

FREE WILL XII

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*.

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 person. The person 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. (Frankfurt thinks that a person can lose their freedom of action and still have freedom of will; for instance if they do not realize that they cannot act they might still go on freely controlling their will in accord with their second order volitions.) 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? Consider Jeanette Kennett's example of wanting to want strawberries (because it would be socially useful). (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 looks as though Frankfurt has left the central issue unanswered.

Valuing

One response, espoused by Watson, is that a person has free will in so far as they can bring their desires into line with what they *value*. He thinks that second order desires are beside the point. Two questions with this: (i) what is it to value something rather than desiring it? (Of course the two accounts would come back together if you identified what we value with our second order desires; a position advocated by David Lewis.) (ii), as Watson later acknowledges, mightn't one freely act on a desire, which one does not value as best: "it may not be thought best but it is fun, or thrilling; one loves doing it".

Frankfurt's Later Account

In later papers (esp. 'Identification and Wholeheartedness'), Frankfurt comes to understand identification in terms of decisions. Actually there seem to be two distinct phenomena that he discusses. The first concerns the case of checking a sum over and over. At some point one might arrive at a decisive identification with a certain answer (p. 179). It 'resounds endlessly'. Here there is a judgement that no further conflict will be found. But this model doesn't seem to be apt for the case where there is inner conflict (either over which desire to act on first, or over which desire to act on at all); here the point seems to be that one makes a decision to embrace one desire rather than another. Note though that Frankfurt hasn't given us an analysis of what such a choice amounts to. In particular, he hasn't done it in terms of desires. So we have apparently left the Hobbesian model completely. He does say something about what such a choice involves though: it gives a criterion for coordinating other beliefs (p. 186). Does it matter that he doesn't give a reductive account? Has he shown that the notion is deterministically acceptable?

Readings

Frankfurt; 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person' in Watson (the original view)

'Identification and Wholeheartedness' in Fischer and Ravizza (the later account)

Watson 'Free Agency' in Watson

Lewis 'Dispositional Theories of Value' in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 63 (1989)