Attachments and the moral psychology of internal conflicts

Raffaele Rodogno

Abstract: What does it mean for an individual to be conflicted about something or to undergo an internal conflict? What is it exactly that comes into conflict? In what sense, if at all, is the self involved in these conflicts? The bulk of this paper aims to answer these questions. As we go along doing this, a specific view of internal conflicts will emerge. On this view, being conflicted is something that can be understood only by reference to the so-called attachments of the conflicted individual. This view is then contrasted with Harry Frankfurt's (1988c) view of internal conflicts. Finally, we will move from the characterization of this phenomenon to a short discussion of its ethics. Why or how do internal conflicts matter? Should they always be solved?

Keywords: internal conflicts; ambivalence; moral psychology; Harry Frankfurt; identification; attachments.

0. What does it mean for an individual to be conflicted about something or to undergo an internal conflict? What is it exactly that comes into conflict? In what sense, if at all, is the self involved in these conflicts? The bulk of this paper aims to answer these questions. As we go along doing this, a specific view of internal conflicts will emerge. On this view, being conflicted is something that can be understood only by reference to the so-called attachments of the conflicted individual. This view is then contrasted with Harry Frankfurt's (1988c) view of internal conflicts. Finally, we will move from the characterization of this phenomenon to a short discussion of its ethics. Why or how do internal conflicts matter? Should they always be solved?

1. What does it mean for an individual to be conflicted about something or to undergo an internal conflict? Internal conflicts are normally understood to be a matter of one and the same individual's psychology. As a first approximation, we may characterize as *internal* those conflicts that involve tensions or disagreements between an individual's psychological states or attitudes. This, however, can quickly be shown to be an insufficiently specific charac-

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terization, as it misses one central element of our everyday understanding of this phenomenon.

Suppose that some of the beliefs you hold are inconsistent. Perhaps their inconsistency is not immediately apparent, but if you bothered to draw out their implications, you would quickly realize that they entail other beliefs that are indeed inconsistent. In this situation, there is a sense in which some of your internal states are conflicting. Yet, on the basis of what we know about this case, we cannot say that you are conflicted or are undergoing an internal conflict. All we would be entitled to say is that you hold conflicting (or inconsistent) beliefs. What is missing?

Perhaps what is missing is the lack of awareness (on your behalf) of an inconsistency in your beliefs. Awareness of this kind (i.e. of inconsistencies or tensions in one's attitudes), however, is not yet sufficient to individuate the phenomenon at issue here. The presence of conflicting beliefs, desires, or other attitudes *within* a person does not as such amount to something that the person experiences or would experience as a conflict, or something that would on its own incline others to perceive this person as someone conflicted. To illustrate, suppose now that a friend invites you to draw the relevant implications that follow from your beliefs. You quickly become aware that your original beliefs are inconsistent with each other. For all we know, at the end of the exercise, you may be *surprised* about your inconsistencies, perhaps *confused* and needing some time to reorganize your ideas. Or perhaps you will simply be *indifferent* about this particular doxastic incoherence of yours. None of this, however, seems to warrant the claim that you are conflicted.

In short, the fact that a person is the *locus* of conflicting attitudes (and she is aware of that), or again, the fact that conflicting attitudes are to be found "inside" a person (and she is aware of that) is not enough to show that we are in the presence of an internal conflict, in the pertinent sense of "internal". Upon realization of the conflict, the person's indifference or her quick reorganization of her attitudes (by, for example, abandoning some of them) can be taken as sufficient to show this point. The pertinent kind of internal conflict cannot be one whose awareness leaves the subject indifferent, nor can it be one that the subject can solve in a split second by reorganizing her conflicting attitudes.

2. Suppose now that these beliefs matter to you, that it is important to you that both beliefs are true. Perhaps what is at stake here is (an important part of) your worldview. Say that you are both a woman of faith and a woman of science but you have just realized that your belief in free will is incompatible with your causal deterministic view of the universe. This time your realization brings in an element of conflict that was not present in the previous examples.

You feel that you have to reject one of your beliefs, but you cannot bring yourself to reject either one of them just yet. As this tension goes on, you slowly become anxious, nervous, restless and irritable. Eventually you might have the feeling of being torn, fought, divided, or not at-one with yourself. This idea of a divided "self" is central to the phenomenon we want to explain, one intimately connected to current discussions on personal identity and identification, and one to which we shall return.

Let us now work with another, perhaps more familiar example, of a conflicted individual. Given limited resources of time and energy, a person's commitments may pose conflicting demands on her. She may, for example, feel that the proper amount of caring and attention deserved by her children can be provided only at the cost of cutting down on her professional ambitions. If the individual really cares about her children and her career, she will be likely to experience the negative affective states and dispositions mentioned above and, to the extent that the conflict persists, she will likely become increasingly stressed out, or even depressed and apathetic.

While this is a phenomenologically impoverished description of internal conflicts (better descriptions await us later), it should, as a first stab, be enough to individuate the common phenomenon that goes under this heading (more in the way of individuation will be said later). The important point is the necessity of bringing into the picture the things that the individual cares about or, as we shall henceforth call them, her attachments. In order to articulate this point, and for the sake the discussion that ensues, we need to say a few words about the notion of attachment at issue here.

3. "Attachment" is a semi-technical name for what could otherwise be called a primitive and persistent form of valuing. Notions that are in the vicinity, if not interchangeable with "attachment" or "being attached to X" are "caring about X", "X being important to one", and "X being something that matters to one". Individuals can be attached to all sorts of things: to various kinds of pursuits (professional, leisurely, life-mission, i.e., saving Venice from sinking), to themselves, to other persons and other creatures such as pets, to particular objects, to ideas, ideals, and values. On the view defended here, an attachment is individuated by recognizing a specific pattern of (i) affective dispositions; (ii) cognitive dispositions; and (iii) motivational dispositions. Attachments are also (iv) contributing to defining one's personal identity, at least in one important sense of the latter, and (v) are conditions for the possibility of an individual's well-being.[1] A good grasp of these features of our attachments will be instru-

[1] The notion of attachment at hand here is significantly inspired by Harry Frankfurt's (1988b;

mental in disclosing the nature of internal conflicts and what we are to do with them. Let us begin with the first three features.

4. As just stated, we infer that an individual is attached to something if this person displays a certain pattern of affective, cognitive, and volitional dispositions. Let us sketch the *shape* of this complex pattern of dispositions, starting with its affective side. Suppose, as in the example above, that you are attached to your job as a way to realize your career ambitions. Suppose now that you experience a setback at work: something you had invested a lot in will not come to fruition. As a result, your professional advancement is stunted. This situation is likely to be the source of considerable frustration for you, perhaps sadness or a sense of loss, and even as a source of loss of self-esteem. If the setback is big enough (perhaps your career plans as whole are now being threatened), you may begin to feel fear if not anxiety. If the worst happened (say you realize that you will no longer have the opportunity to achieve your professional ambitions), you might plunge into despair, at least for some time. What is more, you may well also be disposed to feel shame for failing to live up to what you would consider to be the minimal standards of doing your job well.

Suppose now, that you are not particularly attached to your job, and that you understand your professional occupation, say, being a traffic guard, simply as the most efficient way to paying your bills so as to be able to have as much time as possible to dedicate to your other attachments (your family, philately, or what have you). *Ceteris paribus,* you will be more inclined to changing jobs without becoming affected, sad, or plunging into despair (unless, of course, you become attached to the people in that job). Being fired may of course be the source of anger or frustration, not, however, because you have now forever lost the opportunity to realize your traffic guard dreams but because it comes in the way of your other attachments. Similarly, for example, the fact that you do not take yourself to be doing your job minimally well will not make you

1998) notion of *caring about something* but also significantly different in one important respect. On Frankfurt's account, caring about something is ultimately a question of commitment, which relates to our volitions and, in particular, to the will. Frankfurt (1998c) further unpacks this as follows: "Being committed to a desire is not at all equivalent to simply approving of the desire or to merely endorsing it. Commitment goes beyond acceptance of the desire and hence willingness to be moved by it. It entails a further disposition to be active in seeing to it that the desire is not abandoned or neglected". (162). Attachments do not necessarily involve these features. For one, their intentional objects are not always the agent's attitudes (and her desires in particular). We may be attached to all sorts of things, including people, objects, and ideals. Also, on the view defended here, when we are attached to something, we are disposed not to neglect that thing, as for example, that would engender self-disappointment, or even shame and pangs of conscience. One need not postulate a further (somewhat detached, top-down) disposition to actively will not to neglect the desire for that thing. Why or how this is so will become clearer by the end of Sections 4 and 5.

prone to shame (though, once again, it may worry you insofar as it may ultimately be a threat to your other attachments, such as, for example, certain ideas of your self as, say, a smart or talented individual). In other words, as one becomes attached to something, one becomes affectively vulnerable to its fate. More in particular, we tend to respond with positive emotions (e.g. joy and pride) and affective states (tranquility, vitality, flow) to what we experience as affecting our attachments positively, and with negative and hostile emotions (e.g., fear, anger, shame, guilt) and affective states (e.g. irritability, boredom, stress, anxiety) to what we experience as affecting our attachments negatively.

Attachments also manifest themselves in specific patterns of cognitive dispositions, and that in at least two ways. Firstly, a subject will tend to be more interested, receptive, and generally oriented towards facts that are relevant or potentially relevant to her attachments: such facts will tend to be more salient to her. As someone who cares about a career in academic philosophy, for example, you are more likely to join blogs and mailing lists that distribute information about philosophy-related topics, events, jobs, and publications. You will not be likely to join similar lists for architects or engineers. Your attachment, then, translates into actions that affect the content of your cognitions by steering the flow of information that you receive in certain directions rather than others. This flow of information, however, is influenced also in a less voluntary way, as when, while reading a newspaper, any title involving the word "philosophy" immediately catches your attention (is more salient than other titles) and you are thereby prompted to read the article. Secondly, and more importantly, certain attachment-relative facts will be immediately cognized as reasons. Hence, you will cognize the fact that jobs in philosophy are advertised mainly in this period of the year as a reason to check your email now. In other words, our attachments manifest themselves in specific normative configurations of the world.

Finally, attachments manifest themselves in specific patterns of motivations. This is not surprising given what we have so far said about attachments. Specific patterns of motivation typically follow from our affective states and normative cognitions. Emotions are typically understood as involving action dispositions to act (fear disposes us to fleeing or fighting; remorse to making amends; etc.); and the fact that we "see" something as a reason to act in a certain way typically motivates us to act in that way. Note, however, that while we can infer attachments from some of our motivations, it is not the case that we can do so from all of our motivations. What we have to look at, then, is the way in which our motivations are (or are not) nested in the rest of our moral psychology and in our attachments in particular. My desire for a chocolate ice-cream, for example, may well be just that: its frustration, even if repeated,

is not likely to generate sadness, anxiety, or depression.[2] My desire to publish my work in a good journal, however, if repeatedly frustrated, may well involve such responses.

5. Attachments are not born out of conscious decisions and plans. Or better, we do not become immediately attached to something just because we have decided to do so. Complex patterns of dispositions such as those described above take time to form, change, and disappear. Even if we do with time become attached to something as the result of a conscious decision, the process is not entirely transparent to us and by far not under our direct control. There is no certainty in the process. More typically, our attachments at any time are not the product of clear-cut decisions. Life exposes us to persons, creatures, things, values, projects, ideas, and ideals. We get attached to them, because we like them or find them attractive, because we depend on them, because they love us and are attached to us, because we are continually exposed to them over a period of time, because we actively engage with them, because of ambient expectations, simply instinctively, and for other explanatory reasons that are often beyond our grasp or awareness. This is not to say that we cannot adopt evaluative stances towards our attachments. We do evaluate our attachments morally and prudentially, especially on those occasions in which they come into conflict with the other things that are important to us. Hence we may well think that our loving (being attached to) a person that treats us like garbage may be bad for us. It is precisely the perception of the threat that this attachment poses on the other things that we care about (self-esteem, self-respect, and more generally, our sheer capacity to function) that brings this evaluation to the fore.

6. With this view of attachments in hand, we return to internal conflicts. The first question we shall ask is epistemological. How do we know, first-personally or third-personally, whether a person is conflicted? In our everyday life, one important piece of evidence is the individual's affective state. An individual who undergoes an internal conflict will not be doing too well. She will likely be anxious, nervous, restless, and irritable. These affective states are obviously not specific to internal conflicts: one can certainly be nervous without being conflicted about anything. Yet these states signal that something else is also present, namely, attachments. As we saw above, these states typically arise when the fate of the things an individual cares about is threat-

[2] See Frankfurt (1998: 156-158) for a similar point concerning the connection between caring about something and desires.

ened. As suggested by our initial examples, this is precisely what we should expect: internal conflicts arise in connection with the things we care about, and, more in particular, when the fate of these things is perceived as being threatened in some way.

From a first-personal point of view, there is of course more to the phenomenology (and hence the epistemology) of internal conflicts. Conflicted individuals may indeed appeal to notions such as feeling torn or divided, ambivalent, or not at-one with their self. I would in fact suggest that these feelings are (conscious or unconscious) interpretations or attributions that subjects make as they become aware, *via* their irritability, anxiety, nervousness etc., that some of their attachments are in conflict. On this view, then, the subject is in a negative affective state (anxiety, irritability, nervousness), which she attributes to an internal conflict; and the subject feels torn.

7. This is not to say, however, that individuals have to feel torn, divided, or not at-one with their self in order to count as conflicted individuals. We can certainly imagine cases in which an individual is in a negative affective state, which arises from and signals an internal conflict, while not yet explicitly experiencing the situation as one of conflict. Let us illustrate this case by elaborating the example of the conflicted working parent introduced above.

Suppose, for example, that you are an academic and are enduring a setback or a difficult situation at work. The tasks that you are supposed to accomplish (e.g. teaching a course and writing up a paper) simply require more time than what you can allot to them given your other commitments, and, in particular, given that you have a family to return to and take care of every day. Perhaps what you are undergoing is not a major setback or a catastrophic situation, but it is bad enough to make you feel disappointed, frustrated and nervous, and entertaining thoughts about changing job that make you unsettled. This affective state is not something you can easily shake off. As your workday ends, it follows you home to your family. As a result, everything at home feels harder than usual. You experience your kids as only capable of placing endless demands on you and never capable of providing any help or simply doing as they are told. Similarly, your spouse suddenly seems unhelpful and insensitive if not downright egoistic, thinking purely about his/her own typically unimportant problems. You resent both your children and your spouse. You become more and more irritable. As this situation goes on day in, day out, you begin to wear out and boil over. You lash out on your children, who are now being scolded and reprimanded for things that would have otherwise been met by you with a patient smile. Similarly, you now reject your spouse's attentions, which you

experience as inappropriate if not insolent. More generally, your disposition to respond with joy and pleasure to those things that used to elicit joy and pleasure in you is waning. Yet at the same time, you experience your outbursts as unjustified. You admit to yourself that you have overreacted. Feelings of guilt and shame begin to punctuate your days.

Despite all that, you do not yet experience your situation as one generated by the conflicted demands imposed on you by your attachments. Even in the absence of the specific feeling of being torn or divided, however, we should be inclined to treat this as a case of internal conflict. We could say that you *are* conflicted even though you do not *feel* conflicted (or torn or divided). The conflicting demands that arise from your attachments are the source of your frustration, irritability, nervousness, resentment, feelings of shame and guilt, and diminished disposition to feel joy and pleasure.

8. One advantage of this account of internal conflicts is the way in which it explains the ambivalence that often accompanies them. Ambivalence is here characterized quite standardly as the state of having mixed feelings, loving and hating, or contradictory ideas about something or someone. I take it that in this sense ambivalence at least partly overlaps with the feeling of being torn, divided, or conflicted. In our example, the resentment towards your spouse, the fact that you now perceive him/her as egoistic and insolent, while at the same time caring for him/her, is precisely a manifestation of this ambivalence. Hopefully, if the conflict is quickly resolved, your ambivalence towards him/her will only be temporary, and you will soon cease to view your spouse in these negative terms. But if the conflict persisted, you may eventually develop a stable disposition to see him/her in these terms.

An account of internal conflicts should be able to explain the origin of the ambivalence it involves. This, I would maintain, can be done only by accounts that involve conflicting attachments. Suppose for a moment that you did not at all care about your job (in a manner similar to our traffic guard from before). While you may well find excessive pressure at work stressing and exhausting, there is no reason to think that you would perceive your attachment to your family as threatening your career. There would consequently be no reason to think that you would start resenting your spouse or your children.

9. Another advantage of the view proposed here, is that it can account for the idea that the conflicted person is not at-one with *herself*, i.e., that her *self* is divided. As Frankfurt (1998b) puts it:

A person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it. By caring about it, he makes himself susceptible to benefits and vulnerable to losses depending upon whether what he cares about flourishes or is diminished. We may say that in this sense he *identifies* himself with what he cares about. [3] (111).

When we care about or are attached to something we identify with that thing in the sense in which we experience its fate as if it somehow was ours. The key term here is the notion of identification. As Velleman (2002: 120) notes, the targets of the individual's identification are the *objects* of her motives or, as we would rather want to say, of her attachments (and not her motives or attachments themselves, a point to which we return later). As discussed above, the objects of your attachments are responsible for shaping much of your affective, cognitive, and volitional life. If you are attached to your children, for example, you will react with pride to their achievements and with sadness and/or disappointment to their setbacks. The point here, however, is that you will feel pride and sadness for things that *they* have done or undergone as if they were things that *you yourself* had done or undergone. Typically, the achievements and setbacks of other people's children will fail to elicit these responses in you. You are not attached to them and thereby do not identify with them.

As argued elsewhere (Rodogno 2012; 2014a), this type of identification with the objects of one's attachment is self-defining or constitutive of a person's identity in one important sense.[4] To illustrate, consider again the example of the academic/parent. Suppose now that this person really cares about her profession and her family, but not much else beside that. Suppose also that you are getting to know this person and you want to understand who this person is, what she is all about. To learn about her attachments, i.e., that she is a devoted mother, a loving wife, and a dedicated academic will indeed be fairly informative about who she is.[5] As Wallace (2013: 32) puts it: attachments "define our distinctive point of view as individuals". We are who we are partly in virtue of caring about some things rather than others.

[3] In (1988b: 83) Frankfurt writes very much in the same vein.

[4] This sense does not imply the notion of a 'motivational essence'. See Velleman's (2002) exchange with Frankfurt (2002). The sense of identity at issue here does not depend on any act of the will such as the type of Frankfurtian decisions discussed in the next section. Nor am I assuming that being attached to something necessarily involves approving or endorsing that fact.

[5] If this point needed further proof, you may consider what you would know about a person upon learning that she is a parent and academic, but that, as a matter of fact, she is really not attached to her children and her profession. You will wonder: who *is* this person really? And what *does* she care about? Alternatively, as further proof, you may think of the sense of loss of identity that often results upon losing one's long-term spouse.

This should suffice to show how, in our example, the academic/parent is not at-one with herself. Her identity as a parent clashes with her identity as an academic. If this is along the right lines, her situation is not simply one that brings about ambivalence. It involves more than that. For as long as the conflict persists, her distinctive point of view as an individual is defined in a divisive way. Her very sense of identity is called into question.

10. Interestingly, however, in the recent literature on internal conflicts, identification has mainly been discussed in terms other than those presented above.[6] A person's identity is no longer understood as something defined by the objects of her attachments. It is rather defined by the nature of the relation between the person's will and her desires. Identification is now being understood as an act of the will, and in particular a

> …decision [that] 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.* (Frankfurt 1988c: 170)

A desire with which we do not identify is one by which we do not really want to be motivated. The person who is motivated by such desire is moved "by a force which is in some sense external to him" (1988c: 165). By making the decision, i.e., "by virtue of the fact that he has it *by his own* will" (1988c: 170), the desire comes to be incorporated into the person. He makes it his, commits to it, and takes responsibility for it.

Now conflicts of various kinds are quite central to Frankfurt's account of identification. What is of particular interest to us is the way in which the act of self-constitution is taken to affect the very nature of an individual's conflicts. There seems to be three kinds of conflicts between the desires an individual may undergo. First, it is possible for an individual at times to be indifferent to his own motives, to take no evaluative attitude and no decision towards 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. Therefore the outcome of the conflict can be neither a victory for him nor a defeat. Since he exercises no authority, by the endorsement or concurrence of which certain of his desires might acquire particular legitimacy, or might come to be specially

[6] In what follows, I focus on the relevant work by Frankfurt (1988a; c). Though I cannot discuss their work on this occasion, Korsgaard (2008; 2009), Velleman (2006), and indeed Kierkegaard (1843) would have also been relevant here.

constitutive of himself, the actions engendered by the flow and clash of his feelings and desires are quite wanton (1988c: 164).

This scenario is indeed very close to that we envisaged in our very first example, in which the individual was indifferent to a set of inconsistent and hence conflicting beliefs he held. Both cases illustrate the possibility of conflicts that are in some sense internal to the individual but which clearly fail to involve a conflicted individual. The relevant difference between our case and Frankfurt's, however, resides in what is considered to be the explanation of this phenomenon. According to Frankfurt, it is the fact that the individual has not taken an evaluative stance on the relevant attitudes, or that he has not decided to identify with any of these attitudes. On the account offered above, however, deciding or taking an evaluative stance is not necessary. What counts is whether or not these conflicting attitudes have a place in the person's moral psychology considered more holistically; whether or not they are a part of her attachments.

Frankfurt considers the other two cases of conflicting desires together. In conflicts of the one sort, he writes,

> […] desires compete for priority or position in a preferential order; the issue is which desire to satisfy *first*. In conflicts of the other sort, the issue is whether a desire should be given *any* place in the order of preference at all – that is, whether it is to be endorsed as a legitimate candidate for satisfaction or whether it is to be rejected as entitled to no priority whatsoever (Frankfurt, 1988b: 170).

Now while resolving a conflict of the first kind results in the *integration* of the competing desires into a single ordering, resolving a conflict of the second kind involves a radical *separation* of the competing desires, one of which is extruded entirely as an outlaw. It is "these acts of ordering and of rejection – integration and separation – that create a self out of the raw materials of inner life" (Frankfurt 1988c: 170).

It appears, then, that conflicting desires, and the opportunities of resolution that they afford, play a central role in the constitution or creation of the self. As important, however, is the role that acts of ordering and rejection play in shaping the nature of conflicting desires. Frankfurt writes that a person who decides to supersede a condition of inner division and make himself into an integrated whole may well "accomplish this without actually eliminating the desires that conflict with those on which he has decided, as long as he dissociates himself from them". (Frankfurt 1988c: 170) The decision, Frankfurt explains, creates an intention but does not guarantee that the intention will be carried out. In such cases, while the conflict between the competing desires may not

be eliminated and, in fact, may remain as virulent as before, the decision

> eliminates the conflict *within the person* as to which of these desires he prefers to be his motive. The conflict between the *desires* is in this way transformed into a conflict between *one* of them and the *person* who has identified himself with its rival (Frankfurt, 1988b: 172).

The fact of deciding on one side changes the nature of the conflict. What was a conflict between desires now becomes one between the person, on the one hand, and the extruded desire, on the other.[7]

11. In this section, I argue that we should resist framing the scenarios on which we build our views of conflicts in terms of *isolated* (conflicting) desires, on which individuals may or may not decide. Desires, or at least the ones that are capable of generating significant conflicts, are normally part of the (moral) psychological whole we called attachment. Thinking in terms of attachments is psychologically more realistic. What is more, reframing the structure of the debate in terms of conflicting attachments shows that self-constitution does not play the role advocated by Frankfurt, or so I will argue.

Let us return to our academic/parent. We know that her respective attachments will likely place her in a situation in which she has to respond to conflicting desires such as, for example, the desire to (stay longer at work and) finish the paper she is writing and the desire to (rush home and) cook a good dinner for her family. In light of the way in which our attachments work, one should doubt that much hinges on these two token desires and their conflicting relation *taken by themselves*. In order for the individual to be conflicted, this particular conflict must represent something much bigger than itself. As Frankfurt himself claims, decisions "establish a constraint by which other preferences and decisions are to be guided" (1988c: 175). Our academic would not agonize over this decision unless it had deep-going ramifications in her life (and psychology). The decision would consist in acts of ordering or rejection (integration or separation) that bear not simply on these specific desires but on the attachments to which they belong. In a situation such as this, almost any other set of desires, and, in fact, almost any other set of attitudes connected to the relevant attachments, might have been the pretext for this decision.

What follows from this is that by deciding, say, to separate herself from one desire, the person is deciding to separate herself from the relevant attachment

[7] Note that compared to his (1988a), in his (1998a) Frankfurt seems to abandon the idea that a decision or, for that matter, any other psychological act is necessary in order to seal identification. He does however insist that we can infer on what side of the conflict, if any, the person stands by understanding the structure of her will or high-order attitudes: that particular structure is now called 'satisfaction'.

(and similarly in the case of acts of ordering). This, however, means that the decision has not changed the conflict from one between desires to one between the person and the outlawed desire, and this for a number of reasons. First, the decision was never really about these two conflicting desires, they were just the pretext. Second, it follows that after the decision whatever conflict is there is really not about (these) desires. Third, it looks like there is an important sense in which there will be a conflict *within the person* on both sides of the decision. This may not be the person that self-constitutes herself by way of decisions. It is however the individual whose identity derives from the object of her attachments. It is psychologically unrealistic to think that, in a case such as this one, a decision can immediately transform a person's identity in this sense. An established pattern of cognitive, affective, and conative dispositions will take some time to undo.

Frankfurt may reply that what he had in mind were cases more akin to his famous example, in which a smoker decides on his desire to refrain from smoking (for health reasons) rather than on his addiction-induced desire to smoke.[8] This example may indeed be a familiar one, and it does indeed fit the idea that after the decision the conflict is one between the person, on the one hand, and the desire to smoke on the other. What is not clear, however, is how we are supposed to view the situation ahead of the decision. In particular, while it is easy to see how some people are essentially or instrumentally attached to being healthy, it is not quite clear how we are to envisage our desire to smoke (understood as the product of an addiction).

I would advance that in many cases, ahead of the decision, the presence of these conflicting desires will not produce conflicted individuals, the main reason being that the demands imposed on the person by smoking will not be perceived as directly coming into conflict with the demands imposed on her by whatever attachments make health precious to her. There may, however, come a moment where the risks of smoking are perceived as representing a much more concrete threat. Perhaps the individual has become increasingly attached to the idea of having children and has reason to believe that smoking may cause infertility in her and malfunctions in her future children. If these thoughts worry her, she will begin to experience smoking as a threat to her other attachments.

The question, however, is whether she would at the same time also experience the demands for a healthy lifestyle as a threat to her smoking. If she does not, we have no reason to think that she would be conflicted, even if she expe-

[8] The example was made famous by Frankfurt (1988a). In that article, Frankfurt's theory was not in terms of decisions but in terms of high-order volitions. This example is also the only concrete one mentioned in the article on which we focus here, namely (1988c).

rienced conflicting desires for some time. It is not impossible, however, to conceive smoking as an attachment or as part of an attachment (e.g. an attachment to a certain self-image). Here we can certainly imagine that the individual may become conflicted, at least until a decision is taken. But this case, then, would be similar to the case of the academic/parent, involving attachments on both sides of the conflict, and the conclusions drawn there will apply here. Whether smoking is an attachment of some kind or not, then, the decision to stop will not change the nature of the conflict.[9]

12. So far we have discussed the nature of internal conflicts and some of the connections to the self that they may enjoy. In this concluding section, however, we should ask ourselves some questions about the ethics of internal conflicts and in particular whether we should always aim at solving them. The answer is not univocal. In fact, the answer is unequivocally positive in those cases in which the conflict is so serious as to have a deleterious impact on the individual's well-being and on the well-being of those around her. As we saw, serious internal conflicts may result in negative affective states (stress, anxiety, depression) that may become so severe as to incapacitate the individual from acquiring, pursuing, or nurturing her attachments more in general. Elsewhere (Rodogno 2014b), I have argued that our attachments are the condition for both an individual's well-being and ill-being. Conflicts that have such incapacitating effects would take away the very possibility of a good life. In fact, whatever your view of well-being, it would not be difficult to argue that being unable to relate (affectively, motivationally, or even cognitively) to what one cares about must be really bad for the individual. For the hedonist, for example, it would mean that she may cease to find pleasant those activities that used to be her sources of pleasure. For the Objective List theorist, it would mean that the individual would cease to be motivated to pursue the objectively good things. Finally, a diminished capacity to form and pursue desires is bad news for well-being understood in terms of desire satisfaction.

[9] It may be objected that this point does not go through, for it trades on an ambiguity of the notion of a person and the sense of identity/identification attached to it: while Frankfurt operates with the idea of self-constituting identity, I operate with persons as identified by the objects of their attachments. I hope this section to have shown that situations of conflict should be discussed within the more holistic moral psychology involved by attachments rather than the frame of single conflicting desires. If that point is accepted, the latter notion of identity becomes part of this discussion at least as much as that on which Frankfurt focusses. In fact, as we shall see in the next section, it undermines the force of Frankfurt's ethics of self-constitution. My conclusions in this – and to some extent the next – section mirror those arrived at by Schechtman (2004). Her argument, however, does not explicitly rely on the claim that we need to review the basic moral psychological frame in which this discussion is framed.

This, however, does not mean that attempting to resolve internal conflicts is always what we have most reason to do or what is best for us, for not all conflicts have such devastating impacts. As Guignon (2013) puts it,[10] ordinary people generally have multiple attachments, and those attachments have varying degrees of intensity. A person is a professor, a mother, a caregiver to older parents, an aspiring violinist, a wise shopper, and so on. She may be deeply committed to some of these attachments, but there does not seem to be anything by virtue of which they can be bound together into a unified "fundamental project". Nor is it obvious that a conjunctivist approach to these involvements is possible. Some of these projects clash with one another, so that giving yourself wholeheartedly to one makes it hard to realize the others adequately. As a consequence, many of us just muddle along through life trying to do the best we can, giving ourselves fully to some attachments when we are caught up in them, but then putting them aside when we are called on to be, for example, good parents.

Muddling through life can be achieved with some success with help from various strategies. One such strategy is that of taking steps towards decreasing the demands that one's attachments seem to produce. Hence you may decide to tune down your professional ambitions by, say, taking on board less work or being less perfectionistic about it while at the same time making your children less demanding and more independent by, say, teaching them how to use public transportation. This strategy consists at bottom in attempting to diminish the extent to which the attachments place conflicting demands on oneself. If this strategy were taken to its logical end, attachments would simply cease to generate conflicting demands. The question here is how far one could pursue this strategy without eventually diminishing the degree to which one is attached to, say, one's job, family, or whatever else is at play here.

Another strategy consists in overtly acknowledging the conflict thus increasing one's preparedness to dealing with its consequences. You may for example accept that your professional ambitions will be more likely to suffer serious setbacks, given the nature of your other attachments. You will, however, look out for these frustrations and be ready to tackle them as they appear. That may turn out to be an exercise in compartmentalization such as, for example, learning to "leave" your professional frustrations at the office or, similarly, your family problems at home.

Frankfurt believes that we should always strive to be wholehearted, as giving up on that would amount to accepting ambivalence. The latter "is not a matter of simply having conflicting feelings. It consists essentially in having

[10] Guignon actually makes the following point in terms of commitments rather than attachments. In the rest of this paragraph, I follow his words very closely.

a divided will – that is, of being unresolved as to which side of the conflict among one's feelings one is on". (2002: 126). It is a "disease of the will" that leads to "self-defeating behavior and thought… and crippling irrationality". (2002: 127) This may well be so. As argued above, however, ambivalence is a product of conflicting demands imposed on us by our own attachments. Being wholehearted may then involve acts of integration or separation that may cost us all too dear in terms of our own well-being. In our less than ideal circumstances, we may discover that at times it is indeed best for us to live with a crippled will and an unruly set of attachments.

Raffaele Rodogno
Aarhus University
filrr@cas.au.dk

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