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In this paper, I am concerned with the notion of free will and moral responsibility. In particular, I will analyze the Deep Self View of freedom. The Deep Self View believes that a person is only morally responsible for an action if he/she can dictates their will and action by their desires and use their deep self to dictate their desires. I will argue that Susan Wolf’s version of the Deep Self View does not properly define when people are morally responsible for their actions. Her argument absolves too many evil actions and people from the proper blame and responsibility.

The contentious concept of free will divides may philosophers and thinkers into two factions: determinists and indeterminists. According to Peter van Inwagen, “determinism is the thesis that it is true at every moment that the way things then are determinists a unique future, that only one of the alternative futures that may exist relative to a given moment is a physically possible continuation of the state of things at the moment” (van Inwagen, 396). This basically states that only possible future state of the universe is possible given the laws of nature and the current state of the universe. One way to think about this is that if time were reset, no single event would change coming back to the present time at this which time was reset.

On the other hand, indeterminism states that given the laws of nature, there is more than one possible future. These concepts then bring into question the fundamental validity of free will. That is, can free will and determinism be compatible when they seem to contradict each other? Compatibilists believe that the two can coexist while incompatibilists do not. One basis argument for compatibilism is that a person with free will can choose to do whatever he/she decides to do. Philosophers such as van Inwagen and Pereboom argue against compatibilism by asserting that people do not have the correct control over their decisions.

Susan Wolf’s Deep-Self View asserts that the ability to control ourselves is a sufficient conditions for moral responsibility and free will. Accoridng to Wolf, “a person has freedom of action… if he she (or he) has the freedom to do whatever she wills to do” (Wolf, 373). The Deep Self refers to the desires and values a person has that dictates his/her will. Wolf uses several philosophers to highlight her ideas, the Deep-Self View. First, she touches upon Frankfurt’s ideas of different-ordered desires. First order desires are things a person wills, desires that make them act the way that they do. Second orders are values that a person identifies with. It is the act of wanting to want somethings. According to Frankfurt, second order desires allows first order desires to become a person’s will. Wolf describes this by stating that “wills are psychological states in us, but expressions of characters that come from us” (Wolf, 461).

The Deep Self View, then believes that a person is only morally responsible for an action if he/she can dictates their will and action by their desires and use their deep self to dictate their desires. That is, your will is dependent on your deep self. The Deep Self View can be further compartmentalized into freedom of action and freedom of will since a person’s actions are determined by their will and then this will is determined by the deep self. A person should be able to think back or make amendments to their actions or assess how they could have changed their actions during a certain situation. These beliefs help explain why kleptomaniacs, hypnotized people and non-human animals are not morally responsible for their actions.

Wolf, however, asserts that the Deep Self View has several deficiencies and does not fully reconcile the compatibilist view. Her main objection is that people e are not actually in control of the causes of their deep self. If people are not in control of the causes of their deep self, then they are not actually in control of their will or actions. To highlight her argument, she tells the story of a character JoJo, the son of Jo the First, an evil dictator. As JoJo grows up, he is educated by his father and looks up to his father and all the evil things he does. Because of his upbring, JoJo develops evil first and second order desires. Since his second order desires make his first order desires wills, his deep self is in control of his will. He should then be morally responsible for his actions. Wolf, however, argues that JoJo should not be morally responsible for his actions. Since the Deep Self View argues that he is morally responsible, the Deep Self View is false.

Wolf revises the Deep Self View to account for sanity. She asserts that a person is morally responsible only if their deep self is in control of their wills and their deep self is sane. A person is sane if he/she knows what he/she is doing and he/she knows the difference between right and wrong actions. Based on these conjectures, it can be said that JoJo is not sane because “a person… who cannot see that having someone tortured… is wrong plainly lacks the requisite ability” (Wolf, 465). As such, JoJo is not morally responsible because he has no control over his sanity. These beliefs cater to legal practices that consider whether an offender was sane during his crime.

Wolf’s modified version of the Deep Self View does not show when people should be morally responsible for their actions. Firstly, under her assumptions made in the JoJo case, any bad person with a horrible upbringing would not be morally responsible for his/her actions. JoJo should not have to know the difference between right and wrong to do a wrong thing. The notions of right and wrong are determined by society as a whole. Moral responsibility should be determined based on the action done, not just whether the person was sane. For instance, absolving Nazi’s from the blame of killing people is highly insensitive and would not be a highly agreed upon opinion among a large group of people.

In conclusion, Susan Wolf argues against the validity of the Deep Self View. She asserts that sanity must be a necessary condition for moral responsibility. That is, if a person is not able to distinguish between right and wrong then he/she cannot be morally responsible for their actions. I argued that this notion is false because it is too absolving of harmful actions.