

# WOLF ON FREEDOM

Ted Sider  
Intro Metaphysics

## 1. Frankfurt

Basic idea of contemporary compatibilists: you're free if your psychology is arranged in the right way.

**Simple theory** A person acts freely if and only if her action is controlled by her desires

**Control**  $X$  controls  $Y$  if and only if:

- i)  $X$  in fact caused  $Y$ , and
- ii) if  $X$  had been different, that would have caused something else

In order for an agent to have both freedom of action and freedom of the will, that agent must be capable of governing his or her actions by first-order desires *and* capable of governing his or her first-order desires by second-order desires. (Wolf, p. 331)

**Frankfurt** A person acts freely if and only if

- i) her action is controlled by her first-order desires, and
- ii) her first-order desires are controlled by her second-order desires

## 2. Watson

**Watson** A person acts freely if and only if

- i) her action is controlled by her first-order desires, and
- ii) her first-order desires are controlled by her value system

(One's value system is one's beliefs about good and bad, right and wrong.)

### 3. Taylor

**Taylor** A person acts freely if and only if

- i) her action is controlled by her first-order desires, and
- ii) her first-order desires are controlled by her character, and
- iii) her character is “subject to self-assessment and redefinition...”

We human beings—and as far as we know, only we human beings—have the ability to step back from ourselves and decide whether we are the selves we want to be. (Wolf, p. 332)

### 4. The deep self view

Although there are subtle and interesting differences among the accounts of Frankfurt, Watson, and Taylor, my concern is with features of their views that are common to them all... All agree that if we are responsible agents, it is not just because our actions are within the control of our wills, but because, in addition, our wills are not just psychological states *in* us, but expressions of characters that come *from* us, or that at any rate are acknowledged and affirmed *by* us... [They agree that] responsible agents are those for whom it is not just the case that their actions are within the control of their wills, but also the case that their wills are within the control of their *selves* in some deeper sense. (Wolf, p. 332)

Advantages of the deep self view:

- Explains why kleptomaniacs and hypnotized people aren't free
- Explains why children aren't free (they don't have deep selves)

### 5. Wolf's objection to the deep self view

JoJo is the favorite son of Jo the First, an evil and sadistic dictator of a small, undeveloped country. Because of his father's special feelings for the boy, JoJo is given a special education and is allowed to accompany his father and observe his daily routine. In light of this treatment, it is not surprising that little JoJo takes his father as a role model and develops values very much like Dad's. As an adult, he does many of the same sorts

of things his father did, including sending people to prison or to death or to torture chambers on the basis of whim. He is not *coerced* to do these things, he acts according to his own desires. Moreover, these are desires he wholly *wants* to have. When he steps back and asks, “Do I really want to be this sort of person?” his answer is resoundingly “Yes”... (Wolf, p. 334)

1. If the deep self view were true, JoJo would be acting freely
2. JoJo is not acting freely
3. Therefore the deep self view is not true

In defense of 2:

In light of JoJo’s heritage and upbringing—both of which he was powerless to control—it is dubious at best that he should be regarded as responsible for what he does. It is unclear whether anyone with a childhood such as his could have developed into anything but the twisted and perverse sort of person that he has become. (Wolf, p. 334)

Is the problem that JoJo lacks some further sort of control? No.

Though I can step back from the values my parents and teachers have given me and ask whether these are the values I really want, the “I” that steps back will itself be a product of the parents and teachers I am questioning. (Wolf, p. 333)

Having seen that these types of control are not enough to guarantee us the status of responsible agents, we are tempted to go on to suppose that we must have yet another kind of control to assure us that even our deepest selves are somehow up to us. But not all the things necessary for freedom and responsibility must be types of power and control. We may need simply to *be* a certain way, even though it is not within our power to determine whether we are that way or not. (Wolf, p. 335)

## 6. The sane deep-self view

According to the M’Naughten Rule, a person is sane if (1) he knows what he is doing and (2) he knows that what he is doing is, as the case may be, right or wrong... we may understand sanity, then, as the minimally sufficient ability cognitively and normatively to recognize and appreciate the world for what it is.

**Sanity** A person is sane if and only if she has the ability to know the truth about both factual and moral matters

**Sane deep-self view** A person acts freely if and only if

- i) her action is controlled by her first-order desires, and
- ii) her first-order desires are controlled by her deep self, and
- iii) her deep self is sane

...this new proposal explains why we give less than full responsibility to persons who, though acting badly, act in ways that are strongly encouraged by their societies—the slaveowners of the 1850s, the Nazis of the 1930s, and many male chauvinists of our fathers' generation, for example... In our sense of the term, their deepest selves are not fully *sane*. (Wolf, p. 336)

## 7. An asymmetry

There is, on Wolf's view, an asymmetry between "good brainwashing" and "bad brainwashing". JoJo's upbringing deprived him of freedom, whereas my upbringing did not, solely because JoJo's upbringing was morally incorrect.