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## Response to Asger Kirkeby-Hinrup

Gåvertsson, Frits

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*Total number of authors:*  
1

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00



## Response to Asger Kirkeby-Hinrup

FRITS PER WILLIOTH GÅVERTSSON

Department of Philosophy. Lund University  
Helgonavägen 3. 221 00 Lund. Sweden  
frits.gavertsson@fil.lu.se

In his “How Choice Blindness Vindicates Wholeheartedness” (2015) Asger Kirkeby-Hinrup, despite previous qualms (see Kirkeby-Hinrup 2014), argues that the account of free will proposed by Harry Frankfurt (1971; 1988) via its reliance on the notion of wholeheartedness is vindicated by recent empirical data from choice blindness experiments (cf. e.g. Hall – Johansson – Strandberg 2012; Hall – Johansson – Tärning – Sikström – Deutgen 2010; Hall et al. 2013; Johansson – Hall – Sikström – Olsson 2005; Johansson – Hall – Sikström – Tärning – Lind 2006).

In choice blindness experiments a test-subject is presented with a choice and asked to justify her preference for the choice made over the alternatives, but in the experimental manipulations the test-subject is presented with an alternative she did in fact not choose *as if* she had in fact chosen it. The *choice blindness effect* is that test-subjects rarely detect the manipulation but rather confabulate reasons preferring the option they did not in fact choose. The choice blindness effect has been demonstrated in different sensory modalities and across a myriad of social domains thus making the phenomenon seem rather pervasive. Such experiments, it has been argued, present a problem for free will since if we are, given choice blindness, blind to the outcome of our decisions and provide *post hoc* reasons for choices this might very well generalize to every decision we make so that conscious deliberation and reason responsiveness prior to a choice might have no impact upon the choices we end up making. Thus, choice blindness *prima facie* provides support for accounts favouring substantive revision, or complete abandonment, of the notion of free will while telling against ac-

counts that rely (heavily) on explicit cognitive processes such as deliberation and introspection.

Kirkeby-Hinrup's response is interesting in that it, unlike other attempts, does not rely on alternative interpretations of the data in question. Instead Kirkeby-Hinrup argues that Frankfurt's account of free will can sidestep objections based on choice blindness since it takes (potentially unconscious, fallible, not fully determined) wholehearted identification – understood as desires endorsed by higher-order desires followed by a higher order volition the effect of which is that the individual wishes her particular desire (the target of the higher-order desire) to be her *effective* desire (potentially by an automatic process) – as sufficient for the exercise of free will (Kirkeby-Hinrup 2015, 204-205). In addition, Kirkeby-Hinrup argues, the notion of wholeheartedness, while difficult to operationalize empirically, provide a useful meta-theoretical concept for delineating the limits of choice blindness that both he and the choice blindness experimenters agree is intuitively there (see, e.g., Kirkeby-Hinrup 2015, 205; Hall et al. 2010).

While sympathetic to Kirkeby-Hinrup's general mode of argument I do believe that two comments are in order. Firstly, the line of argument pursued by Kirkeby-Hinrup generalises and is available to any account of free will or authenticity (i.e. the person's deepest and most genuine commitments and desires) as opposed to authority (i.e. psychological elements that represent the person as the author of his own life, of choices about what to do (see Lippert-Rasmussen 2003, 368)) that incorporates a mechanism for delineating authentic desires or volitions and that does not demand excessive reliance on conscious deliberative processes at the time of choice (but may well require or allow these to be active in the formation of said authentic states).

Secondly, it would appear that non-hierarchical – i.e. accounts that do not treat higher-order motivational states as embodying one's real self (see Arpaly – Schroeder 1999) – coherentistic accounts fare even better than hierarchical accounts of the kind proposed by Frankfurt. Non-hierarchical accounts completely sidestep the threat of regress pertaining to higher-order desires that often figure as an objection against accounts like Frankfurt's (see, e.g., Watson 1975, 217-218; Wadell Ekstrom 2005, 49; Lippert-Rasmussen 2003, 354). A coherentistic account, such as the one proposed by Laura Waddell Ekstrom (2005), that takes authenticity to be a matter of how well a given desire coheres with one's character (understood as e.g. a central nexus of beliefs, desires, volitions or preferences) can provide a mode of explanation as

to why *post hoc* justification occurs in cases of manipulation. Given that the strive for authenticity is understood in terms of coherence, attempts at bringing choices one has just made – or believe oneself to have made – into coherence with the rest of one's desires and preferences through *post hoc* rationalisation is exactly what we would expect under the circumstances given such an account. This constitutes an explanatory route not obviously open to Frankfurt, or by extension Kirkeby-Hinrup.

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