

Bieri, Peter. *Das Handwerk der Freiheit: Über die Entdeckung des eigenen Willens*. Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2001. Pp. 446.

In the preface to his new book, Peter Bieri announces that after reading countless papers on free will, he at some point decided to put them all aside and simply work out his own view of the issue. His aim was twofold: to get clear about his own position and to write a book that would be easily accessible, without involved discussions of the literature or excessive use of technical vocabulary. This makes *Das Handwerk der Freiheit*, whose title translates as "The Craft of Freedom: On Discovering One's Own Will," an unusual book. And it is partly because of this that the book makes for a fascinating read. It is informed, well-argued, and lucidly written. What is more, it represents a highly original take on a much-discussed question.

Bieri, who teaches philosophy at the Free University in Berlin, approaches free will with two distinctive methodological commitments. First, he holds that a philosophical treatment of the topic should not only clarify the relevant concepts but put them to use in articulating agents' experiences. The idea is that the experience agents have of their own freedom – what might be called the phenomenology of freedom – provides the data any theory of free will has to accommodate. Consequently, the conceptual apparatus developed by such a theory must be answerable to the phenomenology. Since, however, our experience is not, as such, conceptually articulated, this means that the theorist's initial description of the phenomenology must be independent of his technical terminology. How does one give such a description? According to Bieri, through the use of narration. Telling the story, in detail, of how someone does or does not experience herself as free furnishes the right kind of phenomenological data. To articulate the data is the job of the theory, and success in this endeavor is a criterion of adequacy for its conceptual apparatus. In accordance with this commitment, Bieri devotes a lot of space to examples, loosely arranging them around a set of recurring characters. The examples are developed with great precision. No doubt Bieri's experience as a writer of fiction helped him here: he has published two novels, both of which explore, among other things, the way that freedom, and its absence, are experienced.

The second commitment regards Bieri's argumentative strategy. He believes that defending a compatibilist view about free will involves at least two tasks. The first is to refute incompatibilism by argument. This, however, is not enough. In addition, Bieri wants to explain why incompatibilism, despite being false, seems so attractive to many. This requires a kind of Wittgenstein-inspired diagnosis, for he holds that incompatibilist views of free will rest on the kind of misunderstanding that often arises when concepts tailored to the needs of ordinary experience are transposed into theoretical contexts. Arguments against incompatibilism therefore need to be supplemented with an attempt to identify the source of the misunderstanding. Bieri delivers such an argument-cum-diagnosis in the second, and longest, part of the book. But since in his view the diagnostic procedure can get off the ground only against the backdrop of a plausible account of free will, the book opens with a presentation of his own compatibilist view.

In setting forth his position, Bieri uses Frankfurt's hierarchical account of the will as a model. Like Frankfurt, he takes the capacity reflectively to distance oneself from one's desires to be constitutive of freedom. However, while Frankfurt focuses on second-order desires, Bieri puts the emphasis on deliberation and judgment. The capacity for reflective distance manifests itself when agents consider the relative merits of different courses of action. The imagination plays a crucial role in this process. Imaginatively exploring different possibilities of action allows an agent to register the emotional effects they have on her. This aids in her becoming clear about what she wants.

Sound deliberation is bound to enhance an agent's freedom, which brings us to the core of Bieri's compatibilist view. He initially proposes that, with the exception of some special cases—such as brainwashing—the will is free when it conforms to the agent's judgment. While this captures the basic compatibilist intuition, Bieri thinks that it still leaves something out, for an agent's will is thoroughly free only if she makes it fully her own (*Aneignung des Willens* is the term he uses). Bieri explains this idea by reference to Frankfurt's notion of an agent's identification with a desire, which he attempts to refine in the book's final part. He distinguishes three aspects of identification: articulation, intelligibility, and evaluation. To articulate a desire is to make its content fully explicit. Articulation can be a prerequisite for intelligibility, for we sometimes don't understand our own desires, in the sense that we don't see how a given desire fits our personality. Lack of intelligibility, however, creates a feeling of alienation. Being able to see one's desires as cohering with one another is therefore an aspect of being able to see them as truly one's own. Finally, there is the evaluative component: to identify with a desire is also to approve of it. In Bieri's view, an approved desire is one that is in accord with the agent's self-image, her conception of who she wants to be. This poses a problem. An agent's self-image is itself constituted by desires with which she is strongly identified. But, on pain of a regress, we cannot again gloss 'identification' as "accord with the agent's self-image." Bieri's response is to point out, first, that the relation between identity-constituting desires and more peripheral desires is not static, so that over time a peripheral desire can become central, and vice versa; and second, that the evaluative aspect of identification must not be isolated from the requirement of intelligibility. Yet this response does not solve the problem, the reason being that Bieri's approach to evaluative identification leaves out something important from the very start. Part of what makes some desires central to an agent's self is the way in which she cares about them. These desires are about things that matter to her in a particularly deep way. What is special about the core self is not just that one has some pro-attitude or other toward its components. It's that one has a particularly strong—both motivationally and evaluatively—pro-attitude toward them.

Bieri's exposition of his own view frames a lengthy discussion of incompatibilism, which comes in three parts: first, a detailed presentation of the standard arguments for it; second, Bieri's own counterargument; and third, the diagnosis of its motivations. The counterargument is that the notion of a will not determined by antecedent conditions, as required by incompatibilism, is incoherent. If an agent's character, judgment, and perceptions of the environment do not jointly determine her will, it becomes unintelligible: the agent's reasons no longer explain why she did what she did. What is more, it would be impossible for such a will to have a determinate content, since

determinacy of content, Bieri argues, requires that the will be determined by antecedent conditions. Consequently, an unconditioned will would not really be a will at all.

The diagnosis of the mistakes that motivate incompatibilism is among the most interesting and original parts of the book. Arguments for incompatibilism usually start from the experience of an open future—we think that we have more than one possibility open to us. Bieri has to show, then, how incompatibilists misinterpret this phenomenon and himself present a plausible alternative interpretation. He begins by claiming that it is sufficient for agents to believe that their future is open. It need not actually be open, if that means that an action is not fully determined by antecedent conditions. We can see this if we look at the deliberative process, which is where the idea of an open future originates. The agent considers various options and eventually decides in favor of one of them. How she decides is determined by what kind of person she is: what things matter to her, what kinds of considerations she finds convincing, and so on. But for Bieri, the fact that her decision is determined does not diminish the agent's freedom, because he wants us to think of deliberation as a process, in which the agent discovers what her character determines her to do. If her character determines her will, her actions express who she is, and this makes her will free.

As it stands, this picture may seem to invite fatalism. If antecedent conditions have already determined what I will do, then why bother? Bieri responds that the fatalistic ring has its source in what he calls the "discourse of powerlessness." In the context of deliberation, however, this discourse has no place, because the conditions of its use are not satisfied. One can be powerless only vis-à-vis something that is either alien or external to one. This may be an aspect of one's own person, as is the case with, for instance, a compulsive will. But when an agent's action is in line with her judgment, Bieri claims, there is no standpoint from which she could experience her own deliberative process as alien. If the discourse of powerlessness appears to make sense in this context, it is only because of the tacit, but mistaken, assumption that the agent's real self, the locus of her decision making, is something distinct from the agent-as-deliberator—what Bieri calls the idea of the pure subject.

The idea of the pure subject is in turn motivated by a mistaken interpretation of the phenomenology. The attempt to isolate what distinguishes actions from mere events leads to the suggestion that if the deliberative process is determined, this must be something distinct from it, namely, the pure subject. The mistake here lies in disregarding the fact that the concept of action, like the concepts of authorship and subject, is tailored to the context of the whole person. It is the person that desires, deliberates, and acts, not something inside the person. The search for the pure subject is further motivated by a skewed understanding of the capacity for reflective distance. It is assumed that the ability to stand back from any desire implies that the true locus of agency is something distinct from every desire. This is unwarranted; every decision is made against the background of some desires not currently held in reflective distance. Therefore, the idea of the pure subject lacks support. Since, as a consequence, the discourse of powerlessness finds no foothold either, there is no reason to take the causal dependence of deliberation as a

ground for fatalism. For the will to be free it is sufficient that the agent's action accords with her judgment.

In light of this discussion, the reader may come to regret Bieri's decision not to write a more scholarly book. While his diagnosis seems plausible, its real strength can be determined only by applying it to actual incompatibilist theories. It is, for instance, not obvious that considerations regarding the deterministic nature of the universe have a bearing on the issue of free will only if one presupposes the existence of a pure subject.

*Das Handwerk der Freiheit* is a rewarding book, containing many more interesting points than I have been able to touch on here. Its particular strength lies in the careful attention given to the phenomenology of freedom. This allows the reader to make the connection between a complex philosophical problem and her own experience, leads to a number of original observations, and, furthermore, serves to supply the technical terms with rich and nuanced content. The decision not to engage in discussions of the literature also works to Bieri's advantage. It enables him to let his keen sense of the phenomenology guide the construction of the theoretical edifice, thereby avoiding the danger of merely tailoring examples to fit the needs of the theory.

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