

Free Will II: Frankfurt and Wolf

FRANKFURT'S ACCOUNT OF FREEDOM

First: Distinguish amongst your desires, between those that are *effective*, and those that are not. An effective desire is one that actually issues in action. Thus you might both want to go to Mexico, and go to France. If you go to France, that is the desire that is effective. Note that you can both desire to do something and desire to not do it. But only one of these can be effective. Frankfurt identifies a person's *will* with their effective desires.

Second: Distinguish, amongst your desires, between first order desires and second order desires. A first order desire is a desire for anything other than a desire; a second order desire is a desire for a desire. So, for instance, you might have a first order desire to smoke a cigarette, and a second order desire that you desire not to smoke a cigarette. A second order desire might or might not be a desire that its corresponding first order desire be effective. Thus I might wish that I wanted to give all my money to charity, since I might think that having such a desire would show me to be an excellent person; but I might nonetheless not actually want that desire to be effective. I might think it would be terrible if I actually did give all my money away. But when a person does want the first order desire to be effective, when they want it to be their will, Frankfurt calls this a *second order volition*. We can imagine third order desires. Beyond that things get a little hazy.

Some creatures have no second order volitions. Frankfurt calls such creatures *wantons*. He claims that non-human animals and children are all wantons in this sense. He contrasts wantons with *persons*, who do have second-order volitions. (This seems a bit stipulative; wouldn't we say that an adult human being who had no volitions was still a person?) As an example, compare two sorts of drug addicts, a wanton and an unwilling addict. The unwilling addict wants not to want the drug; but his craving is too strong. In contrast the wanton has no desires about his desire; he is indifferent to being an addict. (Note that the wanton can still have contradictory desires; he might both want and not want the drug; the important thing is that he has no preference as to which of these desires triumphs.)

Now Frankfurt is in a position to define freedom. He thinks there are two aspects. Firstly, there is the aspect we have already looked at: a person's *actions* are free in so far as they stem from their desires; that is, if they had desired differently, they would have acted differently. But for Frankfurt this is merely freedom of *action*. In addition a person has freedom of *will* (i.e. their effective desires are free) in so far as they can control their desires. That is, a person has free will just in case they have second order volitions, and they can bring their first order desires into line with them. (Plausibly, simply having them line up isn't enough; you could achieve that by changing your second-order desires. So the thought might be that the second-order desires *control* the effective first order.) So we can see why the cases we looked at earlier aren't cases of free will. The dog and the small child don't have free will, because they are wantons; they lack second-order volitions. The unwilling drug addict lacks free will for a different reason; he has a second order volition, but it does not control his effective desire. The kleptomaniac is similar. Similarly you do not have free will if you act on a desire that is implanted in you by hypnotism when you have a second order volition not to have that desire. (Although presumably if you do want to have that desire—perhaps you paid a hypnotist to get you not to want cigarettes because you thought that was the best way of quitting—then the act is still one performed from free will.)

WORRIES ABOUT FRANKFURT'S FIRST ACCOUNT

In pushing the problem up one level (from first-order desire to second-order) has Frankfurt really solved it? Two worries: (i) Are second-order desires really so special? Some people (e.g.

David Lewis) identify second-order desires with values. But consider Jeanette Kennett's example of wanting to want strawberries (because it would be socially useful). Would it help if we said that the requirement was simply that your highest order desire is what you act on? (ii) Suppose that I implanted a second order desire in you by hypnosis. Then surely you wouldn't have free will if you got your desires to conform to that; but Frankfurt's account seems to have the consequence that you would. Of course, we could always then insist that there must be a third order desire; but suppose that too were implanted by means of the microchip, or by hypnotism? Whatever level we go to, we can wonder whether that desire is held freely; and then we seem to need to go up another level. We are in a regress. Frankfurt's response to worries like this is to say that there are certain desires that we *identify with*; and that free will consists in getting our desires into line with these. But what makes something a desire that we identify with? We have seen that it isn't just a matter of *level*. So it might look as though Frankfurt has left the central issue unanswered.

What is the real worry with the implanted desires? One thought: it's an infringement of freedom when *someone else*—a hypnotist or the like—implants the desires. But suppose it isn't a case of that: consider the US teacher who developed paedophilia after developing an orbitofrontal brain tumour (though that might be disinhibition; see Burns and Swerdlow 2003); the case of Phineas Gage.

Perhaps the problem is more to do with the strange origin of the desires. Consider the parallel case of belief. Suppose someone had beliefs that were in no way hooked up with the world. Even if the beliefs happened to be true, we would think that there was something very wrong with them; they wouldn't be knowledge. Perhaps likewise, desires should be formed as a result of interaction with the world of the right kind. Indeed there is perhaps a link with beliefs here: to be free we need to be able to form our desires in accord with what we believe to be desirable, and we need to be able to form our beliefs about what is desirable in accord with what is desirable. Or, put in a slightly different way, it is to be *reasons responsive*.

WOLF: THE SANITY CONDITION

Imagine the case of Jo-Jo, the son of a vicious dictator. Jo-Jo grows up to inherit his father's power; and he also comes to inherit his desires and values. Jo-Jo identifies with his desires and values; but Wolf argues that he is not free in that his upbringing leaves him, in a rather technical sense 'insane'. Freedom requires not just that the agent have true beliefs, but that 'one's value be controlled by processes that afford an accurate conception of the world'.

Some worries. First, there are the worries that Wolf herself raises at the end of the paper: that the view assumes a certain moral objectivity, and seems to collapse rationality too easily into truth. (Ordinarily we think that a person can be fully rational, and sane, but, through bad luck, come to form false beliefs about the world). We should perhaps talk of *capacities*, whether or not these are successfully exercised. Second, we might wonder whether Wolf's view is as convincing about freedom as it is about responsibility. We might concede that Jo-Jo is in some sense not responsible, whilst not conceding that he fails to be free. But is it even clear that he is not responsible? And consider other cases where people lack capacity, e.g. through drug addiction. Third, doesn't it matter *how* the responsiveness to reasons works? Suppose we simply hooked someone up to someone else, so that they did whatever the other person thought reasonable. They might be reason responsive, but they wouldn't be free. (In an attempt to get round this concern, Fischer and Ravizza, who develop a similar account of reason responsiveness, add a historical ownership condition; see the Watson review on the website.)