White Rose Research Online

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk
Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York

Deposited via The University of Leeds.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/84719/

Version: Accepted Version

Article:
Steward, H (2013) Responses. Inquiry: an interdisciplinary journal of philosophy, 56 (6). 681 - 706. ISSN: 0020-174X

https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2013.841055

Reuse
Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown
If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

Response to Kim Frost

Kim raises a number of fascinating questions concerning the position for which I argue in *A Metaphysics*. In what follows, I shall try to try to say what I can to defend the claim that it is the Agency Incompatibilist, rather than the Two-way Compatibilist, who best captures what it is we think we attribute when we attribute agency. But Kim's paper, like Sarah's and Karin's, makes me acutely aware that compatibilism can take far more sophisticated forms than the form on which I focused my opposition in *A Metaphysics* – and I am grateful for the opportunity to think harder about some of its more subtle manifestations.

One great virtue of Kim's paper is the care it takes to distinguish different conceptions of two-way powers. At the outset of the paper, Kim mentions what he calls a 'generic' conception of a two-way power as a power that has two, mutually exclusive kinds of exercise. This conception, he says, is common both to Aristotle and to *A Metaphysics*. But in fact, I am not sure this is right – for I am not sure agentive powers, as I conceive of them, really *do* have two, fundamentally different kinds of exercise. The reason they do not is that, for me, *not* exercising a power – even a two-way power – is not a way of exercising it. It is very fundamental for me that agency involves exercise; the agent has to *do* something in order to act. But she doesn't have to do anything in order *not* to act – and thus not acting does not count as an exercise of a two-way power. I have, for example, not exercised my power to sing over the last hour or so. But in not having thus exercised it, I don't want to say that I have all along been exercising one half – the negative half, as it were – of the power to sing or not to sing. I haven't been doing any exercising of that power at all – though I have possessed it, throughout the past hour. So I don't in fact agree that a two-way power, by my lights, has two, mutually exclusive kinds of exercise. The fundamental kind of exercise of the power of singing is simply singing. Why then say that singing – like other active powers - is (normally) a *two-way* power? Because I am currently able both to exercise it and not to exercise it – and these abilities are connected, in that one's exercise would not *count* as active if the power *not* to exercise that ability were not simultaneously present. But this

second power, in the light of which we judge the first to have the active character it does, is a power whose realisation is merely passive.

What is crucial for me, I think, to the definition of a two-way power is the point Kim makes about conditions of exercise of the power being merely necessary, rather than necessary and sufficient for its exercise. That is what is at the heart of the distinction between one-way and two-way powers, as I conceive of it. Kim suggests that Aristotle also believes that the conditions of exercise for his two-way powers are merely necessary conditions for the actual exercise of those powers. But in Aristotle's case, the insufficiency of the conditions of exercise is supposed not to lead to an absence of *determinism*. On the contrary, the way in which a two-way power is exercised is *determined by desire*. Determinism is thus alleged to be *compatible* with the absence of conditions of exercise for two-way powers which are sufficient. But is this combination of non-necessitation with determinism coherent? Kim comments that: "If we thought of the determining factor as just one more condition of exercise, we would perhaps lose the contrast between one-way and two-way powers, because the conditions of exercise and determining factor together would give necessary *and* sufficient conditions for one or other kind of exercise of an Aristotelian two-way power on an occasion" (p.?) But the question is why exactly desire does *not* count as a mere condition of the exercise of a power in one direction rather than another – and more generally, how one is to decide what does and does not count as such a condition. For example, are *all* psychological conditions excluded from the class of conditions of exercise? Imagine a doctor who is overtaken periodically by acute anxiety, sufficient to prevent him from having the confidence to perform his work. His medical knowledge remains intact and once the anxiety fades, he is able to work again. Is the absence of this anxiety a condition of the exercise of the powers constituted by his knowledge of medicine? If so, we would seem to have admitted at least some conditions of exercise which are psychological – and we must find different grounds for the specific exclusion of desire. But if not, it must be explained why exactly absence of anxiety is different from absence of e.g. temporary paralysis, which might equally impede the exercise of the powers of a medical practitioner and which surely cannot be characterised as psychological. One might have the suspicion that it will turn out to be exceedingly difficult to make the distinction between conditions of exercise and determining

factor, or factors, precise. Moreover, even if it *can* be made precise, the resulting distinction has to be usable to ground a conception of two-way power which is *metaphysically interesting.* Otherwise, one might think the possession by agents of two-way powers might readily be granted, but would not serve truly to differentiate the agents from the nonagents in any way that had serious metaphysical clout. That would be a hollow victory for someone seeking to combine compatibilism with the claim that agents may be granted two-way powers.

I do not want to be too pessimistic about the possibility that desire might indeed be found to be a truly distinctive factor, which fully deserved not to be assimilated to the other conditions of exercise of a given power actively to ø. Indeed, I rather think it *is* distinctive. But the best way I can see of making out the case for its distinctiveness actually renders the possession of two-way power in Kim's hoped-for modified Aristotelian sense dependent on the possession of two-way power in my incompatibilist sense. The best reason, it seems to me, for supposing that the factor of desire, thought of as that thing which explains, in all cases of rational agency, why someone exercises a particular active power in the way that they do, is that desire (in this sense) is best not thought of *in general* as something genuinely present *antecedent* to action at all. Rather, the desire to ø becomes attributable after the fact, in virtue of its being apparent that an agent *has* ø-ed, and there being no special reason for thinking s/he has ø-ed involuntarily or inadvertently or under duress, etc. One thereby concludes that the agent must have wanted to do what she did, given that she did it – and there is no indication of any subsequent dissatisfaction on her part with what has occurred. But this is to suggest that desire is indeed *not* a condition of the exercise of a rational power in the sense that it is something that must be *antecedently* present before the action will occur. Rather, it must be ascribable *post facto*, if the action has occurred, and there is no special reason for thinking that action to have been, after all, some kind of manifestation of irrationality, perverseness or compulsion. But in that case, it seems to me, the action itself is *not* necessitated by antecedent factors – which is as much as to say that it is the agent herself who makes the determination of (settles) what is to occur, in the wake of which determination we are then able to ascribe desire. And that, it seems to me, is the position of the Agency Incompatibilist.

It may be that this point is connected to the question about whether determinism might be given a timeless formulation, which Kim raises later on in the paper. I am intrigued by this idea – but I am unsure what it can buy us. I agree that there is a conception of settling (we could call it 'determination') on which the total condition of a deterministic Universe at any point is settled by its total condition at any other, together with the laws, in the sense that it can be logically extrapolated from this information. But I do not really see how this view is to be prevented from entailing *non-timeless* settling of the present by the past, and of the future by the present. I remain to be convinced, I think, that there need be any surreptitious conceiving of the Universe (or perhaps its laws) as a giant substance or set of substances, in the mere view that the laws and the initial conditions together have determined the present. I *can* see that a mere regularity view of laws of the sort for which Ayer was doubtless arguing when he commented on the 'primitive mistake' that Kim alludes to, will serve to remove the sting of determinism, but the trouble is that I have never found regularity views of laws remotely plausible. Perhaps the key to an acceptable compatibilism might lie in showing that it is indeed possible to overcome the many objections to them.