

Katherin A. Rogers

Anselm on Freedom.

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Most contemporary analytic philosophers know Anselm of Canterbury primarily through the famous ontological argument of his *Proslogion*. Far less known is his account of free will in the *De libertate arbitrii* and other works. This account is precisely the focus of Katherin Rogers' study which aims to show that Anselm defends a strong libertarian conception of human freedom. In fact, Rogers pushes this thesis a bit further, for she holds that Anselm is the first Christian thinker, and 'perhaps the first person on the planet', to espouse a true metaphysical libertarianism.

This study considers Anselm's libertarianism with respect to two criteria: self-causation and open options. An agent's action is free if it is self-caused—that is, if the choice to act originates with the agent and is not imposed from without. Anselm defines human freedom as 'the power to keep justice' and analyzes this in terms of a choice to set aside immediate desires and act from a desire that is aligned to the will of God. Thus, freedom also involves open options, for it is not enough that the choice of action be from the agent himself, but that it results from a selection from among more than one available desire within the agent.

Agents always desire what appears to be beneficial. Human agents can, in addition, desire justice—that is, desire that the desire for benefits not be disordered and excessive, but in accord with the true good which is identical to God's will. This gives rise to a potential conflict, for the motivating desire for benefits operating in an unregulated manner can exceed the limits of justice. The human agent, then is capable of desiring benefits falling outside those benefits proper to him. This allows for open options in choice, for any benefit presented to the agent is open to pursuit in excess or as limited by justice. While all desires are from God, the agent alone selects from among these open options, in that the agent possesses a real power to keep or discard justice. Indeed, Anselm goes so far as to say that in holding fast to justice when he could have abandoned it, the human agent, in a qualified manner, gives himself justice. Thus, the human agent is free, Rogers argues, in a strong libertarian sense.

Rogers further argues that Anselm's libertarianism is central to his conception of human nature, for it explains precisely the sense in which human beings are *imago Dei*. As the Perfect Being, God's actions are entirely from himself (*a se*). Moreover, God's actions are just, and justice consists in rightness of will for its own sake. God must act justly, for God must act in accordance with his own will. Such necessity in God's actions, however, does not constitute a limitation, but indicates God's independence and absolute

power as an agent. Thus, God's freedom does not require open options as does the freedom of created human agents. Yet, human agents share in the absolute freedom of God through their ability to choose from among immediate desires and the desire for justice. It is precisely insofar as human beings are free in a strong libertarian sense that they participate in divine reality or, as Rogers puts it, share in God's aseity.

Rogers contrasts Anselm's strict libertarian conception of free will to what she considers the compatibilist views of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. The reason for this contrast is, in part, her consideration of libertarianism in strict opposition to all forms of causal determinism. She considers Anselm's notion of moral responsibility to be similar to that of modern defenders of libertarianism: a sort of rational intervention into the causal course of events through a special category of agent-causation that stands apart from all other causal systems.

Yet it is not clear to this reader that Anselm's treatment of human freedom contrasts quite so sharply with those of Augustine and Aquinas. Both would certainly agree with Anselm that human agents are capable of self-causation in an ontologically significant sense. Indeed, such a notion of voluntary agency is a standard element of the philosophical tradition within which all three thinkers are working. Aquinas, at any rate, holds that free agency does arise from antecedent states, but that such agency retains significant ontological independence in that it cannot be reduced to such antecedent causal operations. Here, it would seem, Anselm and Aquinas agree. While Anselm appears more interested in the moral and theological issues associated with human freedom than, say, its biological antecedents, it is not clear that he would deny them altogether. Rogers is surely right to argue for the primacy of self-causation in Anselm's account of free will, yet such is also the case for Aquinas. Perhaps the account of Aquinas is not so far distant from that of Anselm as Rogers suggests.

Part of the problem is that the terminology arising from the modern problem of freedom and determinism provides a rather uneasy fit to the discussions of classical philosophers such as Anselm. Rogers herself is aware of this and mentions several times the anachronism of using such terms as 'determinism', 'compatibilism', and 'libertarianism' in reference to Anselm, Augustine, Aquinas, and other pre-modern thinkers. This becomes evident, for example, in her notion of causal determinism which seems too closely tied to the notion of mechanical force. It is not clear that Anselm would limit his understanding of causality in this way.

The problem of anachronism notwithstanding, Rogers offers a careful and systematic study of Anselm's treatment of human freedom in the context of theistic theology. Even if her claims regarding Anselm as the first libertarian are overstated, philosophers of religion will find her discussions of free will with respect to the theological problems of creation, grace, divine foreknowledge and eternity useful and provocative. Moreover, Rogers' recognition of the importance of Anselm's claim that

rational free will is the means by which human beings share in the perfection of God is a significant contribution to the understanding of the most notable of medieval monastic philosophers.

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