In Defense of Ambivalence

Simon D. Feldman and Allan Hazlett

DRAFT

> He was not a hypocrite, just broken and split off like all men.
>
> — David Foster Wallace, "Good People"

> Do I contradict myself?
> Very well then I contradict myself,
> (I am large, I contain multitudes.)
>
> — Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

Harry Frankfurt (1988, 1998, 2004) defends an ideal of wholeheartedness. We follow Frankfurt in distinguishing between ambivalence (a species of incoherence in desire) and wholeheartedness (the absence of ambivalence), but part ways with him by arguing against the idea that wholeheartedness is an ideal. Our argument is based on cases of valuable ambivalence – cases in which ambivalence contributes to the wellbeing of the ambivalent person.

1 Ambivalence and wholeheartedness

We shall first distinguish between ambivalence and wholeheartedness. Then we'll turn to the idea that wholeheartedness is an ideal. Ambivalence exists when "there is no univocal answer to the question of what the person really wants." (1988, p. 165) This might be a situation in which "with respect to [some] object, he is drawn not only toward it but away from it too," or because "the person's preferences concerning what he wants are not fully integrated, so that there is some *inconsistency* or *conflict* … among them." (Ibid.) When a person is ambivalent, "what is divided is neither a person's reason nor his affects, but his will." (1998, p. 98-9) Frankfurt writes:

> Insofar as someone is ambivalent, he is moved by incompatible preferences or attitudes regarding his affects or desires or regarding other elements of his psychic life. This volitional division keeps him from settling upon or from tolerating any coherent alternative or motivational identity. It means that he does not know what he really wants. (1998, p. 99)[1]

> It may happen that a person truly loves something but that, at the same time, it is also true that he does not want to love it. Part of him loves it, as we might say, and part of him does not. There is a part of him that is opposed to his loving it, and that wishes he did not love it at all. In a word, the person is ambivalent. (2004, p. 91)

[1] Note that this articulation is misleading, as it implies that there is a fact of the matter about what the ambivalent person "really" wants. For Frankfurt, ambivalence entails indeterminacy in what a person "really" wants.

Of course, we must keep in mind that this talk of "parts" of a person is metaphorical. Plato (*Republic,* Book 4) seems to have thought that incoherence in desire was impossible, and to have concluded that apparent incoherence in desire is actually just difference in a person's rational, appetitive, and spirited parts. But this was a mistake: it cannot be the case that she desires p and also that she does not desire p But it is perfectly possible that someone desires p and also that she desires not-p. It's not (as Plato says) that there's two parts of Leontius, one that wants to look at corpses and one that doesn't; it's just that Leontius both wants to look at corpses and wants not to look at corpses.

Ambivalence, however, isn't (mere) incoherence in desire. Compare the reluctant smoker, who wants to smoke a cigarette but "really" wants not to smoke a cigarette. Here there is incoherence "*between* what the person really wants and other desires … that are *external* to the volitional complex with which the person identifies," (1988, p. 165) whereas in ambivalence the "incoherence is *within* this volitional complex," (Ibid.) such that the incoherent desires "are both wholly internal to a person's will rather than alien to him." (1998, p. 99) The ambivalent person is thus "radically divided and incoherent." (1988, p. 164)

We can further clarify the notion of ambivalence by appeal to Frankfurt's conception of caring. For Frankfurt, **caring** is a species of desiring. In the case of someone who wants to go to a concert, "[h]is caring about the concert would essentially consist in his having and identifying with a higher-order desire … that this first-order desire not be extinguished or abandoned." (1998, p. 161) Thus "whether a person cares about something pertains essentially to whether he is *committed* to his desire for it." (Ibid.) Whether a particular instance of desiring amounts to caring is a matter of whether the individual "identifies herself" with the relevant desire. When you **identify** with a desire of yours, you approve of it (1988, p. 65), you desire that it not be extinguished or abandoned (1988, p. 161), and you desire that it move you to act (1988, pp. 164-7).[2] Desires with which you do not identify are external to your will and alien to you (1988, pp. 58-61).

Ambivalence exists when there is an unresolved conflict within what a person cares about. Thus when someone loves something, but "[t]here is a part of him that is opposed to his loving it, and that wishes he did not love it at all," there is a conflict not only at the level of the relevant lower-order desires, but at the level of the relevant higher-order states as well. To love something is (for Frankfurt) to care about it, and care requires higher-order identification with lower-order desire – it requires that you be on the side of the relevant lower-order desire. Thus when someone loves something, but wishes she did not love it, there is division within the "volitional complex." "An ambivalent person," Frankfurt argues, "is simultaneously on both sides of the struggle within himself." (1989, p. 138) The parties to the conflict, as it were, "are both wholly internal to a person's will rather than alien to him."

For Frankfurt, the solution to ambivalence is wholeheartedness. It is possible to escape ambivalence by identifying with one or the other, and not both, of the relevant incoherent desires. In doing so the person will have made up his mind, where "[a] person who makes up his mind … seeks thereby to overcome or supersede a condition of inner division and to make himself into an integrated whole." (1988, p. 174) Becoming wholehearted "requires … that the person become finally and unequivocally clear as to

[2] We leave open the question of whether identification is voluntary. Frankfurt argues that it is (1988, pp. 64-8, 1998, p. 137).

which side of the conflict *he* is on." (2004, p. 91) In so doing, he will have become "wholehearted."

To sum up, then:

- A person is **ambivalent** when she identifies with an inconsistent set of desires.
- A person is **wholehearted** when she identifies with a consistent set of desires.

Given these conceptions of ambivalence and wholeheartedness, several comments are in order. First, wholeheartedness doesn't ensure coherence in desire. "The unwilling addict," Frankfurt writes, "is wholeheartedly on one side of the conflict." The reluctant smoker identifies with her desire not to smoke, her desire not to smoke is an instance of caring, and she does not identify with her desire to smoke, which is not an instance of caring. Second, for this reason, wholeheartedness doesn't ensure lack of alienation. The reluctant smoker is alienated from her desire to smoke, despite her wholeheartedness about not smoking. Third, wholeheartedness doesn't ensure enkrateia. Having identified with her desire not to smoke, the reluctant smoker may still continue to smoke. She doesn't want her desire to smoke to move her to act. But it moves her all the same.[3] Finally, "ambivalence," in Frankfurt's sense, is not synonymous with one ordinary sense of the word in contemporary English, on which to say that someone is ambivalent about something is to say that she is indifferent to it, that she does not care one way or the other. Nor is it synonymous with "ambivalence" in the sense of indecisiveness (more on which below).[4]

2 Wholeheartedness as a eudaimonic ideal

Despite the fact that ambivalence might be inescapable (1988, p. 107), Frankfurt argues that it is a bad thing. He writes that "ambivalence is a disease of the will" (1998, p. 100) or "a disease of the mind" (2004, p. 95), and that "the health of the will is to be unified and … wholehearted" and that "the mind is healthy … insofar as it is wholehearted." (2004, p. 95) Why think this? And what does this mean? In what sense is ambivalence a "disease of the will"?

To focus our discussion, we'll take the supposed disvalue of ambivalence and the supposed value of wholeheartedness to be **eudaimonic** value and disvalue. Eudaimonic value, for S, is value vis-à-vis the wellbeing of S. Eudaimonic value concerns what is good and bad for a person, i.e. her wellbeing. "Wellbeing" is used here in a broad sense, such that "wellbeing" is a name for welfare, the good life, quality of life, happiness (in one of its many meanings), or for "living well and faring well" (Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1095a15). Just as "everything" is the uninformative answer to the question of what there is, "wellbeing" is the uninformative answer to the question "What makes someone's life go best?" (Parfit 1984, pp. 493-502). Given this broad sense of "wellbeing," we take hedonism (Feldman 2004; cf. Parfit 1984, pp. 493-4, Heathwood 2010, pp. pp. 648-50), perfectionism (Hurka 1993), life-satisfaction theories (Sumner 1996), and desire-fulfillment theories (cf. Parfit 1984, pp. 493-9,

[3] Furthermore, as Frankfurt (1988) argues, neither is wholeheartedness required for successful action, since "people often decide to do things which – whether they realize it or not – they would do in any case." (p. 174)

[4] The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers: "The coexistence in one person of contradictory emotions or attitudes (as love and hatred) towards a person or thing." The *American Heritage Dictionary* offers both this and an alternative meaning: "Uncertainty or indecisiveness as to which course to follow."

Heathwood 2010, pp. 650-2) to all be theories of wellbeing. "Eudaimonic value," therefore, does not necessarily refer to value vis-à-vis Aristotelian εὐδαιμονία, nor to value vis-a-vis εὐδαιμονία accoring to any particular theory. "Eudaimonic value" refers, by definition, to value vis-a-vis wellbeing. We will defend claims that are incompatible with some philosophical theories of wellbeing; our goal in all this is to base our arguments on pre-theoretically plausible ideas about wellbeing.

How then shall we understand the idea that ambivalence is eudaimonically disvaluable and that wholeheartedness is eudaimonically valuable? We'll say that p is (or would be) **better** than q, for S, when either (i) p and were it the case that q, then S would be worse off, or (ii) q and were it the case that p, S would be better off. (We'll say that one thing is better than another, full stop, when context makes it clear who the relevant subject is.) This is a way of understanding the sense in which something might **contribute** to S's wellbeing – by making S's life go better than it otherwise would have gone.[5]

Might we say that, for all S, being wholehearted is always better then being ambivalent, for S? This is not plausible. As Frankfurt himself admits, "[t]here are circumstances in which it is only reasonable, no matter how uncomfortable it may be, for a person to be drawn in several directions at once." (1998, p. 102) We will return to such cases below (§??).

We might say that wholeheartedness is always pro tanto eudaimonically valuable and that ambivalence is always pro tanto eudaimonically disvaluable. But this does not seem to capture the strength of the value of wholeheartedness that Frankfurt has in mind. Physical exercise is always pro tanto euaimonically disvaluable, in virtue of the fact that it is painful and exhausting. Likewise, philosophical inquiry is always pro tanto eudaimonically disvaluable, in virtue of the confusion, struggle, and effort involved. Indolence, whether physical or intellectual, is always pro tanto eudaimonically valuable, in virtue of being pleasant. If we say that wholeheartedness is always pro tanto eudaimonically valuable and that ambivalence is always pro tanto eudaimonically disvaluable, then we will leave open the possibility that wholeheartedness is akin to indolence, and that ambivalence is akin to exercise and inquiry.

Frankfurt writes that ambivalence "is never desirable as such or for its own sake." (1998, p. 102) But it isn't clear that this captures the supposed value of wholeheartedness either. The most obvious value that attaches to exercise and inquiry is instrumental: painful exercise leads to health, frustrating inquiry leads to understanding. Yet can't one enjoy exercise and inquiry for their own sake? Perhaps, although it is not clear that when one desires painful exercise and frustrating inquiry, one is desiring these activities "as such." Is it the exercise or inquiry itself that is enjoyed, or the pleasure that accompanies it? (One and the same thing can be both painful and pleasant.) We'll return to these questions below (§??), where we'll argue that in whatever sense we can desire painful

[5] We can distinguish two sorts of contribution: causal and constitutive. Winning the lottery might **cause** your life to go better, providing you with financial independence, the means to pursue your interest in fine dining, and the opportunity for philanthropy. The eudaimonic value of winning the lottery is *instrumental* – the cash is a means to other eudaimonically valuable, ends. Alternatively, your friendships might **constitute**, in part, your good life. In addition to its instrumental eudaimonic value, friendship also has *final* eudaimonic value, in virtue of being a constitutive part of your good life. Friendship is not only a means to other eudaimonically valuable ends; it is eudaimonically valuable for its own sake, as part of wellbeing itself.

exercise and frustrating inquiry "as such" and "for their own sakes," we can desire ambivalence "as such" and "for its own sake."

One way to articulate the idea that ambivalence is eudaimonically disvaluable, in some more serious sense than the sense in which exercise and inquiry are eudaimonically disvaluable, is to say that wholeheartedness is an eudaimonic ideal. The notion of an ideal can itself be articulated in a number of ways. Charles Taylor (1991) writes of an "ideal of authenticity," suggesting "a picture of what a better or higher mode of life would be, where "better" and "higher" are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer a standard of what we ought to desire." (p. 16) What seems essential to such a picture is the proposing of the eudaimonic ideal as something we ought to seek – as something that might guide us, as a standard, or goal, or *telos*, in our project of trying to live well. There may be cases in which ambivalence is better for us than wholeheartedness. But, in general, other things being equal, typically, in normal or typical circumstances, we would be better off wholehearted. And thus we ought to seek wholeheartedness.[6]

This formulation is lamentably unclear. What makes circumstances "normal"? How can we know whether we have found a counterexample to the thesis that wholeheartedness is an eudaimonic ideal, as opposed to an "exception that proves the rule"? We can offer a bit more clarity by using some language offered by Rosalind Hursthouse (1999) in defense of the view that "the virtues, for the most part, benefit the possessor." (p. 173) On her view, this is falsified neither by cases of virtuous people faring badly nor by cases of wicked people flourishing. The claim that the virtues benefit the possessor is the claim that the virtues are "one's only reliable bet as far as a flourishing life is concerned." (p. 174) This claim has two aspects: first, that the virtues *are* a reliable bet as far as flourishing is concerned,[7] and, second, that the virtues are the *only* reliable bet as far as flourishing is concerned. The second aspect would be falsified only by a "clearly identifiable pattern" of wicked people flourishing (pp. 173-4); likewise the first aspect would be falsified only by a "clearly identifiable pattern" of virtuous people faring badly.

Given our comparative notion of betterness (§1.2), we'll adopt a comparative version of Hursthouse's idea. Consider:

> **Eudaimonic ideal of wholeheartedness:** Being wholehearted is a more reliable bet, when it comes to wellbeing, than being ambivalent. In other words, for all S and p, wholeheartedness is normally better for S than being ambivalent In other words, there is no clearly identifiable pattern of cases in which ambivalence is better than wholeheartedness.

This isn't falsified by cases in which ambivalence is better than wholeheartedness, because those cases might be abnormal. It is only falsified by a clearly identifiable pattern of cases in which ambivalence is better than wholeheartedness. We still face the problem of determining what counts as an "normal" case. But we shall proceed.

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[6] In this paper we focus on the eudaimonic value and disvalue of wholeheartedness per se, i.e. the eudaimonic value and disvalue of being wholehearted. An important and closely related issue is that of the eudaimonic value and disvalue of *seeking* wholeheartedness.

[7] Hursthouse actually says something a bit weaker than this: that no "regimen," other than virtue, "will serve one better," (p. 174) which leaves open the possibility that the "regimen" is not an especially reliable bet, just the most reliable of the options. (Consider here Hursthouse's comparison of the virtue theorist' "regimen" with a doctor's prescription: a medical treatment might be the best option, and still likely, perhaps even almost certain, to fail.) But none of this matters for our purposes here.

We can assume from the start, however, that the eudaimonic ideal of wholeheartedness is not verified if it turns out that in the statistical majority of cases, wholeheartedness is better than ambivalence (whatever exactly it would mean for there to be a statistical majority of "cases of wholeheartedness"). On the statistical majority of roads, the more reliable bet, when it comes to avoiding a crash, is to drive on the right. But we should not say that, for all roads, driving on the right is the more reliable bet, when it comes to avoiding a crash, than driving on the left. The right thing to say is that *sometimes* driving on the right is the more reliable bet, and *sometimes* driving on the left is the more reliable bet. When you're in the UK, for example, driving on the left is the more reliable bet. There are exceptions to this rule, of course, as when another car has stopped in the left lane and you need to swerve into the right lane to avoid it. That is an abnormal, exceptional circumstance. But the whole business of driving in the UK is not an abnormal, exceptional circumstance. It is a clearly identifiable pattern of cases in which driving on the left is the more reliable bet, when it comes to avoiding a crash.

3 Against the eudaimonic ideal of wholeheartedness

Consider:

> Sergio has been going out with David for the last few months. They've got great chemistry and they enjoy the same activities: they go dancing and hiking; they cook together. David even likes the same stupid TV shows from the 80s that Sergio likes (*Magnum, P.I.*, *Simon & Simon*). But Sergio can't help thinking about the fact that David doesn't appreciate his more serious side. They don't talk much about books or ideas and David gets really annoyed when Sergio starts to "overanalyze" things – for example, when Sergio went on a ten minute rant about whether *Magnum's* campiness redeems its objectionable sexual politics, David groaned and said "why can't you just enjoy things without thinking about what they *mean* all the time?" Overall, Sergio likes David a lot but isn't sure how deep his feelings for him go, and thinks maybe his attraction to him is objectionably superficial. Then again, Sergio is worried that maybe he's just being an elitist snob. Not everyone has to want to *theorize* all the time. Sergio is conflicted. "Part of him" likes, perhaps even loves, David, and that "part of him" wants to continue pursuing a relationship with David. But another "part of him" dislikes, perhaps even loathes, David, and that "part of him" wants to break off the relationship.

We'll argue that cases of romantic ambivalence, like the case of Sergio, provide a counterexample to the eudaimonic ideal of wholeheartedness.

The case of Sergio and his love life is underdescribed (as is Frankfurt's case of ambivalent love, 2004, pp. 92-3). Sergio is not "unequivocally clear" about which of his own feelings about David he identifies with. Following Frankfurt, we can say that "part" of Sergio loves David but that "part" of him doesn't. What might this involve? There are a number of possibilities:

- Sergio oscillates between loving and not loving David. The "parts" of Sergio are "time-slices" of the temporally extended person, Sergio, and these "parts" feel differently about David.
- Sergio loves David in some respect but does not love him in some other respect. The "part" of Sergio that attends to the attractive and fun things about David

loves him but the "part" of Sergio that attends to David's anti-intellectualism does not love him.

- There is no fact of the matter about whether Sergio loves David; rather it is indeterminate: it is neither determinately true that he loves David, nor determinately true that he doesn't love David.
- Sergio loves David, just not very passionately. We might say that this love is "half-hearted," and not wholehearted.

In any event, Sergio has not "become finally and unequivocally clear as to which side of the conflict *he* is on." (2004, p. 81) But this still leaves a number of important questions unanswered.

On one way of imagining things, were Sergio wholehearted, he'd break up with David, or have never gone out with him in the first place. It is, of course, possible to imagine versions of the story versions such not being in a relationship is better, for Sergio, than being in a relationship (e.g. David is a serial killer waiting for the opportunity to strike). But the question of whether wholeheartedness would be better than ambivalence, for Sergio, depends on whether not being in a relationship with David would be better, for Sergio, than being in a relationship with David, in all normal cases.

It's easy to imagine that not being in a relationship with David would be worse, for Sergio, than being in a relationship with David. Suppose, for example, that David is Sergio's only romantic prospect, and that were Sergio not in a relationship he would be utterly and miserably lonely. Sergio finds such loneliness unbearable, and very much prefers an ambivalently affectionate relationship to no relationship at all. Our first claim is that, in that case, ambivalence is better than wholeheartedness, for Sergio. Our second claim is that such a case is normal (§2). Sergio's ambivalence is an entirely commonplace romantic occurrence. Moreover, his preference for an ambivalently affectionate relationship to no relationship is commonplace as well. The clearly identifiable pattern exhibited by Sergio's case, on the present version of the story, is that of a person settling for the best option available, an option with which she is not wholeheartedly satisfied. What the defender of the eudaimonic ideal of wholeheartedness would need to argue, on the present version of the story, is that any case in which being in an ambivalent relationship is better, for Sergio, than wholeheartedly not being in a relationship is an abnormal case. We don't find this credible.

On another way of imagining things, were Sergio wholehearted, he'd pursue a serious romantic relationship with David. So here we must ask whether being in a serious relationship with David would be better, for Sergio, than being in a casual relationship with David. As above, it's not hard to imagine versions of Sergio' story on which he would be better off pursuing a serious relationship (e.g. his aversion to David's anti-intellectualism is a manifestation of the lingering influence of Sergio's elitist father, which influence Sergio has struggled to overcome). But it's easy to imagine that being in a serious relationship with David would be worse, for Sergio, than being in an casual relationship.

Suppose, for example, that Sergio very much prefers an ambivalent casual relationship to a wholehearted serious one. He is the "happy cad" of romantic literature: he does not want a serious romantic relationship, not with David, not with anybody. He is the kind of lover who is content with his own erratic emotions, content with his own inconstancy. Perhaps he thinks love cannot be controlled, and resolves to submit himself to its vagaries. We claim, first, that in that case ambivalence is better, for Sergio, than

wholeheartedness. And our second claim is that such a case is normal (§2) – the existence of "happy cads" is a clearly identifiable pattern. [8]

Suppose that, were Sergio to pursue a serious romantic relationship with David, his love for Sergio would be blind, and he would find David's unappealing qualities appealing. Blind love can easily be the result of wholehearted and serious romantic commitment. Would Sergio necessarily be better off were he to find those unappealing qualities appealing? Not, at least, from the epistemic point of view. Sergio's present ambivalence manifests his sensitivity to David's good and bad qualities; the reason that "part of him" loves David and "part of him" doesn't is that David is in some respects appealing and in other respects unappealing. The epistemic vice of blind love is risky. Blind love can make us ignorant of the flaws of our beloved, in ways that put our own wellbeing at risk. Think here of someone who ignores or explains away her beloved's tendencies towards violence. Blind love can also put the wellbeing of our beloved at risk. Thank here of someone who ignores or explains away her beloved's self-destructive drug addiction. We maintain, first, that the epistemic vice of blind love (along with its costs, just described) could easily be worse for Sergio than ambivalence. This is easiest to see if we imagine that Sergio prefers epistemic virtue (along with its benefits) to wholeheartedness. We maintain, second, that such a case is normal. The clearly identifiable pattern, in this case, is the tendency of wholehearted love to be blind: the tendency of wholehearted lovers to ignore or explain away their beloved's flaws.

Finally, we must keep in mind, as Frankfurt makes clear, that wholeheartedness is compatible with alienation. Wholeheartedness does not require "that either of the conflicting impulses disappear," nor "that either of them increase or diminish in strength" (2004, p. 91) "The unwilling addict," he writes, "is wholeheartedly on one side of the conflict from which he suffers." (1998, p. 99) But he is alienated from his desire to smoke – he remains "radically divided and incoherent." (1988, p. 164) So one possible situation in which Sergio is wholehearted is one in which he is alienated, either from his (now "alien") affection for Sergio or from his (now "alien") lack of affection for David. Although one can imagine that such alienation might be better, for Sergio, than his actual ambivalent state, it is also easy to imagine that such alienation would be worse – e.g. if Sergio finds it unbearable. In the first case, it is easy to imagine that Sergio would be worse off wholehearted, in virtue of being persistently beset by "alien" yearnings for David. In the second case, it is also easy to imagine that Sergio would be worse off wholehearted: stuck in a relationship with a partner for whom he suffers "alien" feelings of loathing. Neither of these cases, we submit, would be abnormal. There is a clearly identifiable pattern here, namely: you wish you didn't desire something, but the desire refuses to go away.

We conclude that there are normal cases in which ambivalence is better than wholeheartedness. Our aim here has been to remain neutral when it comes to theories of wellbeing (§2). However, we have offered cases which should appeal to adherents of desire-fulfilment theories of wellbeing, since we have described Sergio variously as preferring romance to loneliness, as preferring a casual relationship to a serious one, as preferring epistemic virtue (along with its benefits) to epistemic vice (along with its costs), and as preferring ambivalence to alienation. But you needn't endorse a desire-fulfilment theory of wellbeing to embrace our argument. A perfectionist about wellbeing

[8] Frankfurt claims that you can't wholeheartedly want to be ambivalent (1998, p. 106). If so, the "happy cad" can't wholeheartedly embrace his ambivalence. But this isn't helpful for those seeking an account of the eudaimonic disvalue of ambivalence.

could agree that ambivalent affection is better than blind love, for example, if she defends the constitutive value of knowledge (Hurka 2001, p. 12, Sosa 2003, pp. 173-5, Zagzebski 2003, pp. 140-1, 2004, Greco 2010, Chapter 6), or if she defends the constitutive disvalue of the moral risks associated with epistemic vice. A hedonist about wellbeing could agree that ambivalence is (at least sometimes) better than alienation, for example, by appealing to the painfulness of alienation. This doesn't mean that someone couldn't adopt a theory of wellbeing that is inconsistent with our conclusion, for example, a theory on which wellbeing consists in being wholehearted.

You might object that the negative effects of wholeheartedness that we described – e.g. Sergio's loneliness, or his epistemic vice – aren't inevitable consequences of wholeheartedness. Sergio could, after all, learn to live alone without feeling lonely. Or he could wholeheartedly love David while recognizing his flaws: he might reject his *desire* to break up with David while remaining aware that David's flaws are *reasons* to break up with him. But given our modal conception of betterness (§2), what is relevant to determining whether wholeheartedness would be better than ambivalence, for Sergio, is what *would* be the case, were Sergio wholehearted, not what *could* be the case. Sergio, in one version of the story, would be miserable were he to break up with David. Such a case, we submit, would not be abnormal. Sergio, in another version, would love David blindly, were he to love him wholeheartedly. Such a case, we submit, would not be abnormal.

4 Two objections

Here we shall consider two (related) objections to our argument against the eudaimonic ideal of wholeheartedness. Although both objections can be met, they shall lead us to consider another case of eudaimonically valuable ambivalence, below (§5).

Objection: Frankfurt (1998) writes that:

> Ambivalence is constituted by conflicting volitional movements or tendencies, either conscious or unconscious, that … are inherently and hence unavoidably opposed; that is, they do not just happen to conflict on account of contingent circumstances. (p. 99)

Sergio's volitional conflict does not meet this condition. The conflict is between his desire to date someone intellectually serious and his desire to date someone fun. What Sergio really wants is to date a highbrow intellectual who dances, hikes, cooks, and likes 80s camp. The fact that his desires can't be satisfied is just down to his contingent circumstances; they are not inherently opposed.

Reply: Sergio's desires, as we described them above, are to continue to go out with David and to break up with David. These desires, we submit are inherently opposed. It is not merely contingent circumstances that make it the case that Sergio cannot both date and not date the same man. We might say, however, that this inherent conflict is superficial, by contrast with a non-inherent conflict, between Sergio's "deep" or "fundamental" desire to date someone intellectually serious but also fun. So perhaps we could say that ambivalence requires inherent conflict at the level of "deep" or "fundamental" desire.

This requirement threatens to make ambivalence a very rare, perhaps non-existent, phenomenon. There will never be an ambivalent smoker, for example, because the inherent conflict between her desire to smoke and her desire not to smoke is superficial.

At the "deep" or "fundamental" level, she wants merely the pleasure of smoking and to avoid ill health, but it's a contingent fact that this desire can't be satisfied, since it's a contingent fact that smoking tobacco causes health problems.

For this reason, we think it is a mistake to place the proposed requirement on ambivalence. But we shall turn, below (§5), to a case of ambivalence in which the relevant conflict is "deep" and "fundamental."

Objection: Recall Frankfurt's idea (1998, p. 102) that in some circumstances, being wholehearted is not warranted. Michael Lynch (2004) writes that "in some cases not knowing what you care about can be perfectly understandable, even an inevitable response to a terrible situation." (2004, p. 123) Sergio's situation is perfectly understandable, and his ambivalence is eudaimonically valuable, but only because of his unfortunate, if not "terrible," situation. Given his unfortunate situation, the best he can manage is ambivalence. It would be better, for him, were his situation different: if he could meet someone who was appealing in all the ways David is, but also not unappealing in all the ways that David is, i.e. a highbrow intellectual who dances, hikes, cooks, and likes 80s camp.

Reply: The fact that Sergio's situation is "unfortunate" is not relevant to the question of whether the eudaimonic ideal of wholeheartedness is true. That claim was that being wholehearted is a more reliable bet, when it comes to wellbeing, than being ambivalent. The claim was not that being wholehearted is a more reliable bet, *for people in fortunate situations*, when it comes to wellbeing, than being ambivalent. Sergio's situation may be unfortunate, but there is nothing abnormal about it: it's familiar, it's commonplace, and situations like it arise all the time.

However, we shall consider, below (§5), a case of eudaimonically valuable ambivalence which does not involve an unfortunate situation, in the sense that it is not a case in which the ambivalent person might find herself in a more fortunate situation, in which ambivalence wouldn't be better than wholeheartedness.

5 The eudaimonic value of ambivalence

Consider:

> John was raised in an Intuit community in Canada. He developed in his adolescence, and retains at present, a deep love for and valuation of the traditions of his community, including their annual whale hunt. However, while at college John became interested in animal welfare, and developed an equally deep love for and valuation of animals and their wellbeing. John returns home one summer, around the time of the whale hunt, and finds himself torn between, on the one hand, his desire to participate in the hunt, a manifestation of his love of his community's traditions, and, on the other hand, his desire not to participate, a manifestation of his love for the whales themselves. "Part of him" wants to join the hunt, but another "part of him" wants not to join the hunt, and John does not side unequivocally with either of these "parts." He does not know what he really wants. He is ambivalent, in Frankfurt's sense.

We shall argue that cases in which a person's values come into conflict, like the case of John, provide counterexamples to the eudaimonic ideal of wholeheartedness. We shall

argue that being ambivalent is better, for John, than being wholehearted. Then we shall argue that John's case is normal, and identify the pattern of which it is an instance.

We shall offer three reasons to think that being wholehearted would not be better, for John, than being ambivalent. First, it is easy to imagine that, were John to *become* wholehearted and embrace one of his conflicting values, he would suffer substantial alienation. And it is easy to imagine that such alienation would be worse, for John, than the ambivalence from which he presently suffers.

Second, were John to become wholehearted, he would betray one of his values. Of the other members of his community, who are wholeheartedly behind the hunt, he feels that they are missing something that he isn't missing: the value of animal welfare. Of his fellow activists, who are wholeheartedly against the hunt, he feels that they are missing something that he isn't missing: the value of his community's traditional practices. By John's own lights, either a wholehearted embrace of the hunt or a wholehearted rejection of the hunt would involve the violation of his values. For this reason, we can easily imagine that John himself does not think that being wholehearted would be better, for him, than being ambivalent.

Importantly, the same argument applies if we consider whether it would be better, for John, *to have always been* wholehearted: if he had never cared about animal welfare, or if he had never cared about the whale hunt. It is of course possible to imagine someone *like* John wishing that he had never become an animal welfare activist, or wishing that he had been born into a different community. But such a person would not be ambivalent – someone who wishes he had never become an animal rights activist has already wholeheartedly rejected animal rights; someone who wishes he had not been raised as a whale-hunter has already wholeheartedly rejected the values of the community. From John's perspective, someone wholeheartedly against the hunt is missing something, and someone wholeheartedly in favor of the hunt is missing something.

Third, there is a significant sense in which a wholehearted version of John would not be *John*. John's conflicting values constitute his identity, they tell us who he is. What is distinctive about John is that he cares both about his community's traditions *and* about animal welfare. For this reason, were John to become wholehearted, he would become, in one sense, inauthentic. For the same reason, there is an important sense in which *John* could not be wholehearted. The question of whether being wholehearted would be better, for *him*, is therefore moot.

John's volitional conflict is "deep" and "fundamental" (§4). His conflicting values are inherently opposed. It is essential to the traditions of his (particular, token) community that they hunt the whale, and it is essential to animal welfare that whales not be killed. There is a temptation here to try to change the case so that the conflict is no longer "inherent." What if John's concern were for the preservation of biodiversity, or even for this particular species of whale, such that he would be satisfied by brokering an agreement for a quota on whale hunting by his community? What if the whale hunt were peripheral vis-à-vis his community, an accidental rather than an essential feature of their practices, such that he would be satisfied to convince them to give it up? What if what John really wants is the excitement and danger of hunting the whale, so that he would be satisfied by hunting a robotic whale surrogate? But the case can't be changed: John "deeply" and "fundamentally" wants the whale to be hunted and he "deeply" and

"fundamentally" wants the whale not to be hunted.[9] What needs to be interrogated here is why we suffer from this temptation to change the case: why we are reluctant to admit the possibility of inherently conflicting values. It seems to us that the possibility, indeed the ubiquity, of such conflict is the inevitable result of the existence of a plurality of goods, more on which below.

John's situation is not unfortunate, not in the sense that there is a more fortunate situation he might find himself in. This is a consequence of the fact that his volitional conflict is inherent. You might argue that it would be better, for John, had he never come to have his essentially conflicted identity. But this argument would require the premise that it is better to have a simple, unified identity than to have a complex, conflicted identity. It is more plausible that there is no simple and absolute relationship between the complexity of a person's identity and the quality of her life. The eudaimonic ideal of wholeheartedness seems to preclude, a priori, the possibility of living well whilst enjoying multiple, conflicting identities (ethnic, national), loyalties (to family, to tribe, to nation, to a cause), or values (moral, political, religious). We find this preclusion implausible.

Finally, John's case is normal, and is an instance of a clearly identifiable pattern. We see John's conflicting values as manifesting his virtuous sensitivity to conflicting goods. The wholehearted alternative to his ambivalence would be insensitivity of one at least one of these goods: hence our claim that being ambivalent is better, for him, than being wholehearted. Even if there is something irrational about being conflicted in this way (§6.4), it does not diminish the goodness of one's life to experience conflict as a result of the pull of competing goods. It would be a significant cost for the defender of the eudaimonic ideal of wholeheartedness if she had to reject this kind of value pluralism. So: the eudaimonic value of John's ambivalence, we maintain, consists in his responsiveness to conflicting goods. Ambivalence will enjoy this value whenever one is responsive to conflicting goods. This is the clearly identifiable patterns of which John's case is an instance. Once this point is appreciated, we can multiply cases beyond necessity: the ambivalent parent, who values both her child's safety but also her independence; Sartre's ambivalent student, who loves both his mother and the Resistance; and so on.[10]

The ambivalent person is able to embody sensitivity to a plurality of goods in a way that a wholehearted person isn't. This provides the sense in which ambivalence can be desired "as such" or "for its own sake" (§1). We want to say: John's ambivalence is desirable, but not under that description. Similarly, one might say that painful exercise and frustrating inquiry are desirable, but not under that description. But the final value of exercise (the enjoyment of it for its own sake) cannot be separated from it – in this sense we value exercise "as such." But similarly the final value of John's ambivalence cannot be separated from it – in this sense he can value his ambivalence "as such." John's valuable allegiance to both his community and to animal welfare is inseparable from his ambivalence. There is no way for him to ally himself with both these goods apart from being ambivalent.

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[9] It is implausible to think that it would be better, for John, were his community to give up hunting whales. This would just be the betrayal of the community's traditional values, *en masse*. Alternatively, it is hard to imagine what it would be like were the fate of the whale not a matter of animal welfare – perhaps this would be the case were the "whale" in fact a robot surrogate.

[10] Recall (§3) the idea that Sergio's ambivalence involves a sensitivity to the world: in his case, to David's attractive and unattractive qualities, respectively. Sergio's affection is based on an accurate perception of David's attractive qualities, and his lack of affection an accurate perception of his unattractive qualities.

In both John and Sergio's (§3) cases, ambivalence can yield a kind of temperate and prudent moderation. John does not threaten to become a fanatic either for or against whale hunting. Likewise, Sergio's ambivalence is likely to yield a kind of self-protective realism about romance. A steady awareness of one's beloved's flaws might also be good for relationships and for us; it might ultimately conduce to the stability of an enduring relationship. Likewise, a steady awareness of a plurality of goods is the antidote for sanctimony and extremism. It is telling that we often think of wholehearted romantic love as blind and unstable, and of wholehearted moral conviction as dangerously monomaniacal. If ambivalence is connected with moderation in this way, the relationship between wholeheartedness, ambivalence, and wellbeing is further complicated.

Wholehearted values threaten to become unshakable – this is the point of Frankfurt's discussion (1988, pp. 177-90, 1998, pp. 129-41) of the ways in which love constrains the will and makes certain courses of action "unthinkable" and others "volitional necessities." However, the capacity to re-evaluate the worth of our projects is one that we generally value. Bernard Williams (1981) describes "ground projects" as those we cannot step away from without in some important way losing ourselves or the meaning of our lives (cf. §6.7). They are projects "which are closely related to [our] existence and which to a significant degree give a meaning" to our lives (p. 12), which "propel [us] into the future, and give [us] a reason for living." (p. 13) Given the existence of ground projects, Williams argues that we cannot be under a utilitarian requirement to abandon these ground projects whenever the utility calculus demands it. The problem with this is that in allowing ground projects to trump other considerations in this way, Williams also seems to be granting us permission not to weigh costs and benefits when it comes to the things we are wholehearted about. This might seem like a kind of freedom. But the kind of "volitional necessity" we experience when it comes to our ground projects is not always eudaimonically valuable, and seems eudaimonically disvaluable in the case of the fanatic or the naïve romantic. Given a plurality of goods, ambivalence is often an appropriate response; wholeheartedness can manifest childlike naïvete about the complexities of life and about diversity of goods. Wholehearted love, untainted as it must be by doubt and ambivalence, seems to be most characteristic of young love and young lovers, blind and intemperate. And moral saints, single-mindedly devoted to their causes can seem equally misguided in their monomaniacal pursuits.[11]

The disposition to reconsider the value of our projects, in light of relevant (and especially salient) evidence, is also closely related to the idea of conscience. Acting on or against conscience can involve betraying deep parts of ourselves. But we don't conclude on these grounds that it would be better not to have conscience. A parallel argument applies to ambivalence. The disposition to think abstractly and from a variety of different perspectives about what we ought to do is a disposition that can reliably produce ambivalence. We shouldn't conclude on these grounds that this kind of thinking is bad or bad for us. We should conclude, rather, that living well can be expected to involve quite a bit of ambivalence.

So, if the ambivalence that comes from being aware of our flaws or of a project's problems can be good for us, what about the kind of ambivalence that involves oscillating between different attitudes? Could it be good for Sergio to oscillate between loving and not loving David? Consider that on Monday I like coffee ice cream best; on

[11] For a powerful account of the life of a person with wholehearted moral commitments, see Ian Parker, "The Gift," *The New Yorker* (August 2, 2004).

Tuesday I prefer mint chip and am completely indifferent to coffee; on Wednesday I may either go back to preferring coffee or I might discover rum raisin and be torn among them all, each competing for the rank of favorite. Not only does this not seem bad for me at all, it may conduce to the kinds of varied experiences that expose one to a range of worthwhile pleasures. By contrast, a fully wholehearted commitment to coffee ice cream would seem to preclude change and the discovery of other good things. Now, admittedly, people, tribes, and causes are not like ice cream, and there are obvious moral considerations that are implicated when we think about inconstant romantic love or wavering moral commitment. But as for the question of wellbeing, the analogy holds. Shifting, serially, between feeling one way and then another about David can be good for Sergio. The same, mutatis mutandis, for John. So, against Frankfurt, we have shown that being ambivalent, being moved in contrary directions, can sometimes be the optimal course, given those available to us.

6 Objections

In this section we consider objections to our argument, which defend the eudaimonic disvalue of ambivalence. We proceed from those we find least convincing to those that we consider more serious.

6.1 "Ambivalence is an enemy of truth"

Frankfurt (1998) writes that:

> [A]mbivalence, like self-deception, is an enemy of truth. The ambivalent person … does not prevent the truth from being known. Instead, his ambivalence stands in the way of there being a certain truth about him at all. (p. 100)

But this is a bad reason to think that wholeheartedness is better than ambivalence. It is it not in general better for there to be a fact of the matter about whether p than for there to be no fact of the matter about whether p. It is not in general better for there to be "more truths." And it is not in general better, for a person, for there to be facts of the matter about her, as opposed to indeterminacies. Determinately not-bald Eddie's life does not get worse when he starts balding and then improve upon his becoming determinately bald. The virtue of truthfulness requires that the truth be told; it doesn't require that the truth be made.

6.2 Ambivalence is a lack of freedom

Frankfurt writes that "enjoying the inner harmony of an undivided will is tantamount to possessing a fundamental kind of freedom." (2004, p. 97). But this doesn't help us understand why wholeheartedness is better than ambivalence. For if wholeheartedness just *is* a kind of freedom – and it is clearly not the only kind – then we still need an account of why possessing this kind of freedom is better than not possessing it. Compare: living alone on a desert island would involve a kind of freedom – freedom from the law, freedom from social mores – but it is obscure whether possessing such freedom would contribute to one's wellbeing.[12] The same point applies to Frankfurt's suggestion that wholeheartedness is "tantamount to the enjoyment of a kind of self-

[12] Moreover, wholeheartedness, because it generates "volitional necessities," entails a lack of a certain kind of freedom. See Frankfurt 1988, Chapter 13, 1998, Chapter 11.

satisfaction." (1998, p. 102) As Frankfurt makes clear (pp. 102-6), "satisfaction" here is not valuable in virtue of being pleasurable (cf. §6.3). "Self-satisfaction" just *is* wholeheartedness. But then we still need an account of the eudaimonic value of "self-satisfaction."

6.3 Ambivalence is painful

You might argue that wholeheartedness is better than ambivalence in virtue of the fact that ambivalence can be painful. As Frankfurt argues, wholeheartedness entails "an absence of restlessness or resistance," (1998, p. 103) while ambivalence, as Lynch (2004) points out, can involve "a feeling of being lost, of unhappiness." (p. 123) Were Sergio and John wholehearted, so the argument goes, they would avoid this unpleasant feeling.

Two replies. First, recall the pain of exercise and the frustration of inquiry (§1). There are many familiar situations in which being in a more painful state is better, for someone, than being in a less painful state. Pain plausibly has pro tanto wellbeing disvalue. But avoiding pain is not plausibly an eudaimonic ideal. Although we can imagine that Sergio and John would be less pained were he wholehearted, this easily might not improve their quality of life. The supposed fact that wholeheartedness is relatively painless is a pro tanto consideration in favor of wholeheartedness, but it is not enough to suggest that wholeheartedness is normally better than ambivalence.

Second, just as ambivalence can be painful, alienation can be painful as well (§3). And the pain of alienation could easily be *worse* than the pain of ambivalence. Thus it seems that there can easily be cases in which wholeheartedness would not even be more pleasant than ambivalence.

6.4 Ambivalence entails incoherence

You might argue that wholeheartedness is better than ambivalence in virtue of the fact that ambivalence is a form of incoherence. We'll grant that ambivalence entails some kind of incoherence or inconsistency. Frankfurt argues that "the essence of rationality it to be consistent," (1998, p. 97) and that ambivalence "is as irrational, in its way, as holding contradictory beliefs." (p. 99) He argues that:

> Division of the will is a counterpart in the realm of conduct to self-contradiction in the realm of thought. A self-contradictory belief requires us, simultaneously, both to accept and deny the same judgment. Thus it guarantees cognitive failure. […] Deficiency in wholeheartedness is a kind of irrationality, then, which infects our practical lives and renders them incoherent. (2004, p. 96)

There is a lot going on here and we shall have more to say about Frankfurt's argument below (§§6.5 – 6.6) But we can rule out certain accounts of the eudaimonic disvalue of ambivalence.

First, the worry about Sergio cannot be that his desires (to pursue a relationship with David, to break up with David) cannot both be satisfied. I may only have a dollar and desire both to eat a McChicken and a double cheeseburger. I can't have both, but there is no incoherence, no irrationality, and no eudaimonic disvalue in wanting both.

Second, the worry about Sergio cannot be that he suffers from something analogous to believing a contradictory proposition. It is not that he desires the impossible outcome that he both dates and does not date David. Rather, he both desires to date David and desires not to date David. If his situation is analogous to any doxastic state, it is the state of believing p and believing not-p, not the state of believing the contradictory proposition *p and not-p*.

Third, given that second point, it is not obvious that Sergio's ambivalence is irrational. For it is not obvious that inconsistency in belief (believing p and believing not-p) is irrational, as opposed to the more obviously irrationality of believing a contradictory proposition. Some epistemologists (Klein 1985, Christensen 2004) argue that the solution to the preface paradox is to reject the principle that rationality requires consistency in belief.

Fourth, even granting that Sergio's ambivalence is analogous to the irrationality of inconsistency in belief, this does not suggest the eudaimonic disvalue of ambivalence. The irrationality of inconsistency in belief is *epistemic* irrationality. But inconsistency in belief often lacks any eudaimonic disvalue. The preface situation is a case in point: believing $p_1 \ldots p_n$ whilst believing that one of $p_1 \ldots p_n$ is false does not threaten the eudaimonic of the believer. Indeed, such inconsistency may well be better than consistency, for the believer: giving up one's first-order beliefs in $p_1 \ldots p_n$ would leave one with nothing on which to base one's actions; giving up the second-order belief that at least one of $p_1 \ldots p_n$ is false would be to abandon a virtuous kind of intellectual humility.

Finally, recall that wholeheartedness doesn't ensure coherence in desire. So wholeheartedness is not better than ambivalence in virtue of eliminating incoherence in *desire*. The incoherence eliminated in incoherence of the *will* (Frankfurt 1998, pp. 98-9) – when you are wholehearted, there is coherence among the desires with which you identify. But not all incoherence is eudaimonically disvaluable. If ambivalence is eudaimonically disvaluable because it entails incoherence of the will, we shall need an account of why incoherence of the will is eudaimonically disvaluable.

6.5 Ambivalence and constitutive "aims"

Some philosophers argue that desire "aims" at the attainable (Charles 1982/3, Velleman 1992). Since Sergio cannot both date David and not date David, his desires, collectively, are guaranteed to fail vis-à-vis the "aim" of desire. In his ambivalence, Sergio seems indifferent to this guarantee of failure. The incoherence of his will seems to come down to his indifference to the incoherence of his desires. But this doesn't help us overcome the worries raised above (§6.4). In whatever sense desire "aims" at the attainable, belief "aims" at truth. This is why "cognitive failure" is guaranteed in the case of inconsistent beliefs. But someone might be indifferent to the guarantee of cognitive failure, as in the preface situation. Even if such indifference is epistemically irrational, it does not seem eudaimonically disvaluable – such indifference could easily be better, for a person, than resolving the contradiction.

Some philosophers argue that intention, too, has an aim. Nishi Shah (2008) argues that just as deliberation about what to believe collapses into deliberation about what is true, deliberation about what to intend collapses into deliberation about what it is to be done. And Michael Bratman (2009a) argues that "intentions … are elements in a *coordinating system*," the function of which "is to guide practical thought and action by way of a

coordinated representation of our practical future." (p. 53) For this reason a "constitutive aim of intention" is "coordinated, effective control of action." (2009b, p. 25) If this is right, then incoherent intentions are, collectively, guaranteed to fail vis-à-vis the "aim" of intention. We'll return to some of these issues below (§2.6). But we can note first that the worry about Sergio cannot be that he suffers from incoherence in intention, for the simple reason that such incoherence is no part of the story – and no part of ambivalence, as Frankfurt describes it. Although ambivalence is a syndrome of the will, and not merely of desire, it does not require or suggest the forming of incoherent intentions. Sergio has conflicting feelings about David, and fails to "side with" one set of feelings as opposed to the other. But he does not, for example, both intend to pursue a relationship with David and intend to break up with David, nor does he intend both to pursue a relationship and to break up. The same, mutatis mutandis, when it comes to John.

6.6 Ambivalence entails practical inefficacy

Above (§2.4) we said we needed an account of the eudaimonic disvalue of incoherence of the will. Frankfurt suggests one, based on the idea that ambivalence involves "passivity or impaired autonomy." (1988, p. 165) The wholehearted person is "in a position to act with confident and settled purpose," (2004, p. 90) whereas the ambivalent person's "will remains obstinantly undefined and therefore lacks effective guiding authority." (p. 92) On Frankfurt's view, "[c]onflict within the will precludes behavioral effectiveness, by moving us to act in contrary directions at the same time." (p. 96) When our passions are conflicted, and we fail to decide between them, we are pulled in different directions, and this is not conducive to success or sustained achievement in any endeavor.

It is easy to imagine that ambivalent Sergio will act differently then wholehearted Sergio would act. He appears fickle and "half-hearted" in his interactions with David; he treats David affectionately one day while spurning him the next, depending on whether he is attending to David's attractive or unattractive qualities. But recall that our question is whether wholeheartedness would be better, *for Sergio*. His fickle behavior may amount to a certain kind of ill-treatment of David; it fails certainly to conform to a certain romantic ideal. But it seems more natural to see these romantic failures as a problem *for David*, not for Sergio – at least if David yearns for a wholehearted relationship.[13] (If both Sergio and David are happy cads, there seems to be no problem at all!) Is there some eudaimonically problematic sense in which Sergio's fickle behavior is "ineffective," beyond the fact that it is ineffective vis-à-vis certain romantic conventions?

Similarly, ambivalent John may act differently than wholehearted John would act. He stays up late into the night, pondering his ethical dilemma. He too fails to conform to a certain ideal of resoluteness. But it is obscure whether this is bad *for John*.

So Sergio and John's actions may be "ineffective" vis-à-vis certain ideals. But such fickle and wavering behavior seems perfectly "effective" as expressions of their genuinely conflicted feelings. To act otherwise, given their ambivalence, would require a pretense of wholeheartedness. To the extent that we imagine Sergio and John's behavior as fickle

[13] Objection: Sergio's actions are immoral, and immorality has constitutive eudaimonic disvalue.

or wavering, their behavior seems to corresponds perfectly with their various, sometimes changing, feelings.

In general, someone ambivalent about whether to **Φ** may suffer from this kind of "behavioral ineffectiveness" when it comes to **Φ**ing – she may be fickle or wavering when it comes to **Φ**ing. But we have not found an explanation of why this is eudaimonically disvaluable.

However, it is important to note that the person who is ambivalent about whether to **Φ** may well end up choosing to **Φ**, just a she may well end up choosing not to **Φ**. Sergio may decide to continue dating David, despite his flaws, and John may decide to join the whale hunt, despite the fact that it pains him to do so "The point of making up one's mind is not … to ensure a certain action," Frankfurt writes, "[n]or is it to ensure that one will act well." (1988, p. 174) The ambivalent person may choose to **Φ**, but when she **Φ**s she will do so ambivalently: her **Φ**ing will not be the manifestation of a coherent will. We might say that she will act *wantonly*. A "wanton" (Frankfurt 1988, p. 16 and passim) is an agent without second-order volitions, and thus is an agent who does not identify with any of her first-order desires. When the ambivalent person acts, her action is relevantly akin to that of a wanton. As Frankfurt (1988) explains, "[n]othing in the concept of a wanton implies that he cannot reason or that he cannot deliberate concerning how to do what he wants to do." (p. 17) (Indeed, there is no reason to imagine the wanton's behavior as fickle or wavering.) When it comes time to decide whether to join or not join the whale hunt, John will be forced to choose one option or the other. The fact that he is ambivalent about whether to join the hunt does not mean that he will be unable to choose, or that he will be unable to choose rationally. He will consider the pros and cons of joining the hunt, and will act accordingly. His action, so long as he remains ambivalent, will not manifest a coherent will. But we have arrived back at our original question: what's the eudaimoinic disvalue of not manifesting a coherent will?

6.7 Ambivalence and final ends

Frankfurt (2004, p. 52) equates wholehearted love with the having of final ends. Let us grant that when someone wholeheartedly loves *x* she cares about *x* for its own sake. Still, there is no reason to think that wholehearted love is the only species of final valuation, that it is the only way to care about someone or something for its own sake. Consider someone ambivalently torn between allegiance to two objects of her final concern, like John, or like Sartre's student, unable to choose whether to promote the concerns of his nation or of his family. The student suffers from an abundance, not a lack, of final ends.

Suppose that a lack of wholehearted love amounted to a lack of final ends. Why would this be a bad thing, for the individual in question? Frankfurt argues that "without final ends we would find nothing truly important," and that "[w]e would not really care about anything unequivocally and without conditions." (2004, p. 53) But the argument here is going in a circle: the supposed value of wholeheartedness is being explained by appeal to the supposed value of having final ends, which in turn is explained by appeal to the value of wholeheartedness.

The strongest conclusion that can be drawn here is that *if* someone is unhappy with his lack of wholehearted love, *if* he has the goal of having wholehearted love, *then*

wholeheartedness would be better for him. But none of these "ifs" need be the case. If one is content to be fickle or indecisive, if one is happy to be less than fully passionate, there there's no reason to insist that one's life is going badly.

Frankfurt also argues (2004, pp. 53-5) that wholeheartedness is a necessary condition on living a meaningful life. A life without final ends would be a life "empty of meaning," (2004, p. 53) and "there would be no meaningful purpose in any activity in which we might engage." (p. 58) Living a meaningful life seems to require that we pursue our projects with "zest", or in Susan Wolf's (20010, p. 58) terms, with "active engagement." You might conclude, then, that living a meaningful life requires wholeheartedness.

Are Sergio and John's lives meaningless, or do their lives lack meaning with respect of their ambivalent aspects? Sergio's life does fail to have *certain* purposes: he is not fully committed to David, and he is not fully committed to a certain romantic ideal; John's life fails to have *certain* purposes: he is not fully committed to his community's traditions nor is he fully committed to animal welfare. But this only seems eudaimonically problematic if Sergio and John are failing to pursue what they think is valuable. We need not imagine that they are.

Perhaps paradoxically, it turns out that getting more wholehearted about more things may actually tend to undermine wholeheartedness. If we increase the number of things we are wholeheartedly committed to, we thereby increase the possibilities for conflict among these things. You may start out unambivalent about the importance of your work and equally unambivalent about the importance of your environmental activism. But given your limited time and the nearly unlimited demands of these two commitments, you will pretty quickly start to worry about whether you are properly allotting your time, and this means thinking about how to prioritize your values. Suddenly, your wholeheartedness is in jeopardy. For this reason, we can see why wholeheartedness is not a eudaimonic ideal.

A final comment on the eudaimonic value of having final ends. In Frankfurt's discussion, he compares the life of someone with *no* final ends with that of someone who *has* final ends. It is no part of Sergio and John's stories that they are ambivalent about everything. And the question we have asked is: would it be better, for these people, were they wholehearted, rather than ambivalent? Our argument is consistent with the possibility that *some* wholeheartedness is a necessary condition on living a meaningful life, or on living a high-quality life, or even on being a person, as Frankfurt (2004) suggests: our need for final ends is based on "a quite primitive urge for psychic survival," for "self-preservation … in the sense of sustaining not the *life* of the organism but the persistence and vitality of the *self*." (pp. 54-5) It would be a mistake to conclude from this that wholeheartedness is a eudaimonic ideal. Having some amount of mass is a necessary condition on living a meaningful life, but mass is not an eudaimonic ideal: it is not generally the case that having more mass is normally better, for a person, than having less mass. The eudaimonic ideal of wholeheartedness proposes that wholeheartedness is normally better than ambivalence. But properties that one must have to some extent, to live well or to even to exist at all, are not in general properties such that having them is normally better than not having them.

7 Diagnosing the appeal of wholeheartedness

Wholeheartedness, we have argued, is not an eudaimonic ideal. But one might remain drawn to the ideal of wholeheartedness. As a matter of fact we feel pain when we are

conflicted about our loves or when we are pulled in different directions by the appeal of different activities. We experience cognitive dissonance when our half-hearted or weak-willed behavior does not match our desire to be wholehearted and we rationalize to try to overcome this condition. Perhaps even more significantly, what Williams (1981) calls our "ground projects" may constitute the strongest evidence of how wholeheartedness functions in our lives. Ground projects are fueled by "categorical desires," about which we are not fundamentally conflicted.

> The categorical desires which propel one on do not have to be even very evident to consciousness, let alone grand or large; one good testimony to one's existence having a point is that the question of its point does not arise, and the propelling concerns may be of a relatively everyday kind such as certainly provide the ground of many sorts of happiness. (p. 12)

In other words, our engagement in activities whose worth we do not question and about which we are not skeptical or ambivalent provides us with meaning. Putting it even more strongly, Williams claims that ground projects "are the condition of my existence, in the sense that unless I am propelled forward by the conatus of desire, project and interest, it is unclear why I should go on at all." (Ibid.) Now, if having ground projects is the condition of our existence, this might seem to support the thought that wholeheartedness is, after all, an ideal. But we rejected that argument above (§2.7).

If Williams is right, then those of us who are not suicidal are already successfully wholehearted about *something*. Most of us are lucky enough to be unconflicted about some specific things in our lives. What it shows is simply that most of us in fact have some specific ground projects that we cannot give up without a serious blow to our wellbeing. And this can lead us, mistakenly, to a variety of generalizations, perhaps most importantly, that others ought to be committed to the same (or the same kind of) thing. Those who think there is something wrong with Sergio's ambivalence toward David, for example, may be in the grip of a commitment to the value of a certain kind of wholehearted romantic love. And they may draw the hasty conclusion that anyone not so committed cannot be living well. If one takes wholehearted romantic love as a basic good, then, since Sergio's fickleness blocks him from it, one may take his prospects for a fulfilled life to be under threat. By contrast, when we look at cases of ambivalence where no ground project of our own is implicated, or where the ground project itself seems unduly risky or objectionable, wholeheartedness no longer seems to have eudaimonic disvalue. More generally, in any case where we are disposed to see a failure of wholeheartedness as detrimental to the wellbeing of the ambivalent person, we propose that we should take this as evidence of *our own* commitment to the value of a certain project, not of the value of wholeheartedness as such. If this is right, there is reason to doubt that it is wholeheartedness, per se, that we value.

Analogously, in glorifying wholeheartedness, Frankfurt seems to be expressing his commitment to a certain substantive vision of what is necessary for a maximally meaningful life, a vision on which ambivalence always makes our loves worse. But upon closer inspection, we have seen that this is a highly controversial idea. To remind ourselves how this is controversial consider our reaction to a version of the Sergio case where he is content with his ambivalence, where he is honest with David about his feelings, and David is okay with them too, and where Sergio's ambivalence about David protects him from the pitfalls of blind love and opens him up to other worthwhile experiences. There seems to be no eudaimonic disvalue in this case. Thus the

eudaimonic ideal of wholeheartedness starts to look like a cover for various other values.[14]

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