

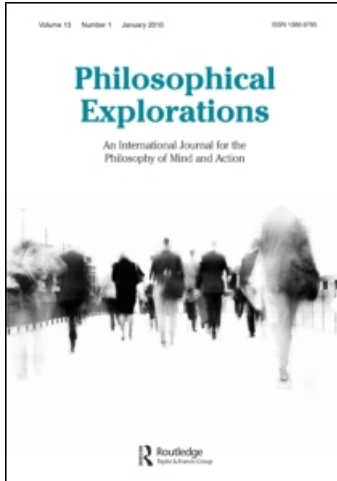
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Ambivalence

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The phenomenon of ambivalence is an important one for any philosophy of action. Despite this importance, there is a lack of a fully satisfactory analysis of the phenomenon. Although many contemporary philosophers recognize the phenomenon, and address topics related to it, only Harry Frankfurt has given the phenomenon full treatment in the context of action theory – providing an analysis of how it relates to the structure and freedom of the will. In this paper, I develop objections to Frankfurt's account, all revolving around the charge that his account contains a serious ambiguity between willing and identifying. With such objections in place, I then develop an analysis that avoids the difficulties and ambiguities that Frankfurt's analysis is prey to. I briefly distinguish ambivalence from other types of internal conflict. This paper aims to offer conceptual clarification on the phenomenon of ambivalence, which will then allow for discussions about the normative merits and demerits of ambivalence, the effects of ambivalence on autonomous action, and methods of resolution of ambivalence.

Keywords: ambivalence; autonomy; Frankfurt; will; identification

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of ambivalence is an important one for any philosophy of action. Despite this importance, there is a lack of a fully satisfactory analysis of the phenomenon. Although many contemporary philosophers recognize the phenomenon, and address topics related to it,¹ only Harry Frankfurt has given the phenomenon a full treatment in the context of action theory – examining how it relates to the structure of the will, freedom of the will, and freedom of action. In this paper, I develop objections to Frankfurt's analysis of the phenomenon of ambivalence. I argue that his account contains an ambiguity between identification and willing. I treat this ambiguity as a distinction, and then use it to develop an analysis of the phenomenon of ambivalence that avoids the difficulties and ambiguities to which Frankfurt's analysis is prey. Throughout, I consider and rebut some preliminary objections to this new analysis.

2. Frankfurt on ambivalence

Frankfurt has argued that the objects, people, courses of action etc., that we desire are objects of first-order desires. We, as humans, have the ability to reflect on these desires

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and either want to have them or not want to have them – these desires about our first-order desires are second-order desires. If, upon reflecting on a desire, we want to have it and we want it to be effective in moving us to action, then it is our will (also referred to by Frankfurt as a second-order volition), and acting freely consists in acting in accordance with our will (Frankfurt 1988a, 14–6). According to Frankfurt, ambivalence occurs when there is a conflict during will formation. An ambivalent agent experiences conflict during the process of reflecting on a desire that she has, and the conflict prevents her from forming a will, i.e. from taking a position on whether it is a desire that she wants to have and to be effective in action. Frankfurt's exact words:

Ambivalence is constituted by conflicting volitional movements or tendencies. . . (Frankfurt 1999b, 99)

If there is an unresolved conflict among someone's second-order desires, then he is in danger of having no second-order volition; for unless this conflict is resolved, he has no preference concerning which of his first-order desires is to be his will. (Frankfurt 1988a, 21)

He is inclined in one direction, and he is inclined in the contrary direction as well; and his attitude toward these inclinations is unsettled. Thus, it is true of him neither that he prefers one of his alternatives, nor that he prefers the other, nor that he likes them equally. (Frankfurt 1999b, 100)

Frankfurt differentiates ambivalence from other types of conflict that an agent may experience. One common type of conflict that an agent may experience is temptation. In the case of temptation, the agent has taken a side about what desires she wants to have and to move her to act (she has formed a will); and so the conflict is between her and the outlaw desires. In ambivalence, however, the conflict is *in* the agent; for she has not taken a side; the agent herself is torn. Frankfurt says, ' . . . the person is not merely in conflict with forces "outside" him; rather, he himself is divided' (Frankfurt 1988b, 165). Another common type of conflict that an agent may experience is a conflict of first-order desires. An agent may experience a conflict at the first-order level (e.g. eating steak or a vegetarian meal for dinner), but to qualify as a case of ambivalence, there would have to be a conflict at the second-order level as well (e.g. the agent is conflicted about whether she wants her desire for pleasure or her desire for health to be effective in action).

Frankfurt argues that the opposite of ambivalence is wholeheartedness. He says, 'If ambivalence is a disease of the will, the health of the will is to be unified and in this sense wholehearted' (Frankfurt 1999b, 100). And that wholeheartedness ' . . . requires that with respect to any such conflict, he himself be fully resolved. This means that he must be resolutely on the side of one of the forces struggling within him and not on the side of any other. Concerning the opposition of these forces, he has to know where he himself stands. In other words, he must know what he wants' (Frankfurt 1999b, 100). Once a person is wholehearted, Frankfurt describes it as being ' . . . tantamount to the enjoyment of a kind of self-satisfaction . . . a state of satisfaction with the condition of the self . . .' (Frankfurt 1999b, 102). The satisfaction that Frankfurt has in mind is not narcissistic or enthusiastic, it is just ' . . . an absence of restlessness or resistance . . .' (Frankfurt 1999b, 103–4).

3. Why Frankfurt's analysis is flawed

Although Frankfurt's work has the merits of taking on the phenomenon of ambivalence directly, his analysis contains a serious ambiguity between identifying and willing. This

ambiguity needs to be sorted out in order to accurately locate the phenomenon of ambivalence and in order to differentiate it from other conflicts of the will.

The ambiguity

To begin, consider Frankfurt's analysis of freedom of the will. In his 1971 seminal paper, 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', Frankfurt argued that what makes us persons is the ability to reflect on our desires; to form 'second-order desires'. For example, a smoker may desire a cigarette, but she does not want to want to smoke the cigarette because she is trying to quit. The smoker has a 'first-order desire' to smoke, but does not have a 'second-order desire' to smoke. Frankfurt argues that the smoker's will is not free, because a person's will is free only when her first order desires are in accord with her second order desires. The smoker who is trying to quit does not identify with her first order desire to smoke the cigarette; she views it as outlaw (Frankfurt 1988a, 14–6).

On this account, freedom of the will requires an agent somehow to identify with, as opposed to outlaw, the desires that she has. Frankfurt describes the range of ways that an agent can identify with a desire: to identify with a desire is to 'acknowledge that satisfying it is to be assigned some position in my preferences'; it may be that the desire doesn't please me or make me proud, but I am 'willing to have it represent me'; I 'accept it'; I make 'no determined effort to dissociate myself from it'; in 'weary resignation' I 'consent' to having it and to being influenced by it (Frankfurt 2006, 8).² Or, I could identify more strongly with the desire and regard it with 'welcoming approval', or even feel like not having that desire would be 'unthinkable' (Frankfurt 1988c, 177–90; Frankfurt 1998, 26–7).

On the other hand, to view a desire as outlaw is described by Frankfurt in the following range of ways: I feel like I am a 'bystander' to it; it 'disturbs' me; it makes 'no sense' to me; I'd 'never think of acting on it'; it has 'no recognizable warrant'; it 'happens to me/enters my mind'; it feels 'oddly disconnected' from me or even 'dangerously antithetical'; it is an 'unacceptable intruder'; I feel an 'anxious disposition to resist it'; it is 'outlawed and disenfranchised'; 'I refuse to recognize it as grounds for what I think and do'; I treat it as 'categorically unacceptable' and try to 'suppress it or rid myself of it entirely'; regardless of how insistent it may or how powerfully moved by it I am I 'give it no rational claim'; I am 'determined to give it no position at all' in the order of my preferences (Frankfurt 2006, 9–10).³

If the outlawed desire succeeds in defeating our attempts to resist it, then '... the outlaw imposes itself upon us without authority, and against our own will. This suggests a useful way of understanding what it is for a person's will to be free' (Frankfurt 2006, 14). So far, it seems that, for Frankfurt, a person is acting with free will so long as she is acting on one of the desires that she identifies with (and not acting on one that she views as outlaw).

But, in other places in Frankfurt's work, it seems as if something more specific is required for freedom of the will: in order for a person to enjoy freedom of the will, she must choose a particular desire, out of the set that she identifies with, to be effective in action. That desire is then said to be the one that she 'wills'. For example, Frankfurt says: 'It is not merely that he wants the desire to X to be among the desires by which, to one degree or another, he is moved or inclined to act. He wants this desire to be effective – that is, to provide the motive in what he actually does ... want the desire to X not merely to be one of his desires but, more decisively, to be his will' (Frankfurt 1988a, 15). So then, the picture is something like this:

On this reading of Frankfurt, freedom of the will consists not merely in having and acting on desires that an agent identifies with, but in having and acting on the desire that

the agent (more narrowly) wills (wants to be effective in guiding action). Freedom of the will consists in an orderly arrangement. Passages in Frankfurt's most recent essay, 'Taking Ourselves Seriously', lend support to this reading that freedom of the will consists in an orderly arrangement of first-order desires (i.e. structure and harmony). Frankfurt says: 'The volitional unity in which the freedom of the will consists is purely structural' (Frankfurt 2006); 'When we are acquiescent to ourselves, or willing freely, there is no conflict within the structure of our motivations and desires' (Frankfurt 2006); 'Willing freely means that the self is at that time harmoniously integrated' (Frankfurt 2006); and 'This would amount to an inner harmony that comes to much the same thing as having a free will' (Frankfurt 2006, 17–9).

The ambiguity in Frankfurt's account of freedom of the will leads to a similar ambiguity in his analysis of the phenomenon of ambivalence. At times, Frankfurt writes as if ambivalence occurs at the level of identification, and at other times he writes as if it occurs at the level of identification plus willing (at the level of ordering the desires that the person identifies with). In support of the former reading of Frankfurt's analysis of the phenomenon of ambivalence, consider the following passage: 'A person is ambivalent, then, only if he is indecisive concerning whether to be for or against a certain psychic position' (Frankfurt 1999b, 99). It is not that the agent has decided that she identifies with the desire and approves of it being among her motivations, but just cannot decide whether she wants it or other desires that she identifies with to move her to action right now. The agent cannot even decide whether she identifies with the desire in question at all. Similarly, about the ambivalent agent, Frankfurt says: 'He is inclined in one direction, and he is inclined in the contrary direction as well; and his attitude toward these inclinations is unsettled. Thus, it is true of him neither that he prefers one of his alternatives, nor that he prefers the other, nor that he likes them both equally' (Frankfurt 1999b, 100).

At other times, however, Frankfurt writes as if ambivalence occurs at the level of willing; that it is a failure of the agent to order her desires and decide which of them she wants to be effective in action at a particular time. In other words, he writes as if ambivalence occurs when an agent likes or dislikes both alternatives equally (contra the above quote), and cannot decide which to prioritize, or which to be effective in action at a particular time. Frankfurt writes, to overcome ambivalence, an agent should '... give up trying to have things both ways and find some coherent order ...' (Frankfurt 1999b, 107). The ambivalent agent has a conflict among the desires that she identifies with and has trouble ordering them, i.e., deciding which of the conflicting desires she wants to be effective in action at a particular time.

Now that the ambiguity in Frankfurt's account is exposed, the ambiguity can be turned into a distinction (between willing and identifying), that can allow us not only to understand the phenomenon of ambivalence better, but also to understand its relationship to other conflicts of the will. For example, if ambivalence is understood as a failure or a trouble at the level of deciding which desire the agent wants to be effective in action at a particular time (i.e. of willing), then one way that weakness of will might be understood is that an agent *has* decided which desire she wants to be effective in action but acts not on that desire, but on another desire that she identifies with (but does not more narrowly will). If, on the other hand, ambivalence is understood as a failure to decide whether a desire is one that the agent identifies with or views as outlaw, then one way that weakness of the will might be understood is that an agent *has* decided which desires she in some sense identifies with and which she views as outlaw, but has acted on a desire that she has outlawed. Moreover, understanding ambivalence in will versus identification will be an important distinction to keep in mind when theorizing about how to resolve it. Suggested methods of

resolution may vary greatly if the problem is one of forming a psychic attitude towards a desire or one of ordering desires.

4. New analysis

Locating ambivalence

The above discussion of the ambiguity in Frankfurt’s analysis of the phenomenon of ambivalence is not purely negative, for we can sort out the ambiguities and develop an alternative analysis of the phenomenon.

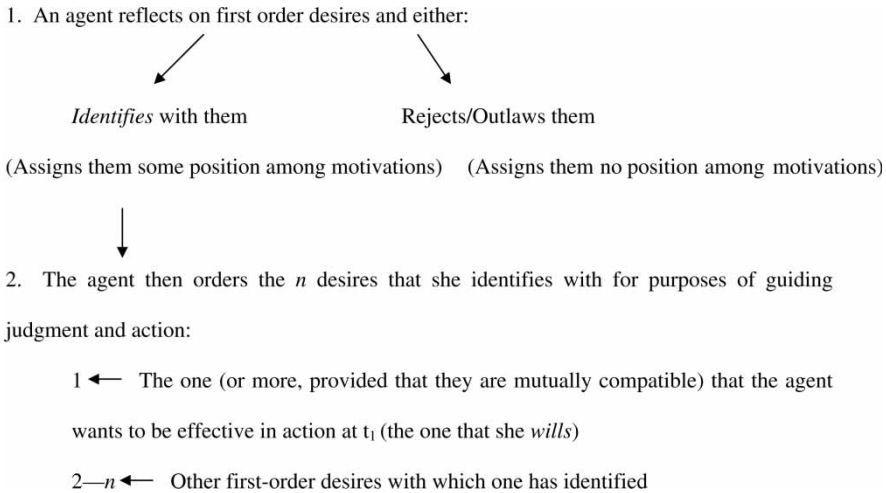


Figure 1. Identifying and willing.

Referring to Figure 1, ambivalence *can* occur during the first decision process (of whether or not to identify with or reject a particular first order desire). Ambivalence can also occur during the second decision process, i.e. when an agent is deciding which desire (of the desires she identifies with) she wants to be effective in action at a particular time. Hence, ambivalence can be either a failure/trouble to form a psychic position towards one’s desires (to identify or outlaw) or a failure/trouble to order one’s desires (to form a will). Indeed, there are many cases where an agent identifies with desires where the satisfaction of one negatively affects the satisfaction of another, and as a result has trouble ordering those preferences.⁴ Consider the literary example of Agamemnon. In Aeschylus’s play *Agamemnon*, Agamemnon is faced with the conflict of whether or not to kill his daughter Iphigenia in order to spare the lives of his cavalry. The anguish of his mental conflict can be felt in his words (Aeschylus 2008):

A heavy doom, sure, if God’s will were broken;
 But to slay mine own child, who my house delighteth,
 Is that not heavy? That her blood should flow
 On her father’s hand, hard beside an altar?
 My path is sorrow wheresoe’er I go.
 Shall Agamemnon fail his ships and people,
 And the hosts of Hellas melt as melts the snow?
 They cry, they thirst, for a death that shall break the spell,

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For a Virgin's blood: 'tis a rite of old, men tell.
And they burn with longing.— O God may the end be well!

Agamemnon has two desires, to spare the life of his daughter and to spare the lives of his cavalry. It is not as if Agamemnon is having a problem forming a psychic attitude towards those desires; he is not having a problem deciding whether he identifies with both desires or views them as outlaw. He does identify with both. The problem that Agamemnon is having is one of ordering his desires; of deciding which desire he wills to be effective in action at this particular time.

Consider another example of an agent experiencing ambivalence: an agent is ambivalent about having children. The agent has a desire to raise children (and raise them well) and is not having a problem deciding whether he identifies with that desire or views it as outlaw; he identifies with it (he wants to assign it some position among the motivations and causes of his behavior). But the agent also has a desire to devote himself intensely to his career. He also identifies with that desire, but knows that the satisfaction of it conflicts with the satisfaction of his desire to raise children well, and so is having a problem deciding which of the two desires he wants to move him to action. His ambivalence is a case of a failure to order desires (a failure of willing) and not a failure to form a psychic position about a desire (a failure of identifying).

Ambivalence as a structure of the will

Thus far, I have clarified an ambiguity in Frankfurt's account about the location of ambivalence, and have argued that cases of ambivalence can be located not just in the realm of identifying, but also in the realm of willing. Another important conceptual issue that must be addressed is whether ambivalence is to be construed as a feeling that an agent has or as a structure of an agent's will. Frankfurt defines ambivalence as a structure of the will, as I explained in the section on Frankfurt's analysis of ambivalence. I essentially agree with Frankfurt's analysis on this point, but an important objection needs to be addressed. Some might object that ambivalence is fundamentally a feeling, the feeling of being torn and conflicted, just as love and anger are fundamentally feelings. It would seem odd for love or anger to be defined as anything but a feeling; it would be as if we as outsiders could insist that someone was not really angry or in love because they did not behave a certain way. It would be similarly odd to define ambivalence as anything but a feeling.

In response, this objection has some merit, for there is an affective component to ambivalence just as there is to love and anger. But there is a danger in making the affective component the, or part of the, necessary and sufficient conditions for ambivalence for two reasons: (1) we then face a conceptual difficulty of counterexamples where an agent (e.g. a zombie, or an anthropologist from Mars) has the structure of the will for ambivalence, looks like she is ambivalent, but lacks the affective component; (2) it becomes difficult to differentiate ambivalence from other conflicts, such as temptation and regret, that might feel very similar to the agent experiencing them. So, in order to accommodate the objection that there is some affective component tied to the phenomenon of ambivalence, but avoid the difficulties involved in making an affective element the, or part of the, necessary and sufficient conditions for ambivalence, I suggest that ambivalence is fundamentally a certain structure of the will (conflict of second order desires) that is 'necessarily-typically' accompanied by a certain affective element (the feeling of being torn). That is, the affective component is necessarily part of it, but it does not have to occur in all genuine cases; it merely has to

typically occur. I borrow the term ‘necessarily-typically’ from Berys Gaut in his article, ‘The Paradox of Horror’ (Gaut 1993). Gaut argued that although it may seem paradoxical that some of us enjoy horror (i.e. enjoy unpleasant emotions such as fear and disgust), it is not a paradox at all because emotions are essentially evaluations (in the case of horror, negative) which can feel either pleasant or unpleasant (in the case of horror, pleasant). He recognizes that negative emotions (evaluations) are usually tied to unpleasant feelings and so he argues for a conceptual connection between the evaluation and the feeling that he calls ‘necessarily-typically’. Negative emotions ‘necessarily-typically’ produce unpleasant feelings, in the same way that pain ‘necessarily-typically’ produces avoidance behavior.

Two degrees of ambivalence

Thus far, I have characterized ambivalence as a structure of the will in which there is either a difficulty in forming of second order positions (identifying or outlawing) or a difficulty ordering second order desires (willing), that necessarily typically causes the agent to feel torn. Ambivalence of both types comes in degrees.

The most severe degree, I call paralyzing ambivalence. The difficulty of a decision is so paralyzing that the agent does not form a will at all; she does not decide which of her desires she wants to be effective in action at a particular time (think of Agamemnon in the phase of paralysis). A less severe degree of ambivalence I call residual ambivalence. The agent does form a will but is still drawn towards the other desires that conflict with the desire that she wills. I will discuss each degree of ambivalence in turn.

As an example of a case of paralyzing ambivalence, consider the following: Mr. X, a youthful 70 year old man, was involved in a head on motor vehicle accident. As a result, he lay in a hospital bed, on a ventilator, and paralyzed from the neck down. Mr. X had to decide whether to have the ventilator withdrawn and die, or remain on the ventilator, living a life on a ventilator and paralyzed from the neck down. Mr. X’s family, physicians, and an ethicist all talked with Mr. X to try to ascertain what he really wanted. These conversations spanned over weeks, but Mr. X did not know what he really wanted. He could not decide which of his desires (his desire to live or his desire to avoid living a life paralyzed and on a ventilator) he wanted to be effective in action; he could not form a will; he was paralyzingly ambivalent.

The severity of ambivalence found in paralyzing ambivalence is usually the result of having to decide between making a full commitment to one thing or another, and a compromise is not obvious or available because one commitment excludes acting on the other. When an agent, such as Mr. X, is paralyzingly ambivalent (referring once again to the diagram below), he experiences a conflict among the desires that he identifies with and does not settle on which of those desires he wants to be at the top of the order; to be effective in action at a particular time. In the case of Mr. X, he has a desire to live that he identifies with, and a desire to live a certain quality of life that he identifies with, and the satisfaction of those two desires conflict in this particular instance. Mr. X does not decide on the ordering of those desires; his ambivalence is paralyzing in that he fails to form a will.

While paralyzing ambivalence is a structure of the will in which there is a difficulty in forming second order positions (identifying or outlawing), or a difficulty in ordering second order desires that (1) necessarily typically causes the agent to feel torn and (2) results in the agent failing to form a will, there is another degree of ambivalence that I call residual. Residual ambivalence is a structure of the will in which there is a difficulty in forming second order positions (identifying or outlawing), or a difficulty in ordering second order desires that (1) necessarily typically causes the agent to feel torn or uneasy, but (2) does

not result in the agent failing to form a will. The agent does form a will but is still drawn towards the other second order desires that conflict with the desire that she wills. Imagine the following example: Chris and John are engaged to be married and have a young child together. John was raised Catholic, but has not seriously practiced his religion since his teens. Lately however, John has been rekindling his relationship with the Church and over the past few months he has begun to experience a deep feeling that he is being called to become a priest. John has a desire to marry Chris and share a life with Chris and their daughter, but he also has a desire to become a priest. Both desires are ones that he identifies with in that he in some sense endorses them as being *among* the influences on his behavior. After some time and inner turmoil, John makes a decision and forms a will. He commits to his desire for a life with Chris and their daughter being the one that is effective in action.

One question that may arise is that it is not clear what it means to simultaneously form a will (decide which desire is to be effective in action at t_1) yet still be strongly drawn towards conflicting alternatives (that one also identifies with). This question arises from the differentiation between types of ambivalence that I have provided, and from the distinction between willing and identifying that I have drawn. It is an important and interesting question about the particular phenomenon of residual ambivalence, and although addressing it fully would require a separate paper on residual ambivalence alone, I will provide a preliminary response. To form a will in cases of residual ambivalence is to resign oneself to a certain ordering of one's desires, and to take steps towards making the desire that has been ordered primary effective in action. Now, taking steps towards making the primary desire effective in action can mean small and gradual steps. For example, whenever John feels like looking at the webpage for priests he redirects his thoughts to something else. Whenever he begins to miss his deep involvement with the Church, he reminds himself of what he would be losing in pursuing that option. John begins therapy with Chris to make their relationship even better and more attractive. John is, however, residually ambivalent. He is still drawn towards (and at times strongly drawn towards) his desire to become a priest, especially when he drives by a church or sees a book on Catholicism while he is browsing at his local bookstore.

Ambivalence vs. regret

Analysis of ambivalence sheds light on a related phenomenon: regret. Ambivalence, of the residual degree in particular, bears some relation to regret. There are, however, two different sorts of regret to be discussed: (1) an agent regrets how she ordered her desires, or (2) an agent regrets that she had to order her desires; that the satisfaction of some conflicted with the satisfaction of others. The former type of regret is directed towards the agent herself, the latter type of regret can be directed towards oneself or towards the world. The type of regret that is most likely to be associated with the phenomenon of residual ambivalence is the latter. Referring back to the case of John the would-be priest, it is not that he regrets that he decided that he wanted his desire for a relationship with Chris to be effective in action instead of his desire to become a priest. The regret that John may experience is directed towards the world, it is regret that he could not have both desires satisfied.

To complicate matters, there is a way in which regret may be directed towards the self, but not be regret about how the agent ordered her desires. If the decision that the agent made about the ordering of her desires involved other persons, then the agent may regret that she did harm *to* those persons (even though she does not regret her ordering). For example, if ambivalent Agamemnon finally chose (as he did) his army over his daughter, then it is too

simple to describe his regret as towards the world, as regret that he could not save both Iphigenia and his army. Agamemnon may regret doing wrong *to* Iphigenia. It may be more accurate to describe his regret as directed towards her and not towards the world or the circumstances. All of this is just to point out, however, that the phenomenon of ambivalence has some relation to the phenomenon of regret, but that they are not the same thing.

Ambivalence vs. weakness of will and temptation

Another common type of conflict of the will is temptation, which if succumbed to becomes weakness of will. Recall that Frankfurt differentiates ambivalence from temptation in the following way: in the case of temptation, the conflict is between the agent/the desires that she identifies with and the desires that she views as outlaw. In ambivalence, however, the conflict is *in* the agent. Frankfurt is partly correct in his distinction between ambivalence and temptation. Temptation can be a conflict between the desires that the agent identifies with and the ones that she views as outlaw, but temptation can also be a conflict between the desire that the agent wills (the one that she wants to be effective in action at t_1) and the other desires that she identifies with. Hence, an agent is weak of will when she acts on a desire other than the one that she wills. This other desire can either be one that she views as outlaw or one that she identifies with. For example, I may decide that I do not identify with my first order desire to eat ice cream for dinner, but the desire to eat ice cream for dinner continues to influence me; it tempts me. I succumb to it and eat ice cream for dinner; I am weak of will. Or, I may decide that I *do* identify with my desire to eat ice cream for dinner, but on this particular evening I do not will it. I have another desire that I identify with that conflicts with it (e.g. I am on a health kick right now and have a desire to be healthy, and I ate ice cream for dinner last night). The desire to be healthy is the one that I will; it is the one that I want to be effective in action this evening. The desire to eat ice cream for dinner tempts me and if I succumb to it I am weak of will, *even though it is a desire that I identify with*. These cases of temptation/weakness of will are different from a case of ambivalence, where I am not able to decide whether I identify at all with my first order desire to eat ice cream for dinner (whether I assign it some position), or (more likely) where I am not able to decide what I will this evening (whether I want my second order desire for health or my second order desire for ice cream to move me to action this evening).

One objection is that on my analysis, temptation/weakness of will cannot be distinguished from residual ambivalence. I have said that if a desire other than the one that I will influences me (even if it is a desire I identify with), then that is a case of temptation. Yet, cases of residual ambivalence just are cases where desires that I identify with continue to influence me. So, it is true that on my analysis all cases of residual ambivalence are cases of temptation. The difference between the two phenomena, however, is that not all cases of temptation are cases of residual ambivalence (since I have argued that temptation also occurs when an agent is influenced by desires that she views as outlaw). On my analysis it is also true that cases of residual ambivalence are also cases of temptation and may very easily turn into cases of weakness of will. For if the agent acts on a desire other than the one that she wills (even if it is a desire that she identifies with), then she is weak of will. Return to the case of the man who wills to remain with his fiancée and their daughter, but is residually ambivalent in that he is still strongly influenced by his conflicting second order desire to become a priest. He is tempted by his desire to become a priest, and if he abandons his fiancée and runs off to become a priest then he is weak of will, even though his desire to become a priest is one that he identifies with.

Ambivalence vs. indifference

Ambivalence is not to be confused with indifference. Here, Frankfurt is entirely correct. Consider the following quote by the character Meursault in Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (Camus 1989, Part 1, Chapter 4):

She was wearing a pair of my pajamas with the sleeves rolled up. When she laughed I wanted her again. A minute later she asked me if I loved her. I told her it didn't mean anything but that I didn't think so. She looked sad. But as we were fixing lunch, and for no apparent reason, she laughed in such a way that I kissed her.

Meursault does not reject his desire for Marie, nor does he endorse it. He is not ambivalent, for he is not experiencing strong feelings drawing him in conflicting directions. He is what we might call, indifferent. To be indifferent to one's own motives is to, as Frankfurt says, '...take no evaluative attitude toward the desires that incline him to act. If there is a conflict between those desires, he does not care which of them proves to be the more effective. In other words, the individual does not participate in the conflict' (Frankfurt 1988b, 164). This type of indifference we might call, borrowing from Frankfurt, 'wanton indifference' (Frankfurt 1988a, 18).

Another type of indifference (one that Frankfurt does not discuss) is someone who does not even have first order desires that incline him to act one way or the other. There is no conflict between the desires that incline him to act (first order desires) because he does not even have inclinations one way or the other. Imagine that an agent has to decide whether to spend the day at the beach or the park – those are his only two options. The agent is indifferent about where he spends the day in the sense that he does not have a first order desire inclining him to spend the day at the beach, nor does he have a first order desire inclining him to spend the day at the park. This type of indifference we might call 'first order indifference', or more colloquially depression or lack of motivation. Both wanton indifference and first order indifference are distinguished from ambivalence by the fact that in cases of indifference, there is no conflict of the will at all.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, internal conflict comes in various forms. In this paper, I have provided an analysis of one of the more neglected forms of internal conflicts: ambivalence. I have argued that Frankfurt's account of ambivalence contains an ambiguity between identification and willing. I turn this ambiguity into a distinction, and use it to develop an analysis of the phenomenon of ambivalence that avoids the difficulties and ambiguities to which Frankfurt's analysis is prey. I argue that ambivalence is a structure of the will in which there is either a difficulty in forming second order positions (identifying or outlawing) or a difficulty ordering second order desires (willing), that necessarily typically causes the agent to feel torn. I hope that the conceptual clarifications that I have made contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of ambivalence, which will then allow for discussions about the merits and demerits of ambivalence, the effects of ambivalence on autonomous action, and methods of resolution of ambivalence in cases where ambivalence has significant negative consequences for an agent.

Notes

1. See, for example, Bratman (1999); Bratman (2002); Bratman (2003); Calhoun (1995); Christman (1991); Christman (1993); Ekstrom (1993); Ekstrom (2005); Velleman (2002); Greenspan (1980); Harrist (2006) and Koch (1987).

2. See Frankfurt (2006, 8). The exact quote is as follows (emphasis original): ‘When we consider the psychic raw materials with which nature and circumstance have provided us, we are sometimes more or less content. They may not exactly please us, or make us proud. Nevertheless, we are *willing* for them to represent us. We *accept* them as conveying what we really feel, what we truly desire, what we do indeed think and so on. They do not arouse in us any determined effort to dissociate ourselves from them. Whether with welcoming approval, or in weary resignation, we *consent* to having them and to being influenced by them. This willing acceptance of attitudes, thoughts, and feelings transforms their status. They are no longer merely items that happen to appear in a certain psychic history. We have taken responsibility for them as authentic expressions of ourselves’.
3. See Frankfurt (2006, 9–10). The exact quotes are as follows: ‘Sometimes we do not participate actively in what goes on in us. It takes place, somehow, but we are just bystanders to it. There are obsessional thoughts, for instance, that disturb us but that we cannot get out of our heads; there are peculiar reckless impulses that make no sense to us, and upon which we would never think of acting; there are hot surges of anarchic emotion that assault us from out of nowhere and that have no recognizable warrant from the circumstances in which they erupt’. And ‘By a kind of psychic immune response . . . we dissociate ourselves from them, and seek to prevent them from being at all effective . . . this means that we deny them any entitlement to supply us with motives or reasons. . . . Regardless of how insistent they may be, we assign their claims no place whatever in the order of preferences and priorities that we establish for our deliberate choices and acts’.
4. An agent may be unambivalent about the first decision (whether or not the desire is one that she identifies with), she may even be unambivalent about the second decision in that she wants either desire 1 or 2 to move her to action at t_1 but not desire 3 or 4. What she is ambivalent about is whether she wants desire 1 or desire 2 to move her to action at t_1 . For example, imagine that a person is unambivalent that she identifies with her desire to go to the beach, her desire to go to the park, her desire to go to the bookstore, and her desire to have sex. She is even unambivalent that she wants either the desire to go to the beach or the park this afternoon. What she is ambivalent about is whether she wants her desire to go to the beach or her desire to go to the park to be the one that is effective in action this afternoon. This footnote arises from Geoffrey-Sayre McCord encouraging me to reflect on the way that dividing up desires affects the classification of ambivalence during an informal conversation upon his visit to Michigan State University in June 2007.

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