

FREE WILL XV

Velleman: Epistemic Freedom

Velleman understands intentions as beliefs; basically, an intention is the self-fulfilling belief that an agent has that they will perform action F as a result of having that very belief. Since intentions are beliefs, they have truth conditions. An intention of the form 'I will F' is true iff I will indeed F.

One of the interesting things about self-fulfilling propositions is that we can be in a position to correctly affirm different, mutually inconsistent propositions. Whichever one we affirm we will be right. Velleman thinks that this sheds much light on the issue of freedom:

On the one hand, there may be no particular way that the future is going to turn out—or at least, no way that's necessitated, under the laws of nature, by the present state of the world. In that case, the future would be causally or metaphysically open. On the other hand, there may be no particular way that we must describe the future as turning out, in order to describe it correctly—or at least, no way that's necessitated, under the laws of nature, by a correct description of the present state of the world. In that case, the future would be, as I put it, epistemically open. ('Epistemic Freedom' p. 34)

We have epistemic freedom, but not metaphysical freedom.

Questions:

- (i) Is Velleman's account of intentions plausible?
- (ii) If it's not, can we rephrase his claim in a different way?
- (iii) If so, how interesting and how plausible is it?