

Sample Essay Outline

Thesis: Agent-causation libertarianism (ACL) is notorious for being hard to accept, even among its supporters. Richard Taylor (1991, p. 14) writes, for example, “One can hardly affirm such a theory of agency with complete comfort, however, and wholly without embarrassment ...”. Most philosophers seem to agree with the assessment of Peter Strawson (1962, p. 12) that the metaphysics of ACL is “obscure and panicky”. My thesis in this essay is that ACL is motivated by a false assumption, that *random events are uncaused*. I also claim that, if this assumption is dropped, then space is created for more reasonable forms of libertarianism to emerge.

Exposition: I will present the key arguments of two agent-causation libertarians, Richard Taylor (1991) and Roderick Chisholm (1964), to show that their arguments depend on the (false) assumption that causes determine their effects.

Arguments: It is essential to any libertarian view of free will that at least some human actions are freely chosen, and that such free actions are not causally *determined* by factors external to that person. Under the assumption that causes determine their effects, it would follow that a person’s free actions cannot even be *caused* by external factors. Yet a person’s actions cannot be uncaused altogether, since such a person would then be “an erratic and jerking phantom”, as Taylor (1991, p. 11) puts it. This is what seems to force libertarians into adopting the “obscure and panicky” notion of causation by an agent.

Objections: I expect that many readers will object to my assumption in this essay that causes need not determine their effects. I don’t think I’ll have space in the essay to argue in detail for this assumption, but I’ll briefly argue that causation will be indeterministic whenever some of the causally-relevant aspects of the system concerned are ‘inscrutable’, i.e. they cannot be represented precisely in abstract terms.

Bibliography: Taylor, R. (1991) *Metaphysics*, 4th edition.

Chisholm, R. (1964) *Human Freedom and the Self*, The Lindley Lecture, 1964.

Strawson, P. (1962) “Freedom and Resentment”, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 48, 1–25.