

KATHERIN ROGERS

## SAVING ETERNITY (AND DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE AND FREE WILL): A REPLY TO HASKER

William Hasker and I have a disagreement about eternity—actually, about whether or not appealing to a particular understanding of divine eternity can reconcile divine foreknowledge with libertarian human freedom. Hasker argues that if God had foreknowledge of a particular future choice, that choice cannot be free with libertarian freedom. I hold, to the contrary, that, given a certain theory of time, it is possible to reconcile divine foreknowledge with libertarian freedom. In a recent article, “Can Eternity be Saved? A Comment on Stump and Rogers”, Hasker makes it clear that one of the fundamental disagreements between us lies in what each of us takes to be required for libertarian free will (HASKER 2020).<sup>1</sup> I will briefly outline the theory of libertarianism that I find plausible, then explain how a libertarian free choice under that description can be foreknown by God. (I base this analysis of free will and the solution to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge on the work of St. Anselm of Canterbury [ROGERS 2008, 2015]. I will call my approach “Anselmian”, but whether or not my interpretation of St. Anselm’s work is correct historically is not relevant to the purposes of the present paper.) Then I will explain why Hasker finds this reconciliation unacceptable since it fails to do justice to what he takes to be required for libertarian freedom. Finally, I will argue that Hasker is wrong to insist upon his analysis of free will.

First, why is it that the Christian philosopher might hope that human agents are free with libertarian free will? I take it that there are two or three

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KATHERIN ROGERS, Professor of Philosophy at University of Delaware; address for correspondence: Department of Philosophy, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716, USA; e-mail: [krogers@udel.edu](mailto:krogers@udel.edu); ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5138-1518>.

<sup>1</sup> The paper of mine to which Hasker is responding is “Foreknowledge, Freedom, and Vicious Circles: Anselm vs. Open Theism,” in *Philosophical Essays Against Open Theism* (ROGERS 2019).

reasons depending on how one counts. A first reason is that within the Christian tradition human agents are held morally responsible for their actions. A standard reason for accepting libertarianism is that it seems to many of us to allow for moral praise and blame more successfully than do determinism or compatibilism. On determinism or compatibilism one's choices are ultimately caused by factors outside oneself over which one had no control, thus it seems wrong, on these theories, to hold the human agent responsible. It is especially problematic for God to hold us responsible if it is He who has—ultimately—caused our choices. Secondly, or perhaps this is another way of stating the first reason, in the Christian tradition human beings are held to be creatures of enormous value, and part of that value derives from our being able to contribute to our characters on our own. As robustly free we are *imagines Dei*, not puppets of God or nature. Finally, on a libertarian analysis it is possible to avoid the consequence that God is the author of sin. In the Christian tradition God is the creator of all that is not Himself. But if God is the ultimate cause of sin, then the entire Christian history of fall and redemption seems to be just a story God is telling Himself. St. Anselm finds it unbearable that God might be the cause of sin and goes so far as to argue that it is *logically impossible* that God could cause the created agent to sin.<sup>2</sup> The ultimate responsibility for the created agent's choices must lie with the agent himself—the created agent must be able to choose with aseity, “from himself”—and that, at least in the view of many of us, requires libertarian free will.

The Anselmian thesis is that in a universe made by God the created agent can choose with aseity only if he faces open options and it is up to him which option he chooses.<sup>3</sup> He has the power to choose either way. A free choice looks like this: S (some created agent) has (at least) two, mutually exclusive, morally significant desires which he hopes to satisfy. (“Desires” should be understood broadly to include motives, inclinations, etc. And it is choices of moral significance that are of interest, since the values to be preserved by positing libertarian free will have to do with moral responsibility, moral stature, and ascribing sin to the created agent, not to God.) Let us call these desires A and B. At a point in time, T1, S is debating whether to pursue A or to pursue B. Call this the torn condition (TC). Somewhat later, at

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<sup>2</sup> See Anselm's *On Freedom of Choice*, chap. 8.

<sup>3</sup> I interpret Anselm as holding that divine freedom does not require open options. God exists in total independence, and so does not need open options in order to will *a se* (ROGERS 2008, 185–205).

T2, S makes the choice for B, let us say, by continuing to pursue the desire for B to the point where the desire for A ceases to be viable. This schema allows Anselm to hold that S makes an *a se* choice without appealing to any *sui generis* causes and without adding anything new to the sum of existent beings in the universe. This “parsimonious agent causation” thus avoids appearing *ad hoc* and is consistent with the thought that God is the source of everything with ontological status (ROGERS 2015, 81–100).<sup>4</sup> And it is absolutely up to S whether he opts for A or for B. So the truth of the proposition, “S chooses B at T2” is absolutely up to S. This entails that truth about, and knowledge of, a free choice depends upon that actual choice. I label this the “Grounding Principle” (ROGERS 2015, 109–16).

In saying it is “up to” S, I mean that S has the unobstructed power to pursue A or to pursue B. “Power” here is understood as an ability or strength in the agent. (A key difference between Hasker’s analysis of free will and mine revolves around how we understand the *power* required for free agency.) “Unobstructed” means (roughly) that the power is free from any external, necessitating factor that makes it inevitable that S choose one way rather than the other. (A thoroughly developed explication of “unobstructed” is beyond the scope of the present paper. A brick falling on S’s head and knocking him out as he is in TC would prevent the exercise of the power in question, but our concern here is with the sort of factor that would disallow options; that would deny the agent the ability or strength to pursue either one of the mutually exclusive desires.) An external, necessitating factor might be causal, such as the will of God, an irresistible desire, or one’s brain chemistry. One could hold that the Molinist’s so-called “counterfactuals of freedom”—truths about what any possible agent would do under any possible circumstances—are also external necessitating factors, although they are non-causal. They exist independently of any agent, yet an actual agent cannot act contrary to them. I take it that a better way to put this is that, if the Grounding Principle is correct, there simply are no Molinist “counterfactuals of freedom”. The truth of what an agent chooses depends on the actual choice of the actual agent (ROGERS 2015, 112–16). Anselmian libertarianism does allow for a completely innocuous “internal” necessitating factor: By choosing B at T2, S makes it the case that S chooses B at T2 and, necessarily, If S chooses B at T2, then S chooses B at T2. This can be called a “consequent” or “subsequent” necessity in that it is just the logical necessity of “If X, then X”.

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<sup>4</sup> And it can be developed to allow that S does not exercise any causal force or power on God, although God’s knowledge does counterfactually depend upon S’s choice (ROGERS, 2019, 106–7).

I label it an internal necessity to draw attention to the fact that it is S himself who introduces the necessity. I take it that this sort of necessity does not conflict with free will (ROGERS 2015). This analysis of free will, I argue, incorporates everything we value when we consider free will to be an important human faculty. By emphasizing aseity, derived from the unobstructed power to choose between options, we can hold the agent morally responsible, and hence to be the superior kind of being that an *imago Dei* ought to be. And, since the choice is up to the created agent, God cannot be thought to be the author of sin.

How can God foreknow a future free choice on this analysis of free will? The Grounding Principle entails that God's knowledge of a free choice must somehow be dependent upon the actual making of the choice. Suppose we adopt isotemporalism, the view (sometimes called four-dimensionalism or eternalism) that all times are equally existent, they have equal ontological status, and what appears to a given perceiver at a given time to be past, present, or future is relative to that perceiver at that time. God, not embedded in, or extended through, time sees things as they really are. All times are equally "present" to God. God knows that S chooses B at T2 because T2, like all moments of time, is present to Him. For a temporal being, it is true to say, at T1, that God knows that S will choose B at T2, but strictly speaking, God's knowledge of the agent's choice is not *foreknowledge*, but rather eternal knowledge (ROGERS 2008, 176–84). Isotemporalism does entail that the proposition "S chooses B at T2" is true at all times, since all times are equally "there" in the isotemporal universe (what can be called the "block" universe). And that means that, at T2 S cannot fail to choose B. It is necessary, at all times, that S choose B at T2. But the necessity is a consequent or subsequent necessity; since S chooses B at T2, S chooses B at T2. There is nothing in this picture to undermine the Anselmian analysis of free will. Even as S chooses B, S has the power—the causal strength or ability—to choose A, and it is absolutely up to S that he exercises that power to choose B, rather than A, at T2. The consequent necessity involved is directly traceable to S's *a se* choice, and thus cannot conflict with the most robust free will. God's eternal knowledge of "S chooses B at T2" cannot undermine the freedom of S's choosing, since it is S's choosing B at T2 that brings about God's knowledge that S chooses B at T2. Thus God can have eternal knowledge of what are to us future free choices without that knowledge conflicting with human freedom.

Hasker holds that this attempt to solve the dilemma of freedom and divine foreknowledge fails. On his understanding of “free will”, if S chooses B at T2, and if it is true at T1 that “S chooses B at T2”—as it must be if God *foreknows* S’s choice or if we live in an isotemporal universe—then S’s choice cannot really be free. Before T2 S cannot change or bring it about that “S chooses B at T2” is false, and therefore S does not have the sort of open options, and the sort of power, required for free will. Proposing that time is isotemporal and God’s knowledge is eternal does not solve the conflict given Hasker’s view of what is required for free will. In his *God, Time, and Knowledge* he writes,

The notion of free will involved here is nicely expressed by David Basinger when he says that when a person is free to perform an action, she “has it in her power to choose to perform A or choose not to perform A. Both A and not A could actually occur; which will actually occur has not yet been determined.” For a formal definition of this notion, we have the following: (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. (HASKER 1989, 66)

The notion of what is *in one’s power* is central, so Hasker develops a series of “power entailment principles” (PEPs). He concludes with PEP7: “If ‘P’ is true and entails ‘Q’, then if it cannot be in anyone’s power to bring it about that ‘P’ is false, it cannot be in anyone’s power to bring it about that ‘Q’ is false” (HASKER 1989, 114). Take “P” to be “God knows at T1 that S chooses B at T2.” That entails “Q”; “S chooses B at T2.” Assuming P, it cannot be in anyone’s power, including S’s, to bring it about that P is false. But then it cannot be in anyone’s power, including S’s, to bring it about that Q is false. It is not in S’s power at T2 to refrain from choosing B, and so, given Hasker’s analysis, S is not free at T2. And focusing on *eternal* divine knowledge does not undermine the argument. “God knows eternally...” is unalterable at T1, T2 and, indeed, at any moment in the history of the universe. So “God knows eternally...” conflicts with S’s ability to choose other than B at T2 as much as does “God knows at T1...”.

But why should we accept Hasker’s understanding of free will and his PEPs? He holds that they are intuitively obvious (*ibid.*, 66, 114). I disagree. I find it difficult to pinpoint the time at which S might actually exercise the sort of power Hasker has in mind—the power involved in his definition of free will, that is, to choose A or to refrain from choosing A (say by choosing B). At T3, after choosing B, S cannot refrain from choosing B. Hasker and

I agree. And at T2, that is, at the time that S chooses B, S cannot refrain from choosing B. On Hasker's analysis, this seems to render S unfree at the time he actually chooses. If (P) "God knows at T2—simultaneous with S's choice of B—that S chooses B at T2" (P could also read "It is true at T2 that S chooses B at T2"), then (Q) "S chooses B at T2". Since it is not in anyone's power to bring it about that P is false, it is not in anyone's power to bring it about that Q is false, and S does not have the power required for free will at the time he makes his choice. And Hasker apparently agrees. He writes, "When do the alternative possibilities (which, as [Rogers] agrees, are needed for free will) obtain? The obvious answer is, in the period before a free action is performed. After S has chosen B at T2, it is no longer possible for him to choose A instead, but before he has chosen, it is indeed in his power to choose A" (HASKER 2020, 142). I take the term "after" here to cover both T2 and T3 since it is clearly not possible for S to choose A if he is presently choosing B. The consequent necessity at work here seems to me to be innocuous vis-à-vis free will because it is just a logical necessity traceable to S's own choice—if S chooses B at T2, then it cannot fail to be the case that S chooses B at T2. But apparently this necessity conflicts with the sort of power required for free will on Hasker's view.

So, as Hasker says, he must locate the relevant power at a time before the making of the choice. Should the claim be that S is free if it is in S's power to choose A or B at T1, before S makes a choice? On my understanding of power—a strength or ability which the agent can exercise *a se*—then it is in S's power at T1 to choose A or B. Indeed, it is in S's power at T2 to choose A or B at T2, in the sense that even as he chooses B, he possesses the ability to choose A. S's exercising his power to choose B in no way conflicts with his strength or aseity regarding the choice for A, it just makes it the case that he does not choose A. On my view, the consequent necessity entailed by "S chooses B at T2" and by "God knows that S chooses B at T2" is consistent with S's freedom. But Hasker does not analyze the power of free will in terms of the agent's strength. The agent's power must include the possibility of choosing otherwise, where "possible" entails that the actual choosing by the agent makes it *impossible* for him to choose otherwise—impossible in a way that conflicts with free will. This is clear since Hasker apparently agrees that after the choice (T3) *and during the choice* (T2) it is not possible for the agent to have chosen, or to be choosing, otherwise and so it is too late for the relevant power to exist.

But locating the open options, and the crucial power, before the choice is puzzling. By hypothesis, T1 is the time *before* the choice. It is not possible for S to choose between A and B at T1, since S cannot be choosing before he is choosing. S cannot choose either A or B at T1, since at T1 S does not choose A and does not choose B. Should Hasker say that it is in S's power at T1 to choose A or B at T2? But at T1, T2 does not exist. It does not exist on Hasker's analysis of time in which the future is just not existent at all. Nor does T2 exist *at T1* on isotemporalism. It is not clear, then, how a power existing at T1, and not at T2, can cover or include an act at T2. Hasker has already granted that at T2 S does not have the required power to choose A or B. On Hasker's reading of power and what is possible, at T2 S's choice for B renders the choice for A *impossible*. So at T1 S cannot have the power to make it the case that, at T2, S will have the power to choose between A and B. I agree that it seems right intuitively that a power to choose between alternatives—under some description—is important for free will. But Hasker's explication of that power, and hence his understanding of free will, does not strike me as intuitive.

Hasker supports his intuition citing Richard Purtill: "Now it seems as clear as anything in logic can be that the logical consequences of what I cannot change are things I cannot change, that if A is beyond my control, and B is a logical consequence of A, then B is beyond my control." This suggests that Hasker, following Purtill, holds that free will requires that the agent (S) be able to *change* what he chooses. But if what it means to change X is to make it the case that X is different at one time than at another, it is simply impossible that S change his choice. (This is true with or without isotemporalism and with or without divine foreknowledge.) If S chooses B at T2, then at T3 he cannot have done other than choose B at T2. And at T2 he cannot be doing other than choosing B at T2. And at T1 he cannot *change* the choice for B, since no choice has yet been made. There is nothing to change. The Purtill quote moves immediately from "change" to "control", suggesting that what S cannot change must be beyond S's control. But, although S cannot *change* his choice for B, it does not follow that the choice is beyond his control. On the Anselmian view, if S makes an *a se* choice for B at T2, then it is entirely up to S that he chose B over A. That is the same as saying that S controls his choice for B over A. In the Purtill quote, if we try to apply it to the question of divine foreknowledge, Hasker might run it like this: A="God knows that S chooses B at T2" and that logically entails B, where B="S chooses B at T2". S cannot change A, and so cannot change B,

thus S has no control over A, and no control over B, and so S is not free. But we have already seen that S cannot *change* his choice for B under any circumstances, with or without divine foreknowledge. Moreover, on the Anselmian analysis, S *does* have control over A. God's knowledge, and the truth of "S chooses B at T2", is grounded in S actually choosing B at T2. It is up to S that he chooses B at T2, and hence up to S that God knows that he chooses B at T2. That was why appealing to isotemporalism offers a solution to the dilemma. Again, the ability to choose between alternative options is important for free will, but Hasker's analysis of free will and his PEP principles are far from intuitive. They are puzzling regarding just when the power in question is possessed or exercised. And they entail that God's knowledge conflicts with human freedom, even if the knowledge is dependent on the agent's free choice.

Furthermore it is difficult to see that Hasker's analysis of free will does a better job than the Anselmian view of grounding the values that have traditionally been associated with freedom for created agents. On the Anselmian view, S is entirely responsible for his choice for B at T2. Thus he can be praised or blamed, and enjoy the important metaphysical status of a creature capable of being morally responsible. And, since S's choices are up to S, God cannot be the author of sin. The PEPs are intrinsically dubious, and the power they express seems to add nothing of value to the free will of the created agent.

A final reason for rejecting Hasker's intuitive understanding of free will, with the entailed PEPs, is precisely because this understanding does not allow for a reconciliation between divine foreknowledge and free will. Church tradition has embraced human freedom, although there has long been debate about exactly how that freedom should be analyzed. Augustine and Aquinas, for example, are arguably compatibilists, while Anselm and Duns Scotus can be read as libertarians. But suppose one does share Hasker's intuition to this extent: the created free agent must confront genuinely open options (under some description). I would add the requirement that the choice be absolutely up to the agent. Many Christians, past and present, have rejected the sort of compatibilism found in Augustine and Aquinas where it is God who ultimately causes human choices. It seems to many of us to be a bad move to try to solve the freedom and foreknowledge dilemma by abandoning robust, libertarian free will. But historically Church teaching has held divine fore-



knowledge of future contingents to be non-negotiable.<sup>5</sup> There are many reasons for this. The Bible is full of prophecy about events which almost certainly involve free choices (on the assumption that human beings do indeed have free will). Divine omniscience and omnipotence are more extensive if God knows not only the past and the present but also the future. Divine sovereignty is safeguarded, since God has the knowledge to bring about His ends.<sup>6</sup> (On isotemporalism this means that God knows and acts upon all of time in His one, eternal act.) This helps mitigate the problem of evil since we can be assured that God knows how He will bring good out of the evil in the world. The philosopher who takes traditional Church teaching seriously will be loath to abandon it without seeing overwhelming reasons to do so. And possibly not even then, since it is entirely reasonable to suspect that one's own cognitive efforts are less trustworthy than those of the great intellects of the Church and (depending on how one reads Church history) the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The current philosophical discussion of free will and divine foreknowledge is indebted to Hasker for proposing challenging arguments and generating useful debate. But anyone pledging allegiance to Church tradition will not abandon divine foreknowledge of free choices on the basis of Hasker's intuitions about what free will consists in. Rather than jettisoning either libertarian free will or divine foreknowledge, better to attempt a reconciliation. And if the grounding principle is correct—the truth about, and knowledge of, a free choice is dependent upon the actual making of the choice itself—then positing that God is eternal, and all of time is immediately present to Him, seems the most adequate way to respect both sides of the dilemma.

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<sup>5</sup> Some intellectuals in the 13th century pushed one of the theses of Open Theism; God cannot know the future because the future does not yet exist. Bishop of Paris Etienne Tempier condemned this claim in the *Condemnation of 1277*, #15. The *Condemnation* is interesting for its consistent defense of human freedom under a libertarian-seeming model.

<sup>6</sup> Hasker disputes my attempt to defend this point, but he does not address my explication of how a mere time-traveler could use his ability to know the future to help bring about his desired future events (ROGERS 2019, 100–109). Instead, he focuses on what, in my narrative, he takes to be logically prior to, and subsequent to, God's eternal act. A response to Hasker's critique on this point would take us too far afield, but a place to begin might be to note that, while it makes sense to talk about what is logically prior and subsequent within God's eternal act, it may be a mistake to say that anything is logically prior to, or subsequent to, the "whole" act itself. Moreover, Hasker does not address my related point that God does not make decisions, nor does he weigh in on my defense of causal loops. All of these issues could be developed in defending the thought that divine foreknowledge of free choices does indeed render God's power over reality much greater than if God did not know the future.

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SAVING ETERNITY (AND DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE AND FREE WILL):  
A REPLY TO HASKER

S u m m a r y

William Hasker and I disagree over whether or not appealing to a particular understanding of divine eternity can reconcile divine foreknowledge with libertarian human freedom. Hasker argues that if God had foreknowledge of a particular future choice, that choice cannot be free with libertarian freedom. I hold, to the contrary, that, given a certain theory of time—the view that all times exist equally—it is possible to reconcile divine foreknowledge with libertarian freedom. In a recent article, "Can Eternity be Saved? A Comment on Stump and Rogers", Hasker makes it clear that one of the fundamental disagreements between us lies in what each of us takes to be required for libertarian free will. In the present paper I outline the version of libertarianism that I find plausible, then explain how a libertarian free choice can be foreknown by God. (I call my approach "Anselmian", in that it is based on my interpretation of the work of St. Anselm of Canterbury.) Then I will explain why Hasker finds this reconciliation unacceptable since it fails to do justice to what he takes to be required for libertarian freedom. Finally, I will argue that Hasker is wrong to insist upon his analysis of free will.

**Keywords:** Anselm of Canterbury; William Hasker; eternity; foreknowledge; free will.

OCALIĆ WIECZNOŚĆ (ORAZ BOŻĄ PRZEDWIEDZĘ I WOLNĄ WOLE):  
ODPOWIEDŹ WILLIAMOWI HASKEROWI

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Autorka nie zgadza się z Williamem Haskerem co do tego, czy odwołując się do szczególnego rozumienia boskiej wieczności, można pogodzić ideę Bożej przedwiedzy z wolnością człowieka w ujęciu libertariańskim. Hasker twierdzi, że gdyby Bóg posiadał przedwiedzę o konkretnym przyszłym wyborze człowieka, wybór ten nie mógłby być wolny w sensie wolności libertariańskiej. Wręcz przeciwnie, autorka uważa, że biorąc pod uwagę określoną teorię czasu (pogląd, że wszystkie czasy istnieją jednocześnie) możliwe jest pogodzenie Bożej przedwiedzy z wolnością libertariańską. W swoim niedawnym artykule pt. „Can Eternity Be Saved? A Comment on Stump and Rogers”, Hasker wyjaśnia, że jednym z podstawowych obszarów braku zgody między nim

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i autorką jest to, co każde z nich uznaje za wymóg zaistnienia wolnej woli w ujęciu libertariańskim. W niniejszym artykule autorka przedstawia wersję libertarianizmu, którą uważa za przekonującą, a następnie wyjaśnia, w jaki sposób libertariański wolny wybór może stanowić przedmiot przedwiedzy Boga. Następnie autorka wyjaśnia, dlaczego Hasker uważa to podejście za nie do przyjęcia. Otóż nie oddaje ono sprawiedliwości temu, co on uważa za wymagane dla zaistnienia wolności libertariańskiej. Na koniec autorka podaje argumenty, które wykazują błąd Haskera w jego podejściu do analizy wolnej woli.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Anzelm z Canterbury; William Hasker; wieczność; przedwiedza; wolna wola.