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Autonomy and the Self

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Foreword

The initial idea for this volume grew out of a conference entitled "Norms and Persons – Freedom, Commitment and the Self," which we organized in Konstanz, Germany, in 2008. Based on the illuminating and inspiring discussions there, it quickly became clear to us that, in future work, we wanted to focus more on the complex relationship between personal autonomy and the notion of the self. This finally led to the idea of editing a volume on the topic, bringing together internationally renowned scholars and a number of aspiring young researchers.

First and foremost, we would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all the contributors to this volume for their unwavering willingness to participate in this project—putting together a volume such as this indeed always takes longer than initially expected—and for providing us with such insightful and thought-provoking papers.

We would also especially like to thank Gottfried Seebaß, research project leader of the project "Normativity and Freedom" within the Konstanz Collaborative Research Centre "Norm and Symbol," which was funded by the "Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft," for his encouragement to edit the volume in the first place and for his continuous support during the entire editing process.

Furthermore, we would like to thank Nancy Kühler for meticulously taking care of the language editing of all the papers by non-native speakers and also the Konstanz Collaborative Research Centre "Norm and Symbol" for kindly funding this language editing.

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Last but not least, we would like to express our gratitude to Ingrid van Laarhoven and all the other people at Springer Science + Business Media who were involved in this project for their keen interest, right from the start, in publicizing this volume and for their kind and enduring support during the whole publication process.

Münster and Konstanz
2012

Michael Kühler and Nadja Jelinek

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Introduction

Michael Kühler and Nadja Jelinek

Autonomy is generally held in high esteem. It serves as one of the central concepts in many philosophical debates, e.g. on understanding ourselves as persons, on how to conceptualize morality, on the legitimization of political norms and practices as well as on questions in biomedical ethics. In all such debates, the concept of autonomy is invoked either to formulate a certain constitutive moment of the subject in question or to function at least as an essential justificatory criterion, i.e. as a value to be respected when it comes to assessing a position's plausibility and validity.[1]

Derived from the Greek *autós* ("self") and *nomos* ("law" or "rule"), the term "autonomy" was first used to describe Greek city states exerting their own laws. The general idea, which has not changed since then, is that the subject in question, in one way or another, "governs itself." Accordingly, the idea of *personal autonomy* is that a person "governs herself," i.e. that, independent of unwanted internal and external influences, she decides and acts according to her own convictions, values, desires, and such. Of course, this all too short explanation gives rise to more questions rather than providing an answer. For what exactly is meant by the idea of convictions, values, or desires being a person's *own* and which influences endanger autonomy and why?

After the discussion following Harry G. Frankfurt's seminal paper "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,"[2] autonomy is nowadays explained mainly by pointing to a person's capacity to reflect and endorse or disapprove of her (first order) desires on a higher (second order) level and to form a volition in line with an approved desire which moves her to act accordingly. It is, of course, highly disputed whether Frankfurt's hierarchical model of desires and volitions and his later specification of "volitional necessities" are the most plausible way to spell out this capacity in detail.[3] In this respect, Frankfurt's line of thought is one of the main

[1] For a general overview of the various strands of the discussion on (personal) autonomy, see Christman (1989), Taylor (2005), Christman and Anderson (2005), Buss (2008), and Christman (2009).

[2] Frankfurt (1971).

[3] For an overview of the discussion on Frankfurt's approach, see Frankfurt (1988, 1999) as well as Betzler and Guckes (2000) and Buss and Overton (2002).

Norm-Guided Formation of Cares Without Volitional Necessity – A Response to Frankfurt

John J. Davenport

1 Introduction: Identification, Leeway, and Existential Autonomy

Imagine that we have a sound argument that personal autonomy in 'elements of agency' such as actions, omissions, and intentions depends at least partly on what Harry Frankfurt has called volitional "identification" with the motives, reasons, and norms that are expressed in the related decisions to act in these particular ways for particular ends (or that figure in the best teleological explanation of why we form the relevant intentions and try to carry them out).[1] Imagine also that we have in hand an adequate explanation of the subjective conditions concerning internal relations among psychological states that are necessary for identification with motives, norms, and practical reasons in general (formal autonomy). Among other things, such an explanation would provide a convincing answer to the well known "regress" and "authority" problems with Frankfurt's initial hierarchical theory of identification as constituted by second-order desires to act on certain first-order desires rather than others.[2] Even then, an adequate theory would have to add objective criteria for states of identification, such as robust but not overdemanding requirements of reasons-responsiveness and other conditions that rule out autonomy-undermining forms of covert manipulation. For, as James Taylor argues, whatever subjective attitudes we regard as constituting identification with motives, "it will always be possible for a process of manipulation to result in a person meeting the subjective conditions" we specify.[3] In short, the

[1] See Harry Frankfurt (1971) (reprinted in Frankfurt 1988).

[2] See the useful summary of objections to early hierarchical theories of identification in James S. Taylor (2005b).

[3] James S. Taylor (2005a), 124. See also James S. Taylor (2003).

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psychological influences and other causal factors involved in the *origins* of an agent's identification with certain motives matter for their autonomy.

To align the terms used in autonomy theory with recent literature on free will, it is useful to refer to these restrictions on origins as *source-conditions* for identification.[4] There are two crucial questions to be answered in providing a theory of autonomy-promoting sources for identification:

(A) Do these sources have to involve *libertarian freedom* – either in (i) the *leeway*-sense of being able to bring about different identifications than one actually forms (within some range of options), starting from the same initial conditions, or (ii) in the sense of *aseity*, e.g. being agent-caused or otherwise undetermined by sufficient causal conditions that were beyond one's control?[5]

(B) What other limitations are there on the kinds of psychological processes that can lead to identification with motives – including both negative conditions ruling out certain kinds of manipulative influences, and positive requirements for competencies that are developed in early life, types of social recognition, education and support, and so on?

My task in this essay is to consider question (A) and to defend a leeway-libertarian source-condition for autonomous identifications and commitments against Frankfurt's criticism of this idea in his arguments for the importance of "volitional necessity." In particular, I will indicate how a process involving leeway-control can generate new commitments in a reason-guided way without having to rely solely on existing motives inherent in an individual's current identity. In past work, I have defended a leeway-libertarian conception of *moral freedom* (the control necessary for moral responsibility in general)[6]; I have also argued that the narrower phenomenon of *responsibility for character* requires "liberty of the higher-order will," meaning leeway-freedom to form different identifications from among a morally significant range of options.[7] This thesis is relevant for present purposes because, among several concepts of autonomy found in common usage that need philosophical explanation,

[4] Most contemporary analytic authors have instead called them "causal" or "historical" or "procedural" conditions, but these terms have ambiguities that can lead to confusion. For example, "procedural" is also used as the opposite of "substantive" to indicate that no particular *content* in the agent's values or motives is required for autonomous agency. A "historical" theory sometimes means an actual-sequence model requiring nothing beyond actual capacities or dispositions to respond differently when circumstances change, as opposed to powers to bring about alternative sequences of events. And the label "causal" is sometimes used for theories that do not require decisions as a special kind of agency to play any crucial role in the origin of autonomous intentions. By contrast, the term "source" has no such connotations; thus calling something a theory of "sources" for autonomy does not connote particular positions on these contested questions.

[5] The term "aseity" comes from Anselm, but it means the same thing as what Aquinas would call a "primary cause" or "first mover" or (in Kant's terms) initiating a new causal chain. In the past, it was often assumed (e.g. by Aristotle, Anselm, and Kant) that the only way to exhibit aseity was to have leeway-liberty. Yet recent analytic work on free will has pressed the point that these ideas are at least conceptually distinct (see Hunt and Pereboom).

[6] See Davenport (2006).

[7] See Davenport (2002b, 2007a).

one that is especially important for our moral lives equates the core of personal autonomy with the freedom or control required for responsibility for what we may call our inner character or volitional self.[8]

Let us label this freedom that is necessary for responsibility for one's inner character or core practical identity "existential autonomy" (EA). It does not concern whether or to what extent I am free to act on my values, projects, or identity-defining commitments in the social world; rather, it focuses on whether I am self-governing (in some intelligible sense) in the genesis or development of the very "self" that then hopefully governs my particular intentions and outward actions. The apparent reflexivity of self-governance at this level makes this one of the hardest problems in autonomy theory.[9] The *Existential Thesis* (ET) holds that existential autonomy requires leeway-liberty at sufficient junctures in the historical development of the agent's identity-constituting commitments, cares, and projects – all of which generally include identification with certain motives that cohere with one's ends and opposition to others that do not.

In past work, I have argued that Kierkegaard is a libertarian in this sense; but temporally extended self-making "choices" on his conception are not arbitrary or irrational leaps unguided by normative grounds. On the contrary, even his famous "choice" to start making ethically serious choices or to engage deeply in roles, relationships, and vocations is guided by reasons favoring it.[10] Likewise, my version of ET is *not* the early Sartre's view that all practical reasons or norms that can rationalize choices between options (or provide a teleological explanation of the resulting action) must themselves be selected by the agent in a choice with open alternatives. I accept that not only basic capacities to experience and recognize values and to reason critically, but also implicit rational commitments to certain normative contents (such as the inherent value of free rational agency), are constitutive rather than optional for agents developing their capacity for autonomy. As finite beings, we obviously do not create ourselves *ex nihilo*, and many competencies required for personal autonomy depend on both nature and nurture if we are to develop to the point where existential autonomy becomes possible for us. And when it does, the relevance of some norms for action and choice of life-goals may be rationally inescapable since they are implicitly affirmed in any exercise of our agency. So existential autonomy as I conceive it is metaphysically modest and requires at least a moderate objectivism about ethical values and other types of norms.

[8] See Susan Wolf on "deep responsibility": Wolf (1990), ch. 2, 42–44. Frankfurt also recognizes identification and caring as active processes through which we become responsible for our own character; see Frankfurt (1987) (reprinted in Frankfurt 1988). "Inner character" on my account is largely constituted by one's higher-order volitions, or the cares of which they are components; it is distinct from various traits, behavioral dispositions, emotional tendencies and other observable features of one's personality with which one may not identify at all. The first two chapters of my future book on autonomy will defend in detail the idea that personal autonomy should be interpreted as the freedom-condition of deep responsibility for self (character, or practical identity).

[9] Thus several philosophers have argued that autonomy is inconceivable or incoherent at this foundational level: see Galen Strawson (1986) and Robert Noggle (2005).

[10] See Davenport (2001a, b, c).

2 Preliminaries: Rationalist Constitutivism and Arguments Against Leeway-Liberty

However, this "constitutivist" idea (as it is now widely called) is often misinterpreted in recent work on autonomy, where it is taken as a substantive *psychological* condition meaning that persons who are not motivated by these norms (or more strongly, who do not decide in accordance with them) cannot be counted as psychologically autonomous in their motivation or their actions.[11] This confusion is encouraged when recent constitutivist deductions of moral norms imply that recognition of such norms as practical reasons that then guide our decisions is built into all deliberate action in which we take aspects of our existing practical identities as reasons to act.[12] In my view, the constitutivist thesis should not be construed to mean that that identification with certain norms, or motivation that flows from embracing them as one's own, is *psychologically* inevitable for persons; on the contrary, persons can and sometimes do violate such norms in psychologically autonomous acts, or even try to reject them as false ideologies. Rather, the constitutivist thesis properly says that persons are *rationally* committed to the relevant norms by exercising their capacity for autonomy and rational agency in general; in other words, the practical *authority* of the relevant norms as binding on them, whether they like it or not, is implied by exercising their agentive powers – even when they are not motivated by these norms, and when they violate them in immoral acts.[13] In doing so, they are denying or undermining the basis of their inherent authority to rule the development of their own character or identity, and so they may forfeit some of the rights that this authority normally gives them. But that does not mean they have lost the psychological control necessary to be responsible for the character they are developing (e.g. for their immoralism or amoralism), or that they are insane.[14]

[11] For example, Marilyn Friedman understands the thesis this way when she rejects the claim that one cannot autonomously will to give up one's autonomy. See Friedman (2003).

[12] This problem was evident in Christine Korsgaard's deduction of the moral law in *The Sources of Normativity* (1996, 105) and it remains unsolved in Korsgaard's *Self-Constitution* (2009), 31–32; in my view, Korsgaard conflates a being-bound-by-norms that is constitutive of agency with following these norms (at least to a considerable extent) or acquiring moral worth on a *contrastive* scale. Thus immoral action remains only a simulacrum of real action on her new account. But these problems of moral theory are not my present focus.

[13] This construal may make it harder to argue for the constitutivist thesis, but it avoids the fatal error of ruling out autonomous immoral action and autonomous rejection of morality. Note that Kant, Locke, and Rousseau all regard implicit commitments to the inviolable value of our own freedom as the reason why liberty is "inalienable" and slavery cannot be chosen autonomously. Their claim is that slavery cannot *rationally* be chosen, and therefore such a choice cannot express the agent's rightful authority – not that it is psychologically impossible to choose it. An analogous idea in the realm of collective autonomy holds that it is rationally impossible for a democratic people to choose its own destruction or to choose to enslave persons: a people or legislature representing them violates the moral presuppositions of its own authority to legislate in these choices. But again this is not psychologically impossible; legislatures have passed such laws, even if critics are justified as regarding them as null and void of authority because they are self-undermining *ab initio*.

[14] See Davenport (2002).

Call this the *rationalist* version of constitutivism; it holds that the inescapable relevance of basic norms is psychologically compatible with rejecting them (rebellion) and with recognizing but violating them (akrasia). They may be rationally nonoptional for agents capable of autonomy; but for such norms to become autonomous guides to further choices, we first have to identify with them. This is compatible with the further thesis (which is part of ET) that autonomous identification with norms involves leeway-liberty at least at some points in our psychological history. In my view then, an existential conception of autonomy as requiring leeway-liberty in the higher-order will fits well with rationalist constitutivism as a metanormative theory about the justification of the most basic moral norms. ET is also consistent with the view that there are other objective values or practical reasons that should guide choices that significantly affect the direction of our personal lives, but which are not grounded in the constitutivist way. In defending ET against Frankfurt, I will sketch an account of how norms in general can guide, inform, and thus help explain the very choice to identify with them. This possibility suggests that the idea debated in this volume that "an agent must already be committed to some norms or values" in order for free or autonomous choices to begin[15] hides an important ambiguity. If rationalist constitutivism is correct, then there is *one* sense of "commitment" in which a free agent must have such a commitment to make any autonomous choice at all: we are *rationally* committed by our nature or by what we implicitly affirm in the activities that constitute our agency. But this does not entail that we must be *volitionally* committed to norms or practical reasons, or already identified with them (or with desires to act on them), for autonomous choice to get off the ground. In particular, I will critique Frankfurt's argument that we must tend towards some "volitionally necessary" cares for persons, goals, norms, or ideals in order for our choices to avoid autonomy-undermining arbitrariness.

Before I explain these terms and Frankfurt's arguments for volitional necessities (which I'll refer to collectively as the VN-argument), three preliminary points about my approach and topic will be helpful. First, rather than give direct evidence for a leeway-libertarian conception of existential autonomy, here I am only offering *indirect* support for that conception by refuting certain arguments made by Frankfurt against it. Second, my present target is not the most famous of these arguments, in which counterfactual interveners are employed in alleged counterexamples to leeway-liberty conceptions of responsibility for actions and intentions or (similarly) responsibility for "higher-order volitions" or "cares."[16] I have addressed these familiar and controversial arguments at length elsewhere; here I focus instead on less familiar

[15] See the Introduction to this volume. The conference from which several papers in this volume derive offered this thesis and its denial as two basic positions held today, whereas my approach seeks to show that a third way is possible.

[16] This literature began with Harry Frankfurt (1969), reprinted in Frankfurt (1988). In later versions of such arguments by John Fischer, David Hunt, Derk Pereboom, Michael McKenna and others, actual-sequence overdetermination cases are also introduced as counterexamples to PAP-type principles.

arguments by Frankfurt for a claim that is much *stronger* than merely denying all incompatibilist versions of the "principle of alternative possibilities" (PAP). Third, Frankfurt's VN-arguments are also distinct from the general "luck objection" to leeway-liberty conditions on responsibility for any elements of agency (actions, intentions, decisions, omissions, motivational dispositions, higher-order volitions, etc.). For the general luck objection (sometimes called the "*Mind* Argument" and given in a deductive form that is superficially similar to van Inwagen's "Consequence Argument"[17]) holds that agents exercising leeway-liberty lack sufficient *control* over which of their options they choose to be responsible for their choice. The dialectical standoff on this issue is also well-known. The basic luck objection probably begs the question against leeway-libertarianism by demanding a *complete* teleological explanation of the contrastive fact that the agent chose option A over other options B or C when these were all within her power. This seems to presuppose an overly strong version of the principle of sufficient reason which immediately entails that PAP is false.[18] The control-problem can also be answered if an adequate and plausible account of agent-causation can be given. Moreover, at least one premise in the *Mind* Argument is more controversial than any in the Consequence Argument.

These are all vital questions on the forefront of current free will debates, but I do not need to settle any of them to answer Frankfurt's VN-arguments. For this interrelated cluster of arguments tries to make autonomy compatible not primarily with physical determinism but rather with *psychological* determinism, in its account of how norms become motivating for us. In other words, it defends an account of motivation that is closer to Hume's than to Kant's, and which is rejected by defenders of "reasons externalism" such as Thomas Nagel and R.J. Wallace[19] even though they may agree with Frankfurt that moral responsibility and autonomy are compatible with physical determinism (or that neither incompatibilist source-conditions or leeway-conditions have been adequately defended). So the VN-argument claims more than familiar arguments employing Frankfurt-style counterexamples to PAP, and it is also independent of the *Mind* Argument against indeterminist accounts of decision-making. In fact, it is closer in spirit to familiar communitarian objections that liberal political philosophy presupposes "unencumbered" selves that are prior to all their attachments, ties or value-commitments: as Michael Sandel writes, on this view "No commitment could grip me so deeply that I could not understand myself without it."[20] Frankfurt agrees with Sandel that the choices of such an unencumbered agent would be arbitrary. Thus my critique of Frankfurt's VN-argument may also help support liberal responses to Sandel.

[17] See van Inwagen (1986), 16 and 126ff, esp. 147.

[18] That is, a version of the PSR that will only seem appealing if one is already a compatibilist! On this issue, see Timothy O'Connor (2000), ch.5.3; Robert Kane (1999); and Kane's exchange with Pereboom in Fischer, Kane, Pereboom and Vargas (2007).

[19] See R.J. Wallace (2006), ch.7, esp. 157 and 163.

[20] Michael Sandel (1982, 1998), 62. Compare this passage: in the face of too many demands and desires, I am unable to "mark out the limits or the boundaries of my self, incapable of saying where my identity ends and the world of attributes, aims, and desires begins. I am disempowered in the sense of lacking any clear grip on who, in particular, I am" (57).

3 From Caring to Volitional Necessities: Frankfurt's VN-Arguments

3.1 Identification, Caring, and Love

In explaining Frankfurt's VN-argument, I presuppose familiarity with several ideas in his corpus, including the distinction between first-order desires (desires$_1$) and second-order desires (desire$_2$); his definition of a second-order "volition" as a desire$_2$ to act on a certain type of desire$_1$; his initial proposal that identification with a motive$_1$ is constituted by a volition$_2$ aimed at that motive$_1$[21]; and his later attempts to reinterpret volitional identification in terms of "decisive" identification, "wholehearted" cares, and "satisfaction" with one's operative motives$_1$.[22] These developments begin in the essay where Frankfurt also introduces his concept of "caring" as a kind of devotion to outward (or first-order) ends that is actively cultivated by the agent.[23] For example, he says that an agent's "caring about going to the concert implies that he is disposed to support and sustain his desire to go to it.... His caring about the concert would essentially consist in his having and identifying with a higher-order desire of this kind."[24] In this description, as in some later analyses, Frankfurt implies that "caring" in the relevant sense for some X requires volitional identification with desires and emotions that are attuned to X's good; motives in accord with an agent's care thus become identified with her: "When a person cares about something...he is willingly committed to this desire. The desire does not move him either against his will or without his endorsement. He is not a victim; nor is he passively indifferent to it."[25]

This helps explain why Frankfurt writes, "If we consider that a person's will is that by which he *moves himself*, then what he cares about is far more germane to the character of his will than the decisions or choices that he makes."[26] Notice that in

[21] All introduced in Frankfurt (1971), reprinted in Frankfurt (1988).

[22] See especially Frankfurt (1987), reprinted in Frankfurt (1988); and Frankfurt (1992), reprinted in Frankfurt (1999).

[23] See Frankfurt (1982), reprinted in Frankfurt (1988).

[24] Frankfurt (1999b), first appearing in Frankfurt (1999a), 160–61.

[25] Frankfurt (2004), 16.

[26] Frankfurt (1982), in Frankfurt (1988), 84; my italics. Thus it seems likely that Frankfurt developed the concept of care to avoid the regress objection to second-order volitions by explaining their inherent (nonderivative or non-conferred) authority. Yet unfortunately Frankfurt did not go on to explain volitional identification in terms of caring. He closely associates these concepts, for example in saying that caring about "what we are" is synonymous with our forming higher-order volitions, or avoiding wantonness (1987, 163). But he keeps these concepts distinct because caring establishes dynamic integration over time while identification establishes structural or time-slice integration among motives of different orders. His later satisfaction-analysis of identification (Frankfurt 1992) prevents him from considering that perhaps synchronic integration requires diachronic (historical/developmental) integration, and leads him to say that "identification does not entail caring," (Frankfurt 2002a, in Buss and Overton 2002, 161), though he affirms the converse, and reaffirmed in an April 2011 conversation with me that he accepts that caring involves volitional identification.

this passage, "will" is no longer understood in Hobbesian fashion as simply the motive on which we act or that explains our intention; rather "will" now stands for autonomous motivation, or more precisely, a kind of motive that is inherently "active" or that counts as the agent's own without needing further endorsement by a yet-higher-order psychic state. It is as if "caring" is a process of personal agency itself, *much as decision is* – though caring about a person, goal, or ideal is distinct from any single decision to care about them. Thus, when Frankfurt defines a volitional sense of "love" as "a species of caring about things," he can say that it is not an "elementary psychic datum" like inclinations or emotions that arise passively in us and thus lack any "inherent motivational authority;" rather, care-love is "itself a configuration of the will...,"[27] meaning again that it is something we "do" in the strongest sense of voluntariness, which has our identification built into it. It already includes higher-order volitions in favor of the relevant motives$_1$, and Frankfurt holds that such "volitional attitudes that a person maintains towards his own elementary motivational tendencies are entirely up to him" (i.e. autonomous, rather than changeable at will), even if the agent also has opposing cares and therefore remains ambivalent in his love.[28]

This background on caring is crucial for my topic, because Frankfurt's view that caring is not controlled by decisions-to-care leads to his alternative hypothesis that "volitional necessities" are required for existential autonomy. As if this were a dichotomy, he repeats the plausible point that caring cannot usually "be initiated by an act of will," and then writes that "in certain instances, the person is susceptible to a familiar but nonetheless somewhat obscure kind of necessity" that makes it impossible to will certain courses of action.[29] These acts may be logically and physically possible, within the agent's abilities and know-how, yet they violate cares that are so central to the agent's identity that these acts are "unthinkable" for her. Such constraints of "volitional necessity" (VN) are not against the agent's will, like the compulsive disorders of an unwilling addict, but are instead expressions of the agent's absolute commitment to whatever or whoever she cares about: thus agents experience VN-cares "as actually enhancing both their autonomy and strength of will."[30]

Critics have pointed out several conceptual difficulties and ambiguities in this account of volitional necessities. Gary Watson argues that phobias and depression can coerce an agent not only by preventing him from enacting intentions that would

[27] Frankfurt (1994), reprinted in Frankfurt (1999), 129 and 137. Compare this to Frankfurt's claim that by ordering our first-order motives and rejecting some outright, we "create a self out of the raw materials of inner life" (1987, 170). Here "raw materials" corresponds to "elementary psychic data" in the 1994 essay.

[28] Frankfurt (1994), 137. This is one of several places in which Frankfurt simply rejects one of the two main "source problems" noted at the start of my essay; he is not concerned that higher-order volitions could result from manipulation. In Frankfurt (1975), he insists that even direct implantation of higher-order volitions cannot undermine their inherent authority for the agent (see Frankfurt 1988, 54), and he has stuck to this highly counterintuitive view.

[29] Frankfurt (1982), 86.

[30] Ibid, 87

bring him into contact with whatever he fears, but also by "leading him to abandon his intention" or not even to form it.[31] This is clearly not the kind of autonomy-enhancing volitional necessity that Frankfurt has in mind. He envisions cases in which an agent's cares or commitments to certain ends and ideals generate what Watson calls the "deliberative necessity" of ignoring certain options as worth considering or as having any relevance for one's choices.[32] Yet there seem to be two levels of volitional limitation within this category. First, there are acts we cannot now intend because they are contrary to strong and deliberatively dominant cares that are currently unopposed in our psyche (and thus "wholehearted" in Frankfurt's sense) but that we could nevertheless work to change. Second, there are identifications that are nested within cares that are not only wholehearted, but also so central to our practical identity that we cannot choose any actions with an intention to lessen that commitment or question that care.[33] It appears that Frankfurt associates volitional "love" with the second, stronger kind of volitional necessity.[34]

3.2 *Frankfurt's Kantian Analogy*

Defenders of the Existential Thesis can accept both that we sometimes experience cares as volitionally necessary and that acting on such motives is fully autonomous, because ET only requires that responsibility for VN-cares trace (in part) to elements of agency that the agent could voluntarily have avoided in the past.[35] Of course

[31] Gary Watson (2002), in Buss and Overton (2002), 133.

[32] Ibid, 142.

[33] This distinction is my own attempt to explain differences that puzzle Watson, which he (incorrectly in my view) tries to explain by dividing identification and caring, and allowing conflicting cares but not conflicting identifications to coexist (see Watson 2002, 146–48). He does so on the basis of Frankfurt's analysis of identification in terms of satisfaction in "The Faintest Passion" (see Watson (2002), 159 n.58). The trouble with this is that Frankfurt has argued persuasively that in cases of "volitional ambiguity," agents can have conflicting identifications that are thus not wholehearted, but not wanton either: See Frankfurt (1987), 165. As Watson notes, this is incompatible with the satisfaction-analysis, but I think it is the latter that should be rejected.

[34] See Frankfurt (1988b), 187–88, and Frankfurt 1994, 138. Yet Frankfurt's case of the unfortunate mother who tries but cannot give up her beloved child for the child's own good is an instance of volitional necessity of the first, opposable kind: see Frankfurt (1982), 90; (1993), 111; and (2002), 163–65. My distinction between weaker and stronger volitional necessities is related to Velleman's distinction between limits to chooseable options that result from motives with which the agent identifies corrigibly (since he "could potentially withhold his reflective endorsement from this constraint") and limits that result from identifications which are themselves not voluntarily changeable by the agent (see Velleman 2002, 94). However, I think the regress Velleman sees looming in this idea reflects conceptual confusion about what gives identifications their authority.

[35] This is a particular application of what I've called the "Principle of Robust Alternatives with Tracing:" see Davenport (2006), 79. Again, I use the phrase *elements of agency* as shorthand for active psychic states or processes such as deliberating with a view to forming intentions, making decisions, having intentions, acting on intentions or trying to act on them, voluntarily omitting to act, having dispositions formed through repeated decisions, higher-order willing, and "caring" in Frankfurt's sense.

Frankfurt rejects such libertarian source-requirements on the history of cares for which we are deeply responsible, but his illustrations of volitional necessity do not directly undermine them. Robert Kane argues that Martin Luther's famous resolve may result from a series of past choices that he could have avoided.[36] As Watson points out, one can also be cut off from certain options by "taking a stand" on normative principles; but this is compatible with being able to reverse such a commitment, even if this is difficult.[37] Similarly, suppose that Frankfurt's Lord Fawn is unable to go through with hearing his spy's report on his fiancée's infidelities because he cares too much about his honor as a "gentleman."[38] Agents in such cases may be confusing difficulty with impossibility; they may also be able to change their cares voluntarily over time in a way that makes currently unwillable actions willable for them.[39] But even if neither of these is true in Lord Fawn's case, his state could be a result of a pattern of discrete decisions involving leeway-control by which he foreseeably deepened his commitment to the values he associates with his social class.

Thus Frankfurt only seriously threatens ET when he goes on to argue that for a person to be autonomous, she must have a *personal essence* consisting of VN-cares that distinguish her as the individual she is.[40] For this volitional analog of a Leibnizian monad suggests that the same agent could not have developed completely different cares or "ground projects"[41] and remained autonomous. Frankfurt first reaches this conclusion by drawing an analogy with Kant's central idea that "A person acts autonomously only when his volitions [or intentions] derive from the essential character of his will."[42] Kant takes the "self" in "self-determination" to mean the universally shared structure of personhood as a type of agency in which intentions are formed under the guidance of maxims.[43] But he famously thinks that only moral

[36] Robert Kane (1996), 39–40; see Watson's discussion of this point in Watson (2002), 137–38.

[37] Watson (2002), 139 and 141.

[38] Frankfurt (1988b), in Frankfurt (1988), 183.

[39] This could happen in at least three ways: (A) They could directly intend something in order to oppose their current care; (B) they could intend something, such as a line of questioning or experiment, that they know risks jeopardizing their current care; or (C) they could intend something they reasonably expect, as an unintended side-effect, to undermine their current care. Note that strong volitional necessity was distinguished by its incompatibility with (A) and (B); my interpretation does not make it incompatible with (C).

[40] Frankfurt (1994), 138.

[41] The concept of "ground projects" that an agent would be willing to die for comes from Bernard Williams (1976), (reprinted in Williams 1981, esp. 11–13) but it is similar to the concept of volitionally necessary cares. The concepts are not quite identical for two reasons: first, one VN-care might have a lower priority than another that we must stay alive to serve; second, Williams seems to allow that we could change our ground projects, though he does not explain how.

[42] Frankfurt (1994, 132). Compare Lewis Hinchman on the tensions between Kantian autonomy as based on the universal human motives distinctive of personhood and contemporary "romantic-individualist" conceptions of autonomy as based on whatever is essential and distinctive of the single agent: see Hinchman (1996), 501–03.

[43] Compare John Rawls (1971), 40. Note the parallel between Sandel's critique of Rawls's conception of autonomy and Frankfurt's critique of Kant's conception.

motivation (aiming at justice or fairness to each) expresses this shared personal nature, and so only this motive counts as autonomous or free in the positive sense of self-authored. Thus Kant argues as follows:

1. An autonomous will is determined by motives that are distinctive of personhood in general: such motives have a practical necessity that comes from being constitutive of moral selfhood.
2. The only motive that is necessary based solely in the structure of moral selfhood is the good will that agents form in response to their own implicit commitment to act on maxims that are fair to all (or universalizable from the perspective of any free rational agent).
3. Thus the only autonomous will is a good will, in which moral reasons are the primary (or on some readings, the only) ground for whatever purposes (ends and means) are adopted.

From Kant's two premises, it follows that VN-cares do not function as autonomous motives in human agents. But since Frankfurt thinks they manifestly do operate this way in our experience, Kant's conclusion is wrong: motives other than formal fairness or universalizability can be autonomous for us.

Thus by *reductio*, Frankfurt rejects Kant's first premise and reinterprets autonomous agency as following from the agent's individual essence, rather than from the shared essence of personhood.[44] This leads to an analogous argument that we can represent as follows:

1. An autonomous will is determined by motives that are constitutive of the individual self (in the sense of practical identity): such motives are practically necessary for their owner.
2. These include moral motives that are universal to all persons, and cares that are volitionally necessary for the individual agent because they are her "personal essence."
3. Thus, given that the moral motive is not enough to set all our final ends, an autonomous will requires volitionally necessary cares.

In Frankfurt's analogy, VN-cares are sources of autonomous motivation leading to autonomous decisions, intentions, and acts because the agent's VN-cares are integral aspects of her individual essence. Autonomous sources of motivation must be "categorical" in Kant's sense, and this requires practical necessity or obligation. Since experience tells us that there are non-moral autonomous motives, Frankfurt compares two types of necessity: "just as the moral law cannot be other than it is, so we cannot help loving what we love...the dictates of love, like the requirements of the moral law, enjoy an unconditional [categorical] authority."[45] In the case of loves, however, the obligation is not moral; it is existential, since it arises from the psychological impossibility of willing otherwise.

[44] On this point, see David J. Velleman (2002), 93.

[45] Frankfurt (1994), 141. Frankfurt also claims, controversially, that moral norms will only count as autonomous motives for us if we care about being moral.

As noted, this analogy implies that the same agent could not have autonomously formed contrary loves, since besides the shared (weak) moral motive, the only autonomous sources are VN-cares that constitute the one's practical identity: "The essence of a person...is a matter of the contingent volitional necessities by which the will of the person is as a matter of fact constrained."[46] They are contingent relative to our shared human essence, since they vary across persons, but they establish an individual essence by being necessary for that individual's will. "Our essential natures as individuals are constituted...by what we cannot help caring about," or our "loves."[47] On this view, we each seem to have a kind of volitional *destiny*: if we develop any cares, they will lie within a certain range, or concern certain objects rather than others.[48] This is dramatically incompatible with the Existential Thesis (ET), and with common intuitions about how cares and commitments develop.

However, Frankfurt's Kantian analogy fails on at least two counts. First, while we should agree with him that non-moral motives can be autonomous, we can avoid Kant's implausible contrary conclusion without redefining the "self" that governs in terms of a volitional essence: there are other ways of changing Kant's first premise. Second, Frankfurt's analogy is flawed, for it assumes that only motives that respond to a sense of categorical obligation can flow from the self rather than from something heteronomous. Kant thinks that all non-moral motives depend on desires that we acquire passively from our innate self-interest, leaving only the moral motive that trumps all other considerations and binds absolutely to count as autonomous.[49] But if we accept Frankfurt's idea that cares are active motives distinct from such passive desires and inclinations, we abandon this assumption in Kant's first premise. Then we have no reason to think that cares must be *unconditionally* necessary to an agent to count as autonomous for her; the normative implications of many cares can be

[46] Ibid, 138

[47] Ibid. Compare p.135: "the lover cannot help being selflessly devoted to his beloved. In this respect, he is not [negatively] free. On the contrary, he is in the very nature of the case captivated by his beloved and by his love. The will of the lover is rigorously constrained." In both these passages, Frankfurt seems to *equate* "love" either with all VN-caring or with a subset of VN-cares such as those with individual persons as their objects. However, it is then puzzling that Frankfurt says care-love is compatible with volitional ambiguity or conflicting cares (138). Unless "loves" are not all VN, this must be a mistake, since a VN-care seems to require that the higher-order volitions involved in it are wholehearted. I might fail to live up to my love for a friend because of the motive-force of alienated desires (e.g. my envy); but if my caring for her is volitionally necessary for me, then surely I cannot have a higher-order volition opposed to my friendly emotions and desires (or a care in which it is embedded, eg. caring about my complete independence). For that would make action contrary to my friend's welfare quite "thinkable for me;" I could even act autonomously on my opposing care. Frankfurt says that I can "negligently or willfully or akratically fail to do" what my love commands (p.141); but on his account, it is hard to see how I can "willfully" act contrary to a volitionally necessary care.

[48] This is the most charitable interpretation I can find, since Frankfurt does not seem to claim that it is volitionally necessary for some potential "persons" to remain wanton; thus he can only mean that *if* we develop cares, they will have a certain character.

[49] This is what I call the 'Elimination Argument' in *Groundwork* I 402.

weaker than that, e.g. requiring the agent to act on them to the extent possible, consistent with other cares, and unless there is overriding reason to change one's cares.[50] So there is in turn no reason to think that cares must be volitionally necessary to acquire the normative force they have as autonomous commitments. Thus the basis for Frankfurt's analogy collapses: his own account of caring implies that there is space between what he calls our "primitive feeling[s]" or "impulse[s]" on the one side and our "established volitional nature" or fixed volitional "identity" on the other. This space is filled by cares that are autonomous *without* being volitionally necessary for their agents. To ignore this alternative is to repeat Kant's false dichotomy in a new guise. It is also to miss a clear implication of Frankfurt's own recognition that "ambivalent" cares and conflicting higher-order volitions are possible.

3.3 *Frankfurt's Integrity Argument*

Still, I suspect that Frankfurt's uncertainty about how cares form – given his plausible point that they are rarely initiated or changed just 'at will' – leads him to assume that cares are *more* autonomous or authoritative the more entrenched they are in our character, thus making VN-cares appear to express the agents's *deepest* identity. There is another route to this thought: Frankfurt's unusual definition of "freedom of the will" as effective control of first-order motives by higher-order volitions describes a kind of *positive* power that is closer to autonomy than to leeway-liberty.[51] Like action on alienated desires, ambivalence resulting from conflicting higher-order volitions or discordant cares undermines this kind of freedom; we are more active when we "unequivocally endorse or support" the motives on which we act.[52] By resolving conflicts among higher-order volitions, "wholehearted" cares identify us more decisively with the motives they endorse and cultivate.[53] In this spectrum, VN-cares may seem to be the most decisive; the motives they support appear to be those with which the agent is *most fully* identified, or identified in a qualitatively maximal way.[54] Thus it was natural for Frankfurt to imagine that VN-cares are the final authoritative source we seem to need to avoid the lack of determinate character he sees in utilitarian moral theories and versions of political liberalism that idealize the widest life-options.

[50] To see the attraction of this alternative conception, consider Annette Baier (1982) and Cheshire Calhoun (1995).

[51] Frankfurt (1971), 20–21. Notice that Frankfurt clearly denies that "freedom of the will" in his sense is necessary for moral responsibility for particular actions (which, on his view, only requires that we do not alienate the first-order desire(s) on which we are freely acting). By contrast, many scholars use "freedom of the will" to stand for what I call *moral freedom*, meaning whatever freedom or control is required for responsibility for decisions and actions.

[52] Frankfurt (1987), 163.

[53] Ibid, 168.

[54] Ibid, 170: "the desire is in the fullest sense his..."

Frankfurt first develops this idea in his essay titled "Rationality and the unthinkable," where he suggests that "enlargements of our freedom" in the negative or leeway-sense of more extensive options is not always good for an agent. Past some point, "Extensive proliferation of his options may weaken his grasp of his own identity."[55] Following Williams and Rawls, he argues that utilitarian agents are "bare persons" who cannot be committed to specific personal ends or values, since these are always dispensable if necessary to maximize utility:

> it is rational for the utilitarian to modify any of his personal characteristics, including his commitment to particular values, whenever that would increase well-being. ....Thus he cannot commit himself to any limits that might serve at once to anchor his judgment and to specify the requirements of his integrity.[56]

It is this kind of vacuity that Frankfurt now thinks *only* volitional necessities can prevent; to have an identity or motives that "are in the most authentic sense his own,"[57] in which he can manifest integrity, an agent has to care about something or someone – either on principle or just because he does – in a way that makes betraying it unthinkable for him. In fact, at least one concrete care has to be "a constitutive element of his nature or essence," meaning that he is unable intentionally to attempt changing it.[58] Otherwise the agent is "prepared to do anything if the consequences are sufficiently desirable – that is, if the price is right." Such an agent has no "essential nature at all,"[59] and therefore she cannot really be "self"-governing.

Although this appears to be an argument that consequentialism is incompatible with autonomy, which depends on identity-defining commitments, it clearly goes farther than anything in Williams or Rawls, who do not rule out intentional changes in our ground projects or in the central goals of our life-plan. Loyalty to non-consequentialist norms that demand to be followed in each case, rather than commanding us to maximize instances of acting in accordance with them, does not by itself entail volitionally necessary loyalty. Instead, Frankfurt has in mind a general conceptual argument that autonomy requires VN-cares of this fixed sort that constitute an "identity" in the strong sense of a personal essence.[60]

[55] Frankfurt (1988b), 177.

[56] Ibid, pp.178–79. This argument borrows from Williams's famous critique of utilitarianism, but it is also supported by Derek Parfit's argument that strict consequentialism (C) can be self-effacing: see Parfit 1987.

[57] Ibid, 184

[58] Ibid, 187–88.

[59] Ibid, 188.

[60] There are problems particular to the Integrity Argument that I'm skipping over. For example, it seems that an agent might be wilfully wanton, even caring to remain spontaneous or not defined by cares for concrete human ends. If he found it unthinkable to abandon this project of aestheticism, could he not show integrity in his loyalty to it? The best answer to this objection would invoke objective measures of what it worth caring about and deny that the willful wanton's project is worthwhile or meaningful, but this kind of answer is not open to Frankfurt.

3.4 The Emptiness of Total Liberty

This becomes clear in the mature version of Frankfurt's VN-argument found in his essay "On the Necessity of Ideals," where he focuses directly on the alleged tension between self-determination and leeway-liberty. The latter is advanced by the "steady expansion of the range of options from which people can select" in life; but there is also

> the ideal of individuality, construed in terms of the development of a distinctive and robust sense of personal identity. To the extent that people find this ideal compelling, they endeavor to cultivate their own personal characteristics and styles and to decide autonomously how to live and what to do.[61]

Here "individuality" stands for self-determination flowing from an "identity" in the practical sense, plus a kind of originality that we associate with authentic personality. But individuality, autonomy, and even libertarian choice itself are undermined by the enlargement of our options beyond some point, in Frankfurt's view. As his field of alternatives is extended, the agent may become "disoriented with respect to where his interests and preferences lie" and "experience an unsettling diminution in the clarity with which he comprehends who he is."[62] The problem concerns not just the quantity of options but their kind: if the most fundamental bases for making choices themselves become optional, then the agent has a kind of deep leeway that is debilitating.

For if the agent's field of options "has no boundaries at all," then "every conceivable course of action" is volitionally possible for him. Since he must choose all of the desires, preferences, and criteria by which he makes practical choices, "It will be possible, then, for him to change those aspects of his nature that determine what choices he makes."[63] If all of his motives and reasons for choice are thus "adventious and provisional" until the agent commits himself to them, then he has no basis for deciding how to commit himself, or what to care about: "Under these conditions there is in him no fixed point from which a self-directed volitional process can begin." Like a pure ego, this agent is "so vacant of identifiable and stable volitional tendencies and constraints" that "the decisions he makes will be altogether arbitrary" in two senses: they are groundless and thus easily reversible.[64] Such a being has a kind of liberty that makes individual self-determination or authenticity impossible. The only way to avoid this is for the person to have volitionally necessary "ideals" that fix some original limits to what is volitionally possible for him. An agent without such a "personal essence" would be incapable of "genuine integrity" because "he has no personal boundaries whose inviolability he might set himself to protect."[65] We can reconstruct this argument as follows:

[61] Frankfurt (1993), 108, following John Stuart Mill's sense of 'individuality.'

[62] Ibid, 109.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid, 110.

[65] Ibid, p.115. Frankfurt's use of the term "ideals" for nonconsequentialist values that agents take as inviolable probably comes from R.M. Hare's similar use of the term in Hare (1963), ch.8.

Frankfurt's Emptiness Argument:

1. To be autonomous, a choice between options must have a teleological explanation in terms of reasons and motives that the agent can see as relevant in his choice-circumstance[66] [common premise].
2. To count as authoritative bases of choice for an agent, reasons, values or norms must be integrated into his autonomous motives. In other words, he must care about them [implicit *reasons-internalist premise*, which also reflects Frankfurt's subjectivist conception of caring].
3. An agent cannot come to care about any basis for choice through an arbitrary decision made for no reason [from 1].
4. Hence norms, values, or practical reasons cannot become authoritative sources for an agent through his own decisions unless these decisions ultimately flow from authoritative motives that are do not result from prior decisions [from 2 and 3 by recursion].
5. Hence autonomous agency must start from motives that are given as autonomous for the agent, because of the nature of agency as such or the individual nature of his own agency [from 4 by elimination of all other alternatives?].
6. Since such authoritative motives from which autonomous agency begins cannot be changed intentionally by the agent's autonomous choices, they count as cares that are *absolutely volitionally necessary* for him (or part of his personal essence)[67] [from 3 and 5].

Notice that this argument does not depend on the concept of integrity. As reconstructed here, it depends mainly on a dichotomy concerning possible sources of autonomous motives, which we will consider in the next section.

4 An Existentialist Response to Frankfurt: Projective Motivation and Norms

4.1 Frankfurt's False Dichotomy and Internalism

This critique of the empty agent is obviously directed against the Sartre's nihilistic picture of the "for-itself" as a freedom that cannot be moved in choosing its original project by any motives or values unless it *consents* to give them motivating force,[68] and which (as Sartre emphasizes) is therefore haunted by anguish at the arbitrariness of its groundless choice of ultimate values or highest priorities and

[66] Notice that this requirement is weaker than the demand for a complete contrastive explanation of why option A was elected over B.

[67] On the nature of *absolute* volitional necessities, see Frankfurt (1993), 112.

[68] Sartre (1966), 71. Susan Wolf offers a similar critique of Sartre in Wolf 1990.

commitments.[69] In my view, Frankfurt's critique shows that agents with Sartrean deep liberty cannot have the kind of character that is necessary both for existential autonomy and authenticity; if Sartre were right about the nature of choice, we could not care enough about our future continuation of our present cares to be anguished about their uncertainty.

But Frankfurt's emptiness argument relies on a false dilemma: an agent can avoid Sartrean arbitrariness without having to start from volitionally necessary cares or ideals as given in her personal essence. Frankfurt's argument probably shows that autonomous choice cannot begin without norms or reasons that already have some involuntary *authority* for the agent or relevance for the initial choices in which she starts actively shaping her own character, which thus makes possible her future autonomous action from character: she cannot begin *from nothing* and act for no reason. But from this teleological point alone, we cannot infer that the norms or reasons that serve as her initial grounds as she becomes autonomous must get their authority from cares that are essential to her individual will. As the reconstruction shows, we need also need the "internalist" premise (2) that norms or practical reasons can have authority for a free agent only if they already *motivate* the agent.

Even then, it only follows from (1) and (2) that the norms which serve as ultimate sources of autonomous agency cannot acquire their authority for the agent simply by arbitrary choice; the agent's motivation by these norms could still be *sheddable*. Thus step (5) is a non-sequiter unless we add the further contentious assumption that no autonomous decision to change basic value-commitments is possible unless it is ultimately guided by unsheddable commitments to other more basic norms. This foundationalist picture contrasts with one that is closer to the metaphor of Neurath's boat being rebuilt piece by piece by the sailors riding on it. Frankfurt has given no argument to rule out the possibility of norms that can rationally guide an agent to change his commitment to those very norms; an agent starting to shape her character on the basis of commitments to such norms would satisfy the internalist premise, yet her autonomous agency would not have to trace to volitionally necessary cares. However, I will set this Neurathian objection aside and focus in the next section on critiquing the internalist premise itself.

4.2 Normative Authority Without Prior Motives

There are several different senses of "internalism" at issue in philosophical debates today, but for Frankfurt's argument, what matters is the idea that norms and practical reasons can guide an agent's choices (or make them teleologically intelligible) only because they link up with present elements in the agent's motivational set.[70]

[69] Ibid, pp.76–77.

[70] See Bernard Williams (1981), 101–13 and Wallace (2006), 45–50.

They are normative or practically significant to the agent only if they motivate her – and this motivation in turn may have different explanations. According to Frankfurt, for reasons that provide ultimate sources for self-shaping motives, either (a) commitment to these norms is constitutive of free agency as such, or (b) commitment to them is constitutive of this agent. For example, the old eudaimonist idea that all motivation derives from the desire for happiness, which in turn is constitutive of will as intellectual appetite, provides one motive that satisfies condition (a). So does Hume's view that the authority of norms depends on our general desires for our own good and for the good of our communities or sympathy for human beings in general – both motives being essential to normal human agency. Frankfurt instead offers motives that satisfy condition (b), namely cares that are essential to the particular agent's heart. These cares have "cognitive and affective considerations" as "sources and grounds" but they are essentially volitional, meaning that their distinctive kind of motivation is a kind of active control or guidance.[71]

Although this type of internalism has seemed attractive to many, I think R. Jay Wallace has shown that it can be coherently rejected.[72] Its core error lies in assuming that practical reasons can guide only if they function automatically as (what I call) *prepurposive* motives. Imagine that there is some minimal set (or sets) of practical reasons and norms N whose authority we must recognize in order to start making any autonomous choices, or to become responsible for aspects of our own character by shaping its guiding aims and devotions. Why should we think that the authority of N that first makes non-arbitrary choices possible must derive from our *caring* about N? Frankfurt assumes that only motivating states can guide choices, and he holds the subjectivist view that cares are not ultimately grounded in reasons that have normative force independently of (or logically prior to) our caring – or that count as reasons for all rational agents. But as I have detailed in my book on the will, his arguments for this subjectivist view are unconvincing.[73] It remains plausible that the choices in which existential autonomy first gets going respond to reasons whose normative force is *neither* created by such choices, as Sartre imagined, *nor* dependent on already caring about such reasons or being committed to them.

Here is the third alternative: we can respond to practical reasons or norms by *generating* new motivation (in the form of new cares or volitional commitments) that do not derive from preexisting motives. On this externalist view, norms can give us reasons to care about final ends (and ways of pursuing them) without already embodying the motivation that will exist in the care once formed. The agent's response to such norms, which generates new motives through setting new final ends, I call "projective motivation." "Projecting" in this sense is meant to contrast with desiring in an appetitive sense, or being passively drawn towards a perceived good. The agent actively projects a purpose in light of reasons that need not already

[71] Frankfurt (1993), 110–11.

[72] See R. Jay Wallace's extensive and insightful discussion in Wallace (2006), chs. 1 and 4. Also see my review essay on this book online at *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*.

[73] See Davenport (2007), ch.14.

attract him, or be the object of past commitments. The new cares he forms are motive-states that do not derive all their strength or direction from desires that already moved him prior to his projective activity, which we can envision as a process of forming multiple intentions over time. As Frankfurt saw, the active process in which cares are formed is usually not compressed into a discrete moment of decision; rather, is on-going *within* a series of particular intentions. But the projective account suggests how cares can be cultivated by the agent without arbitrariness; for the agent forms these cares in *response* to norms that already have authority for the agent. These norms *ground* the setting of new final ends or recommitment to standing goals, but grounding is quite distinct from attracting. Projective motivation in this sense is a kind of *willing* that is more temporally extended than "decision" in the most familiar sense; it is a process in which we devote our psychic energies to a complex task or purpose, and thereby bring different preexisting elements of our psyche such as desires and emotions into line with our extended project. Through extended commitment, it forms new motives that are distinct from prior desires in exactly the way that Kantian autonomy envisions, *but* it can be guided by thick values and norms concerning human goods, not only by considerations of formal fairness. The "will," then, has a motivational function beyond forming plans or intentions, or making instantaneous decisions.

This projective model provides what is missing in Frankfurt's theory, namely an account of how cares can be formed in a way that is both teleologically intelligible and controlled by the agent. If this projective externalist theory is plausible, then autonomous agency need not begin in volitionally necessary cares that are essential to the individual agent. Instead, it can begin with normative considerations that are meaningful to the agent and can guide choices without acting on him to stimulate desire. Thus not all our new motives trace to prior motivation: some are caused directly from the agent's response to the normative significance of reasons that are, at the time, still external to his motivational set. In sum, projective motivation is the process by which new motives autonomously enter and become central to that "set." Thus Frankfurt's arbitrariness objection does not apply: even a currently wanton agent without any cares or higher-order volitions can begin to form these components of an autonomous character without arbitrariness if she is guided by norms or values that make different cares worthwhile or that justify higher-order volitions. If projective motivation is possible, than the dichotomy on which Frankfurt's emptiness argument depends is false.

This becomes a recognizably existentialist view of selfhood or practical identity if we add that in forming the initial cares through which the agent begins autonomously to shape her own volitional character, she could have committed herself to *different* final ends or formed other cares, given reasons or values whose normative importance she already recognized at the time. In other words, the agent has leeway-liberty in the projective formation of identity-defining commitments. It is also consistent with this model to hold that autonomous agents usually retain some level of liberty to change their cares, especially if the reasons on which they were based change in light of new evidence or critical reassessment. Pace Frankfurt, this need *not* entail that all the normative sources that can guide autonomous choices themselves

become optional or dependent on choice; for we can be guided by authoritative reasons and values external to our cares and standing life-projects. We can become aware of such norms and reasons due to influences and experiences in our upbringing that we did not choose, and due to the inherent structure of rational agency. These practical reasons can have an authority that does not depend on being chosen, and that is distinct from the psychological commitment to them that *results* from projective motivation.[74]

4.3 *Existential Autonomy with Leeway-Liberty to the Core*

Since my description of the existential model has been quite abstract, one might ask how this process would unfold in concrete cases. Several useful examples can be found in the characters of Kierkegaard's works who are moving through existential "stages" of life, starting from wantonness or "aestheticism" and working through ethical engagement to religious wonder.[75] But I focus here on the sort of case that Frankfurt seems to have in mind in making his emptiness argument, namely the confused adolescent who has an almost endless variety of options for life, but who sees little or no reason to pursue any of them with earnest devotion or effort. This familiar figure – the listless teenager who recognizes some of his or her talents but cannot yet see any particular development of them as very worthwhile – also seems to haunt communitarians like Charles Taylor who worry that the loss of social horizons of accepted values paralyzes the will in my projective sense. As Taylor says, we have an "ethic of authenticity" that originated in the romantic period, but "everyone understands the complaint that our disenchanted world lacks meaning, that in this world, particularly the youth suffer from a lack of strong purposes in their lives..." This is at least partly because the frameworks that provided reasons for the sort of cares that could make one's life full and rich with meaning have become suspect.[76] In particular, Taylor thinks that loss of religious transcendence can have this result: we rightly celebrate pluralism and progress in ordinary life, but we also feel the "loss of a more exalted view of life, in which heroic action, or political self-rule, or great philanthropic dedication, was seen as a higher fulfillment."[77]

[74] Yet this existential model certainly does not require that all the significance of practical reasons, values, and norms in general is accessible to the agent independently of the state of her will or prior to her caring; quite a bit of what matters or makes different cares and life-goals worthwhile may become apparent (or fully clear) only once existential autonomy has already begun and the agent has projected some commitments. That does not entail that caring grounds these values; it may only mean that caring engagement increases epistemic access to certain values.

[75] See Davenport (2001, 2012).

[76] Charles Taylor (2007), ch.8, 299 and 303.

[77] Ibid, 621. For a similar diagnosis of a young person "disoriented" by loss of confidence in values that could ground choice, see Johnston (1994), 96.

In fact, this sounds very much like Kierkegaard's criticisms of nineteenth century Denmark in his famous essay, "The Present Age."[78] Yet Kierkegaard did not think the solution was to imagine that each person harbors some nascent cares waiting to be discovered; even if she has a unique calling, the individual must devote herself to form lasting commitments.

To apply his conception of self-forming selves capable of becoming autonomous to our case, we have to imagine that a maturing child who is ready to form an autonomous identity (or is already beginning to) has certain innate human needs and is aware of various values either as conventionally held or as personally experienced. If all values worth caring about are regarded as brute preferences, and all virtue-concepts are seen as mere ideology, then certainly this will undermine projective end-setting, or the formation of cares through self-sustained devotion to final ends. My answer to Frankfurt's arbitrariness objection makes autonomy dependent on some substantive reasons that credibly appear to be independent of our will and that justify concrete relationships, life-goals, or ground projects. If a widespread loss of such reasons in modern western culture has occurred alongside a broadening of options through more social mobility, better education, and greater wealth, it is not the breadth of life-options or exposure to competing conceptions of lives worth living that is to blame for ethical subjectivism, lowered ambitions, or volitional inertia among the youth (and among many older but still immature adults). Existential freedom to form alternative possible cares or commitments requires a rich sense of meaning awaiting us in the different potential vocations, practices, and human relationships in which we could engage[79]; so it is hard to see how such freedom could make us less sensitive to the values in the array of options. It is more likely that mass media promoting consumerism, aesthetic lifestyles, and voyeuristic focus on the rich and famous are to blame for today's version of teenage angst (or worse, an *ennui* without real angst). Perhaps the fact that many teenagers in developed societies are not given important jobs or work to do until they reach their mid-twenties also contributes to the problem.

4.4 *The Dilution of Options by Too Many Alternatives?*

Of course, against ET as an account of existential freedom one can still raise the general luck-objection that if our teenager eventually decides to develop her talents in music, we cannot give a complete contrastive explanation for why she did not pursue biology instead, when she was interested in both and saw value in each devotion. But as we have seen, Frankfurt's argument for VN-cares raises objections that are more specific than this. To explain how autonomy is possible, he thinks it is not

[78] See Davenport (2013) (forthcoming).

[79] See Viktor Frankl's account of self-transcending values that ground cares in Frankl (1963).

enough *just* to deny that responsibility for her volitional character entails that an agent has a real non-conditional power to form different cares or long-term ends at some junctures in her life. Nor it is enough to accept a teleological principle according to which, in every significant or character-shaping choice, the agent always has greater reason to choose one action rather than all other epistemically open options.

Instead, Frankfurt requires a kind of substantive psychological determinism according to which it is inevitable that we become committed to certain ends or discover certain cares as part of our personal essence, without which only a very thin set of moral reasons may have normative authority for us. If this were true as a descriptive matter, it seems inexplicable why so many people in contemporary culture would have trouble finding their way through a wide array of life-options to some vocation and relationships that can deeply engage them and bring a strong sense of enduring meaning to their lives: instead, they would just find their most basic passions and pursue them. If Frankfurt's analysis of VN-cares is meant offer any practical aid in becoming autonomous, it seems that personal autonomy must require some kind of self-discovery or response that is not simply ensured by our personal essence. Perhaps charity requires us to interpret his 'emptiness argument' as saying that a very wide range of options at the core level of practical identity (where we establish the concerns that provide narrative unity for almost all our more peripheral activities) blocks the requisite kind of self-discovery by overwhelming our finite capacity to attend to the potential values to be realized along different life-plans. On this reading, the very plenitude of existentially deep life-options blurs the distinctive reasons for each, or makes their potential significance less vivid to us. We are then like the heroes in the old movie, *The Man Who Would Be King*, when they discover Alexander the Great's vast horde of treasure: the individual gems do not stand out in that sea of jewels as they would if only five were laid out on a table. The finite mind is overwhelmed by such enormous wealth; so each item in the collection suffers by comparison and loses its unique appeal.[80]

There is something to this; a child with 100 stuffed animals may love none of them nearly as much as the child who has only one. Likewise perhaps for the ancient kings with many wives who knew nothing of exclusive devotion to one unique partner. But I doubt that this is the predicament of a young person today who seems to care about nothing deeply despite having multiple opportunities and talents. In my experience, the average teenager in advanced western capitalist society hardly imagines more than a few jobs, significant relationships, political causes, or even hobbies as genuinely open to her – and does not even understand the idea of a calling or vocation. A mystic whose mind somehow grasped the vast richness of this world and the plenitude of values that could be served in thousands of different kinds of heroic lives might be overwhelmed in the way described and then be unable to get on with finishing her masterpiece or marrying her beloved, let alone more mundane steps like repairing her house. By contrast, although the typical teenager may be aware of

[80] Unfortunately Frankfurt's subjectivist conception of the relation between caring and values probably makes it impossible for him to accept this version of his emptiness argument.

a wide range of different lives and conceptions of goods worthy of hard work, she experiences options as *differentially accessible*, with only a few being close to her in what we might call 'volitional space' and most being much farther away, because of all sorts of contingencies in her social circumstances as well as unchosen aspects of her personality – such as innate talents, emotional tendencies or temperament, affinities acquired in early childhood, and ordinary habits. Not too many, but too few really interesting options worthy of engagement and effort seem to be within her reach.

To illustrate this idea of differential accessibility, consider the young Alfred Kinsey, as portrayed in the recent film about his life.[81] When he rebelled against his repressive puritanical father, Kinsey devoted himself to animal research because he had experienced the wonders of nature near his home. This care was more accessible to him in that circumstance with his personality than, say, the option of becoming a graphic designer or a sailor, though there may have been other salient options such as becoming a expert in biblical texts who could critique his father's religious fundamentalism. Imagine that Kinsey had spent time with an uncle who was a linguist and mythographer and learned from him about comparative religion; he might then have taken the route of historical critic rather than scientist. Likewise, he could not at the time of his initial rebellion even imagine the career of a behavioral sex researcher; he had to invent that option later when the need for it became apparent as a result of his earlier scientific work. There is no reason to think that the route he chose in his circumstances was volitionally necessary for him; but nor does it appear at all arbitrary. It seems to be both autonomous and chosen among multiple options that were all accessible, although some were more salient or available and others less so at each juncture.

4.5 *Volitional Space and Dimensions of Accessibility*

As this suggests, complete development of the existential conception of caring in response to Frankfurt requires a full explanation of how an agent's leeway-power to bring about any one of multiple options interacts with factors that make it 'easier' or 'harder' to choose different options. For these factors that make options appear as more or less 'choosable' or 'live' to the agent help explain why choice with leeway-liberty is not arbitrary or teleologically unintelligible. In his VN-arguments, Frankfurt overlooks the key point that there are many such factors *other* than an agent's standing cares, and several may operate even for agents who have not yet formed any specific cares or long-term commitments.

This point is intimately connected to a central issue in contemporary free will debates. In this literature, there is now broad agreement that an act or intention's being accessible to powers of agency is a much stronger condition than merely being

[81] *Kinsey*, dir. Bill Condon (20th Century Fox, 2004).

metaphysically possible: a "robust" option is, roughly, one that an agent can bring about voluntarily for reasons that are accessible to her employing (in the normal way) causal powers that make her an agent.[82] Leeway-libertarians are fairly construed as holding that responsibility for some element of agency X requires such robust alternatives to X; likewise, when they assert that "ought implies can," they have in mind a robust sense of "can." Yet the factors that make an option more or less robust, and the different dimensions of accessibility, are not yet well understood, in my view. This lacuna clouds the debate because it makes the type of leeway-freedom that may be necessary for responsibility unclear. I cannot offer a full account here, but the notion of accessibility that we need is clearly relative to agents and circumstances as well as to past developments in character and states of mind; so it is quite complex. Consider that a particular act A may be "possible" in any of the following senses:

1. Agent's S's doing A at time T in circumstances C may be metaphysically possible (or broadly logically possible);
2. It may be nomologically possible (consistent with natural laws and the past up to T);
3. It may be within the physical capacities of agent S to perform A at T in C;
4. S may have the know-how and information to perform A voluntarily at T in C;
5. It may be morally possible (or not wrong) for S to perform A in C;
6. It may be socially possible, given conventions of S's society, for S to perform A at T in C;
7. It may be possible, given S's current character, for S to be motivated to perform A at T in C;
8. It may be psychologically possible, given S's state of mind in C, for S to intend to perform A at T;
9. It may be possible for S to seriously consider or deliberate about performing A at T in C (which implies that S sees doing this as epistemically possible, and perhaps as supported by some reasons).

This is only a first pass, but perhaps a robust option must be "possible" in most of these modal senses. Still, it implies further complexities; for while an act is discretely possible, actual, or impossible in senses 1–5, it may be *more or less* possible in senses 6–9, and *more than one variable* may underlie these differences in degree of possibility.[83] For example, option A may be motivationally more difficult for the agent to choose than option B, because A is contrary to her ingrained habits while B is not, or because it is easier to see A's good aspects and but harder to recognize B's advantages. The relevance of options is always affected by their relation to pressing problems before the agent, and by past commitments; e.g. the option of simply ignoring a fire in the kitchen may be deliberatively irrelevant because I care about my home, as long as it is not contrasted with some other salient option of similar or greater gravity.

[82] For just one of many examples, see Pereboom (2001), 19 and 26. I have critiqued Pereboom's account of robustness in Davenport (2006).

[83] In other words, we no longer have well-behaved modal operators for categories 6–9.

Frankfurt has argued that in some cases it may be easier to intend to do A than actually to do A "when the chips are down"[84]; but rather than reflecting a volitionally necessary care, this can be due to several kinds of influence that affect the options. The relative ease of intending to skydive versus actually jumping out of the plane when the time comes is due to our underestimating our compulsive feelings of fear. A cool girl's ease in planning a mean practical joke collides with her sudden pity for the victim when the moment is ripe because ethical qualms leap into salience when the harm is about to be done. Even the metaphor of volitional space, in which some options are 'closer' to the agent's center of gravity while others are father off towards her horizon, and perhaps others are beyond it (meaning they cannot even occur to him) is still too simple. To model relevance, we would need a complex space with multiple dimensions along which an option can be more salient or more remote for the agent.

5 Conclusion

This partial analysis of *agentive possibility* implies, among other things, that Frankfurt's concept of "volitionally necessary" cares is far too simple, almost to the point of being inarticulate. "Volitional necessity" means that certain options are motivationally impossible while others are necessary for the agent in his or her circumstances – but *not* because of the strength of natural inclinations, brute impulses, or desires that just occur passively within us. Rather, the impossibility is relative to a kind of motivation that is actively sustained by the agent – that is, what I have called projective motivation. But we do not yet know enough about this kind of motivation to predict that certain substantive final ends will necessarily be objects of such inherently volitional motives in an autonomous individual. Moreover, Frankfurt's own examples and similar cases can be interpreted in ways that are consistent with the Existential Thesis instead, in at least three ways.

(a) What appears to be the volitional impossibility of some option for an agent due to his standing commitments may actually be great difficulty short of impossibility.[85] An agent like Darth Vader (in *The Return of the Jedi*) may think it is volitionally impossible for him to betray the Emperor, yet discover that it is not 'when the chips are down'. The character played by Bruce Willis in the film *Armageddon* may think it is impossible that he would ever willingly bless his daughter's marriage to her suitor; but when he changes his mind in the course of experience,

[84] Frankfurt (1982), 84–85, and Frankfurt (1988b), 183.

[85] For instance, the American military officers who "refused to carry out the procedures for launching nuclear missiles" when ordered to do so in what they believed was not a drill (Frankfurt 1988b, 182) may simply have found the prospect much more *difficult* than they thought, especially without certainty that America was under nuclear attack.

we are not likely to think that a volitional necessity has vanished from his psyche. Rather, the simpler explanation is that he mistook the psychological difficulty of this step for sheer unthinkability.

(b) There may be real cases of volitionally necessary caring when someone is so committed to their cause that it is motivationally impossible for them to turn aside from it, but autonomous cares do not start out this way. By the beginning of 1865, it was volitionally impossible for Lincoln to compromise with the South on slavery, just as we think it was psychologically impossible for Luther to back down or recant after posting his theses. But the volitional necessity of these cares was a result of the projective striving put into them through previous years and the response of others; at earlier times, Lincoln certainly *could and would* have compromised. Probably the same is true of Luther some time before Wittenberg. The Air Force officers who Frankfurt cites as admirably unable to obey what they believed was a sincere command to launch a nuclear weapon[86] might have been able to obey this command if earlier on they had chosen a path that led them to a more fanatical mindset.

For all the evidence shows, these agents enjoyed leeway-liberty in this projective process that gave rise to the cares that eventually became volitionally necessary for them. For example, Lincoln could have decided to stay in his law practice and ignore the expansion of slavery, even though he already cared about its evils by 1854. These cases are compatible with ET because it contains a tracing condition allowing volitional necessity (to the point of having only one volitionally possible option in certain circumstances) if this results from past choices in which leeway-liberty was operative

(c) An agent's temperament, education, innate talents and personal affinities may set some limits on what cares she can develop (rendering some volitionally impossible for her); for example, it might have been inconceivable for the teenage Mozart to despise music and seek to eradicate it, just as it might have been unthinkable to the teenage Marx to ignore completely the suffering of the urban poor of Europe while devoting himself solely to opening factories to enrich himself. But in these hypothesized instances, we only have *negative* volitional limits that do not derive from positive higher-order volitions the agent already has: he cannot form certain *types* of care, but not because they conflict with standing particular cares that have already become volitionally necessary commitments for life. Even Mozart's great talent probably did not compel him to care about composing above all else, nor was Marx compelled to become a critic of capitalism in general. Frankfurt sometimes conflates negative limits on one's cares with having certain loves as part of one's personal essence; but loves are positive cares. Unless the psychological limits on the cares we can develop are very tight, they do not destine us to particular loves, and so they remain compatible with ET.

[86] Frankfurt (1988b), 182.

In sum, in cases of types (a), (b), and (c), we do not need to posit any original or fixed positive volitionally necessary care without which the agent could not get started in taking charge of an autonomous set of life-goals, personal projects, or volitional character in general. Yet these types seem to include all the plausible examples one might offer to support the existence of volitionally necessary cares. I conclude that Frankfurt has given no sound reasons to think that existential autonomy is impossible unless it develops from or through VN-cares. On the contrary, a leeway-libertarian conception of existential autonomy fits well with the projective theory of care-formation, allowing us to combine genuine leeway-freedom with normative authority in a single coherent picture.

While I cannot develop this picture further here, imagine that an agent begins as a "wanton" or "aesthete" without distinct cares or clear higher-order volitions. From that perspective, at least some reasons for serious commitment to self-transcending goals are already apparent and they gain in normative clarity as the hollowness of aestheticism becomes evident. The agent can then develop her higher-order will, forming the first cares out of which her volitional character will grow, in light of norms and values whose range and authority become more vivid as her commitments deepen. As this process continues, the volitional space of options around her changes, with options closely related to her identity-defining projects coming into sharper focus near to her, and other options opposed to the life she has chosen receding towards the remote horizon. But at all times, libertarian choice remains possible within this volitional space and each significant alteration in cares changes the topology of that space in reflexive relation to which the self always exists. Although it needs further development, this model offers some promise that a libertarian account of existential autonomy can be defended.

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