVOR PEĆNJAK
Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb