

Steven Luper-Foy ('Rational Definitions and Defining Rationality') adapts the concept of reflective equilibrium to justify the claim that evaluative definitions of key epistemological terms can support regulative principles for adopting beliefs.

Alan Berger ('Idealized Definitions in Physics and Idealized Dispositions') raises a sustained objection to Quine's concept of speakers' dispositions to assent or dissent to sentences under suitable prompting conditions. He explores and finds wanting an analogy with idealized definitions in physics.

George Schlesinger ('Inverted Definitions and Their Uses') applies a familiar traditional principle of good definitions, that the definiens should be conceptually prior to the definiendum, to a number of putative cases of its violation.

Michael D. Bayles ('Definitions in Law') explores the uses of definitions in the law. Perhaps most unsettling is his observation that under some circumstances a definition need not be correct (e.g., one which regards tomatoes as vegetables) in order to be a good one.

Thomas V. Morris ('Defining the Divine') discloses the existence of a substantial body of recent literature in what might be called analytic theology, of which his essay is a rather impressive example. He offers some extremely interesting reflections on two alternative current approaches to defining God, resulting in what he calls Perfect Being Theology and Causation Theology.

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Carl Ginet

On Action.

Cambridge University Press 1991.

Pp. xii + 159.

US \$34.50 (cloth: ISBN 0-521-38124-X);

US \$11.95 (paper: ISBN 0-521-38818-X).

This book poses and ventures to answer some key questions of analytical philosophy of action.

What is an action? Willing, basically. Ginet argues that all action begins with a causally simple mental occurrence, a mental act of volition (or trying) that we can distinguish by its 'actish phenomenal quality', the 'intrinsic mark' of an action. Yet 'the relevant intrinsic features mark an event as an action only if that event occurs in the right surroundings' (4), which sounds to my ear as if the actual mark of an action is not really intrinsic or the

intrinsic quality is not really a mark. Bodily exertion is voluntary (and hence an action) only if it is caused by the agent's volition, although to act, as such, is not always to cause something, and not only for the obvious reason that a mental act of trying might fail to have its effect. Ginet defines action inductively, using acts of volition as his basis and capturing the rest with Goldmannesque generation relations (including compound generation) specified over canonical action-designators.

How do we individuate action? More like multipliers than unifiers, for the most part. (Or more like maximizers than minimizers, to use Ginet's less familiar labels.) Here the familiar worries about identity claims are trotted out — how can actions designated by different designators be identical if what is designated by the one designator is said to be done by or to causally explain what is designated by the other, or if the designators seem to indicate different times of act-completion? Ginet adds some interesting new wrinkles to the counterunifying arguments. The positive case for multiplying, however, rests on a presumption that an action includes what its designator entails, to the extent that an action's circumstances and consequences are also its parts (49-52). Many would not buy this; it's too much like claiming that a husband has a wife as part.

Ginet ends this discussion on a wishywashy note, claiming that the dispute over act-individuation is ultimately not much more than a verbal one: none of the competing accounts is ontologically more parsimonious than the others and all can find some support in ordinary language. Well, we've heard that one before. Goldman (*A Theory of Human Action*, 8-9) once denied that he was increasing the furniture of the world, claiming that rival methods of act-individuation are committed alike to the actions whose individuation is at issue. Unfortunately he overlooked the fact that his method, unlike Davidson's, also quantifies over act-properties. Ginet too smuggles in a further ontological category; where Davidson just has bodily exertions and various nonactions (circumstances, consequences) as their relata, Ginet has each of these *plus* ontologically distinct hybrids composed of these. What is properly called an action is not so easily dismissed as a merely verbal issue!

What makes action intentional? Not necessarily intention. Ginet maintains that an action can be 'intentional' or can be done 'intentionally', even if it is not 'intended' or even if one does not have the 'intention' to do it (75ff). It is enough that I *believe* that starting my noisy car will wake the neighbor to make my waking him intentional; I don't have to intend it as well. He can still justly complain that I intentionally woke him. I doubt, however, that these cognate terms are quite so well behaved as Ginet presumes. Would it really be wrong to tell the neighbor that my waking him, inasmuch as I didn't specifically intend to do that, was unintentional? (My antennae aren't bristling.) Ginet seems to think that if we agree that the waking was not intended, we need to say the waking was intentional in order to attach moral responsibility to it. But that isn't selfevident either. Why not say instead that the neighbor has a case against me in that I *intended* not (*not*: 'did not intend') to let its waking him prevent me from starting my car?

Ginet's other argument involves intending a disjunction. Knowing certain double doors open only one way but not knowing which, I simultaneously push one and pull the other. I intend to open either door #1 or door #2; succeeding in opening door #2 fulfills my intention, even though I didn't intend to open that door specifically. But, maintains Ginet, I did open it intentionally. Well, I'll agree I didn't open it unintentionally. But to say simply that I opened it intentionally seems somehow misleading or incomplete. Compare: I am faced with two fill-in-the-blank questions and I know that the correct answer to one of them is *A*, but I don't know which it is, so I fill in *A* for both. Did I correctly answer question #2 intentionally?

Ginet also discusses the role of wayward causal chains and luck in performing actions. Here again belief is made to carry the explanatory burden for an action's being intentional, namely suitably justified belief that isn't too far from the truth as to how one actually manages to perform one's action. The upshot of the 'too far' is that the boundaries of intentional action will be vague, which sounds vaguely right.

Is free will compatible with determinism? Hardly. Talk of free actions as alternatives open to one is soon transmogrified by Ginet into talk of it being 'open to one to make it the case that *p*' (98). *S* makes it the case that *p* if and only if *S* contributes the last thing needed to make up a minimally sufficient condition for the truth of *p* (100). Hence if it is open to *S* to make it the case that *a* then it is open to *S* to make it the case that *b* & *a*, for some truth *b* (and if *a* is open, so are not-*a* and *b* & not-*a*). The argument for incompatibilism now runs: 'Determinism entails that for any truth *a* as to what will be the case, there is a truth *b* entirely about the past such that it follows from the laws of nature that if *b* then *a*; thus, by the inescapability of the laws, it follows that it was never open to anyone to make it the case that *b* & not-*a*; from this last plus the principle of the fixity of the given past, it follows that it was never open to anyone to make it the case that not-*a*' (106). Those who would resist the conclusion by denying either inescapability or fixity are anticipated. Ginet shows both these moves, which are based on contrary views about truth conditions for counterfactual conditionals, to be implausible.

But aren't reasons causes? Not in a way that presupposes determinism or helps compatibilism. A free action can typically be explained in terms of the agent's reasons (which are a function of his intentions, beliefs, and desires) for doing it. So a compatibilist might take another tack, arguing that only determined events can have such an explanation. This is roughly Davidson's position, which also has it that reasons-explanations indicate causal relations but aren't full-fledged causal explanations because they don't instantiate causal laws or reduce to physical phenomena which do. Recently Kathleen Lennon (*Explaining Human Action*; reviewed in C.P.R./R.C.C.P. 11 [1991] 263-5) has argued to the contrary that there can be 'intentional laws' sans reduction, and since reasons-explanations support suitable counterfactuals, such explanations are causally explanatory. Ginet goes up the middle, arguing that there are *anomic* (i.e., not entailing the existence of a covering

law) conditions sufficient for the truth of reasons-explanations. His case rests on the idea that an action may have 'concurrent intentions', which cannot be nomically or causally related to the action because they don't precede it.

This book is not a quick read: it is detailed, precise, and occasionally more convoluted than seems called for. Nevertheless it not only demands, but also deserves close reading. A definite must for men and women of action!

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Mark Heller

The Ontology of Physical Objects:

Four-Dimensional Hunks of Matter.

New York: Cambridge University Press 1991.

Pp. xiv + 162.

US \$34.50. ISBN 0-521-38544-X.

J.K. Swindler

Weaving:

An Analysis of the Constitution of Objects.

Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers,

Inc. 1991. Pp. xv + 197.

US \$39.50. ISBN 0-8476-7667-6.

Each of these excellent new works in ontology challenges, though in radically different ways and with radically different results, the reality of ordinary objects. Many ontologists have, by adopting a criterion of simplicity for what exists, denied that there are chairs and people; but Heller's and Swindler's objections have to do more with matters of the 'vagueness' (Heller) and the 'impurity' (Swindler) of such things. Each would 'replace' ordinary objects by something else; in Heller's case by 'four-dimensional hunks of matter' and in Swindler's by 'pure particulars'. Each ranges far in his arguments: both philosophers deeply into the realm of the modal and so-called possible worlds, conventionality and context, reference, and the nature of consciousness; Swindler yet farther into the universal and the particular, intentionality and non-existent objects of awareness, and much more.

Heller's concern is not to prove the existence of physical objects but only to argue that whatever physical objects there are cannot be ordinary objects.