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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Frankfurt's concept of identification

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Abstract
Harry Frankfurt had insightfully pointed out that an agent acts freely when he acts in accord with the mental states with which he identifies. The concept of identification rightly captures the ownership condition (something being one's really own), which plays a significant role in the issues of freedom and moral responsibility. For Frankfurt, identification consists of one's forming second-order volitions, endorsing first-order desires, and issuing in his actions wholeheartedly. An agent not only wants to φ but also fully embraces his desire to φ (and φ). Frankfurt's official theory above encounters some serious problems, especially since it is believed that his concept of wholehearted identification is too strong to be necessary for freedom. In this paper, I propose that we can uncouple identification from wholeheartedness and thus get two different senses of identification: weak identification and strong identification. Then, I argue that this distinction does a better job than Frankfurt's official theory. On the one hand, weak identification is enough for ownership and freedom and thus more promising than strong identification; on the other hand, this distinction has an attractive implication that it fits well with our intuition about the degree of freedom and responsibility.

Keywords Freedom · Ownership · Identification · Wholeheartedness · Harry Frankfurt

1 Introduction

A common view about freedom[1] appeals to the ownership condition. An agent acts freely if he acts in accord with his *own* mental state.[2] One's own state should have the authority to "speak for" the agent, e.g., expressing his virtues, principles, or

[1] In this paper, by saying freedom, I refer to the necessary condition of moral responsibility.

[2] I focus on the ownership condition issuing in one's practical life. Thus, unless otherwise specified, mental states in this paper refer to motivational elements which move one to act, such as desires, urges, and carvings.

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standpoints.[3] Keeping this authority requirement in mind, we learn why the crude model of ownership provided by classical compatibilists fails. By focusing on the external impediments of one's will (i.e., effective desires),[4] classical compatibilists suggest a literal reading of ownership. A certain desire is one's own as long as it occurs in his mind. But not all motivational elements are authoritative enough to speak for the agent. Here is a well-known counterexample: Suppose an unwilling addict who "hates his addiction and always struggles desperately" (Frankfurt, 1988: 17). When taking drugs, although acting on his literally strongest desire to take drugs, the addict has no grip on his addictive desire, rather, it is his desire that overpowers him. This poor guy feels *alienated* from his addictive desire; he is thus forced to act in a deep sense.

To resist the challenge of alienation, some elaborate the crude model by seeking apt *filters* to pick out subsets of one's overall mental states which he *really* owns. Harry Frankfurt is a pioneer in exploring those filters. Frankfurt has insightfully pointed out that an agent acts freely when he acts in accord with what he really owns, and only mental states with which one *identifies* are his really own. Call philosophers who accept Frankfurt's insight "identificationist theorists." Frankfurt proposes an influential identificationist theory based on a person's hierarchical structure of will. A person not only wants to φ (first-order desire) but also wants his desire to φ to be effective (second-order volition). Moreover, to meet the authority requirement, Frankfurt proposes that one's having second-order volition must be wholehearted; that is, he must *decide* to be moved by his second-order volition without any reservation. In deciding, the agent makes up his mind and thus has no conflict about what he does; he is completely content with them. Another result of wholeheartedness is that one is alienated from anything opposite to what he decides. According to Frankfurt, an agent identifies with his first-order desires if he forms endorsing second-order volitions concerning them wholeheartedly, and he acts freely when acting in accord with those endorsed first-order desires.

Frankfurt's official theory above encounters some serious challenges, especially since it is believed that Frankfurt's concept of wholeheartedness is too strong to be necessary for ownership and freedom. In this paper, I propose that we can uncouple identification from wholeheartedness, and we thus get two different senses of identification: weak identification and strong identification. To say one identifies himself with his mental states weakly is to say he is *active* or a participant with respect to those states; he is invested in holding them so that he endorses them as his really own. For Frankfurt, it is one's forming endorsing second-order volitions. When one's volition-formation is wholehearted, in my words, he identifies with

[3] I believe that besides the authority requirement, there is the authenticity requirement of ownership (see, for example, Frankfurt, 1988: 65). For example, we might admit some vices (laziness, envy, etc.) as our own while we endeavor to overcome them. In other words, authority tells us that some states are our own and we long to *maintain* them; authenticity tells us that some states are our own while we have to *accept* them.

[4] Besides this crude ownership condition, classical compatibilists also believe that freedom requires alternative possibilities and the truth of determinism. See Hobbes (1997), Hume (1975), and their successors, Hobart (1934), Ayer (1954), etc.

those desires strongly, for it requires one to identify with his mental states without any conflict. In contrast, weak identification needs not to be so.

Then, I argue that this distinction does a better job than Frankfurt's official theory. On the one hand, weak identification is enough for ownership and freedom and thus be a more promising candidate for conditions of them; on the other hand, this distinction has an attractive implication that it supports the degree thesis of freedom and responsibility. We can account for the phenomenon that "A acts freer (or is more responsible) than B" in terms of the degree of identification.

This paper's arrangement is as follows: In Section 2, I present Frankfurt's official theory of freedom. In Section 3, I provide some problems for Frankfurt and connect those problems with Frankfurt's concept of wholeheartedness. Then, in Section 4, I propose that if uncoupling identification from wholeheartedness, if makes sense, then we return to a weaker version of identification, and I argue that weak identification is more promising. Finally, in Section 5, I illustrate the distinction between weak and strong identifications as having a potential and attractive implication that fits well into our ordinary intuition that freedom and moral responsibility are degree matters.

2 Frankfurt's official theory

In this section, I present Frankfurt's official theory of freedom. Let us begin with Frankfurt's central claim that "a person's will has hierarchy." One can want something at the first level; the objects of those first-order desires are items or courses of action, e.g., (drinking) cokes. Not all first-order desires are one's will or volition, only *effective* desires are. Our wills move us "all the way to action." Besides, one can possess second-order desires whose objects are first-order desires. Being desires, those higher-order states could be effective or ineffective, as Frankfurt calls the former second-order volitions. For instance, you can not only *want* cokes and *want to have* the desire to drink cokes, but also *want to move* on from the desire to drink cokes. The last desire, the desire to be moved by your desire to drink cokes, is a typical second-order volition.

Then, consider Frankfurt's concept of person. Not all human agents are persons; some agents who are not persons are called wantons. A wanton essentially does not care about his will; he might form a certain second-order desire while not taking it seriously. It is impossible for a wanton to have second-order *volitions*. By contrast, being a person means having second-order volitions. To have those volitions, a person must *care* about his will and *can* care about that. In other words, a person's nature of self-care and his ability to engage in reflective self-evaluation determine his ability to step back from his desires and form second-order volitions concerning those desires. In such a volition-formation process, first-order desires are merely "psychic raw materials"[5]; thus, "the mere fact that a person has a desire does not

[5] To say a certain desire is a raw material, according to Frankfurt, is to say its occurrence is not up to its owner. For example, my desire to bread occurs when I am hungry, meanwhile I do not create this desire.

give him a reason. What it gives him is a problem" (Frankfurt, 2006: 11).[6] In order to solve this problem, the person must "not be neutral with" his first-order desires. Based on some basis, one "identifies himself, however, *through the formation of a second-order volition*, with [them]" (Frankfurt, 1988: 18. Italics added). Note that the basis of volition-formation, according to Frankfurt, "has no essential restriction." Specifically, Frankfurt claims that one could form a certain endorsing second-order volition *against* what he judges better, or his conscience. He even says, "A person may be capricious and irresponsible in forming his second-order volitions and give no serious consideration to what is at stake" (Frankfurt, 1988: 19, n6); "A person may identify himself with (or withhold himself from) a certain desire or motivation for reasons that are unrelated to any such assessment, or for no reason at all" (Frankfurt, 2002: 160).

Frankfurt believes that only persons enjoy freedom of will. To act freely is to act on what one wants to act; parallelly, to will freely is to will what one wants to will. This understanding of free will is connected with second-order volitions tightly. "It is in securing the conformity of his will to his second-order volitions, then, that a person exercises freedom of the will" (Frankfurt, 1988: 20). Thus, a person *acts freely* in Frankfurt's sense only if he acts in accord with mental states with which he identifies, namely, one acts in accord with first-order desires that are in harmony with his endorsing second-order volitions.[7]

So far, I have articulated Frankfurt's original proposal. In his later works, Frankfurt enriches his account by addressing some challenges to his original proposal. Specifically, Frankfurt proposes the concept of wholeheartedness in order to resolve two different but related issues: the authority problem and the conflicts of second-order volitions. Let me introduce them in turn.

The authority problem comes first. Recall that ownership requires one's really own mental state of having the authority to speak for the agent. First-order desires, as Frankfurt says, are just "psychic raw materials." Thus, the authority of some first-order desires, if any, must be conferred by second-order volitions endorsing them. A natural idea is that the conferring mental states must be authoritative in themselves; otherwise, how can they confer authority to other mental states? Suppose that the authority of second-order volitions is conferred *in the same way* by which first-order desires are authoritative; namely, second-order volitions are endorsed by *third*-order volitions. But

[6] Some argue that desires are not just raw materials, they are results of one's deliberative processes (see Christman 1991; Smith 2004). For example, my desire to learn French might be a deliberate one. I could identify with this desire in *creating* it, but not in *reflecting* on it. I agree with them in some important respects. But I believe that those desires are not counterexamples to identification. But for now, I posit that first-order desires are raw materials.

[7] Note that freedom of *will* is not required for moral responsibility, on Frankfurt's view. By saying "securing," the freedom of will requires alternative possibilities: "Whatever his will, then, the will of the person whose will is free could have been otherwise; he could have done otherwise than to constitute his will as he did" (Frankfurt, 1988: 24). But Frankfurt also claims that this so-called "principle of alternate possibilities" (PAP) is unnecessary for moral responsibility. Frankfurt-Style Counterexamples (FSCs) illustrate this point well. Combine Frankfurt's acceptance of "freedom of will requires PAP" and his rejection of "PAP is not required for moral responsibility," the conclusion is that freedom of will is not required for moral responsibility. Frankfurt contends that freedom required for moral responsibility is the freedom of *action* I conclude in this paragraph.

it does not solve the problem, it just delays it. We can also ask why third-order volitions have the authority to speak for the agent……and so on. An infinite *regress* arises. We cannot accept this regress, for it is impossible for us, as a finite agent, to finish this infinite sequence. And "we do not naturally think of our ordinary actions as resulting from a series of choices" (Wolf, 1990: 30). If impossible, we never act freely. It is counterintuitive.[8] Thus, to make sense of Frankfurt's account, we need a stopping point. But the so-called stopping point would be *arbitrary*. Another way to confer authority to second-order volitions is by adding something to this hierarchical structure such that "they have that authority they are *given* it by something else" (Watson, 1987: 149. Italic original). If so, we must condense that Frankfurt's original proposal is *incomplete*.

To sum up, the authority of second-order volitions casts a serious challenge to Frankfurt's original proposal which is made up of trios: either we fall into the infinite regress, we cut off this infinite sequence arbitrarily, or the hierarchy of will is incomplete.

Then, we turn to the conflicts of second-order volitions. So far, Frankfurt's original proposal just addresses the conflicts between first-order desires: One might take a side with a certain desire when there are two (or more) first-order desires in conflict. For example, if a dieter Joe wants both to drink cokes and not to drink cokes, he might identify with the latter. Besides, Frankfurt notices that one might be *ambivalent*; namely, he faces conflicts between second-order volitions. One might form volitions endorsing his conflicting first-order desires respectively. If so, then which volition and desire are truly authoritative in speaking for the agent?

Frankfurt distinguishes two kinds of ambivalence (see Frankfurt, 1988: 170–2). In the scenario of integrated ambivalence, when faced with conflicting desires and volitions, we can integrate them "into the same order" and fulfill them at different times. For example, if I want to see a movie and play football, and I want both to be effective, I can choose one now and choose another then. Thus, the integrated ambivalence does not trouble us; both volitions are our really own. On the other hand, in the scenario of separated ambivalence, conflicting desires and volitions push one in the opposite direction. For example, the Rat Man of Freud both loves his father and hates him. The Rat Man cannot solve his ambivalence simply by arranging the ordering of affections. Frankfurt contends that the separated ambivalence is a certain kind of mental illness. One's will is thus divided, he "does not know what he really wants." A healthy mind must be united, otherwise, "the disunity of an ambivalent person's will prevents him from effectively pursuing and satisfactorily attaining his goals" (Frankfurt, 1999: 99).

Frankfurt then proposes that when suffering from separated ambivalence, to act freely, one must form second-order volitions wholeheartedly, that is, the volition-formation "is made without reservation." Frankfurt calls such a formation *decision* or *decisive commitment*.[9] When deciding, one reflects on his first-order desires carefully

[8] More about this problem, see also Watson (1975), Hinshelwood (2013), etc.

[9] Later, in "The finest passion," Frankfurt improves his concept of wholeheartedness, replacing the *act* of deciding with the *state* of self-satisfaction (Frankfurt, 1999). I believe that the latter is better than the former. But this difference is irrelevant here, for both are in common with respect to the fact that wholeheartedness requires forming second-order volition without any reservation, and this is all my point about the concept of wholeheartedness.

and makes up his mind to endorse one of them, then one has no any conflict (actual or possible) about what he decides. He enjoys this decision completely. The result of deciding is that, on the one hand, when the agent fully embraces one of his desires, he stands behind it completely; on the other hand, he does not thus eliminate the conflicting desires but alters their nature. He really disowns them even though they remain in his mind. Frankfurt takes it that, "Suppose he resolves this conflict by *decisively* adopting an attitude of *disapproval* toward the passion. He may find nonetheless that his inclination to *approve* of the passion *persists*, though it is now *external* to him and not properly to be attributed to him as his own" (Frankfurt, 1988: 65. Italics added).

Moreover, wholeheartedness can solve the authority problem (at least Frankfurt thinks so). Frankfurt accepts the incomplete aspect of the authority problem, and he solves it by adding the concept of wholeheartedness. Regress does not matter if one decides to fully embrace one of his first-order desires. For in every level, the answers to the question "which desire shall I identify with?" are *transparent* for him, that is, "this [decisive] commitment 'resounds' throughout the potentially endless array of higher orders" (Frankfurt, 1988: 21). And Frankfurt believes that non-arbitrariness of volition-formation is ensured by wholeheartedness as well, for "a person can without arbitrariness terminate a potentially endless sequence of evaluations when he finds that there is no disturbing conflict" (Frankfurt, 1988: 169). That is, wholeheartedness implies there is no any conflict, and the latter means that one forms second-order volitions without arbitrariness.

To conclude, Frankfurt's account can be formulated as follows:

Frankfurt's official theory An agent φ-s freely if and only if he φ-s on the desire to φ and he has the endorsing second-order volition concerning the desire to φ wholeheartedly. That is, he not only wants to φ but he decides to be moved by the desire to φ completely; anything against the desire to φ would be regarded as factors external to him.

3 Rejecting wholeheartedness

The concept of wholeheartedness is the key to Frankfurt's official theory. An agent must decide to act in accord with a certain desire without any reservation; otherwise, he would suffer from the separated ambivalence that should be overcome, for it precludes him from getting what he really wants. In this section, I argue that Frankfurt's official theory encounters some serious problems and thus is not the better candidate for conditions of ownership and freedom. And it is the case because the concept of wholeheartedness is too strong.

Firstly, Frankfurt fails to solve the authority problem. Gary Watson has pointed out, "one makes a 'decisive commitment,' where this just means that an interminable ascent to higher orders is not going to be permitted. This is arbitrary" (Watson, 1975: 218). As I understand him, Watson believes that the concept of wholeheartedness does not work, for it is possible for an agent to decide arbitrarily. Frankfurt admits this point and says, "there remains an element of arbitrariness here…

This judgment is also subject to *error*…It is always possible, in the deployment of any principle whatever, to make a mistaken or *unwarranted* judgment" (Frankfurt, 1988: 169. Italics added). Frankfurt's statements imply that wholehearted identification is non-arbitrary only if one makes a right decision that is warranted or justified. However, as I have mentioned in Sect. 2, Frankfurt allows one to form second-order volitions in a "capricious and irresponsible" way. No one believes that such a decision or formation is warranted. That is, wholeheartedness itself does not ensure that the formed second-order volitions are warranted. A decision could be made arbitrarily.

To illustrate, consider an agent S who wants to do A and, upon reflection, forms an endorsing volition concerning his desire to do A. Moreover, to satisfy the wholeheartedness condition, we suppose that S does not worry about his desire to A at all and S *decides* to do A (in Frankfurt's sense). However, let us further suppose that if S is asked why he decides to do A, he answers that "I just feel like it" or something similar. This agent decides to do A just like rolling a dice and rolling six. There is no good reason (even no reason at all) for S to decide to do A. After all, Frankfurt allows the agent to decide without any reason: "A person may identify himself with (or withhold himself from) a certain desire or motivation for reasons that are unrelated to any such assessment, or for no reason at all" (Frankfurt, 2002: 160). Clearly, S decides to do A capriciously and irresponsibly. As characterized above, S does not take his desire and decision seriously. S's desire and decision are thus unwarranted. Despite his reflection and wholehearted endorsement, the fact that S merely feels like it and S has no reason to justify those things strongly supports this conclusion. It is hard to believe that one thing which lacks rational grounds is warranted. Consequently, S's decision is made arbitrarily, even in Frankfurt's sense.[10][11]

Secondly, I argue that wholeheartedness is too strong to be necessary for ownership and freedom. Consider the following case:

Dieters Suppose two dieters Joe and Jones. Both Joe and Jones aim to maintain their diet and judge "not drinking cokes" as better; meanwhile, they also want to drink cokes because they prefer sugar. The difference is that Jones is a continent agent, while Joe is akratic. When faced with a conflict between better judgments and mere preferences, Jones typically acts in accord with his better judgments, whereas Joe

[10] Some might reply that S's decision is not arbitrary, for S *cares* about his desire and decision. According to Frankfurt, it is the case because S has a second-order volition endorsing his desire to A (thanks to the reviewer for pointing out this issue). However, I am afraid that Frankfurt's criterion for "caring" (one cares about a thing if he forms endorsing second-order volition concerning this thing) is untenable, as it allows the agent to form volitions capriciously and irresponsibly. Even with wholehearted endorsement, if the agent forms volition in the abovementioned manner, whether he really takes his desire to A seriously is quite questionable.

[11] I aim to uncouple identification and wholeheartedness and propose that the weak identification is more proposing. Therefore, there remains a puzzle. How can identification without wholeheartedness resolve the problem of arbitrariness? I will return to this issue at the end of Section 4, where I roughly propose that to resolve the problem of arbitrariness, weak identification requires appealing to some conditions without involving wholeheartedness. I thank the reviewer for pointing out this issue.

often succumbs to his preference. Finally, Jones *decides* not to drink cokes and feels completely content with his decision. Although he prefers cokes, Joe *chooses* not to drink cokes. However, Joe feels a degree of guilt. After all, Joe loves cokes, and he is akratic.

In this case, both dieters act in accord with their better judgments of not drinking cokes and form second-order volitions endorsing their better judgments. However, it is reasonable to conclude that although both Joe and Jones act continently, Joe is halfhearted while Jones is wholehearted. Jones "feels completely content" and thus acts without any conflict, whereas Joe encounters some conflicts when acting. Because of his feeling of guilt, it is reasonable to imagine that Joe is still torn about whether to choose to drink cokes when he actually chooses not to drink cokes. In other words, Joe's better judgment is endorsed in a halfhearted way, while Jones' better judgment is wholeheartedly endorsed.

Being wholehearted, obviously, Jones really owns his better judgment and enjoys freedom. As for Joe, consider the following questions:

(1) Is Joe's better judgment his really own?
(2) Is Joe free in acting continently?

For Frankfurt, the answers to those questions are "no," for Joe is just halfhearted.

But this is counterintuitive. Begin with question (2). Usually, one is free when acting on better judgments, for acting on better judgments shows autonomy that is stronger than free agency. Of course, some doubt whether acting on better judgments is a typical case of autonomy. Mele proposes that if one's better judgments might be implanted by another agent (or blind machines), then his acting on his better judgments is not autonomous. However, in *dieters*, there are no such manipulators or machines. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that Joe is autonomous when he refuses drink cokes; he is thus free. Back to question (1). I believe that Joe really owns his better judgment. Note that although Joe judges his desire not to drink cokes better, he prefers cokes. That is, the motivational power of his better judgment is *weaker* than that of his desire to drink cokes. Thus, in refusing cokes, Joe endeavors to overcome his preference and succeeds. His *effort* indicates his standpoint: Trying or endeavoring is a typical expression of one's values or principles. Although Joe keeps his desire to drink cokes in mind, I do not think that Joe disowns his better judgment. Hence, if Joe really owns his better judgment and acts freely, and as we have said above, Joe just identifies with his better judgment halfheartedly, we can conclude reasonably that wholeheartedness is unnecessary for ownership and freedom.

Thirdly, I also reject another result of wholeheartedness, that is, altering the rejected desire's nature. According to Frankfurt, when faced with conflicts of desires with which one identifies, once one decides to identify with one of them wholeheartedly, he must regard another one as an external desire. It is not his really own at all. It is counterintuitive as well. Take our continent dieter Jones as an example. Jones acts on his better judgments oftentimes. Now imagine that, while he judges "not drinking cokes" better and forms an endorsing second-order volition concerning his better judgment, Jones succumbs to his akratic desire and drinks cokes.

Moreover, Jones is wholehearted in acting so, that is, Jones decides to take a side with his akratic desire. In this scenario, I believe that Jones really owns his better judgment of not drinking cokes for two reasons. On the one hand, Jones is a continent dieter; his better judgment thus indicates his enkrasia mostly; on the other hand, although Jones decides to accept his akratic desire and reject his better judgment, Jones *once* reflected on his better judgment carefully and approved of that after all. However, for Frankfurt, being wholehearted, Jones embraces his akratic desire fully and is alienated from his better judgment. This diagnosis conflicts with our conclusion and, thus is unacceptable.

Lastly, Frankfurt's treatment of ambivalence is questionable, too. Frankfurt contends that in separated ambivalence, one must solve those conflicts by deciding, otherwise ambivalence precludes them from acting *purposively*. After all, he says, "The disunity of an ambivalent person's will prevents him from effectively pursuing and satisfactorily attaining his *goals*" (Frankfurt, 1999: 99. Italic added). Furthermore, being the negation of wholeheartedness, according to Frankfurt, ambivalence also prevents one from acting freely. Nevertheless, in what follows, I will present that Frankfurt's argument fails. An agent could act purposively and freely without resolving the ambivalence. Let me introduce such an agent: Kane's businesswoman.

Being a libertarian,[12] Kane proposes that to be free, *some* of one's actions must be "will-setting" in which the future is open. Those indeterminate actions are called self-forming actions (SFAs hereafter) by which we shape what we are. Typical SFAs occur when "we are torn between competing visions of what we should do or become". To understand SFAs well, consider the following case:

Businesswoman On her way to a significant meeting, the ambitious businesswoman, called Sally, observes a victim in an alley. "An inner struggle ensues between her moral conscience, to stop and call for help, and her career ambitions, which tell her she cannot miss this meeting" (Kane, 1999: 225). Sally wants to pass beyond the alley because of her ambition in her career, she identifies with this selfish desire; at the same time, she wants to stop to help the victim because of her conscience, she also identifies with this moral desire. Moreover, suppose that the strengths of these two desires and identifications are almost equal. Sally is thus in the separated ambivalence and is torn about what to choose. Suppose Sally stops to help the victim of her moral desire finally.

Frankfurt might say that if it were the case of separated ambivalence, then Sally does not know what she really wants, and thus her helping the victim cannot be regarded as a purposive behavior. Furthermore, Sally is unfree simply because she is not wholehearted.

Kane resists these two conclusions. First, Kane believes that Sally acts voluntarily and intentionally. Acting purposively is usually conceived as acting in accord with desires which are treated as *end-setting*, namely, fulfilling these desires helps us reach

[12] A libertarian holds that (i) freedom is not compatible with determinism and (ii) we are free. Consequently, a libertarian also holds that (iii) our world is not determined. See Kane (1996, 1999), Franklin (2018), etc.

further aims. Recall Sally's incompatible desires: her moral desire to help the victim and her selfish desire to pass beyond the alley. Both function as end-setting in her practical reasoning. By acting on the former, Sally wants to be a moral person; on the latter, Sally wants to be successful in the realm of business. Suppose Sally stops to help the victim. In so doing, Sally's selfish desire remains and competes with her moral desire thoroughly (Sally is thus torn). However, this selfish desire is not effective in actual sequence issuing in Sally's action. Rather, it is Sally's moral desire that operates. Therefore, we can say appropriately that Sally acts purposively when she acts in accord with moral desire since it is the only effective desire and it functions as an end-setting.

Second, Kane also believes that Sally acts freely. To act freely in the non-deterministic world, Kane proposes, one must make the effort of will or try to do what he wants to do. If one acts on what he wants successfully, he is free. For example, an assassin wants to kill his enemy and there is an indeterminate noise in his brain. If the indeterminate noise triggers, the assassin would paralyze and fail to kill. Otherwise, the assassin would shoot and kill the target. Even though the assassin's action is indeterminate, he is free *when* he acts successfully. Unlike this will-settled assassin who *already* knows what he wants, Kane goes on, Sally does not know what she wants. To be free, Sally must *double* her efforts of will. Sally tries to achieve two incompatible goals. Kane says,

> [T]his will be true of her, *whichever choice is made*, because she was trying to make both choices and one is going to succeed…And when she succeeds in doing one of the things she is trying to do, she will endorse that as *her* resolution of the conflict in her will, voluntarily and intentionally. (Kane, 1999: 231-2. Italics original)

In Kane's eye, Sally acts freely and is responsible for what she acts. She makes efforts of will in two opposite directions so that whatever she acts, she is successful in acting in accord with what she wants and endorses whichever outcome as her own action.

4 Uncoupling identification from wholeheartedness

Frankfurt enriches his original proposal by adding wholeheartedness in order to solve some challenges. I have shown in the previous section that this addition not only fails to save Frankfurt's official theory but brings about more problems. In this section, I propose that we can uncouple identification from wholeheartedness and likewise (e.g., highest values in Watson's theory), then we get a weaker version of identification. I argue that weak identification is more promising than strong identification that includes the concept of wholeheartedness, for the former does not encounter problems in the previous sections.

The idea of uncoupling identification from wholeheartedness leads us to reconsider Frankfurt's original proposal that one identifies with his mental states when he forms endorsing second-order volitions (without wholeheartedly). It motivates weak identification that emphasizes the activity of identification itself. And in Frankfurt's view, the activity of identification is the formation of second-order

volition. As I have said, first-order desires are "psychic raw materials" which might occur beyond one's control. Thus, by identifying with his desires weakly, one does not create (first-order) desires but is engaged with respect to his *existing* desires. Notice that Frankfurt's original proposal includes *caring* about one's mental states, *considering* them, and *forming* second-order volitions concerning them on the basis of somewhat. Without those activities, one is just a helpless bystander to his mental state. By the activity of identification, one endorses some of his mental states as his really own. When coupling identification with wholeheartedness, we get Frankfurt's official theory and a stronger version of identification. Obviously, strong identification needs more than weak identification. For example, deciding (i.e., Frankfurt's strong identification) is the stronger form of activity than forming second-order volitions (i.e., Frankfurt's weak identification). The former requires one to identify without any actual and possible conflict while the latter needs not be so.

Even though Frankfurt believes that there are no two different senses of identification, he insists that to identify is to form endorsing volitions wholeheartedly. However, I believe that these two could come apart. Reconsider our dieters. The akratic dieter Joe acts in accord with his desire to drink cokes and drinks cokes. Although Joe judges "not drinking cokes" better, he still drinks because he prefers sugar. Joe might feel some degree of guilt, after all, he is in dieting. Joe's identification with his akratic desire is halfhearted and thus is not strong. But all of us agree that Joe is *active* with respect to his desire. He notices this akratic desire and even judges it as good (Joe prefers cokes). Joe thus identifies with his desire weakly. In contrast, another continent dieter Jones has the same type of desire and better judgment. Unlike Joe, Jones decides not to drink cokes. He is completely content with his decision. Jones is wholehearted, or in my terminology, he identifies with his better judgments strongly. If this pair of cases makes sense, then my distinction between weak and strong identification is acceptable.

My idea of uncoupling is also found in Fischer and Jaworska's study. Fischer says, wholeheartedness reveals one's "true self" which is relevant with *autonomous* agency which is stronger than free agency (Fischer, 2012: 173–5); Jaworska distinguishes stance identification from participants' strong identification. She believes that mental states with which one identifies strongly are not only his really own, but "inseparable from and essential to the way she interprets the world and the range of possibilities for action" (Jaworska, 2022: 289). Frankfurt's concept of realness echoes Fischer's and Jaworska's ideas. Frankfurt says, *real* mental states are "more truly" in speaking for the agent and play roles in one's thinking about himself, for it conforms to "a person's ideal image" (Frankfurt, 1988: 63–4). Thus, strong identification can be understood as constituting one's true self, fundamental stance, or ideal image. But Frankfurt does not identify wholeheartedness with realness, for he holds that identification can be "quite trivial". For example, I can identify with my desire to go to KFC; however, this desire is irrelevant to my "ideal image." It is just an ordinary choice about lunch. I agree with Frankfurt on this issue, and my point is that strong identification should be used as an *umbrella* term that refers to these stronger forms of human agency than that of weak identification, including self-governing, continent agency, and planning agency. Parallelly, weak identification is

also used as an umbrella term including self-expressive, akratic agency, and purposive agency.

One point needs to be clarified. The ideas of uncoupling and umbrella terms do not mean that Frankfurt's original proposal is the only way we can choose. Rather, they indicate a *general* point. An identificationist theory, if promising, should provide a weak version of identification, whatever model of weak identification it provides. To understand this point well, consider another influential identificationist theory: Watson's value theory. Simply speaking, Watson proposes that one identifies with his desires and thus acts freely if one also *values* the contents of his effective desires. And the typical form of one's value consists in his *better* judgments that "the thing for me to do in these circumstances, all things considered, is *a*" (Watson, 1975: 215).[13] In short, according to Watson, one acts freely when he acts in accord with his better judgments. A notorious challenge to Watson is the akrasia cases in which one acts freely while he acts *against* his better judgments (reconsider our akratic dieter Joe). The challenge from akrasia to Watson is straightforward. Watson's concept of identification is too strong to be necessary for ownership and freedom. In this sense, Watson's concept of identification (i.e., one's better judgments) is a certain kind of strong identification. Obviously, there are some weaker versions of rational agency, e.g., good judgments. A promising Watsonian identificationist proposal should take good judgments seriously, for it emphasizes the activity of identification (the practical reasoning aiming for the good) and avoids potential implications of strong identification.

Weak identification is more promising, for it does not encounter the problems I present in Section 3. For example, in virtue of their having second-order volitions concerning their akratic desires and better judgments respectively, both Joe and Jones weakly identify with and really own those mental states, and they are free when they act, regardless that Joe is halfhearted while Jones is wholehearted. The businesswoman Sally acts purposively and freely since she weakly identifies with both conflicting desires and acts on one of them.

Some might doubt that if Frankfurt's original proposal is a version of weak identification, and Frankfurt's original proposal, as I have argued in Section 2, faces the authority problem, then it seems that weak identification cannot resolve the authority problem. For example, if freedom stems from non-arbitrary identification, then how does weak identification ensure the non-arbitrariness of identification? Indeed, it is a big challenge to all kinds of identificationist theories, including the weak version. In this paper, my main aim is to distinguish weak identification from strong identification and to propose that weak identification is sufficient for free actions. In saying so, I do not mean that *pure* weak identification consists of a perfect theory of freedom; rather, I want to say that a promising identificationist theory should *involve* weak identification. In what follows, I present one approach to save weak identification from the authority problem. In a

[13] Later, Watson finds that he wrongly identifies values with better judgments, one's valuing φ consist of one's better judgments of φ *and* motivational inclinations to φ (see Watson, 1987). But here this point doesn't matter.

nutshell, weak identification could resolve the authority problem by making some restrictions without appealing to strong identification.

Stump has insightfully pointed out, "A second-order [volition] is itself an expression of the agent's reasoning and therefore *eo ipso* accepted by the agent as approved by his reasoning" (Stump, 1988: 407). As I understand her, what Stump wants to emphasize is that the authority of second-order volitions to speak for the agent, if exists, is conferred from the fact that those volitions are the products of our reasoning processes as persons. We really own those states because we reflect on them and maintain them in our minds. In other words, our *identification* with those states indicates the authority of those states. Frankfurt has suggested a similar idea when he says, "As for a person's second-order volitions themselves, it is impossible for him to be a passive bystander to them. They *constitute* his activity – i.e., his being active rather than passive – and the question of whether or not he identifies himself with them cannot arise" (Frankfurt, 1988: 54. Italic original). It is plausible that the activeness of second-order volitions stems from the fact that those volitions are consequences of one's reflective self-evaluation. If I read Stump and Frankfurt rightly, then identificationist theorists can resist the authority problem without appealing to the strong version of identification. We really own some states in virtue that we identify with those states (weakly).

Some might doubt that the product of reasoning or identifying is not enough, for we might reason in a "capricious and irresponsible" way. I cannot imagine how a capricious and irresponsible process can be aptly called "reasoning." Nevertheless, I agree with those objectors that we should *restrict* the model of reasoning. Recall Frankfurt's claim that "there is no essential restriction about the basis of volition-formation." Bratman has insightfully pointed out that Frankfurt's core notion of second-order volition and his "no essential restriction" claim jointly lead Frankfurt to focus merely on the motivational aspect of mental states issuing in one's actions. But it is incomplete for a promising identificationist theory, and some additions are required. Note that the additions we propose do not imply strong identification.

Stump (1988) and Ekstrom (1993) make brilliant work in this way. Stump contends that "an agent has a second-order volition V2 to bring about some first-order volition V1 in himself only if the agent's intellect at the time of the willing represents V1, under some description, as the *good* to be pursued" (Stump, 1988: 400. Italics added); Ekstrom proposes that an agent acts freely when his preference (likewise Frankfurt's second-order volition) "is formed by an agent's *evaluating* that first-level desire with respect to some standard of goodness" (Ekstrom, 1993: 603. Italics original). Both Stump and Ekstrom claim that our activity of identification should track the good[14]; our reasoning process should be based on our *conceptions*

[14] It is worthy to note that Stump's concepts of "intellect" and "goodness." As Stump has emphasized, "an agent's intellect may formulate a reason for an action in a manner that is hasty, thoughtless, ill-informed, invalid, or in any other way irrational" (Stump 1988: 400). In other words, Stump permits the good to be irrational.

of the good and the right.[15] Bratman has sympathy with Stump and Ekstrom and proposes that identification consists in the agent's treating his mental states as reason-providing (2007). Unlike Frankfurt's second-order volitions which highlight the motivational power of mental states, Bratman contends that to act autonomously, mental states resulting in actions must play a dual role; they not only *move* one to act but also offer *reasons* for actions to the agent. The fundamental idea behind Stump, Ekstrom, and Bratman is that to be authoritative to speak for the agent, the activity of identification has an *essential* restriction. It is bound by goodness or rationality.

5 The degree of freedom and responsibility

If my distinction between weak and strong identification is correct, weak identification appears to do a better job in accounting ownership and freedom. However, this does not imply that strong identification plays no role in freedom. On the contrary, I consider the possibility that strong identification still plays significant roles in our practical lives. I illustrate the distinction between weak and strong identifications, suggesting a potentially promising implication: the support of the thesis that freedom and responsibility vary in degree. For instance, if agent A strongly identifies with his mental state M(a), while agent B weakly identifies with a similar mental state M(b), it is reasonable to conclude that A is freer and, consequently, more responsible than B. For any identificationist theorists, if they accept my distinction between strong and weak identification, the thesis of freedom and responsibility as varying in degree *may* hold appeal. Clearly, further elaboration is needed beyond the scope of this paper to fully illustrate "the distinction supporting the degree thesis." In this section, therefore, I aim to provide some reasons to illustrate this support as attractive and promising roughly.

There are some works on the concepts of degree freedom and responsibility.[16] Following them, I believe that the degree thesis is promising.[17] Here, I just provide a rough justification from the Strawsonian view about the nature of moral responsibility and articulate the degree concept with some examples.

[15] I agree with them largely with respect to the issue of *authority*. However, as I have noted in footnote 3, besides authority requirement, there is another authenticity requirement (consider virtues and vices in us are really ours). And I believe that identificationist theorists I have mentioned neglect this issue, except Frankfurt, for he definitely claims that one could identify with desires of which he *disapproves* (see Frankfurt 1888: 65). How identificationist theorists formulate the authenticity requirement is another big question; however, here, I have no space to address this issue.,

[16] See Coates and Swenson (2013), Coates (2019), Tierney (2019), etc.

[17] Some reject the idea of degree responsibility. I do not claim that accepting this idea is the unavoidable consequence of distinguishing weak identification from strong identification. But it is a puzzle to those rejecters if they still endorse this distinguishment: if weak identification is sufficient and necessary for freedom, then what role does strong identification play in our practical life? Maybe some adopt this stance: being stronger than weak identification, strong identification is the better candidate for exercising a stronger form of agency than free agency, for example, self-governance, see Mitchell-Yellin (2015). This standpoint is similar to mine. It is committed to the view that human agency is a matter of degree (so do I), even though they do not connect it with freedom and moral responsibility where we come apart.

The Strawsonian holds that, roughly speaking, being morally responsible is, in essence, being held morally responsible (see Strawson, 1962). Holding one responsible is manifested in our appropriate reactive attitudes toward him, that is, our emotions and practices (e.g., gratitude, resentment, and anger) responding to one on the basis of his qualities of will (good, ill, or indifferent) expressed in his actions so that it is fair for one to be open to praise and blame.[18] In short, moral responsibility is a matter of interpersonal relationships (see also Mitchell-Yellin, 2015: 385). For example, we are angry with a man who hits the disabled, since his hitting expresses morally objectionable attitudes toward the helpless. If we ensure that this man is not forced and clearly knows what he does (and so on), then our emotions are appropriate. The man is blameworthy for his hitting.

I believe that the degree concept naturally flows from Strawsonian reactive attitudes. Whether one is responsible depends on our responses to him, and we usually respond *differently* when having known different facts. Consider the following cases:

Picking up Imagine your friend promising to pick you up at the airport. But he does not appear on the arrival day. You are very angry with him at first. Suppose your friend plays tennis and knows his promise to you clearly. This fact makes your blame for him justified. He is *fully* blameworthy. Suppose, in another scenario, your friend is akratic, he is defeated by his laziness and appetite sometimes. On the arrival day, his favorite serial show is presented on TV. Your friend remembers the promise and tries to overcome his appetites, but unluckily, he fails. You would be *less* angry with him; however, your friend and you all agree that the blaming is still appropriate. In the last scenario, your friend made the promise a week ago, but before the arrival day, your friend suffered from severe depression. It makes him look like a zombie, so he breaks the promise. Learned this fact, I think, you would not be angry with him at all.

Pressing button In scenario 1, a naught guy presses a button which causes an innocent person to suffer from misery. He acts naughty and wrongly believes it is a light switch. In scenario 2, this guy is reminded that the button is harmful; however, he is uncertain about that and presses it. In scenario 3, this guy knows the function of the button clearly; however, he does not care about that and presses it willingly. I suggest that this naught guy is blameless in scenario 1 while fully blameworthy in scenario 3. His blameworthiness in scenario 2, if any, is less than that in scenario 3.

These two cases above focus on freedom and the epistemic condition of moral responsibility respectively. If those cases make sense, I believe that moral responsibility could be conceived as a degree matter. Then, the question is, can the distinction between weak and strong identification do a good job in the issue of degree freedom and responsibility? There are several reasons for identificationist theorists to be inclined to provide an affirmative answer. In what follows, I attempt to articulate these considerations carefully.

[18] Strawson continues that one is morally responsible unless he can be *exempted*. The thesis of determinism does not always exempt us from moral responsibility. In this sense, Strawson is a compatibilist.

First, I understand the activity of identification as the exercise of human agency. Most people agree with this point. For example, according to Frankfurt, when we identify with some of our mental states, say, we consider those states and form higher-order attitudes towards those states. Alternatively, according to Watson, another influenced identificationist theorist, identification consists of our valuing those states and their contents. In doing so, we exercise our higher-order agency than intentional agency. We are considering, reflecting, and valuing. Then, it is natural that human agency is a matter of degree. Obviously, a boxer is more capable of throwing powerful punches than I am, and a doctor is better at treating patients than I am. In these aspects, they exercise more agency than I do. Therefore, my distinction between weak identification and strong identification fits well with the degree of human agency.

Second, human agency and freedom (and responsibility) are tightly connected. Recall that classical compatibilists understand freedom as the ability to do what one wants to do. The stronger a person's abilities are, the greater their agency, and the more they can achieve. In the classical sense, they are *freer*. In the previous section, I argued that weak identification is enough for freedom, and strong identification is stronger than weak identification. Thus, it is plausible to say that one who acts on mental states with which he identifies strongly is freer than another who just weakly identifies with his states (suppose these two do the one and same thing), for the former exercises more agency than the latter. And because freedom is a necessary condition of moral responsibility (in this paper, I just address the certain kind of freedom required for moral responsibility, see footnote 1), when other necessary conditions are satisfied (e.g., the epistemic condition), the former seems to be more responsible than the latter.[19] In other words, the degree to which one is free and responsible is a function of the degree to which he identifies with his mental states and actions. I propose the following theses:

Degree agency Agents X and Y perform the same action type A. X exercises more human agency than Y if X strongly identifies with mental states resulting in A, and Y just weakly identifies with those states.

Degree freedom/responsibility Agents X and Y perform the same action type A. X acts freer and thus more responsible than Y if X strongly identifies with mental states resulting in A, and Y just weakly identifies with those states.

To illustrate this well, recall the case of *dieters* where Joe and Jones chose not to drink cokes based on their better judgments. The difference, as I have characterized,

[19] As I understand, there are two different models of degree freedom and responsibility. Model 1, as I have mentioned, concerns two (or more) agents might differ in freedom and responsibility while they perform one same action. Model 2 focuses on the possibility that the same agent could be free and responsible to different degree when he is in different scenario. For example, our akratic dieter Joe is free when he drinks cokes. However, Joe would be freer and more responsible when he chooses to reject cokes based on his better judgment. The distinction between weak identification and strong identification is capable of accounting the difference of Joe's two actions: when Joe drinks cokes, he just identifies with his akratic action weakly, whereas Joe strongly identifies with his enkratic action of rejecting cokes.

is that Joe identifies with his better judgments weakly (Joe is halfhearted), while Jones strongly identifies with his better judgments (Jones is wholehearted). Now, consider the following questions:

(a) Do Joe and Jones act freely and responsibly?
(b) If freedom and responsibility are degree matters, then who is freer and more responsible?

In Section 3, I have argued that the answer to question (a) is "yes." As for question (b), I hope to evoke your intuition that Jones is freer and more responsible. Jones is freer because he exercises more agency in deciding not to drink cokes, after all, Jones strongly identifies with his better judgment, whereas Joe weakly identifies with his better judgment. Given the same epistemic status that both Joe and Jones clearly know that what they are doing is a continent thing, Jones is held more responsible than Joe. The reason supporting this intuition is that Jones performs a stronger activity of identification than Joe.[20]

Some might object that if, as I have said, identification, human agency, and freedom are tightly connected, and in Section 3, I have argued that "Joe endeavors to overcome his preference and succeeds," it seems that Joe exercises more human agency than Jones, because Jones, being a continent dieter, does not endeavor. If so, then Joe is freer and more responsible than Jones.

My reply to this objection is twofold. First, although I connect the degree of identification and the degree of freedom and responsibility through human agency, it does not mean that freedom and responsibility are a function of the degree of human agency. Rather, I claim that freedom and responsibility are functions of the degree of identification. The claim that freedom and moral responsibility are functions of the degree of human agency is obviously wrong. Suppose a scientist and I are forced to do badly. The scientist is coerced into making a bomb and detonating it, while I am coerced into inflicting pain on passersby. The scientist exercises more agency than me; however, he is not freer simply because he is forced.

Second, it may not be true that Joe exercises more agency than Jones just because Joe endeavors while Jones does not. Indeed, I contend that Joe endeavors and succeeds. However, I just aim to argue that this fact reveals that Joe weakly identifies with his better judgment and acts freely. Joe's efforts do not mean that Joe exercises more agency than Jones. On the contrary, note that both Joe and Jones act continently; they exhibit self-control in this case, meaning both exercise autonomous agency. However, since Joe is halfhearted, it is more reasonable to say that Jones' autonomous agency is more *perfect* than Joe's in the case of *dieters*. To say one's exercising agency is more perfect, I mean that it is likely for the agent to successfully

[20] Note that the inference from strong/weak identification to a degreed notion of freedom and responsibility seems too quick and heavily relies on our intuitions (thanks to the reviewer for pointing out this issue). However, throughout this section, I aim to underscore that "the distinction supporting the degree thesis" is promising for identificationist theory, and indeed, through my argument, we have some good reasons to accept this support.

exercise his agency. Obviously, when choosing not to drink cokes, being continent, it is easier for Jones to make that choice.

6 Concluding remarks

I have argued that although he provides an attractive concept of identification, Frankfurt's enrichment of his original proposal, i.e., his official theory, brings about a stronger version of identification by appealing to the concept of wholeheartedness. Strong identification is not a good candidate for conditions of ownership and freedom, for it is helpless for some existing challenges to identificationist theory and encounters some new irresolvable puzzles; specifically, wholeheartedness is too strong to be necessary for ownership and freedom. I propose that uncoupling identification from wholeheartedness is promising. Weak identification, the result of the uncoupling, avoids new puzzles that strong identification faces, and the point of weak identification, i.e., the activity of identification, provides the resources to resist the authority problem. Moreover, the uncoupling also fits well with our intuition about the degree of freedom and responsibility.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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