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## Book Review: Crucible Of Reason, Intentional Action, Practical Rationality, And The Weakness Of Will

Noel Hendrickson

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Regarding the second, surely we regard people who have severe memory loss as identical to their previous selves, so why not regard reincarnation as analogous to severe memory loss? Alternatively, one could say that what happens in reincarnation is just like what happens in Reid's example of the old general, except the whole process happens much quicker, so there is memory continuity even though the newly reincarnated person does not remember anything about his earlier self (just as the old general does not remember anything about what his boyhood self did).

Overall, *Christian Philosophical Theology* is a solid work. Researchers in the field will certainly want to be familiar with its arguments, especially those in chapters 13 and 15.

*Crucible of Reason: Intentional Action, Practical Rationality, and Weakness of Will*, by Keith D. Wyma. Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. 307 pp. \$85 (cloth), \$29.95 (paper).

NOEL HENDRICKSON, James Madison University

One of the most puzzling aspects of human agency is how we are capable of performing actions that are both intentional and against deeply-held judgments about what should be done (i.e., "akratic" or "weak-willed" actions). This is particularly difficult to understand in light of a central feature of some theories of intentional action, which holds that an action qualifies as intentional only if it is done because of, and according to, a judgment that the action should be done (i.e., "rational-action" theories). While such theories are widely held, they have a notoriously difficult time accounting for weak-willed actions. For, they require of intentional action the very thing that is absent in cases of weakness of the will (namely, conforming to the agent's judgments about what should be done). In the *Crucible of Reason*, Keith D. Wyma thoughtfully tackles this difficult challenge with an extremely intricate examination of attempts by rational-action theorists to account for weak-willed actions. He provides a detailed discussion of the work of R. M. Hare, Donald Davidson, and (especially) Thomas Aquinas. Ultimately, he contends that each theorist is unable to account for the phenomenon of weak-willed actions, especially in its more robust varieties. In response, he develops a new (modified) Thomistic approach to accommodate more fully the real-life experience of weakness of the will. In addition, because this new approach works best in a full-fledged Thomistic and Christian framework, he provocatively suggests that the ability to account for weak-willed actions may serve as a part of the overall inductive case for Christian theism.

Wyma provides a careful, thorough, and charitable examination of each of the three thinkers. Among a variety of criticisms, he insightfully argues that each of them ultimately has to deny the reality of weakness of the will (at least in its most robust forms). Wyma contends that our real-life experience of weak-willed actions includes extremely robust instances such as acting against fully rational judgments, against knowledge that what we are doing is wrong, and even against fully-formed intentions

to do otherwise. It is impossible to capture the subtlety and detail of his discussion of these three thinkers here. But, roughly, Wyma argues that Hare must deny the reality of weak-willed actions against fully rational moral judgments, Davidson must deny the reality of weak-willed actions against intentions to do something else, and Aquinas (unmodified) must deny the reality of weak-willed actions done against actively considered knowledge of their wrongness. Wyma argues that Hare's account of fully rational judgments as fully-informed and providing an overriding rational preference makes them either unattainable for human beings or impossible to act against. Hence, Hare is forced to explain away our experience of acting against our fully rational judgments. Wyma further demonstrates that Davidson's account of intentions as involving "unconditional judgments" that lead to actions makes them either part of a partitioned mind or impossible to act against. Thus, Davidson has to explain away the phenomenon of acting against fully-formed intentions (or rely upon a problematic model of mental partitioning). Wyma also proposes that Aquinas's model of weak-willed actions, which holds that passion can distract an agent so that he does not actively consider his knowledge that acting on that passion is wrong, makes it impossible for an agent to act against such knowledge. Therefore, Aquinas (unmodified) also has to deny an aspect of our real-life akratic experience, namely, actions done despite active awareness that the action ought not to be done.

Wyma's discussion of his new, modified Thomistic account is also too rich and extensive to summarize adequately here. Among other things, it involves adopting a different interpretation than Aquinas has of Aristotle's distinction between having and attending to knowledge, a more thoroughly Augustinian account of habits, and an account of intentionality in action as a matter of degrees. For the purposes of space, I focus on the third of these, which strikes me as the aspect of the proposal that is of the most general interest. Building on Aquinas, Wyma proposes that an action is rational *and intentional* as a matter of degrees: the extent to which it conforms to ideally rational standards (which are ultimately defined in terms of an ideal exemplar: God). That preserves the rational-action theories, since intentionality in action essentially involves rationality. However, it also makes weak-willed actions possible: One could violate a fully rational (contra Hare), intended (contra Davidson), and actively known (contra unmodified Aquinas) judgment but still act rationally. Rationality, then, is a matter of degrees, and on his account, intentionality in action is as well. The seeming problem for rational-action accounts in accommodating weak-willed actions comes from taking intentionality, or perhaps rationality, in action as an "all or nothing" matter. Clearly, weak-willed actions are not themselves fully rational. But, if intentionality implies rationality, and neither admit of degrees, then no weak-willed action can be intentional either. On the other hand, if there are degrees of both rationality *and intentionality* in action, then the weak-willed actions can be intentional (at least to some extent). Thus, Wyma's account would constitute a substantial improvement over the theories of Hare, Davidson, and Aquinas.

The overall philosophical argumentation presented in *Crucible of Reason* is most powerful as a critique of the three theories. And, much of that effectiveness derives from a strong and consistent insistence that any sat-

isfying account must capture the full-range of the real-life experience of weakness of will (especially its most robust forms). The case for the alternative perspective is somewhat less compelling because it is open to the charge that it also fails to adequately account for the stronger varieties of our akratic experience. For, on Wyma's alternate proposal, while weak-willed actions do always qualify as intentional, they do not ever qualify as *fully* intentional. But, just as the real phenomenon of weakness of will involves acting against fully rational judgments, intentions to do the contrary, and actively considered knowledge, does it not also seem to involve acting in a fully intentional manner? Do we not seem to be acting as intentionally as we ever do when we act against our better judgment? Phenomenologically, it would seem that we do. Perhaps one may worry about relying so heavily upon our experiences, or our intuitive analyses of them, but it is that sort of reliance that makes Wyma's criticisms of Hare, Davidson, and Aquinas so compelling. And, it would seem that it also makes his positive proposal not entirely satisfying either. Something about the phenomena of weak-willed action still seems compromised if we admit that such actions are not entirely intentional. Nonetheless, it does seem that Wyma's position is an improvement over Hare, Davidson, and Aquinas, but it does not yet seem to be completely satisfying. It may be, however, that any rational-action theory will be forced to admit that weak-willed actions are not entirely intentional since such accounts take rationality to be essential to intentionality. In that case, perhaps this is the best such theories can do.

Wyma also makes some very intriguing suggestions about how accounting for weakness of the will could play a role in an overall inductive case for Christian theism. His positive proposal works best in a general Thomistic framework with references to (among other things): (1) an account of original sin, (2) a theory of the habit-forming consequences of sinful behavior, and (3) the notion of God as the defining exemplar of perfect rationality (and intentionality) in action. As such, if his proposed account of weakness of the will were the most adequate, it could (potentially) lend some support to 1–3 and the further suppositions that they involve. Now, relying on God as the defining exemplar of rationality is likely to raise all the suspicions (and usual arguments) that attend to parallel theories about relying on Him as the defining exemplar of moral goodness. We would have a kind of divine command theory of rationality and intentionality. As such, it is not entirely clear that such ideas are likely to aid progress in debates over the plausibility of Christian theism. For, it is unlikely that divine command theories of rationality and intentionality would fare any better (or be less controversial) than such theories of moral goodness. The idea of employing a Thomistic/Christian psychology in order to explain weakness of the will is more promising. After all, there has been relatively little discussion of the question as to why we as human beings seem so susceptible to weakness of will despite our very powerful rational faculties. The notion of human beings as "fallen" and in need of some sort of redemption might turn out to have some explanatory force in this context. Here, Wyma has made some possibly groundbreaking suggestions as to how we might explore that possibility. Obviously, what he explores in this work remains fairly speculative,

but it should provide some inspiration to others for new areas to explore in Christian philosophy.

Overall, Wyma addresses a serious challenge in action theory, and brings together an unusually diverse range of thinkers. His work will be useful for those interested in contemporary action theory or philosophical psychology, as well as inspiring for those who wish to explore new avenues in developing the overall case for Christian theism. In addition, the extensive and illuminating discussion of Aquinas's work makes it an absolute "must read" for anyone working on Thomistic or Medieval action theory/philosophical psychology.