I.

• Watson wants to clarify both the notions of necessity and volition in Frankfurt’s concept of a volitional necessity. He is particularly interested in the distinctive sense in which volitional necessities are supposed to limit the ways we can act.

II.

• Davidson’s account of what it is for a person to be able to do something is, roughly, that she would do it if she wanted and knew how to do it.

• Watson, like Frankfurt, marks a distinction between what we can will and what can do. Conversely, one can be unwilling or unable to do something. Watson distinguishes performance conditions and enabling conditions. (131-132) The lack of will does not imply inability, Watson claims:

  “But it would show confusion about the meaning and role of the ordinary notion of ability to say of lounging Clara that she can’t get out of bed just because one of the conditions of her doing so is absent — namely, her intending to get up. The will to get out of bed is a performance condition, not an enabling condition.” (132)

• In deliberating we need to consider our options. Our options, Watson claims, are those things we could do if we so chose. This dependency of actions on the will is central to issues of responsibility and deliberation.

III.

• But there are volitional disabilities that come from (among other possible sources) depression, phobias, and anxiety. Here we find inabilities to will certain things.

Q: Are such people able to do the things they “cannot” will?

• Watson denies that these kinds of disabilities are like ordinary (say, physical impediment) obstacles to action.

  “Suppose that Clara attempts to arise, only to discover that she has been paralyzed by a stroke. She struggles mightily but to no avail. Although Paralyzed Clara’s agency is ineffective in this respect, her basic agency remains intact. In contrast, Solomon (to say the least) is in serious conflict. He is ineffective in carrying out his intentions because his agency is undermined by his melancholy. In contrast to Paralyzed Clara, his problem is not that he can’t get out of bed simpliciter but that he can’t get himself to do so.” (133)
• Watson makes an interesting distinction between incentives and reasons to overcome obstacles to action.

“You might not be able to overcome your repugnance even in response to a credible offer that in your judgment made doing so well worth it — say for a rather large sum of money which you badly need. But you might manage to do so with a gun at your (or your child’s) head. It is not just that the threat to your child presents you with a stronger reason (though it does); its capacity to counter the aversion, I suggest, depends on the nature of the incentive it crease. It gives you the strength to overcome the initial aversion.” (136)

IV.

• Q: Are volitional necessities practical or normative necessities? That is, are they comparable to situations in which we might say, “I can’t sleep with you. I’m engaged.”?

Williams denies this through his “can’t implies doesn’t” principle. Instead of practical or normative necessities, volitional necessities involve us personally taking a stand.

V.

• The Elizabeth Bennett example: Some options are unthinkable. We can say, in a narrow sense of the term, that they are not options at all (i.e., they are not candidates open to deliberation).

VI.

• For Williams, the volitional necessities (e.g., “I can’t”) are the result of deliberation about what is best. Frankfurt, on the other hand, does not require a connection between volitional necessities and evaluative judgments. Williams and Frankfurt also have different positions on whether we are able to change our volitional necessities.

VII.

• How does Frankfurt distinguish volitional necessities from other kinds of incapacities?

“As we’ve seen, one criterion is that “the aversion has [one’s] endorsement … and … constrains [one’s] conduct so effectively precisely because of this.” Here what one can will is shown by what one can endorse. Frankfurt also tells us that in volitional necessity, “the effectiveness of the person’s incapacity derives from the fact that the person considers that incapacity to be important to him.” On this second criterion, a mere aversion is one whose motivational force does not depend on one’s sense of what’s important. These criteria, which we may call the endorsement and the caring criteria, respectively, can and do come apart in many struggles of the kind that Frankfurt discusses.” (147)

So there are two kinds of identification.

“There are, correspondingly, two distinct notions of identification: identification as endorsement and identification as what one cares about. Both notions pick out something
naturally called “identification”. On both conceptions, furthermore, volitional necessity
contrasts with “mere overwhelming aversion.”” (148)

Example: The woman considering giving her baby up for adoption.

VIII.
• Note the three varieties of motivational necessities:

1. By something we neither care about nor endorse.
2. By what we care about.
3. By what we endorse.