

## CHAPTER THREE

### FRANKFURT ON SELF-CONCEPTIONS AND PRACTICAL REASONS

#### 3.1 Introduction

Having examined Korsgaard's account of the relationship between self-conceptions and normative reasons, in this chapter I turn to Harry Frankfurt's work on this topic. I have three central goals in the pages that follow: (1) to reconstruct Frankfurt's account of the self-conceptions/normative reasons relationship, (2) to explore Frankfurt's account of the existence conditions for normative reasons more generally, and (3) to discuss some initial concerns one might have with this account. I will structure this discussion around what I take to be a "two-level" account of reasons for action implicit in Frankfurt's view. As this two-level view will figure prominently into the course that this chapter takes, let us begin with a rough sketch of its features.

According to the first level of Frankfurt's account—which concerns the inference patterns that an agent should employ in her practical deliberations—Frankfurt's view is that one's normative reasons are determined by what one cares about. To figure out what I should do, I should think about how to best engage the projects that matter to me. According to the second level of his account—which concerns the justification of actions from a non-deliberative perspective—what ultimately justifies an act is (roughly) its contribution to the value of wholeheartedness.

The resulting account has two levels in this sense. While the normative reasons that I think I have from the first person point of view will correspond to the normative reasons that I in fact have based on a more theoretical understanding of my situation (or at least they will if I follow the first-level advice of pursuing only projects that I care about), the explanation of *why* I have these particular normative reasons

will differ between the two levels. While I might think that I should  $\phi$  because I care deeply about  $\phi$ -ing, I actually ought to  $\phi$  because my wholehearted commitment to  $\phi$ -ing satisfies agent-constituting norms. A similar gap emerges according to this account between our first-person understanding of the sorts of values we pursue and a more theoretical understanding of these values (i.e. while I am unavoidably committed to treating certain things as final values from the first-person point of view, the second-level view holds that that these objects possess merely instrumental value). This gap between how Frankfurt thinks you ought to figure out what to do, and what actually makes it the case that you ought to do certain things, is what accounts for this two-level treatment of this view.

In terms of layout, in Section 3.2 I discuss the first-level aspect of Frankfurt's view and his thoughts on the relationship between self-conceptions and normative reasons. In Section 3.3 I turn to the second level of Frankfurt's account. I conclude in Section 3.4 with an initial analysis of this account that will help set the stage for a more critical treatment of Frankfurt's view in Chapter Five (some of the more critical aspects of this review will have to wait until after Chapter Four's discussion of the relationship between normative reasons and values).

Before getting under way, I must mention a few issues that complicate my project in this chapter. First, Frankfurt doesn't explicitly present his view as a two-level theory of reasons. This fact alone leads to some problems, but since there appears to be good textual support for a two-level reading (indeed, attributing such a view to Frankfurt might be the only way to avoid some apparent inconsistencies), this is the view I will present.

Second, unlike Korsgaard, Frankfurt never explicitly argues for a specific understanding of the relationship between self-conceptions and normative reasons. Presumably this is because working out a comprehensive view of this relationship has

not been one of Frankfurt's central aims. Nonetheless, in the course of discussing other issues—such as freedom of the will, the relationship between an agent's motivational limits and what can be reason-giving, and the role of reflective self-concern in one's deliberations—I will argue that Frankfurt winds up committed to a view of this relationship that is worth examining.

Third, Frankfurt's views have come scattered across a number of publications produced over a fairly long time period, which further complicates the task at hand. To my knowledge, Frankfurt has nowhere set down a comprehensive, systematic discussion of his account of reasons in one piece of writing; accordingly, I have been forced to piece together Frankfurt's underlying view from a patchwork of sources, each of which focuses on one or two elements of a much broader account. Reconstructing a view on the basis of a corpus of this sort is hardly the ideal way to proceed, but it cannot be avoided. When questions arise as to how to reconcile changes that have occurred in Frankfurt's views over the past few decades, my tendency will be to give more weight to his more recent work.

Based on these remarks, one may wonder how appropriate it could be to attribute the view that is described in this chapter to Frankfurt. In what sense will this be "Frankfurt's view?" What follows will clearly not be a typical exercise in exegesis. The task I have in mind is rather one of "investigative reconstruction." The basic idea is that, based on Frankfurt's work on a number of different issues, he seems to be committed to certain a view about both the relationship between self-conceptions and normative reasons, and a two-level view of normative reasons more generally. In trying to spell out what these views are, I will be presenting an amalgam of: (a) views explicitly held by Frankfurt, (b) views Frankfurt appears to be tacitly committed to, and (c) views that, based on what Frankfurt has actually said, he appears to be rationally committed to (either because these rationally required views underwrite

Frankfurt’s explicit views, or are logical extensions of them). We could accordingly think of the composite view that emerges as “Frankfurt Plus.”

### 3.2 Frankfurt’s First-Level Account

The following reconstruction of Frankfurt’s first-level account of practical reasons can be broken down into three central steps. The first step involves what I will call Frankfurt’s Internalism Thesis, which holds that one’s normative reasons for action are determined by the objects and projects that one cares about (Section 3.2.1). This thesis states a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of a reason for action. If I care about object O (and only if I do), then according to Frankfurt, I have normative reason to act in ways that support or preserve O.

The second step involves what I will call the Co-Determination Thesis (Section 3.2.2). This thesis holds that an agent’s practical commitments and the normative reasons that are associated with them (on the one hand), and the agent’s self-conceptions (on the other), are in some sense mutually determining. After discussing the Co-Determination Thesis, I will offer a few comments on the role that Frankfurt’s notion of “identification” plays in the account I will be reconstructing (3.2.3). The third step of this argument combines the first two in the form of a claim that links “internal” normative reasons and self-conceptions (3.2.4).<sup>1</sup>

#### 3.2.1 Step One: Frankfurt’s Internalism Thesis

Frankfurt’s first-level account of practical reasons—which concerns the inference patterns that one should apply in one’s deliberations—is strongly

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<sup>1</sup> While Frankfurt doesn’t speak of “normative reasons” per se, he is clearly referring throughout to considerations that actually justify actions. When Frankfurt argues, for example, that people who don’t care for impartial morality have no reason to follow it, he is arguing that such people are *justified* in not following it. I will accordingly be talking about Frankfurt’s account of normative reasons throughout, even though he doesn’t use this term.

“internalistic,” or desire-based. Simply put, what Frankfurt thinks one has normative reason to do is pursue projects that one cares about. That Frankfurt is committed to this thesis is quite clear; why precisely he is committed to it is less so. Based on some of his comments, I would guess that Frankfurt is moved by the thought that a normative reason must be able to justify actions to a particular agent in a way that this agent himself can recognize, which Frankfurt presumes cannot happen unless these actions are suitably connected to what the agent cares about. (This also appears to be the sort of consideration that has prompted others to think that normative reasons must be connected to the agent’s desires in this way).

It is interesting to note that when Frankfurt employs this thesis to make a point in his works, he often focuses on particularly strong desires rather than mere preferences and tastes, presumably for rhetorical force. He tells stories about agents who care passionately about certain projects and deeply love friends or family members. In a telling passage, he remarks that: “In my view, there really is no authority for us other than the authority of what we care about—or, more particularly, the authority of love” (Frankfurt (8): 276). For Frankfurt, the reason-giving force of a project extends only so far as one cares about it; moral principles and other practical proposals are reason-giving only to the extent that one cares about them.<sup>2</sup> This general view is a central theme in Frankfurt’s work, and further textual evidence of this sort abounds (much of which will appear in citations presented throughout this chapter in support of different claims).

Parallel to this view of normative reasons is Frankfurt’s theory of value. As discussed in the previous chapter, one’s view of the relationship between desires and normative reasons often closely matches one’s view of the relationship between

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<sup>2</sup> See Frankfurt’s discussion of moral principles in “The Importance of What We Care About” (Frankfurt (1): Chapter 7) and “Autonomy, Necessity, and Love,” (Frankfurt (2): Chapter 11).

desires and values, simply because normative reasons and values are often seen as closely connected. Given the preceding discussion, we would expect to find Frankfurt claiming (as Korsgaard did) that certain objects have value because agents care about them. And while this does indeed appear to be Frankfurt's considered view, he doesn't always appear to be of one mind on this issue.

On the one hand, Frankfurt sometimes speaks as though the reason-giving force of an object is a joint product of its "desire-independent value" and the fact that one cares about it. Frankfurt has claimed, for example:

...[T]he fact that the claims of my ideals and of my beloved count for me as reasons in the way they do does seem to me to derive from the fact that I have certain attitudes toward them....Similarly, the peculiar authority over me of my ideals does not come simply from my recognition that they are, like many things that are not among my ideals, worthy or valuable. It comes from my sense of the particular way in which my ideals are valuable to me" (Frankfurt (5): 188).

This passage implies that there are two existence conditions on my normative reasons; I must care about an object, and it must have value apart from my caring about it. Frankfurt seemed to be most hospitable to this view in his earlier work (although his considered position isn't entirely clear in these pieces either).<sup>3</sup>

In other passages Frankfurt's remarks are more ambiguous. He states at one point that "The loving itself is what is fundamental. Our evaluation of the beloved object, or our effort to persuade ourselves that what we love possesses value, is more often a response to the loving than its source" (Frankfurt (7): 249). It is unclear whether Frankfurt is suggesting that my loving a given object makes it valuable, or whether my loving it simply makes it seem valuable to me (which leaves open the possibility of its having desire-independent value of some sort).

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<sup>3</sup>See for example (Frankfurt (1): 92-3) and (Frankfurt (2):162).

However, the most of Frankfurt's remarks suggest that he thinks values are determined by one's desires, and hence that caring about something is both necessary and sufficient for its value. Frankfurt has recently claimed, for example: "My view is that values track love and that love—if we look to the end of the story—has no reasons" (Frankfurt (8): 276). Perhaps even more telling, Frankfurt has recently suggested that Hitler had reason to pursue the projects he did because of his concern for them, where his concern proved sufficient to underwrite the reasons in question. These sorts of remarks clearly indicate that caring is for Frankfurt, a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of both normative reasons and values. Again, further support for these claims will surface in later sections.

Before moving on to the second step of Frankfurt's argument, we need to address a possible worry. Given the two-level framework that I have adopted to make sense of Frankfurt's view, it could be argued (and one might even think that the account as a whole would make more sense if one were to argue) that what I have said about Frankfurt's theory of value is part of his second-level account. For if you are inclined to think that most agents typically take themselves to be responding to the desire-independent value of their pursuits, then it will seem that Frankfurt's claim that "desires determine values" must be a second-level claim.

As it turns out, however, Frankfurt doesn't appear to share this view about what first-person deliberation is like. On the contrary, Frankfurt appears to think that agents typically act with the "knowledge" that their projects have value because they care about them. To put this point in terms of a pair of distinctions that Korsgaard makes in "Two Distinctions in Goodness,"<sup>4</sup> Frankfurt's view is that deliberating agents sincerely believe that the things they care about have only "extrinsic" value,

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<sup>4</sup> (Korsgaard (2): 249-74). According to Korsgaard, the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction concerns the source of an object's value (if it is valuable because I care about, it has extrinsic value), whereas the final/instrumental distinction concerns the character of this value (if it is valuable as a means to something else, it has instrumental value).

since the *source* of their value lies in the attitudes of the agent, and not in the object. Given this view, it would be appropriate to attribute this view to the first level of Frankfurt's theory, since it is accessible to, and (according to Frankfurt) often acknowledged by agents in their first-person deliberations.

To look ahead for a moment, Frankfurt's view on how agents think of their pursuits is also worth mentioning because it will play a big role in my argument that Frankfurt does indeed hold a two-level account. The idea is this. While Frankfurt thinks that deliberating agents will treat cared-for objects as *extrinsically* value (since the agents are the source of this value), he also thinks that they will treat them as having *final* value rather than *instrumental* value (since many cared-for objects are viewed as valuable for their own sake, and not for their contribution to something else). To illustrate, according to Frankfurt I will see that my friend Linda has a certain sort of value only because I care about her (so her value is extrinsic), even though I think that she is valuable for her own sake rather than for the sake of the pleasure she brings me (so her value is final rather than instrumental). Again, I point this out because my argument that Frankfurt offers a two-level view rests largely on the claim that he treats the value status of cared-for objects differently depending upon whether he is considering them from the first-person point of view. I'll return to this argument in Section 3.3.

### **3.2.2 Step Two: The Co-Determination Thesis**

This brings us to the second step of Frankfurt's argument for his first-level account, which concerns what I will refer to as the Co-Determination Thesis (CDT). As a first approximation, CDT posits the following: an agent's practical commitments and the normative reasons that are associated with them (on the one hand), and the agent's self-conceptions (on the other), are in some sense mutually determining.



While it is unclear precisely what sort of connection Frankfurt envisions between these items, at the very least he suggests that any determinations or discoveries that the agent makes with respect to one of them (normative reasons or self-conceptions) will have a significant impact on the other.

Since CDT posits a bidirectional relationship between self-conceptions and normative reasons, to get a bit clearer on what this view says it might be helpful to split it into its two component claims. The first of these holds that in determining that I have reason to pursue object X, I will identify with my interest in X and will in turn wind up with a new or modified self-conception. For example, if I come to think that I have reasons to help protect the environment (reasons that aren't derived from an antecedent self-conception), I thereby acquire the self-conception "Environmental Activist," or something to this effect.

The second claim holds that by concluding that I am simply the sort of person that cannot help but care about project Z (that this is part of "who I am"), I will come to recognize a new set of normative reasons that reflects this self-conception. For example, if I conclude that I am at bottom a "Pacifist," I will come to think that I have reasons for refraining from physically harming others. Commitments that I make to a set of practical reasons becomes "encoded," or reflected in my self-conceptions, and vice versa. In the discussion that follows, I will refer to the first part of CDT as the "reasons-to-conceptions" element, and the second as the "conceptions-to-reasons" element. (If these examples seem a bit under-developed, I have left them this way for a reason. As I will discuss below, one of the primary concerns I have with CDT is that it isn't detailed enough to allow us to fill in these sorts of examples adequately.)

While Frankfurt doesn't explicitly state CDT in any of his writings or offer any formal arguments for it, he makes a number of remarks that imply that he subscribes to this view. Consider the following five claims:

- “When the decision is made without reservation...the person no longer holds himself apart from the desire to which he has committed himself...The decision determines what the person really wants by making the desire on which he decides fully his own. To this extent the person, in making a decision by which he identifies with a desire, constitutes himself...He takes responsibility for the fact of having the desire...when he identifies himself with it” (Frankfurt (1): 170).
- “Since it is most conspicuously by making a decision that a person identifies with some element of his psychic life, deciding plays an important role in the formation and maintenance of the self...making a decision is something that we do *to ourselves*” (Frankfurt (1): 172).
- “It is these acts of ordering and of rejection [of desires, rather than the mere presence of such desires]...that create a self out of the raw materials of inner life” (Frankfurt (1): 170).
- “There is a sense...in which people may be defined by their volitional limits and in which the survival of the self therefore requires a certain motivational constancy or continuity. (Frankfurt (3): 125).
- “A person who fails to act in the ways that caring about his beloved requires necessarily fails to live in accordance with his ideal for himself. In betraying the object of his love, he therefore betrays himself as well” (Frankfurt (2): 139). [See also Frankfurt’s footnote on how Agamemnon is “destroyed” when he acts against his own self-ideal].<sup>5</sup>

Before commenting on these passages, I first need to address a possible concern. Since my focus is on the relationship between reasons and *self-conceptions*, one might worry about the fact that many of these citations appear to refer to the relationship between reasons and “the self.” Is Frankfurt speaking here of what someone *is* or what someone *takes oneself to be*? The central problem here is that Frankfurt does at times appear to use the term “self” to refer not to self-conceptions,

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<sup>5</sup> “Thus, Agamemnon at Aulis is destroyed by an inescapable conflict between two equally defining elements of his own nature: his love for his daughter and his love for the army he commands. His ideals for himself include both being a devoted father and being devoted to the welfare of his men. When he is forced to sacrifice one of these, he is thereby forced to betray himself. Rarely, if ever, do tragedies of this sort have sequels. Since the volitional unity of the tragic hero has been irreparably ruptured, there is a sense in which the person he had been no longer exists. Hence, there can be no continuation of *his* story.”

but rather to something like one's psychological profile, which is to be understood largely in terms of one's proclivity to treat certain considerations as reasons.

As I will argue, there are three good reasons for thinking that Frankfurt is referring to what I have been calling "self-conceptions" in these passages. First, it is important to note that the passages in which Frankfurt makes many of these claims about the "self" involve deliberative contexts: how agents figure out what to do based on thoughts about what they are like, how they respond to "threats" to themselves, etc. When I take myself to have a reason to act in a certain way because *I* am a certain way (or to avoid certain threats to myself), it must be a self-conception that is doing the relevant work, because it is my *self-view* that is the basis of these purported reasons. Since one's encounters with oneself are always mediated through one's beliefs about what one is, the object in question will invariably be a self-conception.<sup>6</sup>

Second, some of Frankfurt's remarks—especially those concerning the cost of acting against one's identifications, as in the Agamemnon case—are simply implausible unless we take him to be talking about self-conceptions rather than psychological profiles. On this point I agree with David Velleman, who, commenting on Frankfurt's discussion of self-concern and "being true to oneself," claims that "In this...usage, I think, the term 'self' refers...to the person's own reflexive representations, which make up his self-image or self-conception" (Velleman (2): 112). Claiming that Agamemnon is destroyed by his action—such that, for example, anyone who loaned money to Agamemnon before this tragedy can no longer rightfully collect money from the guy living in Agamemnon's house—seems false. Claiming

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<sup>6</sup> It is thus telling that Frankfurt's emphasis in the first and third citations are on the "self" that is created out of one's decisions about which desires to act upon, rather than on a "self" that is composed of these desires themselves and their modifications. The fact that it is one's *consciousness of* and *attention to* these desires that create the "self" in question—rather than the simple existence of unattended desires—suggests that Frankfurt really has self-conceptions in mind here. See also Frankfurt's suggestion at (Frankfurt (1): 172) that the "immediate object" of a choice is actually the chooser.

that Agamemnon can no longer think of himself the way he did before seems a bit closer to the mark.

Third, many of Frankfurt's remarks turn out to be rather trivial if he has only psychological profiles in mind. Take for example his claim that when one decides to do something, one creates a "self." If his point is simply that when one chooses to do something, one *ipso facto* becomes the sort of person who makes choices of that sort, the sense in which a "self" is created seems rather uninteresting. If, on the other hand, his point is that one's self-conceptions and self-understanding (or the bases for one's self-conceptions and self-understanding) are constituted in part by the choices one makes, this claim might be worth considering.<sup>7</sup>

With these points in mind, let us return to the preceding citations as evidence for CDT.<sup>8</sup> As the first three bulleted citations indicate, Frankfurt appears to think that the decisions one makes and the projects one commits oneself to—one's conclusions concerning what reasons for action one has—play a central role in the determination of one's self-conception. I take his general point to be that in the process of

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<sup>7</sup> To round out the discussion as completely as possible, let's assume for the moment that someone is unconvinced by these arguments. In other words, suppose someone thinks that Frankfurt uses the term "self" to refer simply to a psychological profile of sorts, rather than to a self-conception. The question to ask here is: if Frankfurt is in fact referring to psychological profiles throughout, can we say something interesting about the implications that this view might have on the relationship between self-conceptions and normative reasons? Can we fit self-conceptions into this picture in an interesting way? I think we can, by arguing along the following lines. First, we would maintain that on the proposed reading of Frankfurt, the primary relationship is indeed between normative reasons and a particular understanding of the "self" as a psychological profile. The important additional claim to make would be that the "self" that is determined through one's practical commitments is also the "self" that serves as the basis of one's self-conceptions, if one consciously reflects upon who one is. Accordingly, we could claim that the determination of one's practical commitments influences one's self-conceptions at a remove; the determination of these commitments winds up determining what sort of *self* one is (in the sense that they contribute to a fuller determination of one's psychological profile), which in turn *should* serve as the basis of one's self-conception (if one takes the time to ask who or what one is). The upshot is that even if one is inclined to hold a different view of Frankfurt than the one I have recommended, we can still work self-conceptions into the picture in interesting ways. To look ahead for a moment, the general strategy I have just recommended anticipates the sort of view of the normative reasons/self-conceptions relationship that I will be pursuing in later chapters.

<sup>8</sup> Note that further textual evidence for attributing CDT to Frankfurt will be provided in Section 3.2.4. I present these passages later on because they speak more directly to other considerations that I want to discuss.

committing myself to particular projects, I also wind up developing a new understanding of myself as the sort of person who has taken up these kinds of projects. Upon committing myself to the value of certain environmental causes—once I come to think that I have reason to support these causes—I will begin to think of myself as an “Environmental Activist.” In coming to think that I should be involved in the world in certain ways, I come to think of myself as being a certain sort of person.

This brings us to the second element of CDT. While Frankfurt’s focus in his discussion is mostly on the reasons-to-conceptions relationship, I take the last two bulleted citations presented above to illustrate the sort of claims that Frankfurt makes about the conceptions-to-reasons relationship.<sup>9</sup> Frankfurt’s point is that I cannot act in ways that run contrary to what I take myself to be (or ideals that I set for myself, to take up the second of these two citations) without jeopardizing my existence as being rightly described by the self-conception in question. If I come to the conclusion that I am at bottom a pacifist (which amounts to holding the self-conception “Pacifist”), then I have reasons to refrain from performing acts of violence. Failing to recognize these reasons (failing to maintain a “certain motivational constancy or continuity” with respect to abstaining from violent behavior) will threaten my very survival, at least in a certain metaphorical sense, given that I take an essential feature of myself to be my pacifism. The general idea is that if I view myself as a Z, I cannot coherently act in ways that are inappropriate for a Z (or at least not with much frequency) and maintain the self-conception “Z.” It is important to note that when Frankfurt discusses the ways in which a self-conception can generate reasons for action, the particular reasons that

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<sup>9</sup> That Frankfurt focuses on the former is unsurprising; as I suggested in my discussion of Korsgaard, our focus as deliberating agents is typically on projects and reasons for acting rather than on ourselves, so it would be natural to give more attention to the impact of our decision-making on our self-conceptions than the other way around.

Frankfurt discusses are always reasons of a certain sort: namely reasons grounded in the value of self-preservation.<sup>10</sup>

Paralleling his focus on particularly powerful desires in the sphere of what I have called the Internalism Thesis, Frankfurt's discussion of the conceptions-to-reasons element of CDT often focuses on volitional necessities—which are in one sense just particularly entrenched elements of one's volitional self-profile—rather than on more contingent elements. Once again I think this focus is partly an artifact of Frankfurt's rhetorical strategy; it is quite plausible to suggest that one has reason to act in ways commensurate with one's view of what one essentially is. The central point that Frankfurt is trying to make, however, would seem to hold for any self-conception that one endorses, including ones that are less entrenched than volitional necessities; the stakes will simply be lower when more contingent aspects of one's self-view are at issue.

When all is said and done, Frankfurt winds up offering an account of normative reasons that in some respects resembles Korsgaard's view. The central difference between the two is that whereas Korsgaard sees the relationship between self-conceptions and normative reasons as unidirectional (the former give rise to the latter), for Frankfurt, the relationship is bidirectional (they are mutually determining). CDT tells us that any determinations that one makes concerning either reasons for action or self-conceptions will have an important impact on the other. In the course of determining what practical principles I should endorse (and accordingly what normative reasons I have), I wind up building a self-conception. Similarly, in the course of determining what I am like—especially when it comes to identifying the

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<sup>10</sup> For more on the rather complex relationship between self-conceptions, self-preservation, and the sort of "death" that Frankfurt alludes to in these cases, see Velleman's "Identification and Identity."

volitional necessities that constitute my self-image—I wind up determining certain normative reasons for action.

### 3.2.3 An Aside on “Identification”

Another reason for attributing CDT to Frankfurt involves his claims about the role that “identification” plays in deliberation. What precisely he means by this term is not always clear, although I suspect that this notion figures prominently in those elements of Frankfurt’s view that figure into what I have been calling CDT. Without going into too much detail on this subject, a good case could be made for the claim that, according to Frankfurt, the process of “identifying” with something *just is* the process of coming to see it as both reason-giving and integral to one’s self-conception. In other words, identification is the process through which the relationship modeled by CDT is instantiated in an agent’s deliberations and actions. For example, when I identify with a desire to save the environment (or perhaps with the project of saving the environment), this desire (or project) becomes both reason-giving *and* a part of who I take myself to be.<sup>11</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that Frankfurt’s view of identification further confirms my attribution of the Internalism Thesis to him. Frankfurt claims at one point that “Identification[s are] volitional states that necessarily create reasons but that do not otherwise depend upon them. We can identify with various psychic elements...without having any reasons for doing so” (Frankfurt (6): 218). In a similar vein, he argues that “it is identification that indispensably constitutes the source and the ground of reasons” (Frankfurt (6): 219). To the extent that I “identify” with what I care about—which in turn makes items with which I have identified reason-giving—the upshot is that desires are what give rise to reasons for action. Moreover, based on

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<sup>11</sup> For more discussion of the two-fold role of identification, see (Frankfurt (1): 67-8).

the first citation above, these reason-giving acts of willing needn't have any reasoned basis or justification to count as reason-giving. Even somewhat "arbitrary" acts of concern are reason-giving for Frankfurt as long as they count as instances of identification.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.2.4 Step Three: The (First Level) Relationship Between Normative Reasons and Self-Conceptions**

On the basis of the preceding sections, we are now in a position to summarize the first-level component of Frankfurt's account. CDT establishes a fundamental relationship between normative reasons and self-conceptions, and the Internalism Thesis establishes the role of desire satisfaction as a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of normative reasons. Combining the two gives us the following view: not only is it the case that my normative reasons are determined by the things that I care about generally, but (a) an important subset of these things will be my self-conceptions (this is the conceptions-to-reasons leg of CDT), and (b) that I have certain normative reasons will have some impact on the self-conceptions that I hold (this is the reasons-to-conceptions leg of CDT). To know that a particular agent has a particular normative reason, is to know both something about what this agent cares about, and something about his self-conceptions.

With a general understanding of Frankfurt's first level account in hand, I would like to consider a question about what motivated Frankfurt to build CDT into his theory of normative reasons in the first place. Precisely what work is CDT doing

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that Frankfurt has been ambiguous in his commitment to this view as well. Frankfurt does occasionally suggest that endorsement needn't play an essential role in instances of identification (somewhat plausibly, in my opinion, but rather inconsistently given Frankfurt's comments elsewhere). "Since I may identify with desires of mine of which I do not approve, identification does not entail endorsement. Since I may identify with desires that I consider to be quite trivial...identifying does not entail caring (Frankfurt (4): 161). While Frankfurt's considered view on this topic is unclear, since almost all of his comments track what I have called the Internalism Thesis, this is the view that I will be holding him to.



in this account? Even if we accept CDT as true, why does Frankfurt introduce it into his arguments? What is the importance of the fact that we can apparently “translate” or “encode” our practical commitments into self-conceptions? While Frankfurt doesn’t offer any direct answers, my own (admittedly speculative) thought is that building CDT into his argument allows Frankfurt to strengthen the case for other claims about normative reasons that he is interested in. More specifically, I cannot help but think that Frankfurt leans on CDT at least in part to underwrite the plausibility of his Internalism Thesis.

Consider the following thought. If you think reasons are linked to desires, and if you focus your thinking exclusively on run-of-the-mill desires and concerns, you may find it difficult to defend your decisions to act in ways that others consider immoral. Simply claiming that you should be let off the hook for an immoral action because acting otherwise would have been contrary to your desires will strike many as a weak excuse. Even if you don’t share the moral view of others, the fact that others don’t accept “frustrated desire” excuses might trouble you. You might accordingly try to think of ways of strengthening your position so as to get you off the hook with moralists.

One way of doing this would involve showing that acting contrary to certain things you care about involves a penalty much more severe than a frustrated desire. For example, if you could argue that abandoning a project you care about could threaten your very identity—and in extreme cases, you as the person you are (recall the Agamemnon case)—then you will be on much stronger ground. This line of thinking is basically what I imagine might have motivated Frankfurt’s commitment to CDT. Consider the following four citations (two of which we have seen already).

- “A person who fails to act in the ways that caring about his beloved requires necessarily fails to live in accordance with his ideal for himself.

In betraying the object of his love, he therefore betrays himself as well” (Frankfurt (2): 139).

- “Now the character of a person’s will constitutes what he most centrally is. Accordingly, the volitional necessities that bind a person identify what he cannot help being. They are in this respect analogues of the logical or conceptual necessities that define the essential nature of a triangle....The boundaries of the will define his shape as a person” (Frankfurt (2): 114).
- “There is a sense...in which people may be defined by their volitional limits and in which the survival of the self therefore requires a certain motivational constancy or continuity. In this sense, of course, survival is not a matter of life and death” (Frankfurt (3): 125).
- “What volitional necessities keep us from violating are not our duties or our obligations, but ourselves” (Frankfurt (1): 91).

In addition to serving as further evidence of Frankfurt’s commitment to CDT, these citations (and the forceful language in which they are worded) illustrate the rhetorical element of the move I am attributing to Frankfurt. Since complaining that the abandonment of a beloved project will cause one pain is unlikely to move someone who is worried that a moral imperative might require this sacrifice, Frankfurt has provided agents with a stronger argument against the moralist by annexing their pursuit of certain projects to their very survival, via CDT. The success of this move (if it is successful) turns largely on the belief that the integrity of one’s self and one’s self-conceptions carries more argumentative weight than the pain of frustrated desires.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.3 Frankfurt’s Second-Level Account

Having discussed the first level of Frankfurt’s account of reasons, we turn now to the second level, which pertains to theoretical justification. The argument reconstructed below is accordingly not meant to guide practical reasoning; indeed, as I will argue later, it isn’t clear that it could. Unlike in the case of indirect utilitarianism,

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<sup>13</sup> I take this rhetorical move to closely parallel the line of argument offered by Bernard Williams in “Persons, Character, and Morality.”

the separation between the two levels exists not because allowing second-level considerations to guide first-level deliberations would lessen one's chances of achieving second-level goals, but rather because second-level facts are incompatible with our first-person deliberative commitments. The defining features of deliberation for creatures like us preclude the incorporation of Frankfurt's second-level considerations into our first-level deliberations, at least in the long run.

To sum up this second-level account, the basic idea is that there are certain norms constitutive of our nature as deliberating agents which demand that we be wholehearted in our practical commitments. Given that these norms are closely tied to our very existence as the sort of creatures that we are, Frankfurt grants them absolute authority. Since I cannot exist at all unless I satisfy these norms to some extent, no actions that I perform can be justified unless they receive some sort of blessing from these norms. Frankfurt even goes so far as to suggest that wholeheartedness (understood as a catch-all for the values associated with satisfying these norms) is the only object of true intrinsic value; other things have value only to the extent that they contribute to wholeheartedness.<sup>14</sup> The argument for this view can be broken down into six steps.

**Step One.** As a deliberating agent, I face a problem: I need to figure out what to do with my life—what actions to perform, what projects to commit myself to, what ends my life should be shaped around, etc. Call this the “problem of commitment.” Without committing myself to some practical projects, I cannot have any reason for performing any particular actions. Frankfurt claims that “...if the restrictions on the choices that a person is in a position to make are relaxed too far, he may become, to a greater or lesser degree, disoriented with respect to where his interest and preferences

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<sup>14</sup> In addition to textual support from Frankfurt's earlier writings (which are the focus of what follows), I take the general spirit of this interpretation of Frankfurt to be “independently confirmed” by Barbara Herman's like-minded attempt to summarize Frankfurt's view in her “Bootstrapping,” and Frankfurt's subsequent endorsement of Herman's interpretation (see Frankfurt (8)).

lie” (Frankfurt (2): 109). Similarly, “someone free of all such restrictions is so vacant of identifiable and stable volitional tendencies and constraints that he cannot deliberate or make decisions in any conscientious way” (Frankfurt (2): 110). I need some fixed commitments simply to orient myself with respect to the options that are open to me. Without any projects or objects of concern, how could I ever have reason to go to my office rather than stand on my head or do nothing whatsoever?<sup>15</sup>

**Step Two.** The solution to this problem will be a set of projects that I conclude I ought to pursue. By coming up with a set of projects and making it operative in my practical deliberations, I will solve the problem of commitment. Call this set of projects and commitments the “solution set.” A given agent’s solution set might contain a number of projects of varying importance, which can involve beloved relatives and friends, professional career goals, life ambitions, hobbies, etc. So long as the agent has some set of fixed points by which she can evaluate her options, she will have solved the problem of commitment.

**Step Three.** As it turns out, I face another general demand that finding a solution set alone cannot satisfy. This is the need to be convinced that a given solution set is really the best one for me to pursue. I must, in other words, be wholehearted in my commitment to this set. Call this the “demand of efficacy,” which serves as an additional constraint on possible solutions to the problem of commitment. Not only must I come up with a solution set, but my will must be oriented to it in the right way.

This additional demand is imposed on me as a deliberating agent for two reasons. The first involves the particularly troubling implications that ambivalence (i.e. a lack of wholeheartedness) has for an agent given the relationship between agency and practical pursuits. If my specific nature as an agent is defined by my

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<sup>15</sup> The point that Frankfurt is making in these passages is very similar to the point Charles Taylor makes concerning “frameworks,” “horizons,” and “orientation” in Chapter 2 of *Sources of the Self*.

practical commitments (I am the particular agent that I am because I have *these* commitments and not others), then any instability in my practical commitments will lead to an “instability” in my agency. Frankfurt remarks; “Like conflicts within reason, volitional conflict leads to self-betrayal and self-defeat...” and similarly, “If ambivalence is a disease of the will, the health of the will is to be unified and in this sense wholehearted” (Frankfurt (2): 99, 100). A blurry and unstable set of ground projects leads to blurry and unstable agency. As further evidence for this, Frankfurt asks us to examine our common psychological reactions to projects that we are ambivalent about. “There is, I believe, a quite primitive human need to establish and to maintain volitional unity. Any threat to this unity—that is, any threat to the cohesion of the self—tends to alarm a person and to mobilize him for an attempt at ‘self-preservation’” (Frankfurt (2): 139).

The second reason why a successful agent must be wholehearted—which is perhaps less interesting than the first, but important nonetheless—is based on more mundane practical difficulties. It will often be the case for any given project P that I cannot both be committed to pursuing P and not pursuing P at the same time; accordingly, I will often need to be decisive in committing myself to a project, which in turn at least sometimes requires that I be convinced that it is the right thing to do. Frankfurt points out that “The disunity of an ambivalent person’s will prevents him from effectively pursuing and satisfactorily attaining his goals,” which implies that “to remain persistently ambivalent concerning issues of substantial importance in the conduct of life is a significant disability” (Frankfurt (2): 99, 102).

Setting aside talk of the norms that govern agency, it should be relatively clear that the likelihood of achieving one’s goals—which is typically what an agent will be most concerned with in his day-to-day deliberations—is threatened by a lack of wholeheartedness. The characters that appear in Henry James’ *The Ambassadors*

serve as a good illustration of these ambivalence-based threats. Strether's ambivalence with respect to the disparate ends he is half-heartedly pursuing throughout the book—along with his eventual “failure”—is set out by James in stark contrast to the wholehearted vision and relentless pursuit of the Wollett contingent's ends by the ultimately “successful” Sarah Newsome and her mother.

To sum up, while the problem of commitment tells us that to be an agent one needs a set of ends to pursue, the demand of efficacy tells us that being an effective agent requires that these ends be pursued wholeheartedly (or at least that effective agency requires some baseline degree of wholeheartedness, and perhaps the more the better).

**Step Four.** This brings us to the mechanism through which one becomes wholehearted. Frankfurt's view is that one becomes wholehearted with respect to a solution set by decisively identifying with its members. What is decisive identification? Frankfurt illustrates this concept by discussing an analogy involving mathematical calculation. The analog of decisive identification in his example comes when one has performed a mathematical operation to one's complete satisfaction. When I add the numbers four and five and arrive at the sum of nine, I am confident that further reflection on this problem—or its repeated re-calculation—will yield the same answer on each occasion. Accordingly, my commitment to the answer “nine” will “resound endlessly;” it is made without reservation (Frankfurt (1): 168).

Similarly, when I decisively identify with a given project—say that of helping my brother find a job—I become equally wholehearted with respect to this project. I am convinced that no further deliberation on my part will yield an answer different from the one at which I have already arrived. Accordingly, I am in no way ambivalent toward this project. While seeking decisive identification and wholeheartedness certainly won't have been the ends that I had in view when I was wondering whether I

should help my brother, it is Frankfurt's second-level claim that achieving wholeheartedness was at least a background norm that will have determined whether my proposed action really was the right one. Consider the following two citations:

- “It might be said, then, that a function of decision [of a sort that is itself a function of identification] is to integrate the person both dynamically and statically....In both respects, the intent is at least partly to resolve conflict or to avoid it. This is...achieved...by endorsing or identifying with certain elements which are then authoritative for the self” (Frankfurt (1): 175).
- “When the body heals itself, it eliminates conflicts in which one physical process (say, infection) interferes with others and undermines the homeostasis, or equilibrium, in which health consists. A person who makes up his mind also seeks thereby to overcome or to supersede a condition of inner division and to make himself into an integrated whole” (Frankfurt (1): 174).

As discussed in Step Three, wholeheartedness is what brings unity to one's agency, and the present point is simply that it is through instances of decisive identification that we become wholehearted.

**Step Five.** On the basis of the preceding points, we can now offer a further claim about what it means to be an agent. In essence, an agent is a being who seeks wholehearted commitment to a solution set. My most basic task in my life as an agent is to do just this. To the extent that I am actually doing this (and perhaps succeeding to at least some extent), I will continue to exist as an agent. To the extent that I am no longer doing this, it is no longer clear that I will count as an agent at all (or at least an effective agent). Accordingly, we could say that the problem of commitment and the demand of efficacy serve as the constitutive norms that govern my very being as an agent. While meeting these requirements is certainly not my aim as a deliberating agent trying to figure out what to do (we are now speaking, after all, of the second level of Frankfurt's account), these requirements nonetheless constitute my success

conditions as an agent. And in this case, success means wholehearted commitment to a solution set.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that two senses of one's "essence" have been introduced at this point. We have, on the one hand, what could be called one's *core essence*, which defines what one most basically *is*; namely, an agent beholden to certain practical demands. On the other hand, we also have what I will refer to as *personal essence*, which we can define as the *particular* volitional necessities that give an agent's will the particular shape that it has (see, for example, the earlier reference to Frankfurt's triangle analogy). While my personal essence—which includes my love of particular family members and my views on what's good in life—may differ significantly from your own, we both share the same core essence as agents beholden to certain practical demands.

**Step Six.** Having discussed the elements of Frankfurt's second level view as it pertains to the problems and solutions of effective agency, we turn now to the implications that Frankfurt takes these views to have for our second-level value theory. In several passages Frankfurt suggests that the everyday objects of our first-level concern have no final value whatsoever (despite the deliberating agent's belief that they do), but have instead merely instrumental value as the means for satisfying the agency-governing norms discussed above. (For simplicity's sake, I will refer to this basket of values more generally as "wholeheartedness;" i.e. when I use this term, it should be read as "the value of being wholeheartedly committed to a viable solution set.") Accordingly, in terms of the second level of Frankfurt's account, not only is a cared-for object's contribution to wholeheartedness sufficient to make it valuable (albeit instrumentally so), this may also be a necessary condition of its value as well. Consider the following:



- “The significance to us of caring is thus more basic than the importance to us of what we care about....the value to us of the fact that we care about various things does not derive simply from the value or the suitability of the objects about which we care. Caring is important to us for its own sake, insofar as it is the indispensably foundational activity through which we provide continuity and coherence to our volitional lives” (Frankfurt (2): 162).
- “The varieties of being concerned or dedicated, and of loving, are important to us quite apart from any antecedent capacities for affecting us which what we care about may have. This is not particularly because caring about something makes us susceptible to certain additional gratifications and disappointments. It is primarily because it serves to connect us actively to our lives in ways which are creative of ourselves and which expose us to distinctive possibilities for necessity and freedom” (Frankfurt (1): 93).
- “The point is that loving is valuable *inherently* and for its own sake. It does not enhance our lives simply by connecting us to other valuable things, or by fulfilling some presumed responsibility to care about whatever things have value on their own” (Frankfurt (2): 173).

On the basis of these claims and the preceding arguments, it is easy to get the impression that for Frankfurt the only object of intrinsic, final value is to be found in an agent’s wholehearted commitment to a solution set.

The upshot is that any given solution set can possess only extrinsic, instrumental value as a means to wholeheartedness, which is the only object of intrinsic, final value. Supreme reason-giving authority for Frankfurt is defined by the constitutive norms that make us the sort of creatures that we are. Anything else can have reason-giving value from this second-level perspective only insofar as it meets this requirement, and only because it does meet it.

It seems to me that the authority that love has for us is closely related to this compelling and irreducible need to protect the unity of the self. Since the commands of love derive from the essential nature of a person’s will, a person who voluntarily disobeys those commands is thereby acting voluntarily against the requirements of his own will. He is opposing ends and interests that are essential to his nature as a person. In other words, he is betraying himself (Frankfurt (2): 139).

It is interesting to note that Frankfurt's view that values are a function of what one cares about is constant between the two levels of his account of reasons; the main difference between the two lies in the character of the values as they are experienced by the deliberating agent and as they are viewed by the theorist looking in from the outside. For example, that I care about environmental activism figures prominently in an explanation of why I have normative reason to pursue this project according to both levels of Frankfurt's account. According to the first level, environmental activism is a project with extrinsic, final value, and I have reason to pursue it because it matters so much to me. According to the second level, environmental activism is a project with extrinsic, instrumental value, and I have reason to pursue it because doing so contributes to and constitutes my wholeheartedness (and hence the sort of "motivational consistency" that is critical to my success as an agent).

Asked why I have reason to pursue this project, I would probably offer the following sorts of answer: "because this project is of great value...a lot of people will be helped by its completion," or perhaps (as Frankfurt sometimes suggests) "because it is so near and dear to my heart." If the same question is asked of a Frankfurtian theorist looking in on me, however, the answer would be: "he has reason to pursue this project because his wholehearted commitment to it will bring him greater unity and stability as an agent, thus satisfying the constitutive norms that define his core essence."

### **3.4 Analysis**

Having completed this reconstruction of Frankfurt's account, I will now discuss some of its more important aspects. While much can be said, I will limit myself to a small basket of issues. Although I will raise some points of criticism in this section, I

will refrain from offering a detailed critique of several points that come up because I will be discussing them at greater length in Chapter 5.

### **3.4.1 The Relationship Between Reasons and Self-Conceptions Across the Two Levels of Frankfurt's Account**

While there are a number of similarities and contrasts between the two levels of Frankfurt's account, two are worth special attention. First, according to Frankfurt's first-level account, we can think of one's normative reasons as closely bound up with the expression and survival of those elements of one's *personal* essence—as well as the self-conceptions based upon it—that one cares about. This view follows from Frankfurt's commitment to the Internalism Thesis and CDT. According to Frankfurt's second-level account, on the other hand, normative reasons are closely bound up with the survival of one's *core* essence. What these two levels have in common for Frankfurt is accordingly a connection between normative reasons and the survival of the self; they differ in holding that different aspects of one's "essence" are at stake in one's actions. From the deliberative point of view, it appears to me as though acting in accordance with my personal essence is important because failing to do so threatens my survival as the person I am. From a more theoretical point of view, we can see that this sort of threat to my survival as the person I am is worrisome instead because such threats have larger implications for my success (and perhaps existence) as an agent more generally.

Second, there is an important implication of the fact that the first-level account involves the agent's deliberations in a way that the second-level account doesn't: namely, that Frankfurt's Internalism Thesis figures directly into our first-level explanations of why certain normative reasons exist, but not into our second-level explanations. Accordingly, while self-conceptions and other objects that the agent

cares about are what prove to be reason-giving on the first-level account, on the second-level view, one's core essence proves reason-giving regardless of whether or not the agent cares about it (and so this value appears to be desire-independent). The significance of this fact will become clear in my discussion of Frankfurt's view in Chapter 5.

### **3.4.2 Assessing the Co-Determination Thesis**

While I am inclined to argue that the general spirit of Frankfurt's CDT appears to be fairly sound on the whole (I will actually offer some considerations in support of a related view in later chapters), it is not without its problems. For present purposes, I will limit my remarks to four specific worries one might have about CDT. I will not follow up on them here, however; since they will form the basis upon which I launch my own account of the relationship between self-conceptions and normative reasons, I will be discussing them at greater length in Chapter 5.

The first and perhaps most serious worry one might have is that CDT is simply under-specified as it stands. Frankfurt clearly thinks that there is some relationship between reasons for action and self-conceptions, but the details of this relationship are very fuzzy (as my reconstruction of Frankfurt's view clearly demonstrates). Simply gesturing at a thesis of mutual determination isn't enough; we need to know more about how and why self-conceptions and practical reasons are mutually determining.

The second worry involves Frankfurt's claim that a very limited class of normative reasons underwrites the conceptions-to-reasons component of CDT: namely those grounded in considerations of self-preservation. Might it not be the case, however, that self-conceptions can give rise to reasons for acting that don't derive from worries about self-preservation, even in a metaphorical sense (as, for example, Korsgaard suggests)? Can't I think that I should act in ways expressive of the self-

conception “Justin’s Brother” without being primarily motivated by the thought that this self-description might no longer apply to me (at least on a certain understanding of what it really means to be a brother) if I fail to help Justin when he is in trouble?

The third worry concerns Frankfurt’s tendency to couch his claims about this relationship in rather descriptive language. Looking back at the five citations offered in support of CDT in Section 3.2.2, Frankfurt often appears to claim that there is a *direct* connection between reasons and self-conceptions, such that any change in one directly leads to a change in the other. The first bulleted citation, for example, holds that in making a decision—or in acknowledging that a certain reason for action exists—one *thereby* constitutes one’s self-conception (to put the claim in terms of self-conceptions, as I suggested we should do). The fourth citation (and its accompanying footnote in Frankfurt’s text suggesting that Agamemnon is “destroyed” by acting against himself) holds that in acting contrary to one’s self-conception, this self-conception is *thereby* lost to the agent.

The central problem here is that this sort of account cannot cope with a number of fairly intuitive counterexamples (two categories of which are worth special attention). What sense can we make of Frankfurt’s suggestion that there is a direct connection between normative reasons and self-conceptions given that one could act for a given reason without it having any real impact on one’s self-conceptions? One might simply not reflect at all on the question of what impact a practical commitment will have on one’s self-conception (this is the first type of case), or alternatively, one might commit oneself to a line of conduct that carries implications for the one’s self-conception that one finds too troubling to accept (this is the second). For example, what if the agent stubbornly refuses to think of himself as a selfish liar despite the fact that he lies all the time for personal gain (perhaps he can’t bring himself to think of himself that way, but is greedy enough to remain committed to a life of lies)? In short,

what if one's actual self-conceptions don't track one's practical commitments in a coherent way? For not only is it the case that some act of reflectivity on the agent's part appears to be necessary for the self that is established by one's recognition of normative reasons to become a self-conception (given how we have defined this term), but furthermore, these acts of reflectivity can at times "malfunction," whereby the self-conception that the agent forms doesn't coherently reflect her practical commitments.

The fourth worry is directed not so much at CDT itself, but rather at the conjunction of CDT with Frankfurt's Internalism Thesis. The worry is that this conjunction might misrepresent—or at least not provide a complete picture of—the relationship between self-conceptions and normative reasons. In particular, it could be argued that even self-conceptions that the agent doesn't care for can be reason-giving for that agent, and this may seem to be the case even from the agent's own point of view. If I am convinced that I am a rather insensitive person—even if I am not happy about this character trait—this self-conception can (and from my own point of view, should) be reason-giving in some contexts (recall my Chapter 1 claim that self-conceptions can figure into one's reasons either by recommending practical projects *or* by serving as practically relevant considerations). On the basis of this self-conception, for example, it seems that I have reason to avoid situations in which I will be around friends who I know are experiencing (what appear to me to be) trivial hardships, since I know that I am likely to make insensitive remarks that could upset them. Accordingly, Frankfurt may be wrong to limit his first-level account of reasons to self-conceptions that the agent cares about, even if this is perhaps the most interesting and important class of self-conceptions for us to consider.

### 3.4.3 Implications of Frankfurt's Two-Level Account

Finally, I would like to note two implications of the two-level aspect of Frankfurt's theory that will serve as a nice segue into the next chapter. The first implication is that from the first-level perspective of practical deliberation, it is wrong of me to think that what I care about possesses final value, even though it isn't clear that I can help but see these objects as possessing such value.

There is indeed much that needs to be said on this first point, but I will limit my discussion here to a few general comments. Given Korsgaard's two-fold distinction in goodness that I alluded to earlier, there are three plausible characters of goodness that one can potentially assign to the things that one cares about. (1) Intrinsic-final value, (2) extrinsic-final value, and (3) extrinsic-instrumental value. As I will argue in the next chapter, option (1) is the most plausible of the three; typically, I treat the things that I care about as if they possessed intrinsic-final value. As we have already seen, however, Frankfurt thinks that option (2) best tracks our own experience. This option holds that a cared-for object has value non-instrumentally (i.e. not for the sake of something else) from the agent's point of view, but the agent is nonetheless aware of the "fact" that the source of its value is the agent's desires.<sup>16</sup> The plausibility of this claim—at least in terms of much of our experience of value, if not all—is highly contestable.

To make matters even worse, Frankfurt occasionally suggests that option (3) properly characterizes our stance towards the things we care about. He claims at one point that:

It is a necessary truth about us, then, that we wholeheartedly desire to be wholehearted. This suggests a criterion for use in the design of ideals and

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<sup>16</sup> To locate this claim with respect to CDT, based on Frankfurt's description of why one has reason to comply with endorsed self-conceptions, this claim should be understood in reference to the reasons-to-conceptions arm of CDT.

programs of life, and generally in determining what to regard as important and to care about. What we care about should be, to the greatest extent possible, something we are able to care about wholeheartedly (Frankfurt (2): 106).

He also claims that “Instances of loving [i.e. being wholeheartedly committed to something] have intrinsic value, which they possess regardless of their other characteristics and regardless of the characteristics of their objects. Since loving as such is valuable, it is reasonable to desire it for its own sake” (Frankfurt (7): 245). While Frankfurt’s remarks to this effect are few and far between, he does occasionally suggest that, in our practical deliberations, we should shoot for wholeheartedness for its own sake, and furthermore, that we should perhaps choose among possible objects of concern solely on the basis of their contribution to wholeheartedness. It is important to note that whereas options (1) and (2) open up a gap between the two levels of Frankfurt’s account by positing different grounds for our normative reasons, option (3)—if Frankfurt ever meant to sincerely subscribe to it—implies no such tension between the two levels. For the time being I will simply remark that option (3) strikes me as incredibly implausible as both an account of how agents treat objects of concern, and as an account of how agents should be expected to deliberate and treat the things they love. Given the fact that Frankfurt only gestures at option (3) on a few occasions, however, it is unclear whether this is a position he really endorses.

The second implication of Frankfurt’s account is this. While there are a near-infinite number of possible solution sets that one could adopt and treat as reasoning from the first person perspective, from the second-level point of view, none of them are any better than any others (if we limit discussion for the moment to solution sets that can be pursued wholeheartedly, assuming that some cannot). Accordingly, if we assume that both Hitler’s project of conquest and genocide and Ghandi’s interest in promoting world peace are both willable wholeheartedly, both projects are equally valuable (as extrinsic-instrumental objects of value) and neither will have anything to



be said in favor of it over the other from a neutral point of view. That such a claim offends against the phenomenology of deliberation and our experience as first-person deliberators perhaps goes without saying. Nonetheless, this certainly seems to be an implication of Frankfurt's account (and indeed one that he has openly endorsed quite recently<sup>17</sup>), and one that will receive significant scrutiny in the next chapter.

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, his discussion at (Frankfurt (7): 246-8).