

XIX Identification

FRANKFURT

Frankfurt starts 'Identification and Wholeheartedness' with a discussion of consciousness. He contends that an essential feature of consciousness is self-consciousness. (Is this a sufficient condition or merely a necessary condition?)

More important though is the discussion of the desires with which we *identify*. Identification here should be understood as acceptance, not as essentially linked either to endorsement or what one cares about. (One can identify with a desire without endorsing or approving of it; and one can identify with a desire that one takes to be trivial; see Frankfurt's 'Reply to Watson' in *Contours of Agency*.) In his earlier work Frankfurt had understood this in terms of higher order desires. But it was unclear why a higher order desire would be one with which one specially identified. Later he 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. 169). It 'resounds endlessly'. Is it that there is a judgement that no further conflict will be found? Not necessarily. Rather the idea is that we decide that no further checking is warranted; and this can be true even if we think that we may have reason to revise it. However, Frankfurt does seem to think that the decision that no further checking is warranted is one that we do think won't be rejected ('he can anticipate that this view will be endlessly confirmed by accurate reviews of it' p. 168); in fact he seems to think that this is necessary for identification. That is what the resonance effect amounts to. Is this right? Couldn't one still identify with a belief without being confident that one's decision not to revisit it would not itself be something that one would revise? Couldn't this go all the way up?

But this model doesn't seem to be apt for the second case, which is one where there is inner conflict between desires (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. In the case where it isn't just a question of which desire to act on first, the rejected desire now becomes an 'outlaw' (p. 170). Again, resonance doesn't seem to be required. Note further that Frankfurt hasn't given us an analysis of what such a decision amounts to. In particular, he hasn't done it in terms of desires. So we have apparently left the Hobbesian model completely. The model looks more like Bratman's.

Frankfurt seems to think that decision is the method by which one eliminates inconsistency: by which one becomes wholehearted (NB. This is to interpret wholeheartedness as a property of the individual, not of a desire. In ordinary use the latter is more common, and Frankfurt sometimes talks that way too, as at p. 175: 'Nor is it likely to be readily apparent whether a decision which the agent intends to be wholehearted is actually so'.) But is this guaranteed? Suppose one decides in favor of A over B, B over C, and C over A. One needs further constraints on desires to achieve this. (It doesn't help if one stresses instead the idea that one is not deciding over desires pairwise, but rather deciding, of each desire, whether it is to be an outlaw or not. Here we have no guarantee that the class of desires that are not outlawed are all consistent. If one says, instead, that it works by pairwise decision, but that each time the losing desire is banished, never to recompute, then in the initial intransitive case, which desire will be banished will just depend on which competition is done first.) At one point Frankfurt does

countenance the possibility 'that the agent has identified himself inconsistently' (p. 175), but the thrust there is that one might think one is consistent when one isn't (one doesn't know how one will act); there is a prior worry that identification cannot lead one even to non-arbitrary apparent consistency.

Frankfurt distinguishes making a decision from making a choice (p. 172). What is he talking about here?

Hobbes' etymological speculations: to deliberate is to de-liberate, i.e. to put an end to one's liberty. But this is a false etymology. It is actually from Latin *deliberare*, to weigh well (cf. *libra*, a pair of scales; the prefix *de* here means *completely*, as in *despoil*).

THE FAINTEST PASSION

Now it is clear that we are talking about wholeheartedness as a property of the individual. Ambivalence eliminates wholeheartedness. But now the idea is that one cannot avoid ambivalence by an act of the will. Frankfurt insists that conflicts between first-order desires cannot be understood on this model. First order desires are merely impulses, so if they fight it out amongst themselves there cannot be a decision.

SCANLON

Why are we concerned with identification? Is it that we are morally responsible only for the desires with which we identify? Or is it rather than identification is something that is desirable in itself; something that is, as Scanlon puts it, necessary for our 'psychic health'?

Against the first reading, consider negligence. So it is better understood as important for the second.

Scanlon's three phenomena: seemings, assessments, optings. To desire something is to see it as a reason for acting. But things can seem to be reasons for action without actually being reasons for action. So our initial seemings then need to be weighed against our further judgments about reasons.

Is Scanlon's account, as Frankfurt complains, too intellectualized?