



Review Article

Willing, Wanting, Waiting*

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Abstract

In his book *Willing, Wanting, Waiting* Holton defends a comprehensive view of the will. His central claims are: (i) that we have a capacity of choice, independent of judgment about what is best to do, (ii) that resistance to temptation requires a special kind of intentions, *resolutions*, and the exercise of an executive capacity, *willpower*, (iii) there is a distinction between weakness of will and akrasia. I argue that Holton is right about these claims, but I raise a few concerns: (a) I am unclear about the philosophical import of (i); (b) I find that important details in the explanation of the working of willpower vis-à-vis temptation are missing and that there are inconsistencies in his account of addiction; (c) I would have liked a more extensive discussion of other possible defects of will; (d) I am unclear about the scope of the will and the relation of willpower to other executive capacities. I conclude with a brief assessment of the contribution of psychological studies to the philosophical investigation of intentions and the will.

Keywords

Will, intention, weakness of will, willpower, akrasia, temptation, addiction, resolution, choice

Richard Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 203 pages. ISBN: 0199214573 (hbk.). Hardback \$49.95.

In *Willing, Wanting, Waiting* Richard Holton defends a comprehensive view of the will, covering such topics as intention, choice, weakness and

* Thanks to the participants in the Stanford reading group on Holton's book (Facundo Alonso, Will Beals, Michael Bratman, Luis Cheng-Guajardo, Alma Papadopol, Grant Rozeboom, Manuel Vargas, and Ben Wolfson) who helped me jump-start this critical review.

strength of will, temptation, addiction, and free will. His most important claims are that intentions are irreducible attitudes of planning agents and that resolutions are a special kind of intentions aimed at resisting temptation. This resistance is the standard source of strength of will. It is secured not only by resolutions but also by the active and effortful exercise of will-power. This executive capacity is at the core of the will. In addition, we also have the capacity of ‘choice’, the capacity to acquire intentions even in the absence of (or contrary to) a judgment of what is best to do. A distinctive and refreshing feature of Holton’s account is the extensive use of psychological studies about the nature of our planning attitudes, inclinations, and executive capacities.

Because of space limitations, I will concentrate my review on Holton’s core view as presented in chapters 3 through 7. (I am leaving out the very interesting defense of partial intentions in chapter 2 on the basis of an analogy with partial beliefs – since it does not bear directly on the central thesis – and the final chapter where Holton discusses some implications of his view of the will on the free will problem.)

Intentions and Choice

At the outset of the book, Holton introduces and defends an account of intentions in the style of Michael Bratman’s influential theory of intentions. In particular, Holton focuses on intentions as controlling attitudes (unless revised, they lead the agent to perform the intended action *directly*) that are stable (once formed, they tend to persist). Intentions help save on the costs of deliberation, and produce benefits in transtemporal, inter- and intra-personal coordination of conduct. Holton offers three original contributions to Bratman’s theory: the appeal to psychological evidence in support of the distinctive features of intentions, a new set of arguments for the irreducibility of intentions to combinations of beliefs and desires, and the notion of ‘resolution’ as a special kind of intention – one that is aimed at resisting temptation.

In chapter 3, Holton discusses the formation of intentions. Some are acquired automatically; others are formed after conscious consideration of what to do and what Holton calls a ‘choice’ or ‘decision to’. Choice is an act that takes time, concentration, and some effort. Choice is not determined by prior beliefs and desires. Once the question of what to do arises, choice is (typically) not just necessary but sufficient for the formation of intention and subsequent action.

Choice can take place in the absence of conscious judgment about what to do. We can decide *to* without deciding *that* (p. 60). Choice needs not be arbitrary, however: 'Very often it will respond to features that we have registered but of which we are unaware' (p. 63). In many cases, conscious judgment follows the choice. It is formed on the basis of the observation of one's choice (pp. 66–67). Choice can thus provide a source of self-knowledge.

Holton supports these claims both on the basis of phenomenological observations and empirical studies. But what is their philosophical import? According to him, one important question concerns the individuation of what the faculty of choice is good for. He argues that its most distinctive benefit is that it makes us able to be moved to action in the absence of conscious judgment. This is especially useful when our responses to cues and factors that are not available to consciousness are better and faster than the responses we could reach via conscious and extended deliberation.

But choice is not an unalloyed good. The faculty of choice might also operate in the presence of conscious judgments that push in a different direction. This might explain some instances of *akrasia* (and be especially troublesome when the conscious judgment, rather than the unconscious registration of reasons, is actually correct, p. 69).

I find these conclusions quite plausible. But I am not persuaded that they help us address important philosophical questions about the nature of intentional agency. It is true that they undermine any theory that denies that intentions can ever be acquired in the absence of a conscious decision. But I doubt that even the most intellectualist accounts of intentional agency commit themselves to this utterly implausible psychological claim.

In addition, Holton's thesis does not raise any problem for the rationalist accounts that claim a special role for conscious judgment only as a *regulative ideal* in the acquisition and retention of intentions. According to these accounts, there is a distinctive rational pressure for acquiring and retaining intentions by responding to the rational considerations that, under suitably idealized conditions, would inform the conscious judgments in support of those intentions. These views do not deny that intentions often are not acquired as a result of a conscious judgment. And they would be happy to make room for a Holton-style choice, especially when, as Holton suggests, it can help us be sensitive to rational considerations to which *actual* (rather than ideal) conscious deliberation might be blind.

It might be suggested that the special place attributed to the faculty of choice could help adjudicate the dispute between voluntarist and rationalist theories of agency, including the controversy about the possibility of radical perversion. However, Holton explicitly states that retaining the

faculty of choice even when one has formed a judgment about what is best is a *contingent* feature of human psychology: we could ‘imagine beings who, once they formed a judgment that a certain option was best, were compelled to act on that judgment’ (p. 68). To sum up, even if I am convinced about the existence of a faculty of choice in Holton’s sense, I am not sure that it can do as much philosophical work as Holton suggests.

Weakness of Will

At the core of Holton’s view is an account of what it takes to stick to an intention in the face of temptation, that is, to achieve ‘strength of will’. He claims that strength of will is usually achieved by the exercise of a distinctive executive skill: ‘willpower’.

To better understand his argument, let’s begin by noting that one of the distinctive features of intentions is that they are subjected to a rational pressure for stability: by default, it is (defeasibly) irrational to give up an intention prior to its discharge. Intentions usually secure their stability by resisting reconsideration, i.e., by resisting the re-opening of deliberation (and therefore the possible revision of the intention).

Holton maintains that *weakness of will* amounts to the over-readiness to reconsider and revise intentions. More precisely, an agent exhibits weakness of will when she unreasonably revises a *resolution* in response to the pressure of any of the contrary inclinations that this very resolution is supposed to defeat (p. 78).

Resolutions are a special kind of intention: intentions adopted to resist the pressure of ‘contrary inclinations’, i.e., of beliefs, desires, or emotions that stand in the way of acting as originally decided (pp. 9–12, 77). Holton contrasts resolutions to ‘simple intentions’, which are not acquired to resist temptations. For instance, the intention to go to the restaurant tonight need not be adopted to resist the effects of future laziness or loss of the desire to eat out. As such, giving up the simple intention to go to a restaurant does not manifest weakness of will. It might, however, exhibit capriciousness if the changes prompted by fickle inclinations are so frequent to undermine the benefits of advanced planning (pp. 76–7).

Holton’s main concern is with revisions of a different kind, those prompted by the very contrary inclinations that the intentions are meant to resist. In these cases, the failure lies in the distinctive operation of the intentions. Hence, this is a defect of the *will* rather than, as in the case of capriciousness, a defect in the structure and stability of the agent’s underlying inclinations.

I think that Holton is right in drawing the distinction between the two kinds of defects and their sources. Nonetheless, I am not entirely convinced by his emphasis on the special status of resolutions. When an agent adopts an intention, she is normally – although often only implicitly – taking this intention to be under the potential challenge of future contrary inclinations. The benefits of planning derive not just from the role of intentions in structuring and efficiently organizing deliberation but also from the expectation of stability in the face of the challenges of contrary inclinations. The existence of these challenges is the default background for human planning agency. Hence, for the most part and by default, intentions come in the form of ‘resolutions’. Simple intentions are rather the exception.

It might be true that only some ordinary intentions make explicit the contrary inclinations that they are expected to oppose, possibly on account of the expected strength of these inclinations and of concerns about the agent’s ultimate success in withstanding them. In this sense, these intentions wear their status as ‘resolutions’ on their sleeves. But I don’t think that from this it follows that the operation of ordinary intentions does not depend on the exercise of willpower as well, although in the form and strength appropriate to the specific challenges that they are going to face.

Hence, it seems to me that Holton, on the one hand, underplays the extent to which ordinary intentions are resolutions (p. 77) while, on the other hand, overplaying the originality of the notion of resolution in the account of planning agency. If I am right, the central and most common instances of intentions are resolutions in Holton’s sense but theories of intentions such as Bratman’s already have the resources necessary to account for intentions-as-resolutions.

Weakness of will in Holton’s sense is different from clear-eyed akrasia, i.e., from acting intentionally and knowingly against one’s better judgment. Holton concedes that akrasia might occur, but he claims that it is a rare phenomenon and that most cases of what is ordinarily called ‘weakness of will’ are instances of over-ready reconsideration and revision of resolutions.

Holton is right about the existence of two distinct failures of will. I find his characterization of the distinction convincing and illuminating. He might also be right that weakness of will in his technical sense is much more common than usually recognized and that it, rather than akrasia, should deserve more philosophical attention.

Nonetheless, I am not entirely persuaded by Holton’s insistence on presenting his proposal as an alternative to the traditional account of weakness of will. At times, Holton makes it sound as if the issue were about how best to interpret ordinary uses of the term ‘weakness of will’. This is a

question that I find of limited philosophical interest. I also suspect that Holton's rhetoric gives an exaggerated impression on how dominant the so-called traditional views are (as he seems to concede at p. 71, fn. 2).

The most important lesson of Holton's proposal, in my view, is that it shows that there are several loci of possible failure of will with respect to intentions, failures that affect the various stages of intentional activity. But I think that Holton is too sanguine in maintaining that weakness of will as ordinarily understood should be accounted for only in terms of the over-readiness to reconsider (p. 86) and that the traditional account is 'not simply inadequate, but straight-out wrong' (p. 87). My concern is that we should not just try to give *akrasia* its due, but also be more open to the possibility that ordinary talk of weakness of will might refer to other forms of executive failure (including loss of nerve, distraction, and listlessness).

In any event, as Holton explicitly notes, his account has nothing to say about the traditional philosophical puzzles about acting against one's better judgment. And the occurrence of weakness of will is far less perplexing than *akrasia*. The interesting philosophical question is rather the one about the possibility of strength of will (p. 112).

Temptation and Addiction

In chapter 5, Holton argues that temptation normally works by 'seduction'. It does not push the agent to act against her judgment but rather corrupts it (p. 97). Temptation usually corrupts by 'capturing the attention, focusing on what is desired, and narrowing horizons' (p. 109) and, as a result, it usually induces a shift in the agent's judgment of what is best for her to do. Hence, when one succumbs to temptation, one acts against one's original resolution but not against one's better judgment at the time of action. Temptation does not bring about *akrasia*.

Holton also discusses addiction. He argues that addiction is compulsive but, contrary to standard accounts, not necessarily irresistible (p. 98). Addiction is a kind of temptation, which seduces in a way similar to ordinary temptations. Yet it succeeds not by inducing a change in judgment but by *decoupling* the agent's desire (and subsequent action) from the unchanged judgment.

Given that temptation either corrupts judgment or makes it powerless, resistance cannot come from the undermining of the desire's force via judgment. One must rather resist the desire's force *directly* (p. 98, 110).

Holton maintains that temptation is a desire with both cognitive and conative aspects: 'a state that preoccupies the agent's attention with an urge to perform a certain action' (p. 102). When the tempted agent becomes aware that she is going to succumb to the urge, she is likely to change her evaluation and shift her judgment (pp. 100–1) so as to avoid cognitive dissonance (the dissonance of seeing her conduct out of alignment with the judgment that is supposed to guide it). When the agent succumbs to temptation, therefore, her intention ends up being aligned with her new judgment and her action is weak-willed in Holton's sense.

Holton's account of the workings of temptation is suggestive, but many important details are not sufficiently spelled out. For instance, how does the temptation give rise to the belief that the agent is likely to act on it? Why is the cognitive dissonance resolved by changing the valuation rather than the belief that one is going to succumb to the temptation? How is the shift in judgment produced? Is it adopted non-deliberatively and only in order to avoid dissonance? Or is it changed by a new deliberation? If the latter, what is the point of deliberating if one already takes oneself to succumb to temptation? Knowing the answers to these and similar questions would help us get a deeper understanding of the mechanisms by which temptation seduces us and prepare more effective defenses against it.

Holton presents only one mechanism to explain the work of ordinary temptation. Could there be others? For instance, couldn't the cognitive component of the temptation (its power to insistently and favorably redirect the agent's attention, p. 102) be sufficient to induce a shift in judgment without going through a belief about one's future failure to act on it and the resultant need to reduce cognitive dissonance? It seems to me that allowing for a variety of sources of judgment shift might still be in the spirit of Holton's approach; in particular, it would not undermine his distinction between *akrasia* and weakness of will. Hence, it would have been helpful if Holton had said more about the availability of additional mechanisms of temptation.

Holton might respond that the dissonance-reduction mechanism is the only one supported by psychological studies. However, the work of Karniol and Miller on which Holton's account is built does not enter into the details of the work of temptation.¹ Their studies only support the suggestion that temptation works by inducing a shift in judgment. The explanation via the

¹ Karniol, Rachel and Dale Miller, 1983, 'Why Not Wait? A Cognitive Model of Self-imposed Delay Termination,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45: 935–42.

reduction of cognitive dissonance is Holton's own (p. 102). He presents it as the 'most obvious explanation' (p. 100), but I wish he had explicitly compared it to other possible account of judgment shift and shown us why it fares better.

Likewise, I wish that Holton had offered more support for his view about the working of addiction. His account builds on the studies of Wyvell and Berridge.² They have shown that addictive behavior in animals is due to the decoupling of the wanting (which is responsible for moving the animal to action) and the liking (manifested by a variety of responses such as tongue protrusion, lip sucking, and smiles). Normally, the liking works through the wanting since there is only one motivational system, so that the strength of the wanting is usually proportional to the strength of the liking. According to them, in animals addiction breaks the connection between wanting and liking so that their behavior follows the wanting but is no longer aligned with the liking.

Holton suggests that a similar story applies to human addiction, except that the decoupling is between the wanting and the judging (p. 108). This is an intriguing conjecture, but Holton only offers a sketch of it. In particular, we are not told how the judging is related to the liking. Does the judging replace the liking in human beings? If so, how? Or, more plausibly, is the judging an additional factor? If the latter, we need to know both how it is related to wanting and liking under normal conditions (e.g., does the judging has to go through the liking, run parallel to it, etc.?) and where exactly the decoupling occurs under addiction (are both liking and judging decoupled from wanting? Or only judging?).

This is not to deny that addiction might indeed make judgment powerless. But in the absence of a more detailed account of how this powerlessness is brought about, it is hard to assess whether Holton is right in claiming that addiction is closely related to ordinary temptation, both in the workings of the strategies of seduction and in the skill that is required to resist it (pp. 110–1, 135).

Willpower

Chapter 6 presents the centerpiece of Holton's account, the discussion of strength of will and willpower. To display strength of will is to stick to a

² Wyvell, Cindy and Kent Berridge, 2000, 'Intra-accumbens Amphetamine Increases the Conditioned Incentive Salience of Sucrose Reward,' *Journal of Neuroscience* 20: 8122–30.

resolution in the face of both ordinary and addictive temptation. This strength is usually achieved by the exercise of ‘willpower’, that is, the effortful refusal to reconsider a resolution (more rarely it can be achieved without willpower, for instance by inducing distraction or acquiring automatisms to avoid reconsideration that do not require a conscious effort of non-reconsideration, p. 127).

Willpower is an active, effortful exercise of a skill, the mental effort to refuse to *reconsider* the resolution in the face of contrary inclinations. Willpower offers a protection from the revision of a resolution, given that an actual reconsideration prompted by a temptation often leads to a shift in judgment (pp. 121-2). The strength of willpower is ‘a separate factor’ in the active determination of the action rather than an additional ‘input’ in a process that would not actively involve the agent: ‘It is something that the agent actively employs’. Willpower works like a ‘muscle’: ‘something that it takes effort to employ, tires in the short run, but that can be built up in the long run’ (p. 120).

Willpower does not induce an automatic and unthinking compliance with the resolution. It works by a ‘rehearsal’ of the resolution, a rehearsal that does not ‘slide’ in full-blown reconsideration. The agent is aware of the resolution (and perhaps of the considerations in its support), but she resists the temptation by avoiding *suspending* the resolution and reopening deliberation. In exercising willpower, the agent might still entertain the thought of the tempting conduct but resist focusing on it and developing it in a way that would lead to the reopening of deliberation (pp. 124-5).

The contribution of willpower as a *skill* in determining the agent’s conduct is additional to and independent of the contribution of the agent’s attitudes, including her resolutions (p. 113). This sets the willpower account apart from the traditional ‘Humean’ and ‘augmented Humean’ theories, which explain intentional action exclusively in terms of the interplay of attitudes and their forces.

The most important support for the willpower account comes from the phenomenology of sticking to a resolution. According to the Humean accounts, sticking to a resolution would take the form of the strongest attitude’s ‘triumphing’ over the weaker ones. But this cannot account for the actual phenomenology of willpower, i.e., the agent’s experience of a struggle – the struggle that manifests her sticking to the resolution ‘by dint of effort in the face of the contrary desire’ (p. 118). Additional evidence for the willpower account comes from studies of psychological development (pp. 125-7), the psychological literature on ‘ego-depletion’

(pp. 128–9),³ and the observation that willpower can be developed through exercise (p. 129).

There is much that I find plausible and congenial about the importance of the active exercise of a skill in order to resist the lure of temptation and its push for reconsideration. But it is unclear to me how the work of willpower relates to the mechanisms of temptation defended by Holton in the previous chapter. In particular, willpower as resistance to reconsideration does not seem to interfere with the mechanism that goes from the agent's awareness of her future succumbing to temptation to the judgment shift via the elimination of cognitive dissonance. These elements, so prominent in the previous chapter, are not even mentioned in the discussion of willpower in chapter 6.

Perhaps the account in chapter 5 was meant to explain how temptation works *once* deliberation has been reopened, that is, once willpower has failed. At that point, the seduction of temptation plus the desire to avoid cognitive dissonance would lead to the judgment shift. If so, however, we are still left with no explanation of the allure of temptation prior to the reconsideration.

What is it about temptation that prompts the reopening of the deliberative question? Why is an effort required to resist it? Holton tells us that willpower is the skill required to resist reconsideration, but no details are given of the specific nature of the threat to non-reconsideration. For instance, does the temptation offer some considerations that the agent might have overlooked in the original deliberation thereby prompting a reopening? Or does the temptation suggest that there have been other problems with the original deliberation? And does the temptation only push for the reopening of the deliberation or does it already suggest what the all-things considered judgment is going to be once the matter is reconsidered?

In chapter 5, Holton presents the temptation as a desire that combines both cognitive and conative components, and suggested that the conative one is especially important (p. 102). How do these two features contribute to putting pressure toward reconsideration? Why isn't the cognitive component sufficient to prompt the re-opening? After all, Holton's description of the strategies of seduction and resistance (p. 109, 124) seems to fit better the

³ Some recent studies, published after Holton's book, raise some doubts about the ego depletion account of self-control. If these results were confirmed, it would be interesting to see how Holton's view could accommodate them. See Job et al., "Ego Depletion – Is It All in Your Head?" *Psychological Science*, 2010, vol. 21, pp. 1686–1693.

attention-directing aspect of temptation than the urge element highlighted in the earlier presentation. Hence, what is the role, if any, of the conative component in pushing for reconsideration?

Detailed answers to these questions matter if we want to gain a better understanding of the nature of temptation and of the skill required to resist it. Unfortunately, this chapter leaves many of them unanswered.⁴

A related worry concerns the role of willpower in dealing with addiction. Holton claims that, ultimately, the same skill helps us deal with both ordinary and addictive temptation: ‘Whether the temptation is ordinary or addictive, the process will be much the same. If the agent can succeed in monitoring what they are doing, whilst at the same time resisting reconsidering the resolution, then they will resist. If not, they will succumb’ (p. 135).

This suggestion appears inconsistent with the account of addiction in chapter 5. Willpower is supposed to help the agent not to reconsider and thus to protect her against a likely shift in judgment. But earlier Holton has argued that addiction is characterized by the *lack* of judgment shift: in addiction, the case in support of the original resolution against the addictive substance is so strong that the agent is under no actual pressure to reconsider the matter (and this is why she can only resolve the cognitive dissonance by coming to believe that the temptation is irresistible, p. 111). The addict still faces the problem of the *decoupling* of motivation from judgment. But how can willpower help with the decoupling, given that willpower is a skill that deals only with the reopening of deliberation? Holton might still be right in claiming that addictive temptation can be resisted. However, the resistance has to come from a different skill than the one exercised in the effortful refusal of reconsideration.

One of the most interesting claims of the book is the necessity of a distinctive ‘executive capacity’ in the account of intentional agency. Is this a vindication of the ‘will’ as a distinctive and self-standing faculty? At times, Holton hints at this possibility (p. 112), although he eventually admits that talk of a faculty is just talk of a skill (p. 134). Even so, the question still remains whether securing strength of will requires the operation of a single ‘volitional’ skill.

As Holton acknowledges, willpower is not the only way to achieve strength of will. The stability of resolutions can be threatened by things

⁴ A couple of more detailed suggestions are offered, in passing, in the later discussion of the rationality of non-reconsideration at pp. 150–1, but they are not explicitly referred back to the earlier discussion of temptation and willpower.

such as loss of nerve, listlessness, defects in the mechanisms of attention, memory, and salience. It seems to me that a variety of executive skills are required to prevent and remedy these defects. These skills might be similar to willpower in that their exercise is subject to depletion, requires cultivation and – at least occasionally – active effort. In addition, it might be argued that some kind of executive capacity is also implicated in securing *enkrasia* (the alignment of intention and judgment). What relation does willpower bear to these other executive capacities? Are they independent of each other? Could they be competing with or reinforcing each other? Is willpower just on a par with these other executive skills or does it rather play a more important role? Holton does not say.

One might also wonder whether these executive skills are specifically ‘volitional’. Similar executive failures and defects might plague theoretical reasoning and, more generally, any kind of rational activity. For instance, even in theoretical reasoning, there might be challenges and pressures toward the re-opening of matters that have already been settled. Is willpower the skill that secures the stability of our theoretical conclusions as well, or only of our resolutions? Is there something specifically ‘volitional’ about Holton’s ‘willpower’ as exercised in the cases he focuses on, or is it just one element of a larger and more complex set of executive capacities that sustain the operation of our rational conduct at large, including purely cognitive activities?

The Rationality of Non-Reconsideration

In chapter 7, Holton discusses the rationality of sticking to a resolution by the exercise of willpower, that is, by way of non-reconsideration. There are two potential problems with non-reconsideration. First, if the agent sticks to a resolution to *x* because the resolution gives her a reason in support of *x*-ing, this reason might have an unacceptable bootstrapping effect. Second, there is the issue of the rational status of non-reconsideration in those cases when the agent anticipates that, were she to re-open the deliberation (as temptation might induce her to do), she would shift her judgment. Once the agent shifts judgment, sticking to the original resolution would be akratically irrational, since the resolute agent would be acting against her better judgment at that time.

Holton argues that both problems can be avoided by adopting a Bratman’s style *two-tier* account of the rationality of non-reconsideration. A particular instance of non-reconsideration of a resolution is (lower-tier)

rational if it is a manifestation of a general habit or disposition of non-reconsideration that is (higher-tier) rational to have and exercise.

Which habits of non-reconsideration are rational? Holton offers a partial list, but he claims – quite rightly, I think – that there is no precise answer. At most, one can offer some rules of thumb, which might partly conflict and whose weighing is ultimately an ‘exercise in practical psychology’ (pp. 160–1).

The two-tier model avoids bootstrapping. A resolution does not generate a new reason for the intended action. Rather, its presence defeasibly ‘entrenches’ the original decision, since it provides the agent with a rational habit of non-reconsideration. The reason generated by a resolution would be a reason for not reconsidering rather than for the action itself (p. 146).

The two-tier account avoids the problem of akratic resolution as well. For the resolute conduct would be irrational only if temptation were *actually* to induce the reconsideration and revision of judgment. As long as the agent does not reconsider, the problem is ‘sidestepped’ (p. 149). Holton is right that the agent can be accused of being irrational in the mode of akrasia only if she actually reconsiders and revises her judgment.

I am persuaded by the two-tier model of the rationality of non-reconsideration, but I am less convinced by Holton’s defense of it against some alleged objections from Bratman. Holton appears to misinterpret the goal of Bratman’s discussion of the rationality of resolutions in the face of temptation. Bratman has not suggested abandoning the two-tier account when faced with temptation. Bratman’s discussion of temptation is rather centered on the rational import of a resolution *once* the temptation has induced a reopening of deliberation. His concern is whether a resolution might still provide a second line of rational defense against temptation. At that point, a two-tier account of rationality is irrelevant, given that by then the habit of non-reconsideration, even if two-tier rational, has proven ineffective. Holton briefly suggests at p. 156 that Bratman might be interpreted in this way (and he offers a criticism of Bratman’s no-regret condition that might be worth further exploration). However, a large part of his defense of the two-tier account in the second half of chapter 7 seems to engage a non-existent challenge.⁵

⁵ Even so, there is a very interesting discussion of an ambiguity in Bratman’s original formulation of the linking principle at pp. 154–5.

Conclusion

Holton's book offers a convincing case for a Bratman-style naturalist and non-reductionist account of intentions, especially in their role as resolutions, that is, as attitudes that try to secure stable conduct in the face of temptation. I am also persuaded by Holton's claim that the explanation of intentional agency (including the work of resolutions) requires more than the interplay of the agent's attitudes alone. I think that, at the very least, one is to assume the proper functioning of executive capacities in the background. At times, their exercise takes the distinctively active and effortful form of what Holton calls willpower.

A question that needs to be explored further is how willpower in this narrow sense relates to executive capacities more generally and what this tells us about the nature and scope of the will. Holton's work should also convince any skeptic about the need and importance of distinguishing weakness of will from akrasia. There is more than one kind of volitional failure. I actually wish that Holton had further explored additional kinds of volitional defects and the executive skills that are needed to remedy them. I also wish that he had told us more about the detailed workings of willpower. Many important questions are left unanswered. This is not, however, an expression of skepticism about the eventual success of a view à la Holton. It is rather testament to the intriguing issues that are raised by his work.

Finally, a distinctive and refreshing feature of Holton's book is the extensive appeal to psychological studies. Much of this research is used by Holton to support commonsensical views about intentions and the will. This is a welcomed result. I am not sure that it might help much in refuting competing philosophical accounts of the will (since I doubt that they really flout common sense to this extent), but it does point out some limitations in the focus of much traditional philosophical investigation of intentional agency and the will.

As for the more constructive use of the psychological studies, it is important to remark that, at some important junctures in Holton's argument, the experimental results do not provide direct support for his conclusions but rather a springboard for some plausible but still unproven conjectures on his part. Consider, for instance, the explanation of the working of temptation via the reduction of cognitive dissonance (p. 102-3) and the account of addiction in terms of the decoupling of desire and judgment (p. 108). Finally, when we come to the centerpiece of Holton's thesis – the detailed account of the operation of willpower – the experimental results simply

run out. As Holton makes clear, at that point, the best we can do is to resort to the expertise of those ‘professionally concerned with the business of resting temptation’, such as Ignatius of Loyola (p. 124). The final methodological lesson is that, while psychological studies help set the agenda for philosophical work on the nature of the will, philosophical reflection also helps set the agenda for further empirical work in psychology. Philosophical naturalism at its best.

