

and such theories have not been discovered. 'For now,' he concludes, 'fully scientific historiography is science fiction' (p. 253). In fact historians normally work the other way around. Knowing the small-scale events, they are able to write about the large-scale changes that supervene upon them. Of course, there are normally many different ways in which certain kinds of large scale events can be instantiated.

This brief survey of some of the main theses of his book shows that Tucker has raised important issues about historical knowledge in a fresh and serious way. If his claims are not always convincing, they should nevertheless renew serious consideration of the issues involved.

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***Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays***, by Gary Watson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004. Pp. x + 377. H/b £55.00, P/b £19.99.

This book is a treasure. Several of the papers included here are priceless classics; all of them are worthy of study; and the whole is more than the sum of its parts. I confess to a sneaking disappointment that the volume does not include Watson's marvellous essays on virtue ethics, 'Virtues in Excess' and 'On the Primacy of Character', which deserve the widest possible audience. (The first appeared in *Philosophical Studies*, 46, in 1984, the second in O. Flanagan and A. Rorty (eds), *Identity, Character and Morality*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.) But they are admittedly off-topic. This collection is devoted to questions about action and responsibility and includes most of the work that Watson has published on these matters since 1975.

His work is unified by several themes: problems in the idea of motivational compulsion or incapacity, the role of evaluative judgement in agency, and the need to account for both self-determination (or 'liberty of spontaneity') and alternative possibilities (or 'liberty of indifference') in a proper account of freedom and responsibility. On each of these topics, Watson is eloquent and persuasive, often (rightly) tentative in the face of difficulties, and rigorous in argument. His writing is subtle and sophisticated, but never technical; it is accessible to anyone. Those who work on freedom in action will no doubt have read many of Watson's papers already, but they ought to buy this book in any case—first for convenience, and second, because it is fascinating to read the essays together. In what follows, I venture some remarks about the light (and the shadows) they cast on one another.

Let me begin with a confession: despite my admiration for his work, I think Watson is guilty of a fundamental mistake. At least in his earlier papers, he

tends to conflate *practical judgement* (of what one should do) with *intention*, *decision* and *choice*. In 'Free Agency' and 'Skepticism about Weakness of Will', the conflation is more or less complete: at one point, he says explicitly that 'choice (and also decision) [involve] applying one's values to the perceived practical options' (p. 55). This claim is qualified in 'Free Action and Free Will' (pp. 168–9) and re-examined in the most recent paper in the collection, 'The Work of the Will'. Here Watson accepts a distinction between 'normative and volitional commitment' (p. 134)—that is, between practical judgement and choice—but he argues that 'volitional commitment' must still be conceived as "an essentially normative stance" (pp. 131, 133): 'nothing could count as intending (or willing) if it were totally unguided by the good' (p. 129). His argument is that it would be absurd to regard the connection between these two kinds of commitment as wholly contingent: while it is possible to decide against one's better judgement in a given case, one cannot do so all the time (pp. 133–4). Even if this is true, however, I do not see how it follows that intention (or decision or choice) must be characterized in normative terms. Why not say instead that, while intention does *not* depend on the capacity for practical judgement, the converse connection holds: nothing could count as practical judgement if it had no tendency to issue in choice? In any case, I think the very fact of a distinction here is enough to raise doubts about some of the earlier papers in the book.

Consider, for instance, the argument about weakness and compulsion in 'Skepticism about Weakness of Will'. Watson takes it for granted that both weak-willed and compulsive agents act against their better judgement. They differ in whether they do so because their will is too weak, or their desire too strong. According to 'the common account' (p. 42), this difference can be captured by saying that the weak-willed agent is *able* to resist her desire, while the compulsive agent is not. Watson argues that the common account is false. Instead, we should say that *neither* agent is able to resist her desire. For Watson, the contrast is rather that the weak-willed (but not the compelled) 'give in to desires which the possession of the normal degree of self-control would enable them to resist' (pp. 48–9). He goes on to say that the 'normal person' here is 'the typical adult in our society' (p. 50). But the point is not statistical: '[weakness] is relative to expectations and norms' (p. 51), not actual frequency.

How do the arguments of this paper look when we distinguish intention from practical judgement? The short answer is: equivocal. Our distinction points to an ambiguity in philosophical treatments of weakness of will. On the one hand, weakness may be a matter of unconflicted *akrasia*: I believe that I should not smoke another cigarette, but I make no attempt to act on that judgement, and decide to smoke one anyway. On the other hand, weakness may involve what can be called a 'failure of will': I believe that I should not smoke another cigarette, and I decide to act on this judgement—but I am unable to abide by my decision, and end up smoking after all. As Watson

observes in ‘The Work of the Will’ (p. 134), it is not clear that unconflicted *akrasia* deserves to be called ‘weakness’ at all. Weakness in the proper sense involves a failure of will. But then it must be distinguished from *compulsion-as-failure-of-will*—and (so I believe) it is *this* distinction that Watson has explained. If an agent is weak *or* compelled, she is not able to act on her initial decision. The difference is that, in the first case, but not the second, she fails because (at least in the relevant circumstance) her self-control—her tendency to *act* on her decisions—is abnormally weak. (As a picture of self-control, appeal to a brute tendency is too crude; there are *techniques* of self-control. But again, let us set that complication aside.)

It follows that Watson is right to deny that weakness-as-failure-of-will requires the ability to resist one’s appetitive desire. We can see this by reflecting on Oscar Wilde, who famously said that he could resist anything except temptation. The proper description of Wilde is that he is unable to stick to his decisions even when the conflicting appetites are weak. But this inability does not imply that he is a thoroughgoing compulsive, as it would if the ability to resist were a condition of weakness. On the contrary, the implication is that Wilde is terribly weak-willed.

Despite agreeing with Watson about this, however, I do not accept his criticism of the common account. Whatever the intentions of its proponents, I think it is most charitably read as an account of the distinction between failure of will and unconflicted *akrasia*, *not* the distinction (between weakness and compulsion) with which Watson is concerned. And here it is along the right lines. In failure of will, both weak and compulsive, the agent is *unable* to stick by his initial decision, in the face of his unruly appetites. (Watson has doubts about this in later work—cf. pp. 65–6, 94–6—but I think it must be true. How can we distinguish failure of will from mere change of heart, except to say that the former is explained by inability?) In unconflicted *akrasia*, by contrast, the agent usually *is* able to resist temptation: if he had decided to do so, he would have succeeded. At the very the least, it is not *because* he is unable to resist his appetite that he ends up acting on it, since he made no effort to resist. No doubt some advocates of the common account have meant it to explain the distinction between weakness and compulsion, if only because (like Watson) they have exaggerated the connection between intention and practical judgement, and have thus obscured the distinction between unconflicted *akrasia* and weakness-as-failure-of-will. Once we clarify this, however, I think we can see that the common account is (or ought to be) concerned with one thing, and that Watson’s argument is about another.

The contrast between *akrasia* and failure of will leads to a deeper disagreement, about the argument of Watson’s seminal paper, ‘Free Agency’. This paper begins with an examination of *crude compatibilism*, on which freedom in action is the ability to do what one wants. As Watson observes, this view cannot account for the diminished freedom of those who are driven to act (intentionally) by ‘addiction, manias, and phobias of various sorts’ (p. 13). After all,

they are acting on the basis of desire. His response is to distinguish *evaluation* (as motivating evaluative judgement) from *motivation* more generally, and to conceive of freedom in action as the ability to do what one *really* wants, in the sense of what one *values* (p. 27). It follows that compatibilists must explain free agency in evaluative terms. Once we admit the idea of intention or decision as something distinct from practical judgement, however, I doubt that Watson's argument goes through. We can explain diminished freedom as failure of will, without having to invoke evaluation or practical judgement at all. The crucial point about failure of will is not whether one decides to do what one thinks one should, but that one is unable to abide by one's decision, whatever it is. What is diminished is freedom in action, not as the ability to do what one wants, but as the ability to abide by one's decisions. We can thus capture the truth behind the crude compatibilist view, and allow for diminished freedom, without having to characterize free agency in evaluative terms.

Regardless of its details, crude compatibilism is open to a second objection, that the freedom it describes is superficial or inadequate: it falls short of the liberty we hope to have. This objection is examined by Watson in several ways, and his attitude towards it is complicated. On the one hand, he is sympathetic to the argument that crude compatibilism can be at best a theory of freedom in action, not freedom of the will (pp. 182–9; cf. pp. 269–70). On the other hand, he is hostile to libertarianism (pp. 189–95). And, if I understand him correctly, he now believes that crude compatibilism (for instance, on his evaluative interpretation) can be defended as a theory of 'attributability' even if it fails as a theory of 'accountability'. This distinction is drawn in an important recent paper, 'Two Faces of Responsibility'. An action is 'attributable' to an agent if she is open to appraisal on the basis of performing it, where the appraisal in question is '*aretaic*' (p. 266)—concerned with virtue and vice. An agent is 'accountable' only if she is eligible for praise and blame, in a way that bears on the application of rewards and sanctions (pp. 274–5). Accountability is the narrower and more demanding notion.

I must admit that I am ambivalent about Watson's distinction. I have the sense that he is on to something quite deep: a contrast between the mere assessment of character (and the approval and disapproval that go along with that) and distinctive attitudes of 'holding responsible' to which questions of fairness can apply. But the distinction is hard to explain, and I doubt that it is well captured through the connection between blame and adverse treatment on which Watson tends to rely (for example, at pp. 278–9). My reservation is one that Watson himself explains, in an earlier paper: even those without retributive sentiments (which dispose us to engage in adverse treatment) can hold one another responsible in a rich sense that goes beyond mere attributability (see 'Responsibility and the Limits of Evil', pp. 257–8).

More generally, it is not clear to me how this new distinction relates to the strategy of Watson's earlier paper, 'Free Action and Free Will'. That essay begins with the need for a *unified* account of freedom, one that captures both

autonomy as self-determination, and 'liberty of indifference' or the availability of alternative possibilities (pp. 161–4). The contrast here, between autonomy and possibility, is clearly not the same as the one that is drawn in 'Two Faces'. But once we distinguish attribution from accountability, we may begin to suspect that autonomy and possibility come apart. Watson comes very close to saying this:

[It] is only insofar as and because blaming responses (at least potentially) affect the interests of their objects adversely that moral accountability raises the issues of avoidability that have been central to the traditional topic of moral responsibility. (p. 280)

What interests me about this remark is not the questionable connection between blame and adverse treatment, but the suggestion that it is only accountability that even *seems* to depend on alternative possibilities. I am sympathetic to this view, which Watson repeats elsewhere (pp. 9–10). But it threatens to support, or at least permit, a *non*-unified account of freedom.

We can see why this matters by looking at an argument developed in 'Free Action and Free Will' (pp. 189–91) and extended in 'Soft Libertarianism, Hard Compatibilism' (pp. 198–207). In each case, Watson objects to the form of libertarianism that 'treats the indeterministic interpretation of alternative possibilities as independent of the feature of self-determination, and attempts to interpret the latter in metaphysically innocent ways' (p. 189). (He regards both David Wiggins and Robert Kane as theorists of this kind.)

In the end this type of libertarianism leaves it obscure how the addition of that negative condition [indeterminism] to the metaphysically innocent condition can be a source of the special value that libertarians are after, or how both could add up [to] a positive notion of power. (p. 190)

I can see how this would be a problem for libertarians who want a unified theory of freedom, or whose 'intuition [is that] determinism is incompatible with ... autonomy or self-determination' (p. 203). They must explain how the failure of determinism contributes to the latter conditions, and that is not an easy thing to do. But once we make the distinction from 'Two Faces', there is room for a different libertarian position, on which indeterminism is not a source of value, or the substrate of a special power, but a condition of the fairness of blame, and thus of accountability. It need not be required for the full-fledged attribution of action, nor as a consequence of autonomy or self-determination. Instead (so the argument runs), the need for incompatibilist freedom follows from the fact that it is unfair to blame a person for something they could not avoid. The libertarian believes in freedom of this kind, as well as freedom in the 'metaphysically innocent' sense—but, since he accepts the distinction from 'Two Faces', he makes no effort to connect the two.

I do not mean to *endorse* this form of libertarianism, with its incompatibilist conception of accountability. My point is simply that it may avoid some of the obscurity that Watson finds in other libertarian views. As in my remarks about 'Skepticism' and 'Free Agency', I want most of all to bring out how the later

papers in this collection illuminate and complicate the earlier ones. To read them together is to gain a vivid sense of how rich they are; Watson's book is required reading not just for specialists, but for those with even a passing interest in questions of agency and answerability.

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*The Magic Prism: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, by Howard Wettstein. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. x + 241. H/b £30.00.

In this work Howard Wettstein recounts the so-called direct reference revolution against the Frege-Russell tradition in the philosophy of language and outlines what he takes to be the lesson we should draw from it. His aim, he avows:

is to develop this [direct reference] alternative, but in quite a different way from that envisaged by the key figures in the movement—Donnellan, Kaplan, Kripke, Marcus, and Putnam. For even as they effected substantial change they remained locked within traditional patterns of thought. I will recommend a way of thinking about language, and about the character of its philosophical study, that likely will seem foreign to both traditionalists and revolutionaries. (p. 60)

Wettstein's proposed alternative—which might aptly be called Reformed Millianism—rejects the traditional Descartes-inspired individualism, with its prioritizing of thought over language, and puts in its place a Wittgensteinian anthropology of our linguistic practices. The following catalogue of claims may help to convey the flavour of Reformed Millianism.

The arguments of the direct reference revolutionaries have discredited the traditional *cognitive fix idea*—the notion that a speaker cannot use a term to refer to an item unless something about his/her cognitive state distinguishes that item from all others. Frege's account of the mechanism of reference is a pseudo-explanation to begin with, for the posited modes of presentation are assumed to possess intrinsically the very aboutness they are invoked to explain. Indeed, the very idea of modes of presentation (and of Fregean Thoughts constructed from them) is a mistake engendered by acceptance of a version of the cognitive fix idea.

A proper name is a connotationless tag whose job is simply to make its assignee a subject of discourse, something we can talk about. What grounds the possibility of linguistic reference to things in the absence of substantive cognitive contact with them is just our having a *linguistic practice* according to which a minimally competent speaker who picks up the name *N* in some standard fashion is *ipso facto* in a position to use it to make *N* a subject of dis-