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Ambivalence, Valuational Inconsistency, and the Divided Self

Consider a person whose evaluative stance toward life is riddled with a particular kind of affective conflict: he is attracted to seemingly incompatible goods; he values various things that he knows cannot co-exist; he is drawn to ways of life that are not compatible or reconcilable. I have in mind here not the hypocrite, who says one thing and does another, nor the waffler, who feels differently at different times and in different circumstances. Nor am I concerned here with mere conflicts of desire. Instead the person I am describing is one who has an honest, stable, but inconsistent evaluative stance toward the world -- not divided merely about what he wants, but about what he feels is worth wanting. This person may not be logically inconsistent -- he does not believe any contradictions -- rather, his endorsed attitudes and desires fail to add up to an internally coherent, unified, evaluative outlook on life. He cares about things that essentially conflict, about things that cannot fit together. He is, in a sense I define more precisely below, valuationally inconsistent.

Of course, this person will find it hard to be satisfied with the world. But some philosophers think there is something else wrong with such inconsistency, and something worse: that such inconsistency is somehow intrinsically bad for an agent, rendering him irrational, self-undermining, or non-autonomous. Here I argue against this view: there is nothing much wrong, I claim, with valuational inconsistency, at least from the point of view of the self. In particular, such "inconsistency" raises the same difficulties for an agent as ordinary conflictedness, of the kind most of us, with our multiple life roles and

overlapping concerns, experience every day. Of course, claims of rationality are always difficult to assess, given the plasticity of the term. I will argue here for four specific conclusions about valuational inconsistency: it does not render a person unable to act; it does not render a person's actions ineffective because of vacillation; it does not undermine a person's autonomy; and it need not make an agent dissatisfied with himself.¹ My defense, then, concerns the claim that valuational inconsistency is bad for an agent. I leave aside, here, the question of whether such inconsistency is bad from a broader moral, pragmatic, or social point of view.

The idea that internal valuational unity is rationally required has informed various philosophical projects. For example, it is commonly hoped that we might find a way to appeal to coherence in understanding moral knowledge and objectivity. If our desires, attitudes, or beliefs about the good fit together properly, this line of thought goes, they are more rational, and so have a kind of justification.² Here I argue that for the special case

¹ I have extracted these from the work of Harry Frankfurt and Charles Taylor. Cheshire Calhoun discusses "integrity" in work related to my theme ("Standing for Something, The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 92, No. 5. (May, 1995), pp. 235-260), and while I share her general view that integrity is a kind of social virtue, and that inconsistency and ambivalence are sometimes required for a life well-lived, my focus in this paper is somewhat different. In particular, Calhoun does not distinguish "inconsistency" from mere conflictedness, as I do below, and does not try to assess whether there is a relationship between inconsistency and rationality.

² One manifestation of this general approach is found in Michael Smith's neo-rationalist view. Smith takes desiderative coherence as its starting point: on his view, you have "normative reason" to do whatever your fully rational self would want you to do, and that is whatever you* would want yourself to do if you* had full information and a maximally coherent, unified set of desires. The subset of particularly moral reasons is picked out by appeal to moral substance, and it follows that when you desire to act badly, you fail to have the desires of your rational self (Michael Smith, The Moral Problem (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) and Ethics and the A Priori (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). I have argued elsewhere that this line of thought doesn't succeed, because coherence of simple desires is not rationally required. Here I consider the more complex

of endorsed desires and attitudes, consistency -- a basic part of coherence -- is not required for rationality in this sense.³ Consistency of this type is also sometimes taken to play a role in understanding agency or autonomy. Some, such as Harry Frankfurt, argue that a person who is deeply divided risks destruction of his personality. At times Frankfurt suggests a connection between the relevant sense of dividedness and the kind of internal "inconsistency" or ambivalence I am discussing here. But I shall challenge this particular connection.

1. What is valuational inconsistency?

By "valuational inconsistency," I mean a particular kind of conflict between endorsed desires or positive attitudes -- or what I'll call simply "valuations." Intuitively, to have a positive valuation for something is to care about or value it, that is, to have an appropriate affective stance toward it. Valuing is distinct from simply wanting. In Gary Watson's vivid example, a frustrated parent may feel a sudden desire to drown his child in the tub; such a desire assails a person, and does not reflect what he cares about or values; the agent hopes that such a desire will never move him to act in any circumstances.⁴ Valuing is also distinct from judging to be good; since it is affective

case of attitudes of endorsement, and argue that here, also, coherence -- or at least consistency -- is not rationally required.

³ Coherence is typically taken to involve some combination of consistency, generality, systematicity, simplicity, and unity; it is in this sense that I mean consistency is part of coherence. For example, full coherence may require, in addition to consistency, not making arbitrary distinctions, or finding as few as possible generalities. I leave open here the ways in which consistency may be a normative matter; as I suggest in section 4 it may be good from the pragmatic or moral point of view. My claim here is that consistency isn't necessary for a person's rational, autonomous, happy self.

⁴ Gary Watson, "Free Agency," Journal of Philosophy, 72 (1975), 205-220, p. 210.

rather than cognitive, and thus bears a closer relationship to motivation; a person may judge something to be good without having a valuation for it.

There are two ways to make the notion of valuation more precise, and in this paper I'll have something to say about each of them. Both can be expressed using the idea of "endorsement," though via different interpretations. The first is to say that a person's valuations are those desires and attitudes that he identifies with, takes on as his own, and regards as properly belonging to himself. On this view, the important questions concern the relationship between the affective state and the self. "I endorse my desire" in this case means "I stand behind it; it is mine." On this view, we say an agent values whatever he has an endorsed desire or attitude for in this sense. The second, focusing on the agent's evaluative stance toward life, takes valuing as a matter of approval; on view, the important questions concern the way in which the agent experiences the affective state as somehow positive. "I endorse my desire" then means "I feel what I want is worth wanting."

To appreciate the distinction, consider these examples. An agent who loves expensive clothes may well identify with her desire to spend a lot of money on such things, in the sense of recognizing the desire as reflecting her self, even if she feels some disapproval toward her desire, in the sense that she thinks she might be a better person if she desired differently. This agent identifies in the first sense of self-recognition, but not in the second sense of approval. On the other hand, an agent who loves expensive clothes but has been practicing being more frugal may surprise herself with a newfound desire to put money in her savings account; she doesn't quite recognize this desire as her own, but

she certainly approves of it. This agent identifies in the second sense of approval, but not in the first sense of self-recognition.

Neither of these conceptions is without difficulties, and I do not claim to be offering a novel account of valuing, identification, and approval.⁵ My aim is just to show that on standard and intuitive interpretations of these notions, inconsistency does not raise problems for an agent's selfhood. These conceptions raise some overlapping and some distinct concerns, but much of what I have to say applies equally well to both, and should be understood as applying to both, unless otherwise specified.

As a simple example of valuational inconsistency, consider a person who has a friendly rival who is up for some great honor. This person may want his friend to win, insofar as he is his friend, and he may stand behind this desire as reflecting a friendship that is important to him. This person may also want his friend to lose, insofar as he is his rival, and he may stand behind this desire as reflecting a kind of competitiveness and ambition that he recognizes and approves as a part of himself. Endorsing his desire that his rival win, and his desire that he not win, this person is valuationally inconsistent.

The first thing that may come to mind when I say "inconsistency" is ambivalence: that is, valuing A and not-A; caring about something and its opposite; wanting the friend to win and not to win; loving and hating the same thing or person. Ambivalence is an important kind of inconsistency, but in my view there is a broader, and philosophically richer, concept at work.

⁵ For discussion of how this ambiguity in the notion of identification bears on theories of autonomy, see John Christman, "Constructing the Inner Citadel: Recent Work on the Concept of Autonomy," *Ethics* 99 (1988) pp. 109-124, p. 113. For a related and illuminating discussion with examples, see Timothy Schroeder and Nomy Arpaly, "Alienation and Externality," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29 (1999), 371-387.

Let me say that valuations for A and B are inconsistent when they "essentially conflict," that is, when there is no possible world in which A and B co-exist. Essential conflict is significant because what matters about the consistency of valuations isn't their logical form, but rather the more general question of whether there is any way, in the abstract, for the objects of valuations to obtain together. The question of whether my valuations essentially conflict is the crux of the matter with respect to "inconsistency," rather than the question of whether my valuations are ambivalent.

This is because what is strange or troubling about valuing A and not-A generally applies as well to valuing A and B where A and B essentially conflict.⁶ Consider: 1) In each case, one has no coherent valuational outlook, for there is no way the world could be that would instantiate and fulfill all of one's valuational requirements. 2) In each case, one is inevitably dissatisfied. 3) In each case, to become satisfied, one would have to change not the world, but one's own valuational stance. When we talk about valuational inconsistency, the intuitive distinction we are trying to draw is that between the person who is internally troubled -- there is something wrong with his valuations -- and the person who is externally troubled -- there is something wrong with the world. Being "essentially conflicted" signals the former difficulty.

A set of valuations, then, is inconsistent when there is no possible world in which they can all be fulfilled -- they conflict essentially.⁷ Since A and not-A cannot obtain

⁶ I consider below, in section 3d, the question of whether ambivalence presents special difficulties beyond that of A and B essentially conflicting. I also say more about my characterization of "inconsistency" in section 4.

⁷ Cf. the definition Ruth Marcus gives for consistency of rules: a set of rules is consistent when there is a possible world in which they are all obeyable. See her "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency," Journal of Philosophy 77 (1980), 121-136.

together, valuational ambivalence is a special case of valuational inconsistency as I understand it here.

When I say "a possible world," I do not mean a world the agent can necessarily bring about; I mean a way things could be so that the valuations would not conflict.⁸ To appreciate the distinction between essential and contingent conflict, consider these examples. If I value taking care of my aging mother, and I value defending my country in times of need, these may conflict, as they do in Sartre's famous example. But if I live in times of peace they may not. So this conflict is contingent, and the agent who has it is "merely conflicted" and not inconsistent. Such conflicts are common: I may value watching the sunset every day, even if I cannot because a job I love requires me to be on duty at that hour. I may value giving money to the local soup kitchen, even if I also value saving that money for my child's future. These values conflict contingently, and are not inconsistent: if I had a job with different hours, or if I had more money, I could be satisfied.

But if I value a life of security and contemplation and also a life of adventure and risk, there is no possible world in which I may have both; these essentially conflict. Likewise, if I value frugality but also generosity, or value giving more to my children than to others but also treating all children equally, I am inconsistent. If I care about sexual monogamy with Jane, and also endorse, as my own, my desire to have sex with Julia, I am inconsistent, since there is no way I can have both. The person who endorses her desire that a friendly rival win an honor, and also endorses her own desire to win the

⁸ Various interpretations of "possibility" lead to various ways of understanding this; here I'll take possibility roughly along the lines of conceivability as proposed by Yablo in his "Is Conceivability a Guide to Possibility?" Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 53 (1993), pp. 1-42.

honor for herself, is inconsistent as well. These values conflict essentially: there is no possible world in which they may all be satisfied.⁹

To see vividly how inconsistent valuations may each be genuinely reflective of the agent's self, and may be desires she truly identifies with and approves of in herself consider the example, which I discuss further in what follows, of a woman who is conflicted because she values being at home with her children and values having her own career. If her former attitude is for being a stay-at-home mom, then her conflict is essential: there is no possible world in which one can be a full time mom and have another job. But if her former attitude is merely one for being available at the right times, with flexible work hours and so on, but she can't find the right kind of job, then her conflict is contingent: with the right work arrangements, she could be content.

Notice, for this agent to be inconsistent requires only that whatever mix of family life and work life she pursues, she will be dissatisfied, feeling under any arrangement that something has been lost. One needn't be extreme in one's child-care valuations to have a conflict that is essential; one need only feel that the time and energy one cares to spend

⁹ Notice, the valuationally inconsistent person need not be logically inconsistent: even faced with the fact that he values or cares about A and not-A, the agent may say that A is good in a way and not-A good in another, taking no stand on which if any is good overall, or he may say that A is good and not-A is good, simply allowing that good and bad need not be logically opposite predicates. To say that A is good in a way and not-A is good in another is not necessarily to say that there are aspects of A that are good and others that are not-good (I discuss this kind of "instrumentality" below); I mean here instead that the predicates good and bad may be modified. See here the discussion in Patricia Greenspan, "A Case of Mixed Feelings: Ambivalence and the Logic of Emotion," in Amélie Rorty, ed., Explaining Emotions (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1980). Greenspan gives a version of the friendly rival case based on simple desires rather than endorsed desires; I discuss the desire case fully in my "On Essentially Conflicting Desires," The Philosophical Quarterly 59 (2009), 274-291.

with one's children inevitably cuts into the time and energy one cares to spend on one's work, and vice versa.¹⁰ This renders a person inconsistent.¹¹

Clearly the "merely conflicted" mother may endorse, in both senses, each of her conflicting desires: there is nothing puzzling about how she may regard both her child-care desires and her career desires as fully her own, reflecting her self, and as desires she approves of. But the same holds for the essentially conflicted mother: although there is no possible world in which her valuations may all be satisfied, those valuations may reflect what the agent takes to be parts of her self she approves of: she cares about a certain kind of motherhood and a certain kind of work, regarding each as worthy of her attention. Such an agent has a kind of "internally divided self"; part of what I show in the

¹⁰ It may seem that such conflicts could be resolved if only "there were more hours in a day," but I think this is often false, since having meaningful relationships with others is more a factor of what proportion of time you spend with them than the number of hours total. A child who has a parent's attention for five percent of the latter's waking hours is not getting much attention, even if for some reason that could work out to a large number of minutes. Imagine a day 100 hours long, and an infant who spends 60 of those hours sleeping, 35 of them with a sitter, and 5 of them with his mother. It would not be strange for this infant's mother to feel an endorsed desire to spend much more time with him. Analogously, what feels like a "significant" work accomplishment is partly relative to what others are accomplishing. It would not be unusual for a person to feel that they hoped their family life would take up a over half their time and that their work life would take up more than half their time. And such a person would be inconsistent

¹¹ Even being able to be in more than one place at one time might not solve a person's valuational dilemmas. If I value having dinner with my partner, I do not want him to be also upstairs working on his book at the same time. I want his full attention. There is a poignant example of this in the graphic novel The Watchmen (by Alan Moore, author, and Dave Gibbons, illustrator, DC Comics 1995). There, Doctor Manhattan can be in as many places at once as he likes; he is able to divide himself up. At one point, his girlfriend discovers that while he is having sex with her he is also in his lab, working on a project. She is enraged, and properly so: relationships require not just numbers of hours but proportions of one's self to feel meaningful. Doctor Manhattan regrets his actions; he wants to love her. To me the moral of this story is that even the person who can be in two places at once cannot solve the problem of valuational inconsistency.

course of this paper is that the internally divided self can be a fully rational and good self.¹²

Of course, the merely conflicted and the inconsistent will each have to prioritize what they care about, choosing one thing over another. One might wonder at this point: as long as I am able to choose, or prefer, A to B, am I really "inconsistent"? My answer is "yes"; I discuss this matter in detail below.

Sometimes we value things instrumentally, for other goods that they bring about. And it may seem that if our inconsistency is merely instrumental, we haven't got a genuine "inconsistency" at all. So, for example, one might say that if I value miserliness (A) only because I value having a pleasant retirement, but I value generosity (not-A) only because I value the admiration of my friends, I haven't got an "inconsistency" in my values: what I really care about is my own comfort (X) and status (Y), and there is a possible world in which these wouldn't conflict: the world in which, say, I am very wealthy. But even such instrumental cases can reflect genuine conflict, and understanding these cases depends both on how our ultimate valuational ends fit together, and on the nature of the relationship between the end and the means.¹³ For example, I may value capitalist competition (A) because of its good economic effects (X), but value

¹² As I elaborate on below, she is "internally divided" because her conflicts are essential and do not arise simply because of the way the world is.

¹³ David Brink suggests that because cases of valuing A and not-A are usually, deep down, cases of valuing A in virtue of aspect X and not-A in virtue of aspect Y, cases of real ambivalence are rare. But, as I argue in "On Essentially Conflicting Desires," not all cases are of this form, and even ones that are properly seen as cases of ambivalence. In any case, as I explain here, the relative consistency of X and Y is still under consideration; thinking in terms of essential vs. contingent conflicts rather than ambivalence vs. non-ambivalence makes clear that the "aspect" treatment does not address the relevant issues. See David Brink, "Moral Conflict and Its Structure," Philosophical Review 103 (4), 1994, 215-247.

its absence (not-A) because greater equality makes most people happier or more satisfied (Y). In this case, it may not be clear whether it is possible to have X and Y without A and not-A, and if it is not, we have the same kind of inconsistency as we do in having non-instrumental values for A and not-A: there is no way to be valuationally satisfied. So these are cases of inconsistency as well. Furthermore, many inconsistencies are basic, and non-instrumental. To value a life of security and of risk, and to care that one's friendly rival win and also that she lose, to want to be a stay-at-home mom and also have a career, are all non-instrumentally inconsistent ways of valuing.

In any case, since valuing is a vague sort of state, whose objects are not always clear, I'll take a person's valuational outlook to be inconsistent when there is no possible way things could be that would satisfy their endorsed desires and attitudes entirely -- no "personal valuational utopia."¹⁴ Thinking this way in terms of dissatisfaction shows a further important point: that the availability of appropriate compromises does not indicate consistency. I may compromise between capitalism and socialism, and reap some of the good of each, and still be dissatisfied with the missed opportunities for greater economic good and dissatisfied with the inequality that does exist. I may compromise between saving my money and giving it away, and still be dissatisfied with the inability to do more of each. An inconsistent agent who values a life of contemplation and also of adventure will compromise, though he will be dissatisfied with any mix. If I value staying home with my children, and also my work, I will likely

¹⁴ Notice a valuational utopia may be different from a desires utopia: if A longs to have sex with his ex-wife but wishes he didn't want to, having sex with her may be in his desires utopia but not in his valuational utopia.

compromise; as long as I have endorsed desires inevitably going unsatisfied, I am nonetheless "inconsistent."

It has long been noticed that abstract values, such as equality and liberty, say, seem to conflict, and it is long been a subject for dispute whether that conflict is genuine, or merely apparent. My proposal here is that however we see the metaphysics, a particular individual's valuational stance is inconsistent if any possible world would be deficient with respect one of his values. I say more about appropriate compromises, inconsistency, and abstract values in section 4.

2. What is wrong with valuational inconsistency?

Now, what might be bad, from the point of view of the self, about having inconsistent valuations? Intuitively, the thought seems to be that when valuations conflict contingently, there is something wrong only with the world -- if things were different, I would be satisfied -- whereas if I am valuationally "inconsistent," there is something wrong with me. The fully unified person should be unified "from within," and thus inconsistency, of the type I have defined here, is bad for an agent.

Harry Frankfurt has been a forceful and articulate defender of the idea that some kinds of internal dividedness are deeply troubling, and destructive for an agent, rendering him irrational or non-autonomous. While Frankfurt may be right that some kinds of internal dividedness are destructive, my aim in this paper is to show that the difficulties in question have nothing to do with whether his valuations conflict essentially or contingently; he and others are mistaking in thinking that "ambivalence" and "inconsistency" are the particular source of any problems with the self. In some places,

Frankfurt seems to be arguing against a general kind of valuational inconsistency of attitudes, as when he says that ambivalence is a disease of the soul that makes a person "volitionally inchoate."¹⁵ In other places, Frankfurt focuses more specifically on problems agents face when they have two options for acting in some particular set of circumstances, conflicting desires about what to do, and conflicting second-order desires about which of these first-order desires to make their will. I call this kind of conflict "choice-conflict."

Like general valuational conflict, choice-conflicts can be contingent, as when I face a choice between eating candy and not eating sugar -- a possible world with sugar-free candy would solve my problems; or essential but non-ambivalent -- there is no possible world in which I can be faithful to Jane and have sex with Julia; or truly ambivalent -- if I must choose, say, between smoking this cigarette now, and not smoking this cigarette now. In the case of both general valuational conflict and choice-conflict, Frankfurt sometimes suggests that conflictedness becomes threatening when it is "essential" or ambivalent, and not merely contingent. While I leave open the possibility that in some conditions, conflicted agents face difficulties, I argue in this paper that those conditions are orthogonal to the question of whether the conflict is "essential," and thus to the matter, often raised, of whether an agent is internally unified or divided.

Here I'll use some of Frankfurt's discussion, together with thoughts of Charles Taylor, as a starting point for thinking about what we are worrying about when we worry about valuational ambivalence.

¹⁵ Harry Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," reprinted in his collection, Necessity, Volition, and Love (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 95-107, p. 100.

With respect to choice situations, Frankfurt says that a person who has conflicting second-order desires about what to do will be deeply troubled.

He writes,

If there is an unresolved conflict among someone's second-order desires, then he is in danger of having no second-order volition; for unless this conflict is resolved, he has no preference concerning which of his first-order desires is to be his will. This condition, if it is so severe that it prevents him from identifying himself in a sufficiently decisive way with any of his conflicting first-order desires, destroys him as a person. For it either tends to paralyze his will and to keep him from acting at all, or it tends to remove him from his will so that his will operates without his participation.¹⁶

The claim is that deep conflict is troubling in at least two ways: a person may be unable to act at all, and if he can act, he will be alienated from his action, in a way that makes it "not his own."

For a simple, Frankfurtian, example, consider a drug addict who both values the pleasure of taking drugs and also values sobriety, and who is faced with the decision of whether to take the drug. He may be unable to act, because he cannot choose what to do, endlessly switching his preference between his end of pleasure and his end of sobriety. Even if he does manage to act, the agent will not identify with his action: it could have gone either way, it reflects nothing about him essentially, it is not to his credit nor to his blame how he acts, because he is not really the author of his action, failing, as he does, to stand behind it.

The idea is a familiar one in thinking about valuational conflict more generally. Without a unified, coherent, evaluative stance of some kind, one is both indecisive and inauthentic. One cannot be decisive, because ambivalence leads us to change our minds over and over, and approach similar situations with different feelings resulting in

¹⁶ Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," Journal of Philosophy 68 (1971), 5-20, p. 16.

different decisions. One cannot be authentic, standing fully behind one's choices, because those choices are not supported by any deep identification. They concern only one's whims and never one's true identity.

But I'll argue that while Frankfurt may be right that some conflicted agents have difficulties with action and the will, the *reasons* for these problems do not concern the distinction between mere conflicts and inconsistency at all. Whatever the difficulty is, it is not a difficulty with inconsistency or ambivalence, and thus it does not concern the internal unity of the agent's valuational outlook.

In later work, Frankfurt goes beyond these kinds of choice situation cases, to claim that more general valuational ambivalence is bad, and here he focuses more clearly on the distinction between mere conflict and ambivalence. What a person needs with respect to his valuations, he says, is "wholeheartedness"; to achieve this, it is not necessary to rid oneself of conflicting desires; rather what is needed is that one identify with one feeling or attitude wholeheartedly, and come to regard others as outlaws. The conflict, then, is transformed into a conflict between the outlaw desire and the person who struggles not to have it.¹⁷ If ambivalence is a disease of the soul, this is the "cure."¹⁸

In their discussions of the subject, both Frankfurt and Charles Taylor say that conflicts become troubling for an agent when they are specifically "essential" or tied to

¹⁷ Harry Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," reprinted in his collection, The Importance of What We Care About (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 159-176, p. 172. Essay first published 1987.

¹⁸ Harry Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," reprinted in his collection, Necessity, Volition, and Love (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 95-107, p. 100.

ambivalence.¹⁹ Each acknowledges the existence, and frequency, of contingent valuational conflicts, and each argues that these are not threatening the way essential conflict is. The reason, Frankfurt says, is that being wholehearted with respect to one "psychic element" is compatible with being wholehearted with respect to another that contingently conflicts with it -- at least, as long as one element has a higher priority.²⁰ They are compatible because the element that has a higher priority will guide the agent's action, while "the element that is less important to him is not necessarily alien, threatening him from outside the structure of his self."²¹ He seems to mean: as long as the person is unified, from within, the way the world is cannot threaten his unity. Again, it is the importance of this internal unity that I will challenge.

To get clearer about the significance of and "cure" for general valuational ambivalence, let's look at Frankfurt's exchange on the subject with David Velleman.²² Velleman raises doubts about Frankfurtian unification, using Freud's example of the Rat Man, who, he explains, loved and hated his father, and consequently had troubling symptoms, such as "repeatedly doing and undoing an action, or thinking and contradicting a thought."²³ But Freud's discussion, Velleman says, shows not that the problem is ambivalence, but rather that the problem is the repression of the hatred; the way the Rat Man repressed his hatred involved identifying himself with his love, and

¹⁹ Harry Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," p. 103, and Charles Taylor, "What Is Human Agency?" reprinted in his collection, Human Agency and Language (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 20-21.

²⁰ Harry Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," p. 103.

²¹ Harry Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," p. 103.

²² J. David Velleman, "Identification and Identity," in Contours of Agency, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 91-123 and "Harry Frankfurt, "Reply to J. David Velleman," Contours of Agency, pp. 124-128.

²³ Velleman, "Identification and Identity," p. 101.

dissociating himself from his hatred. This is what made the Rat Man so unhappy. And this repression seems oddly close to the "cure" for ambivalence recommended by Frankfurt."²⁴

In a reply to Velleman, Frankfurt says that the real problem here is not the mere conflict of emotions, but rather the failure to take a stand with one side of the conflict against the other -- this failure is what ambivalence truly is. To address this, the Rat Man need not get rid of his conflicting emotions, but should just stand decisively behind his love and against his hatred.²⁵ What is wrong with ambivalence, he says, is shown by the Rat Man himself; of his waffling and self-contradiction, Frankfurt says, "That sort of self-defeating behavior and thought violates the elementary requirements of rationality."²⁶

This tells us more clearly what unity requires: one can accept both attitudes as part of oneself, as long as one stands decisively behind one of them and regards the other as an outlier, external to the self. Here Frankfurt emphasizes the idea raised in the earlier cited passage, dealing with choice situations, that the person who is valuationally inconsistent will be unable to act. We also find here a new thought: that even if he can act, the agent's action will be ineffective, because he will vacillate, serving one then another of his values. Third, we see again the worry that when the essentially conflicted person acts, the act will not be autonomous, will not reflect the self in the right kind of

²⁴ Velleman admits that there is an important difference: the Rat Man "expelled [his hatred] from his self-awareness or self-understanding, whereas Frankfurt's view implies that he should have consciously rejected it and thereby expelled it from the self." But this rejection, he says, doesn't seem any better. What the Rat Man should have done, on Velleman's view, was "to accept his filial hostility as part of himself; to accept himself as ambivalent toward his father." Velleman, "Identification and Identity," p. 103.

²⁵ Frankfurt, "Reply," p. 126.

²⁶ Frankfurt, "Reply," p. 127.

way. Finally, a fourth difficulty is the special one that the ambivalent person will be dissatisfied not just with his life, but also with himself.

3. The Valuationally Inconsistent Self: A Defense

Insofar as these worries are meant to apply specifically to valuational inconsistency, I believe they are misdirected. Valuational inconsistency is not dangerous, and can be worth keeping; the valuationally inconsistent person may have an internally divided self, but an internally divided self can be a fully rational and good self. The reason, in a nutshell, is that whatever difficulties divided agents face arise in the same way for merely conflicted agents as they do for inconsistent ones. But clearly there is nothing wrong with being merely conflicted: an agent who values taking care of his mother and values defending his country is valuing in a perfectly appropriate way. This means the difficulties of divided agents tell us nothing about the need for internal unity in an agent's valuational outlook. I elaborate on this thought in the discussions of the four worries in this section.

3a. Inability to act

The "inability to act" charge is a common one in discussions of affective inconsistency of various kinds, but it shouldn't be, because when it comes to action, inconsistency is the same as mere contingent conflict.²⁷ When it comes to the ways that conflict might or might not impede action, the person with a contingent conflict is in the

²⁷ I argue an analogous point in the case of desires in my "On Essentially Conflicting Desires."

same situation as the person with an essential conflict: each, when it comes down to the moment of action, has various options they want to pursue, of which they must choose one. When one is deciding what to do, it makes no difference whether the conflict is essential or contingent. Indeed, the cases in real life that cause us the most daily trouble are often contingent cases, arising because of commitments to jobs, family, friends, and so on, that we haven't the resources to fulfill.

For the case of general valuational inconsistency, recall the conflicted mother who may be merely conflicted or genuinely inconsistent. Whether she is one or the other makes no difference with respect to the kinds of choice conflicts she experiences as arising out of the more general conflict. She is offered a job, and she must decide whether to take it or turn it down, or she must decide one morning whether to stay home with her sick child or drop him off at a friend's house so she can get to her job, or she must choose how many hours her child will spend in daycare. The everyday conflicts of life will arise for the conflicted mother in the same way whether her essential conflict concerns her incompatible life roles, or her contingent conflict concerns two values that, because she lives in a child-unfriendly world, contingently conflict. From the point of view of the agent, these two kinds of conflict would feel very similar. The abstract possibility of a world in which one's valuations can be fulfilled has nothing to do with the experience, in our world, of being valuationally conflicted, and thus has no impact on whether an agent can act effectively.

But of course mere conflict of valuations does not generally render us unable to act; if it did, our wills would be constantly paralyzed -- ineffective behavior would be much more widespread than it actually seems to be. Contingent valuational conflicts --

as Frankfurt acknowledges -- arise very often: most people play various roles in life, involving them in various commitments, which often demand incompatible things. Many people have commitments to careers and to loved ones that conflict. Many also have various good works they value that they would pursue if they had more time or more money. That they do not means that their commitments to these conflict. Shall I volunteer at the school or at the soup kitchen? Or should I just go to my kid's soccer game? If contingent conflicts like these rendered people unable to act effectively, very little would get accomplished.

Ambivalence, in the general valuational case, raises no special new difficulties here: my love and hatred for my father will not prevent me from acting any more than a simple contingent conflict would. In each case I must weigh the alternatives and decide what to do. In each case I will be drawn in different directions by different concerns, and will have to settle on a particular action and carry it out. In each case I may feel that whatever I choose, there were reasons to have chosen differently.

So for the case of general valuations, I claim there is no special problem with being able to act, on grounds that inconsistency is much like mere conflictedness. But what about choice conflicts? Imagine the conflicted mother wants to attend a meeting one afternoon, and also wants not to attend the meeting, because she wants to attend her child's school play. We may wonder: if she endorses both of these desires as worth having, she will be unable to get sufficiently behind one of them to act.

But, again, if there is a difficulty here, it arises in the same way whether the conflict is essential or contingent. Indeed, in the most natural description of this mother's case, the conflict is contingent, since what this mother wants is to attend both the meeting

and the game, and there is a possible world in which she can attend both -- the world in which the meeting is set for the following day. Any difficulty there is arises because she cannot do both in this world. The worry concerns the possibility that an agent can't commit to action, but whatever this problem is, it can arise equally well for the inconsistent and for the merely conflicted person.

Perhaps one may say that even this merely conflicted person is in trouble if she endorses two incompatible actions. It is true that if she forms intentions to perform two acts that are in conflict with one another, an agent has a planning problem. In the typical case, though, acting requires simply prioritizing: forming a preference for one thing over another. Indeed, Frankfurt seems to acknowledge this when he says that in the contingent case there is no problem because being wholehearted about each of two contingently conflicting things, at the same time, is no problem as long as one element has a "higher priority."²⁸

But I claim that one can prioritize in the case of essential conflicts, and ambivalence, as well as one can in the case of contingent conflicts. The person who has an endorsed desire to have sex with Julia and one to stay faithful to Jane, and the person who has an endorsed desire to smoke this cigarette now, and not to smoke this cigarette now, are as able to prioritize their choices as the person who has a contingent conflict between her endorsed desire to go to the meeting and her endorsed desire to go to the play. I may want one of each of these pairs of things, and simply want the other more, and so choose it.²⁹

²⁸ Harry Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," p. 103.

²⁹ If valuations are second-order desires, then we might say that the agent has one second-order desire that overrides the other in the simple sense of being stronger than it. This

So while Frankfurt may be right that there is a problem when a conflicted agent cannot act effectively, this problem is the same for inconsistent agents and for merely conflicted ones. Now, Frankfurt does say that the difference is that in contingent cases, the item of lesser priority doesn't threaten the unity of the self, whereas in cases of ambivalence it does. We also might wonder: if an agent is prioritizing, in what sense is he "inconsistent" at all? I say more about these two matters below.

3b. Vacillation

Even if a person is able to act on a case by case basis, we may worry that his actions may themselves be "inconsistent," in the sense that he vacillates, serving one value then another. This is the second worry; it arises just for the case of "general valuations"; for choice situations, happening at one moment in time, vacillation isn't possible. It is true that the person trying to integrate inconsistent values into his life may make individual decisions that seem not to add up. The conflicted mother may make choices that go this way and that, sometimes choosing to focus on her family and sometimes choosing to focus on her career. The ambivalent child may act on different feelings at different times. If these agents undermine the effects of their previous choices with their later ones, we might describe this as a "doing and undoing."

But often, the scattered choices of a conflicted person reflect not a "doing and undoing" nor a will that is "inchoate and indeterminate," but rather something highly sensible: a compromise. While it is possible for the conflicted person to vacillate in a self-undermining way, he need not; he may "vacillate" because he is seeking out the best

applies to desires that conflict contingently, essentially, and ambivalently in the same way.

way to stay faithful to two things he values, or to himself. A mother who chooses to attend her child's play one week and chooses her own work the next week is, in a sense, "vacillating" but she is not self-undermining, and she is, I think, behaving in the best way possible for someone who values her family and her work.

If one feels deeply committed to two valuations, feeling each to be important, and feeling each to be part of one's identity, it seems the only rational course of action is to try to accommodate each as much as possible. This is unexceptional in the sense that we seem to do it all the time, weighing concerns about family against those of careers, concerns about charity against the good of our loved ones, and various feelings we have about the people around us. This applies in the same way whether the conflict is essential or contingent. The working woman who also values being a stay-at-home mom will likely make use of the same kinds of compromises that the contingently conflicted mother will. Such compromises require agents to make choices that build on, rather than undermining, their previous choices, but these compromises are equally available to the merely conflicted mother and the inconsistent one.

A person who both loves and hates his father may also "vacillate" in a sense: torn between affection and anger, he may act generously and lovingly on some occasions, and coldly on others. This may well be the best course of action, allowing the child to express his divided feelings: it hardly seems better either to deny one's affection and cut off ties altogether, or to force oneself to be loving on all occasions. I allow there may well be reasons to refrain from harming the father, and to provide a kind of care for him; there may even be reason for the child to try to love his father more. But these are moral reasons, and do not follow from considerations about wholeheartedness; if they did, they

would be as easily directed to supporting wholehearted hatred. They also do not demand that one never express one's divided feelings. In practical terms, Frankfurt's demand that we "stand behind" the love and against the hatred will only remove the danger of vacillation by requiring us to act lovingly on all occasions: simply regarding the hate as an outlier emotion will not, itself, be sufficient to address this unless one's behavior becomes consistently loving. But this does seem close to the "repression" Velleman finds troubling.

Perhaps one may say here that the problem here concerns not the question of whether the agent is able to prioritize, but rather how prioritized valuations affect the agent's self. I may be wholeheartedly in favor of A and B, even if these contingently conflict and I must choose one over the other, but I cannot be wholeheartedly in favor of A and not-A, or A and B essentially conflicting, because the very endorsing of one involves a rejection of the other. It is true that if wholeheartedness were independently assumed to be of value, then prioritizing inconsistent values would yield a non-ideal self. That self would have no internally unified list of values toward which it is unequivocally in favor. But the importance of wholeheartedness, and of an internally unified self, is what I am challenging here.³⁰

Perhaps one may object at this point that even if I am right that essential valuational conflicts need not impede effective action over time, still, what a conflicted agent does need in order to avoid vacillation is a "valuational priority ranking": a considered judgment on how to value the things he values, how his preferences for these values fit together, and what proportion of his concern each ought to take up. Otherwise,

³⁰ I say more about this in section 3d.

the danger of vacillation is real: the person who is unsure how to value A and B may pursue one and then the other in a self-undermining way, leading him to accomplish nothing. The person who values the pleasure of drugs, and values sobriety, and hasn't got a priority ranking may well behave irrationally, refraining from indulging all day, suffering, only to undermine his own efforts later on.

And it may seem that to call an agent with a priority ranking "inconsistent" is just perverse, given that he has judged relative priorities and found an acceptable compromise between his conflicting valuations. On this view, the important matter is not whether A and B fit together, but rather how the agent formulates his commitment to A and B: as long as the agent has a priority ranking, those commitments are properly formulated, and the agent is rational.

I discuss this further in section 4, but notice here that even if a priority ranking is rationally required, my basic point still stands: there is nothing worse about essential conflicts over contingent ones, and nothing especially bad about ambivalence; in any case one must prioritize. Again, Frankfurt says that the reason inconsistency is bad, and mere conflict is not, is that, "being wholehearted with respect to one 'psychic element' is compatible with being wholehearted with respect to another that contingently conflicts with it -- at least, as long as one element has a higher priority."³¹ But just as in the case of choice conflicts, priority rankings of general valuations can be just as rationally formed between A and B essentially conflicting, and even between A and not-A, as between A and B contingently conflicting. The woman who values her career and her family life in a way that is "inconsistent," because there is no possible world in which she will be

³¹ Harry Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," p. 103.

satisfied, and the woman who values them in a way that is consistent, may each form priority rankings in the same ways. The person who loves and hates his father may well love his father more, but still experience hatred as a significant part of his valuational life. The drug addict who values both the pleasure of the drug and sobriety may well value them in a prioritized way, caring about one more than the other. So my point stands that there is nothing worse about essential conflicts or ambivalence here.³²

Of course, it is true that being inconsistent creates conditions under which one may vacillate. But so does the ordinary conflictedness of overlapping life concerns. So nothing about the danger of vacillation bears on valuational inconsistency itself.

3c. Valuational Inconsistency and Autonomy

Our third worry is now obviously relevant, since we may wonder: if a person's behavior is determined by factors external to himself, how can it truly be his? The concern here seems to be that the inconsistent person, in choosing sometimes to serve one value and sometimes to serve another that essentially conflicts with it, is committed to neither, and thus his action fails to reflect any valuational commitment at all.

Let me start with general valuational inconsistency. As with the previous discussion, we'll want to distinguish between the person who has, and the person who lacks, a priority ranking. For the person who has such a ranking, I see no difficulty about autonomy, because the valuationally inconsistent person may indeed act in a way that properly reflects the self: he may act in ways that show respect for each of his values in the proportion he endorses. His actions reflect an internally divided self. The

³² I discuss the relationship to the self in the next subsection, on autonomy.

compromises, and choices, this person deems appropriate will reflect his particular valuational stance toward the world. This seems as much reflection of the self as anyone could require, and as much autonomy. In fact, an inconsistent person may be more obviously acting autonomously than an consistent one, since an inconsistent person must reflect before acting, whereas a consistent person -- especially an unconflicted one -- may be acting simply on impulse. And recall, priority rankings are as available between inconsistent values as they are between merely conflicting ones. So there is no difficulty in these cases, and as before, my general point stands: there is nothing especially bad about inconsistency over mere conflictedness.

Consider again the conflicted mother. Any conflicted mother, with or without a priority ranking, may find herself regularly basing her decisions on "external," and seemingly inconsequential, factors: I'll go to the PTA meeting tonight because it's at a convenient location and the traffic is light, but I'll skip the Halloween party planning because I must spend the time responding to emails I neglected during the day. For the agent with a priority ranking, there is nothing non-autonomous about such behavior at all; in fact, it is the stuff of which sensible compromises are made. Assuming the overall pattern makes sense, the person making such choices is absolutely reflecting her "self" -- she is reflecting that she cares about both her career and her family in some particular proportional way.

Perhaps we may worry that even this "prioritized" agent risks behavior that does not match up with her values: she values her career, but finds she sacrifices it so often that she loses her job. We can imagine the "trivia" of life seems to always go one way, suggesting to her that she ought to stay home, go to the school event, etc. But as long as

the agent has a priority ranking, I claim, the problem here is not conflictedness, but any of three others: perhaps she doesn't really value her career all that much, and this is why she often opts in favor of family; perhaps she deliberates poorly, and is overly influenced in her decision-making by incidental things; or perhaps she has poor impulse control, and fails to act in accordance with what she has decided to do. Any of these difficulties would suffice to create the relevant problems, and would do so even in a person who was not valuationally conflicted but just easily distracted. That many conflicted people manage to work out such compromises shows that conflictedness is not the crucial issue here.

Again, these conclusions hold in the same way for both the inconsistent mother and the merely contingently conflicted one, and similar considerations apply to the ambivalent person who loves and hates his father. The child who expresses each of these ambivalent feelings in some proportion reflecting his valuations is reflecting his self. So there is nothing especially bad here about inconsistency. The same morals apply in the case of choice conflicts. Imagine a drug addict who must decide, on some occasion, whether to take the drug or whether to refrain, who prioritizes his choices so that he prefers overall to refrain, and who does refrain. This agent's choice, in reflecting his prioritized concerns, reflects his self; intuitively such an agent seems to have made an autonomous choice.

A brief consideration of some standard accounts of autonomy support these intuitions.³³ Of course, one way of understanding autonomy is grounded in the very

³³ In characterizing these views and suggesting they are "standard," I follow John Christman's *Constructing the Inner Citadel: Recent Work on the Concept of Autonomy* Ethics, Vol. 99, No. 1 (Oct., 1988), pp. 109-124.

notions of identification we have been working with here. On these views, an agent is autonomous if the relationship between an agent and his desires and values is one of appropriate internal identification, so that, for example, is free from influences that are inappropriately external.³⁴ By hypothesis, our inconsistent agents do identify with the desires, goals, and values they are end up pursuing; it's just they identify with other desires, goals, and values that are incompatible with them. In the case of mere conflict, it is clear that, assuming prioritization, conflictedness does not undermine an agent's autonomy; since, as I've argued, one may prioritize among "inconsistent" values as well as among merely conflicting ones, the same reasons show that, assuming prioritization, inconsistency does not undermine an agent's autonomy either.

A second way of seeing autonomy focuses on whether an agent is properly reflective and able to articulate and respond to good reasons.³⁵ Again, nothing about inconsistency prevents an agent with a prioritization from reflecting and acting on the basis of good reasons. Just as in the case of mere conflict, such an agent will typically develop her prioritization in response to certain features of the world, how her choices are structured, and so on, and just as in the case of mere conflict, such an agent will typically act on, or change, her priority ranking in response to reasons.

³⁴ See, e. g., Gerald Dworkin, "The Concept of Autonomy" in John Christman, The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy. New York: Oxford University Press. (1989), pp. 54-62, and also the works, already cited, of Frankfurt himself. Of course, if we assume that autonomy requires wholeheartedness, these agents are not autonomous, but in that case, neither are agents who are merely conflicted and have clear priority rankings. In any case, simply assuming that autonomy requires wholeheartedness would be question-begging in the present context. Views such as these, based on identification, face an important challenge with respect to whether we should understand "identification" along the lines of self-recognition or approval. I take no stand on this matter here; my remarks apply to each in the same way.

³⁵ See, e. g. Lawrence Haworth, Autonomy: An Essay in Philosophical Psychology and Ethics (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986).

What if the agent lacks a priority ranking? Here, I feel, is where the interesting and difficult questions start to arise, though as I've been emphasizing, they are not questions about inconsistency per se, but apply generally to conflicted agents of all kinds: Does an agent without a priority ranking risk failures of autonomy? What should we say about such an agent's values and his self? How is unprioritized conflictedness related to rationality? As I said in the discussion of vacillation, the agent who cares for A and B, and who is uncertain about how to care about these proportionally, may well allow certain external factors to influence their decisions about how to act. Lacking a priority ranking, these agents may allow such external factors to determine the way A and B become incorporated into their lives, thus acting over time in ways that promote some proportionality that the agent herself is not invested in. And then we wonder: do these choices, and this life, properly reflect the agent's self?

Again, notice that that this question is the same, and functions the same way, for agents whose values are inconsistent or ambivalent as it does for agents who are merely conflicted: these agents aren't sure how to incorporate their caring for A and B into their lives, and it make no difference whether A and B conflict essentially or contingently. So again, wholeheartedness, ambivalence, and inconsistency are not the crux of the matter, and my general point stands that there is nothing especially bad about being internally divided in the sense I am discussing.

It is often suggested that autonomy has something to do with the unity or integration of the self.³⁶ If unity and self-integration are understood as involving simply

³⁶ Of conflicts and tensions in a person's valuational stance, Gary Watson says, "Some of these possibilities point to problems about the unity of the person. Here the extreme case is pathological. I am inclined to think that when the split is severe enough, to have more

prioritization among various cares, then I have no deep objection; my point here is simply to insist that, surprisingly, such unity and self-integration is compatible with ambivalence and other kinds of inconsistency. If, however, unity and self-integration are understood as fundamentally opposed to ambivalence and inconsistency, as they are sometimes taken to be, then my point here is that this is false; from the point of view of autonomy, ambivalence, inconsistency and mere conflictedness are very much the same.

3d. Dissatisfaction with the self

For each of the three proposed difficulties I've considered -- inability to act, vacillation, and failure of autonomy -- I've argued that inconsistency is very like mere contingent conflictedness. The fourth worry, in contrast, is constructed to apply specifically to ambivalence. The idea here is that the ambivalent person will be not just inevitably dissatisfied, but that he will be dissatisfied with himself rather than with the external world. Consider again here Frankfurt's idea that contingent conflicts are different from essential ones in that they do not threaten the unity of the self, since "[b]eing wholehearted with respect to one element is consistent with assigning a higher

than one standpoint is to have none" ("Free Agency," p. 216). Of factors that may obstruct autonomy, Robert Young lists "self-deception, ambivalence, and anomie" ("Autonomy and the 'Inner Self,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 17 1980, 35-43). In her *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on Personal Autonomy, Sarah Buss says that the value of autonomy is tied to the value of self-integration: "We don't want to be alien to, or at war with, ourselves; and it seems that when our intentions are not under our own control, we suffer from self-alienation" (Buss, Sarah, "Personal Autonomy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/personal-autonomy/>>). Again, while I agree that there are agents with troubled relations among their values, or between their values and desires, my point here is that these troubled relations are best expressed in terms of a failure to prioritize, and are not related to ambivalence and inconsistency.

priority to another."³⁷ But no one can be satisfied with being ambivalent, because the elements of such an agent will work against one another; such a person can never be satisfied with himself, since he will always be restless, with part of his self working against other parts.

Let me distinguish two related concerns here. One has to do with the abstract unity of the self, and the second has to do with dissatisfaction with the self. Each of these has the greatest force when we consider ambivalence in particular. With respect to unity, we may wonder: If I endorse and stand behind my desire for A, and I take it on as part of myself, then how could I possibly endorse and stand behind my desire for not-A? Doesn't taking on not-A mean, in a sense, rejecting A?

It is true that the ambivalent person lacks a kind of unity the non-ambivalent person has. Insofar as he takes on as his own each of his ambivalent feelings, the child who loves and hates his father may well experience his inner life and self as internally divided. This person is "of two minds," as the saying goes. But as long as he is as able to avoid being self-undermining as the ordinary conflicted person, as I've argued he is, what is bad about being of two minds? Imagine the child's hatred is somewhat stronger than his love. A demand for wholeheartedness, considered on its own, seems to suggest this agent would be better giving up his love. But this seems false.

With respect to dissatisfaction, there are two ways to understand the problem. Recall from section 1 that there are two subtly different ways of saying what an "endorsed" desire is: we may characterize it either in terms of self-recognition, or in terms of approval. On the first interpretation, the dissatisfaction worry is that the agent

³⁷ Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," p. 103.

will be troubled by taking on for himself care for opposite things; on the second, the dissatisfaction worry is that the agent will be troubled particularly by his approval of two opposite things. Let me take these up in turn.

If we take endorsement as self-recognition, although the ambivalent agent will be inevitably dissatisfied, I see no reason for him to be dissatisfied with himself. Although Frankfurt mentions vacillation as one of the pitfalls of ambivalence, we've already seen that this is mistaken: vacillation in behavior is no less likely with contingent conflicts than it is with essential ones. Especially if one's contingent conflict involves values that are quite evenly matched, one may choose to serve one value and then another, though as I've also stressed, this can be sensible compromise rather than vacillation. But if vacillation is not the specific pitfall here, what is? Velleman's idea that self-acceptance is what matters for the ambivalent child suggests a way to understand an agent who is ambivalent yet content: he acknowledges and accepts his own filial hatred as part of himself. Whether a person is willing to accept such hatred as part of himself would seem to me to have more to do with the other facts of the case than with ambivalence. If the child feels his hatred is justified, or appropriate, he may be willing to accept his own ambivalence; if he feels his hatred is arbitrary or undeserved, or if he feels hatred is a morally bad feeling, he may struggle to overcome it. But these sources are distinct from the love the child feels, and so are not tied to resolving ambivalent feelings.

Frankfurt does recognize the possibility that conditions may be such that ambivalence is an appropriate response, but he suggests they will be rare, and he says that even in this case, one cannot desire to be ambivalent for its own sake. This, he claims, shows that we "wholeheartedly desire to be wholehearted." Perhaps, if all this means is

that conflicts between wholeheartedness and the desire to accommodate inconsistent values are always contingent. I suppose they may be, if it is contingent that I value the things I do. But put this way, the point seems to lead to little in the way of irrationality claims: as long as there can be conditions under which it is best to be ambivalent, it can be rational to be ambivalent, and in this case ambivalent may be the best way I can be.

Perhaps one may object here that even if there are conditions under which I must accept my own ambivalence, I cannot hope that such conditions will obtain, and insofar as this means I prefer wholeheartedness to ambivalence, I am, in a sense, dissatisfied with my ambivalent self. I have no reason to value ambivalence for its own sake. But this would be an effective argument only if there were independent reasons to value wholeheartedness for its own sake. What would these reasons be? Wholeheartedness may seem intrinsically appealing when we think of it in terms of a comfortable certainty and lack of anxious doubt. But a person who decided to wage war, to divorce a spouse, or to protect his children by harming others would be a worse person for being wholehearted in his decision. Even if they just "stand behind" the item they judge to be best, to regard the other as an outlier, these agents seem less admirable the more wholehearted they are about their choices. We expect morally sensitive agents to feel sorrow and regret over the harm they are causing, even when they act for the best overall. In these circumstances ambivalence is better than wholeheartedness.³⁸ If this is right, the

³⁸ Moral dilemmas provide rich examples of cases in which an agent seems to be more admirable for feeling less wholehearted about his choice; we want and expect agents in some dilemmas to feel a kind of psychological pain or sorrow about their choice. For more on whether this feeling is "regret," and whether it is rational, see Marcus, "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency," Bernard Williams, "Ethical Consistency," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, supp, vol. 39 (1965), 103-124 and 1966 and "Consistency and

most one could say about wholeheartedness is that it is sometimes good and sometimes not good, which is just what I have claimed about ambivalence itself.

When endorsement is taken as approval, the problem may seem more acute, since to approve of a desire is so closely bound up with having a moral belief or attitude toward the thing in question. Being for something morally, one is typically against those who are against it, and this suggests an agent who is ambivalent will be against himself. For example, imagine a person who loves animals, and endorses with approval his desires to promote their welfare; for this agent to also endorse with approval his desire to hunt would, indeed, seem odd. It seems that the animal-lover part of him should condemn and be alienated from -- and certainly be dissatisfied with -- the hunting-lover part of him.

But while there is something odd about this agent, I claim that this oddness derives from, and is dependent on, the assumption that if the first of these items is morally good, the other may not also be morally good.³⁹ If one does make that assumption then indeed, the agent has a problem, since he is approving of something he is himself committed to regarding as not worthy of approval. But this problem is not a problem of inconsistency. It is a problem of approving of what one regards as not good to approve.

To see that inconsistency of valuations is not itself the difficulty here, notice that an agent who has good reasons for endorsing with approval both his desire to promote animal welfare and his desire to hunt, and who is in a state of uncertainty about what to

Realism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp, vol. 40 (1966), 1-22; and Philippa Foot, "Moral Realism and Moral Dilemma," *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983).

³⁹ Of course, such an agent may act in ways that are self-undermining, protesting, say, the very activities he engages in. As I've argued above, however, while ambivalent agents may act in self-undermining ways, so may agents who are merely conflicted.

do, need not be dissatisfied with himself at all. Imagine we're talking about a young aristocrat in England in the late nineteenth century: he has grown up regarding fox hunting as a wonderful part of his cultural life, a link to his ancestors, and an activity that develops one's courage and fortitude.⁴⁰ He then develops a caring for animals and finds himself in a quandary. He may feel that both hunting and animal welfare are good things; he may be sad that they are mutually exclusive; he may be uncertain how to proceed. We may imagine he is truly ambivalent, endorsing his desire to hunt and his desire to refrain from hunting.

But as long as he regards both with approval, there is no reason for this person to be dissatisfied with himself. He may rather tend toward self-satisfaction, seeing himself as more morally sensitive than both the unconflicted hunter and those who shun hunting altogether. This agent approves of what he finds worthy of his approval. I'm not claiming such cases are typical, just that they show that any dissatisfaction with the self derives not from inconsistency or ambivalence, but rather from the feeling -- a feeling that may accompany inconsistency, but needn't -- that one approves of what one does not regard as worth approving of.⁴¹ To see this, notice that in non-moral cases, no such dissatisfaction arises. Recall the example of friendly rivalry, in which an agent both wants his friendly rival to win and wants his friendly rival not to win. Assuming the agent regards both of these desires as morally neutral, there is no reason for the agent to feel dissatisfied with himself for having them.

⁴⁰ For examples of aristocrats with these feelings, see the many excellent fox-hunting depictions in the novels of Anthony Trollope.

⁴¹ To see why approving of A needn't logically entail not approving of not-A, see again note 9.

Perhaps one may object here that any serious moral agent must be morally against not-A when he is morally for A. It may well be that morally speaking, we have obligations to be against not-A when we are morally for A. Our fox hunter may have a moral duty to resolve his question one way or another. This may all be so, but it does not show any problem at all for the selfhood of the agent. 4. The significance and value of valuational inconsistency

I've argued that valuational inconsistency is not irrational or bad for an agent, partly on the grounds that for an agent, such inconsistency is very like mere conflictedness. In each case one must deliberate, prioritize, form an appropriate plan, and carry it out. Now consider again the objection I raised before: if a person has a plan, and if the appropriateness of this plan is partly grounded in its reflecting the appropriateness of certain compromises, then why consider this agent "inconsistent" at all? Why not say simply that the compromises this person accepts shows what he really values? Indeed, given that I acknowledge that there may be true difficulties in the case of conflictedness and lack of prioritization, why think that the notion of "inconsistency" I've isolated here, if it does not lead to these, is even of interest?

My answer is that the person who prioritizes and compromises may nonetheless be inconsistent in the sense I have defined, and that this sense of inconsistency is a significant one, even if it is distinct from the "inconsistency" we associated with lack of priorities, poor planning, and incoherent action. I've argued above that the person who endorses compromises is valuationally inconsistent if, because of the way he values, he is inevitably disappointed. For this agent, no matter what course of action he chooses and no matter how things turn out, there will always be a kind of left-over, a something-lost.

This agent will be inevitably disappointed; for this agent there is a limit to how much the world can be made to cooperate; for this agent, there is no ideal way things can be.

One simple manifestation of the importance of valuational inconsistency is the way inconsistency itself can be of value. There are two senses in which I believe this is so. The first concerns the well-being of the agent. The person who regards his own valuations as inconsistent rather than merely conflicting will experience his conflict in a special way. To be knowingly inconsistent is to believe that there is no perfect way things can be; if dissatisfaction is inevitable, its presence will be less frustrating. Indeed, any regret or sorrow an agent feels after acting may be less for the agent who is inconsistent, since this agent knows that there was no way to avoid the difficulty: it is not due to a cruel twist of fate that she is dissatisfied, it is inevitable. The woman who values her family and her career in a way that is merely contingent may well be annoyed and frustrated if she cannot find just the right job, and may spend a lot of energy trying to find just the right job, to arrange her life in just the right way. The woman who knows that the way she values is inconsistent may accept compromises with a feeling that some value will be unfulfilled under any circumstances. Sometimes those evaluating their lives talk as if "compromise" is necessarily a dirty word, or that compromising is somehow bad. For the agent who is inconsistent, compromise is necessary and part of the best life possible. This shows the importance of distinguishing "inconsistency" and the mere conflict.

Another aspect of the value of inconsistency has to do with understanding the values of others. In the case of general valuations, the agent who prioritizes while valuing inconsistently is unlike the consistent and prioritizing agent in that the latter is

more likely to regard his own priority rankings as the right ones than the former. This makes the inconsistent agent better able to understand and empathize with the values of others who value differently. The essentially conflicted mother will certainly understand the choices of a stay-at-home mother and the choices of a mother who works full time; even if she prioritizes and thus compromises differently from them, their life choices will make sense to her. The mother with a specific and confidently held sense of proportion, with non-overlapping values, may find other ways of valuing more foreign to her. The person who values liberty far more than equality but acknowledges that his caring for these conflict will share much more with the person who values equality more than will the person with a consistent and wholeheartedly endorsed sense of what proportion is the right one. Valuational inconsistency can thus bring shared understanding to those who value differently.

Getting back to the general significance question, a second more complex sense in which my notion of inconsistency is significant is in the application of methods of coherence in working out what is worth valuing. That such methods are common raises the question of what is good about coherence -- is coherence rationally required? -- and it is to this question that my arguments here apply. Coherence methods typically involve a kind of back-and-forth reasoning: one looks for general principles that explain and justify one's particular reactions to particular cases, and adjusts the general and the particular in hopes of achieving a fully coherent system. Such methods are usually proposed at the level of judgments and beliefs, but if we think that morality is somehow affective we may well try to apply such strategies at the level of desires or affective attitudes. And those who apply coherence methods often stress that "consistency" is the

most basic element of coherence. I have argued elsewhere that for simple desires, the demand for coherence is not tied to rationality, and so the sense in which a coherent set of desires is better than a non-coherent one cannot be found there.⁴² This raises the possibility that it is at the level of affective attitudes of caring and endorsement, rather than for simple desires, that such coherence is rationally required.

Let me call such reasoning "valuational coherence reasoning." Note first that in such reasoning, the "coherence" we are looking for is distinct from the coherence of having a good plan. Typical applications of valualational coherence reasoning can lead us to regard favorably things that cannot co-exist. For example, in a paradigmatic case of such reasoning, we may start with some particular attitudes in favor of promise-keeping, then develop an attitude for promise-keeping in general, and from this acquire an attitude for keeping all of one's particular promises. As is commonly pointed out, however, we may find that when it comes to planning, we cannot keep all of our promises: perhaps I promise to loan Jane 20 dollars and loan Joe 20 dollars and then someone steals my wallet.

The "coherence" we are looking for in valualational coherence reasoning is internal coherence among attitudes rather than the kind of coherence involved in planning: the former is "internal" in the sense that it takes no notice of what the world happens to be like; the latter is "external" in that the coherence of having a good plan necessarily does take such notice. For "valuational coherence," the relevant kind of consistency is internal consistency: whether attitudes "fit together," regardless of the contingencies of the world, i. e. just what I have been calling "valuational consistency." So here my notion of

⁴² See my "Moral Rationalism and the Normative Status of Desiderative Coherence," Journal of Moral Philosophy (forthcoming).

"inconsistency" is the relevant one, and my conclusion that valuational consistency is not tied to rationality stands as part of the answer to the question of whether valuational coherence reasoning is grounded in rationality. I believe that it is not -- overall -- but, of course, here I have considered only consistency. The moral of my claim about consistency, then, is that just because an agent values A does not rationally require him not to value not-A, or not to value B essentially conflicting with A. He may be required to work toward consistency for other reasons; indeed, I think it likely that there are moral, social, and pragmatic norms in play here. But valuational coherence methods attempt to exploit a connection to rationality and the good of the agent's self, and this is what I am arguing against here. This conclusion matters, whether or not we use the term "inconsistent" to describe the relevant state.

A third point here is that taking a person to be "consistent" insofar as he accepts a priority ranking and compromise, as the objection requires us to do, is, in a sense, throwing the baby out with the bathwater, because it requires us to ignore conflictedness as well as inconsistency. If the central question is refocused so that it concerns whether an agent has a priority ranking, then essentially and contingently conflicted agents will be in the same boat, and if the priority ranking manifests itself in an appropriate compromise and eventual plan, the agent is no longer "divided" in any intuitive sense. He has got everything sorted out, and the question of his conflictedness no longer arises. But of course, conflicted agents do feel differently from unconflicted ones, and they are different. If Sartre's young man joins the French resistance knowing that his mother is taken care of, his emotional state will be very different from that of the young man who leaves her behind, alone. While the worry the latter will feel may be explainable without

reference to conflictedness, there is a particular sense that the agent failed to do something he valued doing that is based in the fact that he is conflicted about his action. If we say that an agent with a priority ranking is not divided in any meaningful way, then it seems to follow that Sartre's young man, having decided to fight, should simply be satisfied with his own actions. But this doesn't seem to fit the emotional and valuational facts.⁴³

Finally, let me make a case for the interest of valuational inconsistency by placing it in the context of the larger debate about the compatibility of values. Isaiah Berlin famously argued that certain values were fundamentally in conflict with one another: equality and liberty, for example, always undermine one another, in that we cannot have full equality without curtailing liberty, and vice-versa. Berlin's critics suggest that just because the fullest versions of these values seem to recommend different actions does not mean they are incompatible; it simply means they are delimited by one another. So, for example, the value of "equality" really only reaches as far as it can without clashing with "liberty."⁴⁴

⁴³ These considerations parallel those in the debate over moral dilemmas, in which those who believe dilemmas to be "real" emphasize that there is a moral "residue" or left-over regardless of what action one performs. For arguments in this direction, see Marcus, "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency"; Bernard Williams, "Ethical Consistency" and "Consistency and Realism"; and my "Moral Dilemmas, Collective Responsibility, and Moral Progress," *Philosophical Studies*, 104 (2001), 203-225. Note also my characterization of inconsistency is in line with Philippa Foot's remarks about virtue when she says the interesting and difficult thought about conflict isn't whether virtues make different demands in certain circumstances, but rather the deeper idea that an agent "can only become good in one way by being bad in another." (From her "Moral Realism and Moral Dilemma," p. 397.)

⁴⁴ Ronald Dworkin pursues a theme along these lines in his "Do Liberal Values Conflict," in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2001).

The question of whether values are so constituted to be truly incompatible or to be delimited by one another is deep and complex. A simpler question, closely related to it, is whether the way we care about values is such that they are rendered incompatible or not. In this paper, I hope to have made two steps toward a full answer of this simpler question. One, I have defined what it is to care about values in such a way that they are rendered incompatible -- it is when the agent is valuationally inconsistent. Two, I have shown that of the possible reasons to avoid being inconsistent, a danger of "irrationality" is not one.

Fundamentally, the significance of the "inconsistency" I consider here is that it concerns the matter of the internal unity of the valuing self; my "inconsistent" agent fails to have such unity. The significance of my arguments about such "inconsistency" is that this lack of unity need not be bad for an agent, or irrational. When it comes to valuing, then, the internal structure of the caring self is not the source of any pressure for unity, or coherence, among values.

I've argued that valuationally inconsistency should be understood in terms of essential versus contingent conflict, that valuational consistency is not rationally required, and that my result has significance for broader philosophical projects. Of course, some agents, in some circumstances, may be better off being consistent, so there may be pragmatic, self-interested, or other reasons to strive for consistency. Conversely, though, there are sometimes reasons to tolerate one's inconsistencies. The conflicted mother may be best off knowing that her compromises are inevitable, and the Rat Man may be best off accepting himself as ambivalent. Valuational inconsistency, then, insofar as it is a

value, is one that is agent-relative, and can be overridden by other considerations. For some agents, then, the internally divided self can be the best self there is.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Early versions of this paper were presented at the Canadian Philosophical Association Annual Meeting, May 2007; the American Philosophical Association Central Division Meeting, April, 2008; the Department of Philosophy, Wilfred Laurier University, November 2006, and the Department of Philosophy, Ryerson University, October 2007. My thanks to all for the discussion, and especially to my APA and CPA commentators, Eugene Heath and Nathan Brett. I am also grateful to Lorraine Besser-Jones, Dave DeVidi, Jonathan Dewald, Allan Gibbard, Penelope Maddy, an anonymous referee for Philosophy and Phenomenological Research and two anonymous referees for another journal.