

Kevin Timpe and Daniel Speak, eds. *Free Will and Theism: Connections, Contingencies, and Concerns*. New York, Oxford University Press: 2016. 316 pp. \$84.95 (hbk).

Johannes Grössl
University of Siegen (Germany)

Theists struggle with presenting an adequate concept of free will even more than non-theists do. From a philosophical viewpoint, it is quite interesting to see how beliefs in libertarianism, compatibilism or fatalism influence, or are influenced by, particular concepts of the divine. In their anthology on free will and theism, Daniel Speak and Kevin Timpe deliver thought-provoking insights into such discussions. Because the editors have managed to write an excellent summary on all containing essays as part of the introduction, the contents of the volume shall be recapitulated just briefly in this review, before central topics discussed from different viewpoints are highlighted.

Manuel Vargas argues that libertarianism is often the result of motivated reasoning by theists. Since most theists believe in a good and just God, as well as in the “justifiability of eternal damnation for sinners” (33), they derive libertarianism – the idea that free will requires the power over alternate possibilities. *John Martin Fischer*, on the other hand, argues that compatibilism should be preferred by theists and non-theists alike. This is because compatibilism provides a concept of responsibility and is less susceptible to empirical refutation than libertarianism is, so religious beliefs would not be as much in jeopardy. *Laura Ekstrom* discusses several arguments on why libertarianism is required for certain common intuitions. She rejects that it is required for genuine love, truly good acts, genuine creativity or a meaningful life, but accepts the arguments that it is required for moral responsibility and a veridical sense of self. Ekstrom says, “I do think that libertarian conceptions of free will answer to our conception of our selves as agents facing an open future” (75). Ekstrom plausibly rejects ‘source libertarian’ views: possessing morally praiseworthy virtues always require that a person “chose to act in ways that shaped it to be good, at times when she could have instead chosen to act in ways that are less productive of good character” (73-4). As just mentioned, she does not agree with the common argument that being able to love requires libertarian free will, which undermines common versions of free will defenses regarding the problem of theodicy. *Jerry Walls* defends exactly this claim to argue for theistic libertarianism, i.e. that God cannot determine his creatures to love him. This, Walls argues, is the only reason that renders worshipping an essentially loving God compatible with affirming the possibility of eternal damnation.

Tamler Sommers argues that Christian teaching does not help in determining an adequate concept of freedom and responsibility. Sommers claims

that the doctrine of original sin and biblical stories about God holding people accountable for actions they could not have refrained from doing are neither explicable from a libertarian nor from a common compatibilist viewpoint. This is why Christian apologies for libertarianism fail. *Derk Pereboom* argues that a concept of free will that guarantees moral responsibility is dispensable in a theistic worldview if there is (a) universal salvation and if (b) the problem of theodicy can be solved or neglected without incorporating free will defenses. *Timothy O'Connor* argues contrariwise that an adequate theodicy as well as other Christian commitments require a free will defense in the light of a libertarian concept of freedom. *T.J. Mawson* argues that a commitment to libertarianism may raise the relative plausibility of substance dualism, and therefore also of theism. *Helen Steward* opposes Mawson's argument, claiming that libertarianism is compatible with naturalism, since mere indeterminism of complex entities is a sufficient requirement for agency. *Meghan Griffith* argues that theists have good reasons to advance agent-causalism.

Michael Almeida argues that the free will defense in theodicy is not adequate to defend libertarianism, since libertarianism is, according to him, compatible with God's determining free actions. *W. Matthews Grant* also argues that God's causing particular actions can be compatible with free agency; however, Grant argues from a Thomist doctrine of universal causality and double agency. On this doctrine, nothing exists which is not caused by God, including the free decisions of human agents. *Neal Judisch* argues that divine conservation – God's keeping everything in existence – is only compatible with human freedom if God's action of conserving is understood as *responsive* to human action.

Rebekah Rice defends the claim that God cannot be an agent-cause who always and only acts for reasons and thus argues for a non-agent-causal understanding of divine agency, which she finds more appropriate for human actions too. *Kevin Timpe* argues that divine freedom does not include the power to sin, because God essentially possesses a morally perfect character. Humans may come to possess a morally perfect character by forming a character through a series of libertarian free choices. *Jesse Couenhoven* argues that God can be regarded as praiseworthy even if he is not free in the sense that he can do otherwise. Couenhoven advances a non-volitional account of moral responsibility and a normative conception of freedom (305: "that the highest freedom is actuality in accord with the good").

Although much can be written about every single article in the anthology, I want to focus on specific themes that are dealt with throughout the book. First, most of the authors discuss the relationship between certain metaphysical commitments (regarding agency, free will, responsibility, the mind-body problem) and theism. While Mawson, Steward and Pereboom believe that theism does not have strong implications regarding the plausibility of any concept of free will, most authors do argue for such a connection, positively or negatively correlated. Positively, Griffith believes that theism gives us reason to advance agent causation, and Walls and O'Connor argue that theism gives us reason to advance libertarianism. Contrariwise, but still positively, Mawson argues that it is libertarianism which gives us reason to advance theism. Negatively, Fischer argues that theists are better off not to endorse libertarianism.

Second, most of the authors discuss the nature of free will. Interestingly, the focus here is not, as it is in many books on free will, on the discussion of

Frankfurt cases and the power to do otherwise, but rather on the crucial question of how the relationship between will and reasons can be adequately formulated. For instance, Timpe (278-283) and Couenhoven (302) argue for a moderate intellectualist view of free will: an agent (especially a divine agent) can only will what appears to her as good.

Third, the discussion of free will in humans and in God is frequently related to the divine attributes. According to Sommer's discussion of Walls, if libertarianism were false, God would punish innocently manipulated people (108) and deceive us into believing libertarianism is true (109), both of which are hard to reconcile with divine benevolence. According to Judisch, libertarian free will implies God's responsiveness, which is supposedly compatible with divine immutability (253). He writes that "if divine agency is reliably responsive to human deliberation, action, and intention, then human freedom may be secured even if all that we think and do is caused (exclusively) by God" (255-6).

What unites all contributors to this volume besides the analytic method is the following: no one dares to perceive God's freedom in an explicitly libertarian sense. Most libertarians tend to contend that freedom can be attributed to God only as analogy: our freedom implies the power to act immorally, God's freedom doesn't (e.g. 291: "divine freedom expresses itself as the inability to sin"). Compatibilists can apply the term more univocally to God. However, they revise our intuitive application of the concept of free will to humans: while God is actually and wholly free without possessing the power to act immorally (305: "the highest freedom is actuality in accord with the good"), human 'freedom' is severely impaired, which is why it involves an inclination (not the power) to sin. There have been fruitful discussion of God's being free in a libertarian sense (by Nelson Pike, C.B. Martin, T.V. Morris, William Rowe, W.R. Carter, Laura Garcia, Eric Funkhouser) which could have been more highlighted in one or more of the volume's contributions. Only T.J. Mawson refers to Rowe when arguing that God's perfect goodness "would compel Him not to create any world" (149) – but does this mean that God has libertarian free will to create a world, not to create a world, or to create a different world? Open-theistic perspectives on this question would have been a valuable addition to the volume. Maybe, to present a possible approach, God can be said to have morally significant freedom to perform or to omit supererogatorical acts (good deeds without obligation).

The discussion about the nature of God's freedom would have also been helped by more inquiry into the Christological implications of libertarianism. Tim O'Connor observes the challenge presented here quite accurately. According to Christian doctrine, Christ is both impeccable (140: "nearly all Christians accept that Jesus Christ was (and is) incapable of *sin*") and free (ibid.: "[Christ] is depicted as going to the cross freely, persevering through much anguish in prayer as he anticipates vividly his imminent arrest."). O'Connor leaves the compatibility of these attributes an open question. Unfortunately, libertarians have not yet managed to solve this problem clearly.

This book is a valuable contribution and overview of arguments not only for those analytic philosophers of religion working on the intersection of the free will debate and theism, but also for two further groups. First, philosophers working on human agency and free will can find out how theism might influence the epistemic probabilities for a certain position in the free will debate which, from a purely philosophical perspective, seems to have come to a dead end within

the last decades. Second, theologians who are somewhat familiar with the terminology might be able to get a better understanding on how their views of the divine (e.g. whether they affirm classical attributes like divine immutability and perfect goodness) relates to their views of humanity and the definition of human nature. Moreover, theologians might be inspired by the discussions to scrutinize whether certain religious doctrines (whether Christian or non-Christian) imply an affirmation of specific divine attributes and a specific anthropology, and, together with analytic philosophers, discuss whether both can be built into a logically coherent system.