

PERSONAL AUTONOMY:
PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

The Department of Philosophy

of

Rhodes University

By

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January 1999

ABSTRACT

Gerald Dworkin's influential account of Personal Autonomy offers the following two conditions for autonomy: (i) *Authenticity* – the condition that one identify with one's beliefs, desires and values after a process of critical reflection, and (ii) *Procedural Independence* - the identification in (i) must not be “influenced in ways which make the process of identification in some way alien to the individual” (Dworkin 1989:61).

I argue in this thesis that there are cases which fulfil both of Dworkin's conditions, yet are clearly not cases of autonomy. Specifically, I argue that we can best assess the adequacy of Dworkin's account of autonomy through literature, because it provides a unique medium for testing his account on the very terms he sets up for himself – ie. that autonomy apply to, and make sense of, persons leading lives of a certain quality.

The examination of two novels – Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* - shows that Dworkin's explanation of identification and critical reflection is inadequate for capturing their role in autonomy and that he does not pay enough attention to the role of external factors in preventing or supporting autonomy. As an alternative, I offer the following two conditions for autonomy: (i) critical reflection of a certain kind – *radical reflection*, and (ii) the ability to translate the results of (i) into action – *competence*. The novels demonstrate that both conditions are dependent upon considerations of the content of one's beliefs, desires, values etc. Certain of these will prevent or hinder the achievement of autonomy because of their content, so autonomy must be understood in relation to substantial considerations, rather than in purely formal terms, as Dworkin argues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Mr Marius Vermaak, whose clarity and rigour showed where I was going and saved me from many mistakes, and whose interest sustained me when mine flagged.

Many thanks, also, to Dr Wendy Jacobson for her valuable comments on *The Remains of the Day*, and to my colleagues in the Rhodes Philosophy Department for their encouragement.

I acknowledge with thanks the generous support from the Centre for Science Development (HSRC) - the views expressed here are not necessarily those of the CSD. Rhodes University has also given me financial assistance, for which I am grateful.

Finally, my deepest thanks to Maretha and Veli: For coffee, chocolate and cheerful support through everything.

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Introduction

I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not others' acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody.
(Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty'¹)

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself employs all his faculties.... It is possible that he might be guided in some good path, and be kept out of harm's way, without any of these things [ie. faculties]. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being? It really is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are that do it.
(J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*²)

In these passages, we find expressed the ideas that are my concern in this thesis. Under different names, and with varying degrees of approval, the ideals of individuality, authenticity, self-expression, self-creation and unfettered self-governance are familiar to us in this particular form from the nineteenth century. Berlin, by no means approvingly, called this cluster of ideas *positive freedom*; Mill defended the same values a century earlier under the names of liberty, individuality and genius; and today, as *personal autonomy*, the nature and value of these ideals still generate debate within political philosophy, theories of personhood and the worthwhile life. As an ideal, autonomy represents our need to express ourselves in a way free from the "tyranny of opinion" and the "despotism of custom", in Mill's words (132,136), to take control over the course and character of our lives, and to be in some ultimate way responsible for the kind of persons we are. This desire to be autonomous, responsible agents has become more rather than less urgent in modern society. Although the obstacles to autonomy may be more concealed now and come in different guises, opinion and custom, state intervention and pervasive mediocrity still threaten our ability to fashion our selves unencumbered. Those with an interest in autonomy take it to represent a fundamental need to express their uniqueness: "One

¹ 1969.

² 1974.

simply wants to *be* as an individual, to continue to stand out. This interest in existing as an individual is probably more fundamental than any other interest we have” (L. Haworth, quoted in Berofsky 1995:247).

Autonomy, then, is a concept constituted by a cluster of ideas, related by the etymology of the term: *autos* (self) and *nomos* (rule or law). The term was originally applied to Greek city states that governed themselves, rather than being under the jurisdiction of another power. As applied to persons, the autonomous person is self-governing, expressing her character through the quality she endows her life. As it concerns me here, autonomy is an ideal of character³; it is a judgement of the quality of a person and of the life she leads (or significant portions thereof). This sense of autonomy is global or dispositional in character, rather than occurrent or episodic⁴, because it does not refer to isolated choices or acts. Although the term autonomy is sometimes used to refer to such discrete events or states, this is more appropriately the domain of questions of freedom of the will and of action - whether particular choices, actions, beliefs, values are autonomously performed or possessed. These two senses of autonomy are of course related, because a person’s life is constituted (partly) by her choices and actions, and her character formed and manifested through them. However, my concern is with dispositional autonomy and I do not intend to become embroiled in the free will/determinism debate⁵. It should be clear, however, that because of this relation, dispositional autonomy is a matter of degrees, rather than an all-or-nothing concept. One will have more or less control over the character of one’s life depending partly on the control one has over individual choices and actions.

As a spring-board to my investigation of personal autonomy, I will examine Gerald Dworkin’s account of autonomy. Although Dworkin’s concern is with dispositional autonomy (or what he calls ‘global’ autonomy), the theoretical framework of his work is, in fact, provided by Harry Frankfurt’s classic account of freedom of the will⁶. John Christman writes that the work of both Dworkin and Frankfurt is seminal

³ See Young 1986:9

⁴ Philosophers name these senses differently: Meyers 1987 distinguishes between programmatic and episodic autonomy; Young between dispositional and occurrent autonomy; Dworkin 1988,1989 between global and local autonomy. I will usually use the terms dispositional and episodic.

⁵ Unless otherwise stated, when I refer to ‘autonomy’ in this thesis, it is to dispositional autonomy.

⁶ The classic paper is ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person’ (1971).

with regards to attempts to set out conditions for personal autonomy⁷; and he has also characterised Dworkin and Frankfurt's theory as constituting the 'core' account of personal autonomy⁸. Because of the immense influence of Dworkin's account of autonomy, and of Frankfurt's work in the general field of freedom of will and action, investigating the 'core' account is both useful and essential to any attempt to capture the nature of autonomy. I will set out Dworkin's account in Chapter 1 and then focus on (i) the largely unexplored area of identification, which is central to Dworkin's (and others') theory of autonomy, and (ii) the crucial element of critical reflection. Many of Dworkin's conclusions are influenced by Frankfurt's model of psychological states and phenomena and I shall therefore place his account in the context of Frankfurt's work.

Dworkin wishes to offer an account of autonomy which applies to persons leading lives of a certain quality. He is interested in "what it means to be an autonomous person, to have a certain capacity and exercise it" (Dworkin 1988:20). In order to assess the merits of his account, it would thus be fitting to apply the conditions he sets up to concrete studies of character and lives. Being an ideal of character, the conditions necessary for autonomy must make sense of persons' psychology and the phenomenology of their experiences. Autonomy thus seems particularly suited for exploration in a way which has recently received much attention. I refer to the method of examining moral concepts through literature, an approach pioneered by Martha C. Nussbaum⁹. Nussbaum argues that literature is often much more suited to exploring moral notions than the traditional methods of analytic philosophy, and this is because of literature's distinctive style:

Style itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters. Literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content.... But this suggests, too, that there may be some views of the world and how one should live in it... that cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose... but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars.
(Nussbaum 1990:3)

And:

A view of life is *told*. The telling itself ... expresses a sense of life and of value, a sense of what matters and what does not.... Life is never simply *presented* by a text; it is always *represented as* something.
(Nussbaum 1990:5)

⁷ Christman 1988.

⁸ Christman 1989.

⁹ See her collection of essays exploring this, *Love & Knowledge* (1990).

So, because the style of (certain) works of literature is complex, subtle, often allusive, it can better express complex, subtle and allusive concepts than the style of traditional analytic philosophy which is “remarkably flat and lacking in wonder” (Nussbaum 1990:3).

Nussbaum’s claim can be interpreted more or less strongly, and one can take a stronger or weaker position on the role of literature for moral philosophy¹⁰. The strongest interpretation would be that literature is all we need for understanding moral concepts, or that it is essential for that task; the weaker claim would be that literature is a useful method, perhaps indispensable in certain areas¹¹. Now, I mention moral philosophy here, but it could be that literature is best suited to *ethical* considerations, rather than moral ones. By moral, I refer to the domain of enquiry traditionally concerned with action. It asks, ‘What should I do?’ and aims to provide universal, impartial principles for choices and action. By ethical, on the other hand, I understand an enquiry into the Socratic question, ‘What is the good life?’. Ethical concerns are broader in scope, encompassing personal issues and evaluative concerns not adequately accommodated by the methods and concerns of moral philosophy¹². On a strong reading, Nussbaum would be arguing that literature is indispensable for the investigation of moral concepts. Although I cannot here offer a critique of this strong position¹³, I would argue, however, for the weaker claim: that literature can be extremely useful in exploring broadly ethical concepts concerning the question of how one should live, what kind of person one should aspire to be, one’s stance towards the world – in short, the “manner of life”, in Williams’s phrase (1985:4). Such questions cannot be answered by positing rules and maxims; they require a sensitive awareness to particulars, as Nussbaum has extensively argued, and which certain literary works, particularly novels, explore and perhaps generate.

My interest in autonomy (and Dworkin’s, by the way he characterises his

¹⁰ I am indebted to Marius Vermaak for helping me to clarify the points raised in the following discussion.

¹¹ I will not explore the details of Nussbaum’s own rather elusive position, suffice to say that she seems mostly to make the “narrower and more modest claim” (1990:8) that *certain* truths about human life can only be adequately (“fully and fittingly, without contradiction” [1990:7]) stated in the languages and forms of the literary artist.

¹² See Williams 1985 on the distinction between the moral and the ethical; he takes the moral to be a subset of the ethical (see especially chapter 1).

¹³ See Voice 1994 and Putnam 1983 for critiques on Nussbaum’s position.

intentions) lies in providing a (partial) answer to the Socratic question, so in that sense, I take autonomy to be an ethical, rather than a moral concept. Corresponding to this, I am not concerned here with particularly *moral* autonomy – ie. the autonomous character of one's moral principles in the tradition of Kantian moral theory. So, that being my focus, I propose to study two novels as a means of exploring autonomy. What can we learn about the nature of personal autonomy by carefully reading extended and subtle portraits of characters with which we can identify? The conditions we impose upon autonomy should, as I have already mentioned, actually apply to persons and explain their actions, psychology and projects. I will offer readings of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and argue that through them, we learn valuable lessons about the nature of personal autonomy. The fates of their protagonists – Mr Stevens in *Remains*, and Isabel Archer in *Portrait* - demonstrate the shortcomings of Dworkin's account, and of the assumptions about psychology and persons underlying it.

In these two novels, we are presented with an alternative world of round¹⁴ characters who are sufficiently realistically rendered for us to appreciate their situations, to care for what happens to them, to see aspects of the human predicament evolve in their stories. We see a world different from our own, and do this (at least partly) 'from the inside' of another consciousness. This allows us to explore implications of character, psychology and external influences in the security of fiction - a strange security, however, because we willingly give up our disinterestedness to a master such as James or Ishiguro during the process of reading. Participating in Stevens's or Isabel's stories, experiencing *with* them, we open ourselves to the possibility of change and education, in a space secure only for the fact that we do not actively have to undergo what they do - although we may feel with them - in order to learn what they learn (or do not learn, in Stevens's case).

Our willing immersion in the world of fictional characters is relevant to an exploration of ethical concepts like autonomy. With regards to autonomy, once we are

¹⁴ The terms 'round' and 'flat' characters are E.M. Forster's. Flat characters are also called types or caricatures: "In their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality" (1967:225). Round characters, in contrast, are "capable of surprising in a convincing way", they have "the incalculability of life about [them]" (231), they can undergo change. Although Forster divides characters into these two separate types, it is best to see the round/flat distinction as representing a continuum of 'life-likeness' (see Rimmon-Kenan 1983:40-1).

‘inside’ a consciousness, seeing the world as it uniquely does, we realise two things: Firstly, the presence of certain internal processes, capacities or psychological facts does not render them automatically compatible with autonomy, as both Stevens and Isabel will demonstrate. Autonomy is conditional upon the particular nature and content of those facts and processes, not merely the fact that we can detect identification with one’s motivational structure, or some critical reflection. Only by working through the implications of particular instances and types of psychological conditions can we come to any conclusion about their compatibility with autonomy. Literature, in a sense, provides the opportunity, medium and impetus for this - but only in conjunction with our active and sympathetic participation.

Secondly, the relation between internal, psychological factors and external, social factors becomes significant. As Isabel Archer or Mr Stevens attempt to act and feel in certain ways in their fictional world, they find themselves hampered both by their own character and the brute facts of the world. In the case of Isabel in *The Portrait of a Lady*, we see that regardless of intelligence, good intentions and a wealth of resources, other people can prevent one from achieving autonomy. In the case of Isabel again and Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*, we realise how social forms can also impede one’s achieving autonomy by forming character in a way which prevents one effectively ‘ruling’ oneself, or making certain destructive decisions inevitable, or restricting the options available to one.

I shall therefore argue for a conception of autonomy that demands (i) psychological capacities and skills – captured by a certain account of critical self-reflection and (ii) a certain environment – the world must be such that one can realise the results of one’s reflection in action. Only then, can one control one’s world and express one’s character in the way required by the ideas constituting autonomy. In Chapter 2, I shall explore the psychological conditions through a reading of *The Remains of the Day*, focussing particularly on the role of identification with one’s values, beliefs etc. and on the nature of autonomy-compatible self-reflection; in Chapter 3, through *The Portrait of a Lady*, I demonstrate that such conditions are not sufficient to confer autonomy. External conditions and the content of one’s values and beliefs can hamper one’s competence in translating those values and beliefs into action; so despite a psychological capacity, autonomy as a *condition* of persons is impossible without such competence. My ‘formula’ for autonomy will thus be (i) self-reflection (of a particular

nature) and (ii) competence. I shall finally turn to the value of autonomy, arguing that the first condition especially captures the force of the value that we place on achieving dispositional autonomy.

Chapter 1

In this chapter I will set out Gerald Dworkin's theory of autonomy¹. My purpose here is mainly exegetical and while I do raise some points for discussion, a thorough evaluation is only offered in the course of the later readings of *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Remains of the Day*.

Dworkin offers what he terms a *characterisation* or *theory*² of autonomy rather than specifying a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. The latter cannot be done, he argues, "without draining the concept of the very complexity which enables it to perform its theoretical role" (1988:7). So, he aims to offer a more concrete specification of the general concept of autonomy³ in a way which will capture its force as a political, moral and social ideal without simplifying and thus distorting the original concept.

Conceptions of autonomy should remain faithful to the features of the general concept, the central idea of which, according to Dworkin, is indicated by the etymology of the term: *autos* (self) and *nomos* (rule or law). Autonomous persons are motivated by principles, desires and projects which are their own, or which they have created⁴. Self-rule is thus linked to the logically distinct idea of *self-creation* or *self-authorship*: if people govern their lives by principles which are their own or which they have created, then they are self-governing; an account of autonomy must therefore distinguish values and beliefs which are authentically a person's own, from those which are not. Dworkin himself slides between both notions, even though he cites the etymological root as his central defining idea. He says, for example, that autonomous people "define their nature, give meaning and coherence to their lives, and take responsibility for the kind of person they are" (1988:20). This implies that autonomous people have controlled the formation of their character, values and beliefs - have 'defined their nature' - and then structure their life in accordance with them. Because what motivates them and justifies the particular content of their life is their own creation, they can be said to be self-governing.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, in this chapter, references in parentheses are to Gerald Dworkin.

² 1988:7.

³ For the difference between a general *concept* and a concrete specification of it - or *conception* - see Rawls 1973:5: People may share a concept -of justice, say - even while disagreeing on substantial details. Although they disagree, they are still disagreeing about the same thing -the general concept. So, the concept is "specified by the role which these different sets of principles, these different conceptions, have in common" (Rawls:5).

⁴ See Feinberg 1989:46ff and Young 1986:1ff;7ff for the relation between the autonomy of states, and personal autonomy suggested by this etymology.

A conception of autonomy should thus explain the central ideas of (i) self-governance - of being “one’s own master”, as Berlin put it (1969:131) - and (ii) self-creation - of how one’s values and beliefs can authentically be one’s own creation. Being ruler of oneself requires having a significant degree of control over the pattern and content of one’s life. Dworkin understands that to involve choosing⁵ or defining⁶ the contours of one’s life and being able to make one’s preferences and decisions effective in action. His conception of autonomy must therefore incorporate this feature of *competency*; it would not do, that is, if his characterisation did not make it a central or necessary condition that persons be able thus to control and ‘define’ their lives.

Dworkin’s interest lies with what he calls *global* autonomy⁷ and with autonomy as an ideal of character, rather than of a feature of acts or choices. His statement that he is “not trying to analyse the notion of autonomous *acts*, but of what it means to be an autonomous person” (1988:19-20), shows that he aims less to provide a theory of free action than to analyse a certain way of living and of being a person. Global autonomy is “a dimension of assessment that evaluates a whole way of living one’s life”; it can “only be assessed over extended portions of a person’s life” (1989:60). It applies to persons with a certain character leading lives of a certain quality. It is not applicable only to the moral choices and beliefs of persons, so his account is one of personal autonomy, rather than specifically moral autonomy.

This focus suggests that autonomy is an actual psychological condition of persons, a realised set of skills or a disposition which is expressed in action and one’s general attitude towards the world. However, as we shall see, Dworkin increasingly emphasises autonomy as a *capacity* of persons, rather than a condition⁸. This has the apparent result that persons may have the capacity for autonomy without exercising it, and still count as autonomous. If correct, this is at least a *prima facie* odd conclusion, given his focus on autonomy as a judgement on the course of a life led by a person. The question of whether autonomy is a capacity or a condition is crucial in deciding upon the point made earlier, that an account of autonomy must incorporate the central ideal that people be in control of the course of their lives, that they ‘define’ their nature and lives, in Dworkin’s terms.

⁵ 1988:14.

⁶ 1988:15.

⁷ I will mostly use the term ‘dispositional’, after Young.

⁸ See Feinberg for ‘four closely related meanings’ (28) of autonomy: the capacity, the actual condition, an ideal of character, and the sovereign authority to rule oneself.

Dworkin's theoretical background is provided by Harry Frankfurt's seminal work on freedom of the will⁹. Building on Frankfurt, Dworkin conceives the psychology of a person as structurally hierarchical, in that a person has levels of desires, preferences and beliefs and can reflect from a higher level upon those mental phenomena at a lower level¹⁰. Both the conception of the person as well as the process of critical reflection are therefore hierarchical. This has important implications for the resulting account of autonomy and for its adequacy in interpreting persons' characters and lives.

Dworkin has characterised his conception of autonomy in slightly different ways. The most influential, and the one regarded most frequently as his core account, is expressed by what he terms the 'full formula' (1989:61). This focuses on actual instances or processes of identification, while his other account states that only the *capacity* for identification is necessary for autonomy. I will begin by examining his core account, turning later to the 'capacity' account.

According to the 'full formula', personal autonomy requires that two conditions be met. One is autonomous if:

- (1) one identifies with one's desires - the *authenticity* condition, and
- (2) this identification is not itself "influenced in ways which make the process of identification in some way alien to the individual" (1989:61) - the condition of *procedural independence*.

I will now look at each condition separately.

Authenticity: Identification and Critical Reflection

The authenticity condition requires that to be autonomous, a person must identify with her beliefs, desires, values etc. Dworkin's account of identification assumes and relies on the Frankfurt-inspired hierarchical model of the self and psychological states to which I alluded earlier. Let us then firstly look more closely at this model.

The model is (i) *hierarchical*, in that it presupposes different levels of mental phenomena or states, and (ii) *linear*, in the sense that higher-order mental phenomena are

⁹ Eg. 1971.

¹⁰ The classic critiques of this model are given by Thalberg 1978 and Watson 1975. While they are concerned with free will, their views are applicable to the autonomy debate. Both are sceptical about the vagueness surrounding the idea of identification, and argue that adequate accounts of coerced versus 'free' acts can be given without recourse to hierarchical models. I shall also argue that the Dworkin/Frankfurt notion of identification is inadequate for the job.

matched one-for-one onto lower-order phenomena- a feature I shall call ‘mapping’. The first-order level of mental phenomena is directly related to actions¹¹ because it consists of desires to *do X*. On this level, says Dworkin, one is concerned with the voluntariness of action. However, it is “a crucial feature of persons” (1988:15) that they can reflect upon and take up attitudes towards their first-order desires, and it is here that considerations of autonomy rather than voluntary action arise. This ability to reflect enables persons to approve or disapprove of what motivates them on a lower level, and so to affirm (‘endorse’) or reject those motivations. This has the result that one’s direct lower-order responses occupy a less privileged position as an indicator of ‘who one really is’ or of how one should strive to be¹².

Ultimately, the motivations and reasons for an agent’s actions can be traced back along the explanatory path provided by the mapped-out preferences, and the model is therefore grounded on actions. Furthermore, although never made explicit, the relation is uni-directional: higher-order preferences reflect upon lower-order ones and can change their character or eliminate them. There is no mention of any similar influence on the character of higher-order preferences from the lower-order desires. On such a model, then, one either affirms and therefore identifies with the desires that motivate one to act (and so acts authentically) or wishes not to be moved in that way. Further complications in the attitudes one takes to one’s actions and motivations - eg. ambivalence, self-deception, confusion as to motive or preference - are taken to be in principle accountable for by an hierarchical analysis.

While Dworkin talks variously about desire, habits, motives, reasons for actions, preferences, he tends to concentrate on desires, preferences and beliefs - a consequence, I suspect, of his reliance upon the framework introduced by Frankfurt. For the time being I shall adopt this usage, but later I shall argue that both the model and its language are too crude to do the job that Dworkin requires. Dworkin is concerned with autonomy as a global concept; he wishes to account for character and the quality of whole lives, or significant portions thereof. However, taking ‘beliefs’ or ‘preferences’ as representative of mental phenomena fails to account for a number of facts about persons: for example, that the objects of identification form a *complex* of many different mental phenomena, which are often more complex than simple beliefs or desires because they incorporate

¹¹ Some literature building on Dworkin’s account interprets this more broadly, as states of affairs in the world; eg. Friedman 1986:21.

¹² See Berlin:132f; Friedman 1986:22, Berofsky 1995:101.

evaluative dimensions; that the webs of influence between them travel in different directions, not merely from higher-level ‘preferences’ to lower-level ‘desires’; that there are no ontologically privileged items that necessarily have the only autonomy-conferring status. If this is the case, the notion of global autonomy is not happily analysed in the terms Dworkin most naturally adopts, against the background of the hierarchical model.

The notion of identification required for the authenticity condition assumes this hierarchical model of psychological structure. Dworkin does not offer a detailed analysis of the process by which one comes to identify with a desire, nor of the nature of identification itself. Instead, very much in line with what Frankfurt says on the matter, he writes:

A person may identify with the influences that motivate him, assimilate them to himself, view himself as the kind of person who wishes to be moved in particular ways. Or, he may resent being motivated in certain ways, be alienated from those influences, prefer to be the kind of person who is motivated in different ways. (1988:15)

So, symptoms of a lack of identification - which we can call alienation¹³ - are dislike at one’s motivations, the feeling that one’s beliefs do not reflect the type of person one aspires to be, internal conflict because of incompatible beliefs or values, the feeling of being driven by forces one cannot control, and so on. In extreme cases a person could not remain psychologically healthy. The life of such a person is “not his own. He is thoroughly alienated from it” (Raz:382). The psychological fragmentation we can imagine as a result suggests that identification is in some sense necessary for the most basic functioning and well-being of persons. Understood simply as the opposite of alienation, it is indeed necessary for autonomy because without the basic psychological unity and integrity it presupposes, persons cannot exercise control over their lives in the way required by the concept of autonomy.

Providing a positive account of identification is more difficult than describing its absence. In hierarchical terms, identification simply involves higher-order reflection on lower-order desires and the subsequent formation of positive preferences concerning these - in other words, identification occurs when one approves on a higher level (or has a positive preference concerning) the desires that motivate one’s actions on a first-order level. A person is authentic when the lower-order desires that move her to act are those she wishes to motivate her actions, and this satisfaction with one’s motivational structure is what Dworkin means by identification. Despite talk of satisfaction, however,

¹³ Raz 1986:382.

identification cannot demand that I approve of every aspect of my self, because as Christman notes, this would require that “I would have to be perfect (in my own eyes)” (1988:113). Rather, we should make the distinction between *endorsement* and *appropriation* drawn by Berofsky¹⁴. Motivations may be appropriated within my sense of self and identity without all having been unequivocally endorsed by me. I may reflectively conclude that I would prefer not to be motivated by a certain belief while ruefully admitting its strength and centrality for my actions. I need not deny that it is, however, *my* motivation¹⁵. The opposite of approval need not be alienation; it may be regretful acceptance. All that is needed in the way of identification, then¹⁶, is willingness to incorporate the psychological phenomena that make up one’s psychological history, within one’s sense of self. They must not be so alien to who one takes oneself to be, or aspires towards, that one is torn apart by internal conflict.

Dworkin’s brief remarks also indicate an account of identification that is character-based and potentially more complex than the hierarchical model can adequately accommodate. As we noted briefly above, identification is not simply an indulgent nod of approval at what one may just find oneself thinking or feeling; rather, it comes about after, and because of, reflection. Furthermore, Dworkin’s comments suggest that reflection is agent-directed or character-centred - the agent reflects on the kind of character she wishes to cultivate, or on how certain motivations fit into her ideal of self, rather than only, or most importantly, assessing the value of possible actions in themselves. So, identification is understood as the end result of a process of reflection in which an agent comes to the conclusion (or discovery, perhaps¹⁷) that she is the kind of person who wishes to be moved in the ways her first-order desires direct. With this conclusion her motivational structure is ‘her own’ rather than simply ‘hers’, as Dworkin expresses it (1989:61)¹⁸. This character-centred approach to identification is more harmonious with Dworkin’s explicit interest in global autonomy and the lives of persons than one which relies simply on higher-level approval or endorsement of first-order desires. The latter approach is concerned ultimately with action rather than character

¹⁴ 99f.

¹⁵ See Frankfurt 1988:61ff for a perhaps conflicting view.

¹⁶ And, as we shall see later, provided that the procedural independence condition has been met.

¹⁷ Depending on whether the process of critical assessment is the discovery of already existing, but previously hidden commitments, or the formulation of new ones.

¹⁸ See also Frankfurt 1988:60ff.

and this has the perhaps inevitable tendency of emphasising episodic autonomy over global autonomy.

Because it is dependent upon reflection and self-analysis rather than being merely complacency with one's motivational structure, identification presupposes certain psychological capacities and the exercise of certain skills. In some significant degree rationality, self-awareness and self-knowledge, sensitivity to the implications of one's beliefs and values, a certain integrity and self-control are all assumed. It also requires that certain social conditions be maintained: an environment that is conducive to original thinking and critical debate; toleration; an education system that develops critical skills; the sympathy of other persons etc. - details which Dworkin never adequately explores¹⁹. Examining concrete portrayals of persons and lives - in the reading of the novels to follow - will, however, show the importance of both the psychological capacities and skills as well as the external conditions of their employment for the possibility of achieving dispositional autonomy. While identification and critical reflection presuppose certain capacities, it is a separate question whether autonomy itself is a *capacity* which may or may not be exercised, or a *condition* - a psychological state manifested in a person's behaviour and attitudes. Dworkin's 'core' account implies that it is a condition, as the following descriptions suggest: (i) "A person is autonomous if he identifies with his desires, goals, and values, and such identification is not itself influenced in ways which make the process of identification in some way alien to the individual" (1989:61). This implies an actual psychological condition of identification which has a particular history. (ii) "Autonomy as defined here is a theory about the *presence or absence of certain psychological states*" (1989:62; my emphasis). However, as I mentioned earlier, Dworkin has offered a slightly different account of autonomy, one which also emphasises critical reflection, but in such a way as to makes autonomy a psychological capacity rather than a realised condition. For example, he writes:

Autonomy is a second-order capacity to reflect critically upon one's first-order preferences and desires, and the ability either to identify with these or to change them in light of higher-order preferences and desires. (1988:108)

In this regard, he rejects his original formulation of the authenticity condition, which required as a necessary condition that "a person's second-order identifications be

¹⁹ See 1988:11 for a brief mention of these issues.

congruent with his first-order motivations” (1988:15). Instead, it is the “capacity to raise the question of whether I will identify with or reject the reasons for which I now act” (ibid.) that is crucial to my having autonomy. On this account, as Mele notes, autonomy seems a “wholly internal matter” (1995:146) because the relevant psychological capacities are possessed independently of facts about how they were acquired. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the above formulation makes no mention of the second condition of the ‘full formula’ - that of procedural independence - which provides external or historical conditions to autonomy. More importantly, this characterisation of autonomy suggests, firstly, that an autonomous person need never *in fact* reflect upon her motivations, and need never, therefore, consciously endorse or reject them; and secondly, that a person can be autonomous without ever exercising any of the capacities and skills she possesses. One can then imagine a person with a wealth of mental resources - all the psychological skills listed earlier - who is prevented by external factors from ever exercising them and so never practically controls the character and direction of her life. Such a person - Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* is a fitting example as we shall see - would then, according to Dworkin in this formulation, still qualify as autonomous. This is a conclusion decidedly at odds with the bleak future that James suggests for Isabel beyond the pages of the novel.

One of Dworkin’s objections to his earlier view is that our concern in obvious interferences with autonomy (eg. brainwashing or manipulation) is not with actual identifications. In such a case, a person “is not having his identifications interfered with, but rather his capacity or ability either to make or reject such identifications” (1988:16). While the capacity to identify is of course necessary for any exercise of actual identification, this alone cannot be strong enough to capture what is required for autonomy. Someone may have the capacity for forming higher-order preferences, but unless this is exercised there is no value in its possession and the person can have no real control over the course of his life. It is how and to what end the capacity is exercised that is of significance and (partly, at least) on the basis of which we make judgements about a life. We can still agree that manipulations with a person’s ability to make judgements concerning his actual identifications is objectionable. It is so because we consider that it interferes with his ability consciously and intentionally to exercise the capacity in a certain way, and so mould his life in the way he desires. If these remarks are correct, they suggest that it is better to think of autonomy as a condition of persons rather than merely as a capacity which, by implication, may or may not be realised.

Dworkin's real worry, I suspect, is occasioned by his unease at what he takes the hierarchical model to demand from him. Actual instances of identification, Dworkin argues, are local (or episodic), in that they can be pinpointed over specific periods of time and a person can shift back and forth between identifying with and rejecting a single desire. Autonomy, on the other hand, is an assessment of (portions of) a life, so the conditions to be met should be similarly global in character rather than applying to discrete episodes. Because of the mapping feature of the hierarchical model, where each higher-order preference can (in principle) be matched to a lower desire and therefore to a (potential) action, Dworkin takes 'actual identification' to be what is captured by local autonomy, where specific instances of action are analysed. This, he has argued, is the domain of the voluntary, rather than of autonomy. The model perhaps inevitably leads attention towards isolated one-off instances of identification or rejection and so is inadequate to account for the global scope of autonomy.

However, the new 'capacity' formulation of the authenticity condition does not help Dworkin in focussing on the dispositional nature of autonomy. The capacity alone to raise the question whether or not identification would obtain cannot be what autonomy requires. This account seems to presupposes that a person does or does not in fact identify with her motivations, but has yet consciously to turn her attention to considering that fact. If she did not identify – in the weaker sense of appropriation (that endorsement is lacking would go without saying) – she would suffer a greater or lesser degree of alienation, depending on the significance of the mental item in question. Being motivated in ways she would rather not be, her behaviour is not harmonious with her desires and cannot be said to reflect her character in the way required of an autonomous and competent person. Alienation is not compatible with autonomy, so whether or not a person *in fact* identifies with her beliefs, desires or values is crucial for considerations of autonomy. If we go Dworkin's alternative route we would have an account of autonomy which relies on a hypothetical analysis: *if* this person would identify with the reasons for which she now acts (assuming she is psychologically capable of doing so), then she is *now* autonomous. As a characterisation of dispositional autonomy, this is clumsy and impractical. It gives us no real way of assessing the tenor of a person's life, and again, focuses attention on particular instances of action.

Pace Dworkin, we can account for actual identification in a way compatible with global autonomy. We need not think of a person going through a new process of self-evaluation every time she is motivated to act - this is not necessary before it can be

said that she identifies with (or indeed rejects) what motivates her. As Feinberg says, if “*all* principles... are together to be examined afresh in the light of reason on each occasion for decision, then nothing resembling rational reflection can ever get started” (33). Instead, the type of motivating desire may be one that a person has already assessed in the past; she knows she affirms or rejects its force, and she can presumably provide reasons if it were called for. Perhaps that is all that Dworkin means when he talks about ‘the capacity to raise the question of whether I will identify with or reject the reasons for which I now act’. If that is so, then there need be no disagreement. Of course, a person’s attitude may change, either causing, or as a result of, further reflection, but this does not mean that whether or not she identifies with her lower-order motivations is not as important as her capacity to do so, as Dworkin assumes. As mentioned earlier, alienation is the opposite of identification, and incompatible with autonomy. His worry about vacillation between identifying and rejecting one’s motivations is valid but wrongly directed - the autonomous person’s identifications would be relatively stable and he would display constancy towards the beliefs and values that have survived the required type of critical reflection, but this requirement entails neither compulsive rigidity nor the rejection of the condition of actual identification.

Identification *per se* is central to Dworkin’s account of autonomy and the notion which is most often discussed in the literature surrounding autonomy. I shall leave the above discussion at this point, because as we shall see, regardless of whether identification is interpreted as a capacity or a state, the issue of identification itself still remains obscure and in need of detailed attention, which it will receive in the next chapter. My evaluation of it – and my conclusion that Dworkin’s account is deficient – does not depend on which interpretation is taken on this point and, as stated initially, my aim in this chapter is exegetical. So, I turn now to setting out Dworkin’s second condition for autonomy – that of procedural independence.

Procedural Independence

The condition of procedural independence requires that the identification necessary for autonomy must not be (or have been) influenced in ways that “make the

process of identification in some way alien to the individual” (1989:61). This condition thus gives autonomy an external, history-sensitive dimension²⁰.

As we have seen, Dworkin draws a distinction between a motivational structure being ‘a person’s’, and it being ‘her own’. A person may identify with her lower-order desires, and yet the causal history of the identification may be such that we do not wish to view those motivating desires as ‘her own’. For example, a subservient wife may, in choosing sincerely to dedicate her life to her husband’s comfort, identify with this desire because she has never been made aware that alternative lifestyles were available to her²¹. She could be perfectly contented - in the sense that she does not regard her personal prospects as lacking in anything necessary for a more worthwhile life - but her identification is such that although her desires belong to her causal history²², they are not *her own* because their origin and thus perhaps their continued maintenance was not under her control. In another favourite example of philosophers, a person can be brainwashed or manipulated into believing in a ridiculous cause, yet we may not want to ascribe this belief to *him*, despite it undeniably belonging in his mental history. Each person in these examples fails to fulfil the criterion of procedural independence and so fails to be autonomous.

What then, does procedural independence require? At first glance, it appears to demand that one’s entire motivational structure be the result of no cause other than oneself. The genesis of my desires should be *me*, not my church, nor my family, nor the larger community. This, however, is absurdly strong. As Feinberg says, “[a]lways the self that contributes to the making of the newer self is the product both of outside influences *and* an earlier self that was not quite as fully formed” (34). It is impossible that all one’s desires be independently acquired and free from influence; ignoring the influence of socialisation in one’s attempt to be autonomous is an exercise in self-delusion. Autonomy cannot require the complete transcendence of socialisation²³ because then it would be empirically impossible to achieve.

In the light of these points, which Dworkin himself raises²⁴, it is best to take

²⁰ See Mele: chapter 9.

²¹ See Benn 1976:123ff with regard to the difference between being just a ‘chooser’ and being autonomous: A “competent chooser may still be a slave to convention... . He assesses situations, adapts means to ends, and so on, but always by norms of propriety and success absorbed unreflectively from parents, teachers, or workmates”(123).

²² See Frankfurt 1988a:61ff (in a slightly different context); eg. a desire may be ‘part of the person’s ongoing history’(61), without being strictly speaking attributable to the person herself.

²³ On this, see Meyers 1989.

²⁴ See 1988:7f, 11.

procedural independence as imposing limits on the instances of identification which are compatible with autonomy, rather than establishing positive conditions to be met by the genesis of all mental phenomena. In this spirit, the excluded constraints will be both internal (eg. mental capacities below a certain threshold), as well as externally imposed - both physical (eg. force) and psychological (eg. manipulation, deception, brain-washing etc.). As Dworkin recognises, the problem is that “[s]pelling out the conditions of procedural independence involves distinguishing those ways of influencing people’s reflective and critical faculties which subvert them from those which promote and improve them. ... and doing so in a non ad hoc fashion” (1988:18).

This passage, and the suggested interpretation of the second condition raises two points: Firstly, assessments of autonomy will require that we distinguish compelled from voluntarily acquired beliefs, values etc., and this gives autonomy an external, historical dimension, rather than it being a conditional only upon a certain mental state²⁵. It is possible to reflect upon and identify with both compelled and voluntary mental phenomena, so the difference between the two types will not always lie in their internal character. In such cases, it is the way they were acquired or are artificially maintained (eg. by another agent, or because of post-hypnotic suggestion) that may provide the crucial difference between autonomous and heteronomous identification, and this brings in factors external the person herself. Although Dworkin does not explicitly draw the distinction between internal and external dimensions of autonomy which Mele, for example, explores extensively²⁶, the procedural independence condition indicates it implicitly.

Secondly, the passage also allows us to interpret the procedural independence condition in a way that avoids a danger that a cursory reading of it may encourage: Dworkin mentions influences which may subvert or promote reflective and critical faculties. It is important to realise that many cases of compulsion do not close off forever the possibility of the compelled person coming to reject or ‘make his values his own’ in the way Dworkin envisages. It is a mistake to insist that beliefs, attitudes, desires etc. which were originally compelled cannot ever in principle be candidates for autonomous possession. It renders people helpless in the face of their history, and goes against the fact that people do manage to emerge as authentic self-rulers, to re-create their lives according to values freed of their origins. Regardless of how first-order

²⁵ See Mele:166ff.

²⁶ Especially Chapter 9.

desires were acquired, for some persons there still remains the possibility of taking up a critical stance towards the desires, beliefs and principles with which they find themselves. If this were not the case, then it is doubtful whether autonomy could ever be possible, given that all persons begin their adult lives with some set of acquired beliefs and desires, even if they have not been violently imposed. What is important in this regard, then, is that autonomy requires that a person retain her capacity for critical reflection and her ability to change her beliefs and values. If one has a suitable theory of critical reflection - and assuming that the limiting conditions imposed by the procedural independence condition are met²⁷ - the character of the initial formation of desires is no longer so crucial²⁸. Instead, what comes to play an increasingly important role is the cultivation of a disposition towards a certain kind of reflection. Before looking at reflection, however, let me draw together the main points of the preceding discussion.

In order to avoid imposing too strong a requirement for autonomy, I suggest that we read the procedural independence condition in two ways, both of which should be acceptable to Dworkin: Firstly, as mentioned already, it imposes a limiting condition for autonomy-compatible identification rather than specifying a set of positive conditions for the genesis of mental phenomena. This would fit with his claim that it is impossible to specify a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for autonomy. Secondly, it is only cases of compulsion which undermine a person's ability ever critically to assess or change her value/belief structure, that rule out completely a person's ever becoming autonomous. This would accord with Dworkin's alternative account of identification as a capacity, as well as with the centrality (although little elaborated) that Dworkin gives to critical reflection, to which I now turn.

In an earlier paper, 'Autonomy and Behaviour Control' (1976), Dworkin himself gives critical reflection an important role for autonomy and clearly indicates that the genesis of mental phenomena need not settle decisively the presence or lack of autonomy:

Autonomy cannot be located on the level of first-order considerations. If the autonomous person cannot adopt his motivations *do novo* [sic], he can still judge them

²⁷ This condition prevents agents whose entire value and belief structure has been introduced by compulsion from being autonomous, regardless of whether they can thereafter critically assess that structure. Mele, for example, argues that if certain beliefs and values have been imposed on you, even after critical reflection you could conclude that you are in favour of this new structure. The problem, of course, is that the new value structure itself influences this decision, so it is at least debatable that you are still not autonomous with regard to that structure (see Mele: Chapter 9).

²⁸ This conclusion is perhaps at odds with Raz's characterization of autonomy: that the autonomous life is "judged by its history ...[and] is discerned not by what there is in it but by how it came to be" (371).

after the fact. The autonomous individual is able to step back and formulate an attitude towards the factors that influence his behavior. (quoted in Friedman 1986:22)

So, although one may have had little or no control over the content and acquisition of one's lower-order desires, the critical distance and self-assessment of higher-order reflection can still confer autonomy. Here, the focus shifts to a process of critical engagement by which, in Dworkin's terms, a person *makes* her values and desires 'her own', rather than a one-off, static rejection or acceptance. The idea that self-determination is achieved *because* there is self-creation of this nature is clearly expressed by this formulation.

Of course, as Christman (1988:114) has noted, it is a further question whether, and in what sense, this reflection must be rational. Might not the autonomous person be, after all, the subject of the dictates of rationality, and so no more self-determining than the heteronomous person? In that case, what Dworkin takes to be the core idea of autonomy - self-determination - is specious.

However, as various philosophers have insisted, the autonomous person needs criteria and a conceptual scheme for making sense of the issues relevant to her choices: "To be autonomous one must have reasons for acting, and be capable of second thoughts in the light of new reasons; it is not to have a capacity for conjuring criteria out of nowhere" (Benn:126). Similarly, Feinberg writes:

To reflect rationally... is to apply some already accepted principles, in accordance with the rules of rational procedure, to the test of more tentative principles or candidates for principles, judgments, or decisions. Rational reflection thus presupposes some relatively settled convictions to reason from and with. (33)

Just as a person cannot create herself *ex nihilo*²⁹, so critical reflection cannot operate without recourse to publicly acceptable standards of rationality. Neither limitation renders autonomy an impossible ideal, although, as the novels will demonstrate, there is a danger of over-intellectualising reflection and of ignoring the role of first-order - often emotional - responses.

So far, no claims about the *content* of the autonomous person's character and life have been made. This is because Dworkin takes autonomy to be a formal rather than a substantial concept. As he understands it, this means that "there is no specific content to the decisions an autonomous person takes" (1988:21). A person's character and the quality of her life need not meet certain substantial criteria before they can be judged as

²⁹ See Feinberg:33f.

autonomous. We are given no list of potential candidates for the autonomous life; all that is required is that the two formal conditions of the full formula (or, the capacity for reflection) be met³⁰. So, “the autonomous person can be a tyrant or a slave, a saint or sinner, a rugged individualist or champion of fraternity, a leader or follower” (1988:29). Dworkin’s conception of autonomy – and by implication, his understanding of the general concept – thus demands only procedural, not *substantive* independence, in his terms.³¹

From this, we can see that by referring to autonomy as ‘formal’, Dworkin means that judgements about autonomy must not make reference to the content of a person’s *other* beliefs, values, ends, and the particular nature of her external circumstances etc. He is not applying the categories ‘formal’ or ‘substantial’ to autonomy itself as a value, rather to what other considerations need to be considered in assessing the presence of autonomy. So, he is not analysing autonomy as we may *integrity* for example: We could say that integrity is either merely being whole, consistent and coherent, or we could say that integrity involves certain virtues (eg. honesty and truthfulness). The former would be a formal construal of the concept; the latter a substantial construal. Now, along these lines Dworkin certainly holds autonomy to be formal, but understanding what he could mean by substantial autonomy or substantial independence along these same lines is more difficult. What would autonomy itself, substantially construed, entail? The concept is too broad and includes too many other concepts (constancy, integrity, unity etc.) to be understood in this way. Rather, as I shall understand it, substantial autonomy will refer to a notion of autonomy that requires the consideration of the precise nature of particular personal, external and inner circumstances³².

Dworkin’s construal of autonomy as formal can be understood within a liberal, anti-perfectionist framework. Dworkin is committed to the value of pluralism among conceptions of the good. Autonomy is also, however, a central liberal value, and despite its avowed neutrality regarding conceptions of the good, liberalism has traditionally been associated with forms of life which emphasise independence, originality and hostility towards the “despotism of custom”, as Mill wrote in his famous defence of liberty

³⁰ However, as I show shortly, Dworkin notes a contingent connection between autonomy and certain forms of life.

³¹ 1988:23.

³² I thank Marius Vermaak for bringing the point raised in this paragraph to my attention.

(136)³³. The debate surrounding autonomy thus displays the same tensions as those plaguing liberalism - neutrality between conceptions of the good on the one hand, while displaying a tendency to support what are arguably distinctly liberal values - those so eloquently expressed and defended by Mill - on the other.

Within this tradition, Dworkin places his support on the side of neutrality, arguing for a conception of autonomy that can accommodate a variety of values and forms of life. So, his is a relatively weak conception, one that “has no particular content, that emphasizes self-definition in abstraction from the self that is so defined” (1988:30). Ruling out in principle decisions to live as God or the priest or the community directs, for example, makes values such as “loyalty, objectivity, commitment, and love... inconsistent with being autonomous” (1988:109). Furthermore, he argues that autonomy must be empty of content because of a basic commitment to the Kantian notion of respect for persons: Firstly, in pursuing autonomy, “one shapes one’s life, one constructs its meaning” (1988:31), but there are many different ways of giving shape and meaning to lives. Secondly, any fundamental moral concept must be shared and a substantive conception of autonomy is unlikely to be agreed upon. A formal account which respects liberalism’s neutrality principle is, according to Dworkin, then a way of upholding respect for persons. In this, he is in sympathy with Berlin’s critique of positive liberty, in its instructive worries about the danger of claiming to know what is best for the ‘true self’³⁴.

However, it is interesting to note that Dworkin suggests a contingent connection between autonomy and the substantive nature of one’s values or preferences. It is reasonable to expect certain psychological and sociological restrictions, he says:

It seems plausible that those who practice in their daily life a critical reflection of their own value structure will tend to be suspicious of modes of thought that rely on the uncritical acceptance of authority, tradition, and custom. (1988:29)

If this is the case, it may be that autonomy does after all encourage distinctly liberal values, or that an interesting notion of autonomy is one that, *pace* Dworkin’s best efforts, is actually itself a substantial value. This possibility will become increasingly central in the rest of my exploration of autonomy.

³³ It is of course still a matter of debate whether or not liberalism itself rules out in principle ways of life which are more community or other-regarding. The literature on this is immense and includes the long-standing communitarian/ liberalism debate.

³⁴ Berlin:132ff.

So, to summarise the above exploration (and re-construction) of Dworkin's 'characterisation' of personal autonomy: The general concept of autonomy is understood as self-rule, self-creation and control over the direction of one's life. It is a concept applying to the character of persons and to the tenor of their lives, so it is dispositional in character rather than applying to discrete situations. Dworkin's particular conception of this general notion requires (i) higher-level reflection upon lower-order desires; (ii) identification, being higher-order endorsement (or more weakly, appropriation) of them – these two encapsulating the first *authenticity* condition; and (iii) procedural independence with respect to the identifications (understood as a limiting, negative condition). These conditions are formal, requiring no particular substance to the content of that with which a person identifies.

The question now is whether Dworkin's account – let us call it D-Autonomy for convenience – captures the core ideas constituting the general concept, and whether it can do the work that Dworkin requires given his explicit concerns. Because he is interested in accounting for persons leading lives of a certain quality, a good way of testing his account would be to study portraits of persons: their decisions, the quality (chosen or imposed) of their lives, their interactions with others and with their historically specific social contexts. This is precisely the domain of the novel³⁵ and the rest of the thesis will offer an extended analysis of D-Autonomy through a reading of two novels. If successful, this method may suggest that a character-based approach to broadly ethical – as opposed to moral – concepts, like autonomy is more illuminating than an attempt to set up conditions through traditional conceptual analyses. By character-based approach, I have in mind an investigation of ethical concepts through the study of portraits of persons; exploring the consequences and adequacies of such concepts through their applicability to the phenomenology of persons with which we can identify. This would complement the renewed interest in the notion of character in ethical theory: the idea that actions must be understood as issuing from a particular character, and that they possess a certain moral quality because of the character of the person who performed them. Actions cannot, in other words, be evaluated

³⁵ I use 'novel' broadly here, having in mind as paradigmatic 'realist' nineteenth-century novels, by writers like George Eliot, Henry James, the Bronte sisters etc. I do not wish to enter a debate about the parameters of the term 'novel'; nor deny that there are many contemporary novels in this sense. The novel is certainly not dead, despite constant funereal announcements. One of my chosen novels for this study, in fact, is late twentieth-century.

independently of considerations about the character of the agent. My understanding of autonomy as an ideal of character assumes that the acts of autonomous persons will similarly be of a particular quality, which they gain because they issue from a dispositionally autonomous person. I do not argue that it is impossible to set up necessary and sufficient conditions for concepts like autonomy; I argue, rather, for a different method of doing this – through the exploration of character in literature, rather than through analyses of such concepts in isolation from particular cases and considerations of particular, unique circumstances.

Specifically, I offer the following two literary characters as tests for D-Autonomy: Mr Stevens, protagonist of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, and Isabel Archer, the heroine of Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*. Both Stevens and Isabel fulfil the conditions of D-Autonomy, and yet the novels are studies in the *failure* to achieve autonomy. Neither character manifests the central features of autonomy – they do not govern themselves in the required way, nor do they have the requisite control over the course of their lives - despite passing Dworkin's test. Stevens and Isabel fail to achieve autonomy in different ways, however, and this asymmetry is instructive: Stevens demonstrates a psychological failure not accounted for by D-Autonomy. The nature of his identification and critical reflection prevent him from achieving dispositional autonomy, even though on Dworkin's brief account of these factors, he fulfils them. Isabel, on the other hand, is psychologically capable of achieving autonomy, but she is unable to translate her values and beliefs into action because she is under the malevolent control of another person. She lacks what I shall call *competence*, and which D-Autonomy does not adequately address. In the following chapters I shall argue, offering the two novels as support, that autonomy requires:

- (1) *Critical reflection* and *identification* of a certain character (I shall call it *radical reflection*); and
- (2) *Competence*, the ability to realise the results of (1) in action, and therefore to exercise control over the course of one's life.

Stevens is non-autonomous because he fails to fulfil the first condition; Isabel fails to achieve autonomy because she is prevented from fulfilling the second condition.

This account of autonomy differs in significant respects from D-Autonomy. Firstly, both conditions of D-Autonomy, authenticity and procedural independence, are encapsulated by my first condition. Secondly, autonomy is more than a capacity – it is the achievement of a psychological condition and set of skills which must be maintained,

and which can be lost. Thirdly, and related to this, autonomy requires that one be able to control one's life by translating one's values and desires into action. Possessing the required mental capacities and skills without the means to exercise them is not sufficient for autonomy, as the story of Isabel Archer tragically demonstrates. Fourthly, we shall see that success or failure in meeting these conditions is largely dependent on the *content* of mental phenomena; the substantial nature of certain values and beliefs just prevent the achievement of dispositional autonomy. This has the result that substantive considerations are built into autonomy, despite Dworkin's arguments to the contrary, so autonomy is not a purely formal concept.

The plan of the rest of the discussion is therefore as follows: In the next chapter, I offer a reading of *The Remains of the Day*, using it to demonstrate the deficiency of Dworkin's account of identification and reflection, and arguing for an alternative account. The following chapter will use *The Portrait of a Lady* to argue for the condition of competence, showing that an account of autonomy that ignores its centrality is inadequate. Both chapters will demonstrate the necessity of considering substantial factors for assessing the presence of autonomy. I will conclude by showing how this alternative account of dispositional autonomy explains and defines the value of autonomy.

Chapter 2

In this chapter I will assess the adequacy of Dworkin's first condition for autonomy – the *authenticity* condition - which requires that the autonomous person identify with her motivational structure after critically reflecting upon it. We need to investigate (i) the nature of identification, and (ii) the type of critical reflection which has this autonomy-conferring status. For autonomy, then, a certain psychological state or disposition is required, which Dworkin argues is captured by the authenticity condition. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, however, Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*¹ provides us with a testing ground for Dworkin's theory, because its protagonist fulfils both of Dworkin's conditions (D-Autonomy) and yet is clearly not autonomous. I will argue that Mr Stevens's failure to achieve dispositional autonomy has to do with the particular nature of his identification and personal reflections. Not just any type of identification and reflection is therefore compatible with autonomy. In exploring this, I will set up what I hope is more adequate account of both factors and present an alternative 'first' condition for autonomy. This chapter thus explores the internal, psychological elements of autonomy. In the Introduction, I suggested that a further condition is also necessary, and which Dworkin does not adequately explore – the condition of *competence*. While this chapter touches briefly on it, a full investigation of competence will be left for chapter 3. My conclusions will also show that that autonomy is a substantial notion, dependent on considerations of the content of one's beliefs, desires and values.

The chapter proceeds as follows: First, I introduce *The Remains of the Day* and offer a reading focusing on elements relevant to my concerns. Second, in the light of this reading I examine (i) identification, and (ii) critical reflection, both against the background of Dworkin's theoretical framework - the hierarchical model.

The Remains of the Day

The Remains of the Day is the first-person narrative of Mr Stevens, the precise and loyal butler of Darlington Hall. It is England 1956; Lord Darlington has died in disgrace, branded as a Nazi sympathiser, and the great house has been sold to an American, whose

¹ 1989. In this chapter, references in parentheses are to *Remains*, unless otherwise stated.

jovial indulgence in what Stevens calls the "affectionate sport" (14) of bantering he finds difficult to appreciate. The occasion of the narrative is Stevens's decision to take a holiday while his employer is away. Small lapses in his competence are causing him to entertain "all sorts of alarmist theories as to their cause" (5) and after a circuitous analysis of his staff-plan, he concludes that the reason is "no more complicated than this: I had given myself too much to do" (9). He decides then to "undertake [a] motoring trip to the West Country" and while "passing by" (20) to visit a previous housekeeper of the Hall. Miss Kenton, as he persists in calling her, even though she "is properly speaking 'Mrs Benn' and has been for twenty years" (47), will assist him in again managing Darlington Hall in a fitting manner.

It is entirely "to do with professional matters" (5) that he goes to Cornwall, Stevens insists throughout, characteristically justifying his motives as purely 'professional'. Darlington Hall requires a housekeeper and he has discerned in Miss Kenton's latest letter an "unmistakable message" of "deep nostalgia" for Darlington Hall (48). As she has just left her husband, Stevens feels that a return to the Hall should "offer a very genuine consolation to a life that has come to be so dominated by a sense of waste" (ibid.). So he leaves the confines of the Hall, going "beyond all previous boundaries", feeling as if he is "speeding off in totally the wrong direction into a wilderness" (24). When he finally meets Miss Kenton again, he learns that she cannot return to the Hall, that she has made peace with her life, and that he was probably mistaken in thinking that her letter had even indicated a desire to return. Although her comments suggest a regret that they had never had a life together, they part without discussing their feelings for each other. Stevens uncharacteristically admits that on leaving her, his "heart was breaking" (239), but the novel ends with him resolving to "adopt a more positive outlook and [to] try to make the best of what remains of my day" (244).

Stevens's journey initiates a series of personal reflections; indeed, while ostensibly his travel diary, the time spent describing his travels decreases as his narrative becomes increasingly an assessment of his life and values. His attitude towards self-reflection and his particular reflections on the concept of dignity are useful for our analysis of Dworkin's authenticity condition because *Remains* demonstrates that even an agent who is conscientiously reflective can fail to be so in a manner conducive to being autonomous. As we shall see, the extent to which Stevens's reflections are really instructional is constrained by his solemn regard for his employment -or vocation, rather. Although he comments that it is perhaps natural that a journey should prompt one "towards such surprising new

perspectives” (117), the “healthy flush of anticipation for the many interesting experiences” he is sure lie ahead is transformed into a resolve to focus on “the one professional task” of his trip (26). His excitement at seeing Miss Kenton is therefore transformed into a more fitting resolution of professionalism, but he never subjects this ‘professionalism’ itself to critical scrutiny.

Stevens regards it as a “professional responsibility for all of us to think deeply about things” (44) like dignity, greatness, one’s contribution to history and place in the great revolving wheel of the world (115). He values reflection, but he characterises it as a professional, rather than personal responsibility. As he understands it, his profession calls for analysis of such issues and so he diligently does so. His aim, therefore, is not self-knowledge or personal growth in the investigation of topics central to human life, but to participate in an ideal of professionalism.

Stevens’s aim as a professional is to achieve *dignity*, his conception of which is introduced as he contemplates “the English landscape at its finest” (28) during a break in his travels. He feels that he is “in the presence of greatness”, a quality that lies in the “very *lack* of obvious drama or spectacle” (ibid.) of the land before him. Similarly, it is the “emotional restraint” unique to the English that ensures that “butlers only truly exist in England” (43). This initiates an obviously often-considered analysis of dignity because the *great* butler is one who displays dignity - but a “dignity in keeping with his position” (33). This has to do “crucially with [his] ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits” (42). So, butlers become great, he tells us:

... by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost... .
They wear their professionalism as a decent gentleman will wear his suit: he will not let ruffians or circumstances tear it off him in the public gaze; he will discard it when, and only when, he wills to do so, and this will invariably be when he is entirely alone.
(42-3)

Later, he says that dignity “comes down to not removing one’s clothing in public” (210).

The poverty of Stevens’s notion of dignity is immediately apparent. It does not assume a Kantian “intrinsic, inalienable, unconditional, objective worth”² that all humans or persons share, so is not an expression of self-respect based upon being a person among equals. Instead, ‘dignity for butlers’ is distinct from that of gentlemen, and their self-respect and the attainment of dignity is reliant on two factors: (i) their use and desirability for the masters, and (ii) the perceived stature of those gentlemen.

² Sullivan’s gloss on the Kantian position (1989:197).

As an institution, butlers exist and define themselves in relation to the services they provide for gentlemen. For Stevens, their dignity and self-respect is conditional upon the continuous appreciation of their position; butlers must never forget that *they are* essentially manservants, and those they serve have a position of significance entirely distinct from theirs. A butler would not maintain some essential dignity despite lapses in his professionalism, inappropriate views of his position, or his employer's disgrace, so a dignified demeanour is not expressive of a feeling of self-respect based upon being a human person. According to those of his "idealistic generation" (116), Stevens notes, "if a butler is to be of any worth to anything or anybody in life", he should devote himself to serving a gentleman who embodies everything "noble and admirable" (200) - that is "loyalty *intelligently* bestowed" (201). Butlers are means to the ends of the masters, so they should consider their worth as dependent on that fact - they therefore exist and acquire instrumental worth against their masters' intrinsic worth. So a butler, as we shall see in more detail, must be just a butler rather than a particular and unique individual, and his dignity is conditional upon that role's defining features. On this assumption, the 'receptacle' of butler-dignity is replaceable. Like Utilitarian accounts of value, so long as utility is increased or maintained, it does not matter who or what carries the value. This explains Stevens's worry regarding his trivial errors - if he no longer fulfils the need which he considers justifies his very existence, he may be replaced by another receptacle who can.

Based on his conception of dignity and self-respect, Stevens also has a definite idea about how he should behave in public and private. In this, he is bordering on being *servile*³: I say 'bordering', because servility "betrays the absence of a certain kind of self-respect" (Hill 1991:6). While he is unaware of the impoverished nature of his self-conception, he still thinks he *has* worth and self-respect and certainly would never stoop to behave in the fawning or unctuous manner we associate with servility. He is proud of his dignified bearing and unruffled composure and considers his dignity to depend on their continual maintenance. His sense of worth is, however, dependent on factors other than one's basic humanity and in this way his self-respect resembles servility. His behaviour is a mixture of self-effacement among his employers and self-aggrandisement among his colleagues and in his reflections, which is both pompous and poignant.

³ See Hill 1991: 'Servility and Self-respect', and 'Self-respect reconsidered'.

The nature of butler-dignity is demonstrated further by the complex imagery of these passages which convey, problematically, both contingency and necessity: A butler ‘inhabits’ his role; ‘wears’ his professionalism in such a way that nothing can ‘tear it off him’; only he can ‘discard’ the role. This suggests an intentional covering of the self, but also ideally such a proximity between covering and self that only violent action on the part of another could separate them. Butlers should therefore turn their business suits into their being:

A butler of any quality must be seen to *inhabit* his role, utterly and fully; he cannot be seen casting it aside one moment simply to don it again the next as though it were nothing more than a pantomime costume. (169)

In contrast to the great English butlers, we are told, Continentals “are like a man who will, at the slightest provocation, tear off his shirt and run about screaming” (43).

Stevens never discerns any tension between his image of *donning* a role, with its connotations of contingency and impermanence, and the strain which results from making this essential to one’s being. He sees the trappings of the butler both as incidental (it can be put on or discarded) as well as necessary for its very existence. Because butler-dignity is conditional upon butlers maintaining a proper appreciation of their position and upon the status of their employers, it can be lost or gained in the way that clothing can be shed or assumed. However, if the clothing becomes the skin as Stevens wishes, the professionalism and thus the dignity of the great butler would be essential to his very existence. As a result, his view of the self is equally ambiguous: the self exists prior to its outer manifestation, but is also constituted and maintained by that covering. While Stevens’s choice of metaphor indicates this tension, he remains oblivious to it. Literature is here especially suited to displaying these delicate tensions that may not even be realised by literary characters or by persons in reality. The medium through which one chooses to express oneself can also subtly betray one: The imagery that Stevens (self-consciously) chooses to capture his notion of dignity reveals more than he realises - the paradoxically contingent and necessary character of his conception of dignity. These points are not given to us as propositions or claims; they are gradually developed and revealed through the language of the literary artist, refracted through a particular consciousness. The novel demonstrates that significant aspects of oneself often *cannot* be expressed as propositions in the first-person, because one may not be consciously aware of them at all. We shall see in more detail how the particular nature of Stevens’s narration indicates far more than he realises.

Because he has become so absorbed in the role, Stevens finds it unbearable to be

seen 'naked', without the costume which keeps continental excess at bay. So, he resists Miss Kenton's attempts to probe his private moments with the justification that it was a "crucial matter of principle... that I did not appear in anything less than my full and proper role" (169). So, "any butler who aspires at all to a 'dignity in keeping with his position'... should never allow himself to be 'off duty' in the presence of others" (168-9).

The clothing imagery continues through the novel. For example, Stevens reflects on "what sorts of costume [are] appropriate" for his journey, and whether or not it is "worth [his] while to invest in a new set of clothes" (10). He decides eventually that he can afford one new suit and that the "number of splendid suits" (10) passed on to him by various gentlemen should suffice for evenings⁴. He thus literally sheds his butler's costume for the clothing of those great gentlemen "in whose hands civilization had been entrusted" (116), which suggests that on leaving the Hall he is entering a world in which it is possible to live free of such stringent self-limitation - a possibility represented by Miss Kenton. However, his journey demonstrates that he finds it impossible so easily to shed the role he has made essential to his sense of self. This is despite the implication of his willing co-operation when he is mistaken for a gentleman during his trip - he tries out this role as he donned unfamiliar clothes, briefly considering another story from the one he presently lives. This episode suggests the possibility of his realising the contingency implicit in the image of 'donning' a role. Later, however, he suffers great discomfort at the 'misunderstanding' without realising the symbolic significance presented by this real opportunity for self-expansion.

Stevens experiments briefly with the unfamiliar role of gentleman, and rejects it, just as he rejects the role of lover. While he reads "sentimental love [stories]"⁵ (167) when officially off duty, as Miss Kenton discovered to his embarrassment, he cannot take on the role of lover towards her. He admits now that he did "at times gain a sort of incidental enjoyment" from his reading, which he "perhaps did not acknowledge ... at the time" (168). Really, however, reading these stories, where feelings are expressed "often in the most elegant phrases" (ibid.), "was an extremely efficient way to maintain and develop one's command of the English language" (167). Despite his justifications, we can see Mr

⁴ The fact of Mr Stevens's poverty - that he can barely afford new clothes or a holiday - is an indictment of the structure of Darlington Hall and the society which it represents. I thank Dr Wendy Jacobson for bringing this to my attention.

⁵ These are Miss Kenton's words.

Stevens's unacknowledged need to explore other ways of living. We also see an impoverished view of the emotions implicitly at work here⁶. The emotions Stevens allows himself to explore are 'sentimental'; they are easy, shallow responses rather than nuanced appreciations of concrete situations. Even when Stevens admits the reality of the emotions, it is a meagre existence indeed.

Stevens defines his self in terms of being the butler of Darlington Hall and this in turn defines his life story. He clearly identifies with the role of butler and reflects on his profession and aim of achieving dignity, thus fulfilling Dworkin's authenticity condition, at least. However, as his story unfolds we realise that he is far from being an autonomous agent in the dispositional sense with which Dworkin and I are most concerned. Although he is the nominal author of the life he narrates and arguably self-governing in that he is motivated by values with which he identifies, he remains essentially a character in a story, the content and form of which was laid down independently of him. Being a butler thus constrains the features of his narrative - both the story of his life, and the formal features of its telling. With the trappings of a butler - as he construes it - belong certain modes of behaviour, thought and speech, so he is limited in what he tells, what he cannot say and the audience to whom he addresses himself.

The novel's complex narrative structure demonstrates these points and undermines the force of Dworkin's authenticity condition, as it stands. Accompanying Stevens's narrative and journey is a second silent narrative, which undercuts what he tells us and which contributes another consciousness - one which Stevens must ultimately either reject or accept as a legitimate part of himself. This renders his narration highly unstable and his reliability as narrator is brought increasingly into question⁷. Stevens's denials, his justifications, his responses and what he is silent about have the coherence and continuity of a *narrative*; they articulate their own psychological logic. Often, as explored earlier, this second narrative is revealed through the tensions implicit in Stevens's choice of imagery and metaphor. Occasionally, in telling moments, the second narrative impinges on his conscious narration, or colours his actions with a significance he cannot interpret - his inability to realise the implications of his willing co-option into playing a gentlemen is an example.

His interpretation of certain key events in his past is another indication of the

⁶ We shall see a second equally impoverished view later.

tension between these two narratives and of the unreliability of the primary narrative. His narration of such episodes is for us either a poignant indication of emotional stifling or embarrassingly trivial: For example, his pride at his composure at his father's death and the "glow of satisfaction" (138) from a compliment by a guest on the beauty of the Hall's silver. Stevens's reactions here are inappropriate to the situation and we cannot respond as he does. His composure during the exhausting conference, for example, demonstrates a more worrying tendency to repress legitimate emotional reactions; his perfectionism is pedantic and an obstacle to any fulfilling personal relationships. Another example is the *motivational transfer*⁸ from emotions to dutiful 'professionalism' which I have already mentioned, in which his reactions must be transformed into acceptable responses based on businesslike concerns. Similarly, moments of grief are transferred to triumph at his composure in controlling them⁹. These tensions suggest that it is still psychologically possible for Stevens to shed his butler clothing through (partly, at least) accepting the legitimacy of his emotional life.

At one point, Stevens refers to the "illusion of absence which is essential to good waiting [at table]" (72). The phrase 'illusion of absence' serves equally well to describe his emotional life. In rejecting it, Stevens is denying a part of himself and so 'absenting' a crucial complex of responses from the narrative of his life. Consciously controlled and silenced, his emotions tell their own story in the secondary narrative. Their absence is never more than an illusion.

Stevens's self-conscious style is unrelentingly formal, filled with justifications referring to professionalism and dignity. His pedantic register increasingly accentuates the distance between him and the reader of *Remains* and is thus a factor in undermining his reliability as narrator. In moments of high tension, his language only accidentally betrays a loss of equilibrium. He writes, for example, of the "peculiar sensation I felt rising within me" (212), that the thought that "Miss Kenton, at that very moment, and only a few feet away from me, was actually crying. ... provoked a strange feeling to rise within me" (176). Here, the repressed emotions belonging to the stifled secondary narrative of his life threaten

⁷ See Wall 1994 for a detailed examination of this aspect of *Remains*.

⁸ I owe this phrase to Dr Thomas Martin.

⁹ Besides his father's illness and death, he does the same with his response to the news of Miss Kenton's engagement: his "somewhat downcast" mood is transferred into "a deep feeling of triumph" at having "come through an extremely trying evening" with his dignity intact (227).

to disturb the restraint and formality of his conscious life. Stevens describes this in terms of passive sensations which merely occur within him; alien sensations ‘rise’ with apparently no participation on his part - these feelings are not part of his conscious experience of agency. To prevent the disruption that would result from recognising them, he portrays his emotional reactions as physical and avoids naming them for what they are - perhaps, in fact, unaware at this point of what they are. This shows another impoverished view of the emotions: When Stevens experiences them, they are recognised only as brute sensations with no cognitive function; when reading about others, they can only be acknowledged if portrayed in a trivialising, ‘sentimental’ manner.

The extent of this repression is seen in the way he behaves at the time of his father’s illness and death during a historically significant conference at Darlington Hall. He regards his composure and dutiful service as “a turning point in my professional development”, and judges “with a large sense of triumph” (110) that he came as close as he can to the ideal of butler-dignity. Kathleen Wall notes, too, that “when Stevens feels a need to erase some part of himself, his shift from ‘I’ to ‘one’ is unfailing, indicating a kind of dual identity or sensibility” (Wall:23). The conscious self – ‘I’ - is defined by certain characteristics only; uncomfortable moments which may upset the equilibrium are de-personalised and discussed in terms of a neutral third person. For example, justifying his inability to offer Miss Kenton comfort after she hears of the death of her aunt, he writes that in “forever speculating [about] what might have happened”:

One could presumably drive oneself to distraction in this way. In any case, while it is all very well to talk of ‘turning points’, one can surely only recognize such moments in retrospect. Naturally, when one looks back to such instances today, they may indeed take the appearance of being crucial, precious moments in one’s life; but of course, at the time, this was not the impression one had. (179)

Stevens is almost brought to the point of admitting his sense of loss and futility here, of recognising what Miss Kenton means to him. In order to avoid the pain of this, however, his language becomes impersonal - *he* did not realise how ‘crucial and precious’ the time was, such instances were not ‘turning points’ for *him*. Rather, his remarks become generalisations, carefully distanced from himself by the use of the pronoun ‘one’. This same distancing strategy is apparent in his habit of transferring judgement from his own life to Miss Kenton – for example, when he writes that her life “has come to be so dominated by a sense of waste” (48), or when he insists that she wrote that “the rest of my life stretches out like an emptiness before me” (236), even though she has no recollection of having written it.

Just as being a butler controls the languages with which Stevens articulates his sense of life, so it controls who he talks to. *The Remains of the Day* has an unspecified but directly addressed audience, of Stevens's own social milieu, that knows the workings of great houses and is acquainted with people he mentions. He never presumes to speak to those above his social class, so is most comfortable speaking to those he assumes share his values. Phrases like "As you might expect" (4), "I think you will understand" (5), "You will not dispute, I presume" (34), "those such as you and I" (199), invoke a group of which he is a member and occur most frequently when he feels the need to justify himself. The group defines the social milieu in which he operates and the codes he upholds, so his behaviour must be acceptable to its members. Of course, the world of Darlington Hall is foreign to the real, embodied reader - as opposed to the implicit audience. Stevens's co-option of his audience is thus ironically undercut by the real reader's distance from the values which he presumes his audience shares, and this increasingly brings his reliability as narrator into question. The reader realises that his discomfort in speaking to 'ordinary' people on his journey indicates the extent to which he has insulated himself within a self-justifying world. In doing so, his reflections are never challenging to his fundamental outlook, a point I examine later for its relevance to autonomy. The narrative structure of *Remains* thus demonstrates that a person's identification with his motives, his social status and his professional role may be exactly what presents problems for his achieving autonomy. Identification is therefore not as unproblematic as Dworkin's account of the authenticity condition suggests.

Despite Stevens's self-justifying world, the narrative device of the journey makes it clear that alternative possibilities do exist for him. Stevens is confronted by a changed world and opposing views as he travels, and he is aware of the damaging implications for his carefully maintained ideas. As Lord Darlington's butler, he never presumed to have opinions about the weighty matters discussed in the Hall and still never thinks he could make any significant contribution to history. He cannot address gentlemen as their equal and similarly, he cannot address their concerns. The "most powerful gentlemen of Europe were conferring over the fate of our continent" (227) within the Hall, he says, and yet he showed no interest. It is characteristic, however, that he does *reflect on* his disinterest after being confronted one night by the views of the villagers, an episode that is pregnant with the possibility of his assessing his most fundamental views. One vociferous democrat, Mr Harry Smith, insists that "Dignity isn't just something gentlemen have", and "no matter if

you're rich or poor, you're born free and you're born so that you can express your opinion freely" (186). This egalitarian view of dignity – that it applies to all persons regardless of their role or social position - confronts Stevens's concept of the replaceable, conditional dignity of the butler, clearly offering up an alternative for him. Despite there being "surely little in [these] statements that merits serious consideration", being "far too idealistic, far too theoretical to deserve respect" (194), Stevens conscientiously, yet with a hint of alarm, attends to them, in the light of an incident he recalls where he was manipulated into displaying his ignorance of world affairs before Lord Darlington's guests. His recollection of this is interesting because of the way he narrates it and the nature and conclusion of his reflections on it, so I will now look at it in some detail.

He begins by noting that the incident he is about to narrate "illustrates rather well the real limits of whatever truth may be contained in Mr Harry Smith's views" (195). In other words, he begins with the conclusion already fixed that these new ideas are implausible; the story and his reflections will merely justify it. He is diligent and fair-minded enough to give the views a hearing, but not one that risks undermining his convictions.

Regarding the discomfiting episode with Lord Darlington's guests, he tells us that he "quickly saw the situation for what it was; that is to say, it was clearly expected that I be baffled by the question" (195). Mr Stevens will not confess that he had no answer and he copes with the situation with his characteristic composure. He insinuates that he 'played along', only pretending ignorance in order dutifully to provide the entertainment the gentlemen desired, and we find his willing consent to be used in such a manner objectionable. He then allows Lord Darlington's apologetic excuse to stand as his own view on the matter. His employer said, "The man in the street can't be expected to know enough about politics, economics, world commerce and what have you" (199), justifying his assertion that "[d]emocracy is something for a bygone age" (198).

Stevens tells us first that in recollection, many of Lord Darlington's words do indeed "seem today rather odd - even, at times, unattractive" (199). However, this tentative discomfort is quickly followed by assent – "surely it cannot be denied that there is an important element of truth in these things" - and then a firm statement of support – "Of course, it is quite absurd to expect any butler to be in a position to answer authoritatively" such questions (*ibid.*). He concludes that his original view was after all correct: "a butler's duty is to provide good service. It is not to meddle in the great affairs of the nation" because these "will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and I" (*ibid.*).

Instead:

... those of us who wish to make our mark must realize that we best do so by concentrating on what *is* within our realm; that is to say, by devoting our attention to providing the best possible service to those great gentlemen in whose hands the destiny of civilization truly lies. (ibid.)

Stevens therefore firstly makes Lord Darlington the authority of justification for his own moral principles; and secondly, conducts his reflections in a manner which strives merely to find justification for a fixed conclusion. Both points illustrate how Stevens limits his 'realm' of thought and action in accordance with an ideal of character, and how this in turn prevents him from taking the opportunity provided by his journey for self-knowledge and expansion.

We witness another lost opportunity at the end of the novel. When Steven learns that Miss Kenton cannot return to the Hall, he makes the astonishing admission that "at that moment, my heart was breaking" (239). The potential story of love and companionship he unconsciously desired to write for himself ceases before it began, but it is a characteristically composed Mr Stevens who parts with a smile and good wishes. He then makes a further revelation to a stranger sitting beside him on the pier as they watch the evening descend on cheerful groups of people. Lord Darlington was fallible and naive, he finally admits, but he did at least choose his own path in life, however misguided:

'As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see, I *trusted*. I trusted in his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really - one has to ask oneself - what dignity is there in that?' (243)

At this point, there is an interesting slippage between the two competing conceptions of dignity. Because of his idea of dignity -that it is dependent upon the status of his master and his own service to him - his sense of worth, in fact his very reason for being, is undermined when he admits Lord Darlington's failures. But simultaneously, he realises the poverty of this sense of dignity: he cannot even 'make his own mistakes' because he never initiated anything authentically at all. The dignity he finds lacking there cannot be his original conception which made no reference to a butler's having a role-independent self which *could* find dignity in choosing his own path. Instead, the notion at work makes reference to the autonomy of the unique individual, whose actions, even when misguided, come from his own agency. However, Stevens's final judgement on his life ignores this recognition, making us think worse of him than we might have. Again banishing his doubts into the silence, he banishes a part of himself as well as he once again addresses

himself to his narrative audience:

The hard reality is, surely that for the likes of you and I, there is little choice other than to leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services. What is the point in worrying oneself too much about what one could or could not have done to control the course one's life took? Surely it is enough that the likes of you and I at least *try* to make our small contribution count for something true and worthy. (244)

He once again denies himself the significance of gentlemen, defines his self in relation to his service to them, and abdicates responsibility for taking charge of the 'course of his life'. But he also makes a desperate attempt to salvage some sense of dignity that is not undermined by his master's failure, by asserting his 'small contribution' to something objectively worthy.

The final moment demonstrates again the 'illusion of absence': Listening to the friendly exchanges of people around him, he resolves to consider bantering "more enthusiastically" (245). It may not be so foolish, "particularly if it is the case that in bantering lies the key to human warmth" (ibid.). Despite this poignant recognition of the importance of personal closeness, he immediately characterises bantering as a 'skill', which he will practise "with renewed effort" (ibid.). After all, it is "hardly an unreasonable duty for an employer to expect a professional to perform" (ibid.). Despite his self-reflection and the symbolic potential of his journey away from Darlington Hall, he will return to Darlington Hall with his values unchanged. The only change he recognises is that he will be "in a position to pleasantly surprise" Mr Faraday with his "bantering skills" (ibid.). A new position, he feels, yet one that is firmly defined by the same boundaries and which will guarantee once more the 'illusion of absence'.

What does *Remains* tell us about autonomy, and particularly about Dworkin's account? I would argue that Stevens is a poignant example of *non*-autonomy, and that the medium of the literary narrative is extremely instructive in clarifying the possession (or, perhaps more precisely, the *lack*) of dispositional autonomy.

Stevens may narrate his own story, but he is in fact a character trapped in an outdated social narrative that has defined the boundaries of his life story. He is not merely old-fashioned or idiosyncratic, however. His life is governed by an inherited and outdated value structure, but more than this, his life lacks the self-governance, authenticity and control over choices and actions that are essential features of autonomy. He has set up as

an ideal something which denies his moral equality and calls for a suppression of crucial impulses. It demands that he absent himself as insignificant from the world of the masters, and treat merely as an illusion any motivations which undermine the social and personal narrative through which he defines himself. The self-respect he possesses is dependent on his use to others and in this respect he is servile, despite his dignified bearing. While he may be self-governing in the sense of identifying with his motivations, he does not govern himself in the manner envisaged by Mill or Berlin or even Dworkin himself.

On Dworkin's analysis, however, Stevens would have to qualify as autonomous because he fulfils the two conditions of D-Autonomy: As the first condition requires, he identifies with his belief/value structure and, as we saw, makes an effort to analyse his values. He has as his final end¹⁰ a value - dignity - which he has analysed with some intelligence and has arguably 'made it his own'. He consciously strives to obtain this end through exercising critical control over his emotional life and lower-order motivations. He is a reflective agent who is constant towards a final end he can publicly articulate, who has a Rawlsian plan of life - to achieve the dignity of a great butler - which "establishes the basic point of view from which all judgments of value relating to [him] are to be made and finally rendered consistent" (Rawls 1973:409). Both elements of Dworkin's first condition are thus present: (i) higher-order affirmation of lower-order beliefs and values - ie. 'identification' and (ii) reflection on them. The authenticity condition is therefore fulfilled.

His position regarding Dworkin's second condition is perhaps more problematic. An obvious reply to my charge that he is not autonomous is that if so, this is because the second condition is not met. The procedural independence condition demands that a person's identifications not be compelled or imposed in a way which makes "the process of identification in some way alien to the individual" (Dworkin 1989:61). Given Stevens's background (his father was a butler) and the atmosphere of pre-war England, in which clearly demarcated social positions restricted options and governed social relations to a significant degree, certainly the origin of his values was not within his control. It is psychologically natural that he should wish to be successful in the profession that was in a way the inevitable choice for him. If so, his identification was indeed influenced in a way alien to him. Our intuition that autonomy is absent is justified without needing to discard

¹⁰ I am using the term after Richardson; eg. "A final end is an end that would be sought even if no other good resulted and that is reflectively accepted as appropriately self-regulating" (1994:82). The nature of this 'reflective acceptance' will be examined later.

Dworkin's account.

Despite this, I wish to argue that more is involved in Stevens's heteronomy than the fact of the origin of his values. In Stevens's case, the origin of his values does not suffice to render him non-autonomous, as Ishiguro is careful to indicate. As we have seen, on his journey, Stevens is shown a world in which possibilities have opened, class structures have become less rigid, and which demands from him - as he realises - a re-evaluation of his past and his values¹¹. To some extent, he undertakes this, so he *is* an agent capable of critical evaluation. The indisputable fact of socialisation has not dulled his critical faculties, and - as I explained in Chapter 1 - provided this is the case and the limiting conditions imposed by procedural independence are met, the origin of values and beliefs is not decisive in deciding on autonomy. I suspect that if Stevens were not critically capable, our final response to him would be different. The fact that he turns his back on the opportunity for re-creation and self-assessment, that he faces the waste of his life and then steps back from improving it, in fact banishes the recognition from his consciousness as soon as it makes itself known, ensures we lose a measure of sympathy and respect for him. We can expect more of him, as a moral agent whose critical reflective skills have not been undermined. There would not, in fact, *be* any moral problem if he could not exercise, because he did not possess, the capacities we demand from (potential) autonomous agents¹².

Our problem with Stevens is not simply that he makes a bad choice - an autonomous agent can do that. Autonomously choosing his old lifestyle would at least afford him the dignity of 'making his own mistakes'. Rather, he has made no choice at all; he returns to the security of previous ways of thinking to avoid the type of reflection necessary for making any informed choice. In this way, he typifies a characteristic of what David Shapiro calls the 'rigid character': "The disciplined and dutiful attitude, the rigid will, is not suited to making choices or decisions" (1981: 87).

Of course, it is a separate question to what extent other options are really available to him. What can we expect a middle-aged man to do, with no financial security or prospects, no family that we know of? A social structure has defined him so completely that he has no resources - material or psychological - to begin afresh. This fact

¹¹ This fact - ie. that a change in social structures and expectations allows for a parallel change in individual choices and expectations - demonstrates itself the importance of social factors for the possibility of autonomy. This will be further explored later.

¹² This is true even if, as I argue later, he is in a sense psychologically incapable of doing the *kind* of reflection we require.

is itself a strong indictment of the socio-political structure Ishiguro depicts.

Our reaction to Stevens is therefore ambiguous: On the one hand, we judge him for his curious mixture of self-deception, self-depreciation and self-aggrandisement. We want to hold him morally responsible at least partly for the bleakness of the remains of his day. As I mentioned above, we think that Stevens does ‘write his own conclusion’ to his story. On the other hand, we feel too that this ending is prepared in advance given his psychological constitution, itself influenced by social factors. Because he does not undergo the type of reflection required to make any informed choice, he slips by default back into the cold comfort of habit and illusion.

The Remains of the Day therefore gives us a character who fulfils the conditions of D-Autonomy and yet fails to live autonomously. Dworkin’s concern is with the quality of persons and their lives, and as tested against Mr Stevens, his account clearly does not capture what is required for autonomy. Neither are its assumptions about psychological structure and personhood rich enough to capture the phenomenology of his experiences. Before examining identification and critical reflection, I first want to look briefly at the hierarchical assumptions underlying Dworkin’s account. I will only raise points I feel are relevant to the phenomenology of experience and to the discussion of identification and reflection to follow. I do not, that is, attempt to offer a complete analysis and assessment of hierarchical models¹³.

As we study *The Remains of the Day*, it is immediately apparent that the terms of Dworkin’s account are not rich or ‘thick’ enough to depict or explain the psychology of persons. They cannot capture the complexity of Mr Stevens’s consciousness, the subtlety of his psychological manoeuvres. Because autonomy is partly conditional upon psychological facts, an account which cannot satisfactorily explain those facts is equally unhelpful in evaluating the extent of a person’s autonomy.

Like Frankfurt, Dworkin tends to describe the object of identification most naturally as a preference or desire, sometimes a belief. These are discrete objects, in principle capable of isolation and on the hierarchical model also in principle capable of being mapped out into ordered pairs. I suggest, rather, that we see the objects of identification as

¹³ I will not return to this discussion in the reading of *The Portrait of a Lady* in the next chapter, so I raise these now and assume them for the rest of the thesis.

forming a *complex* of phenomena,¹⁴ made up of beliefs and desires, surely, but also dispositions, emotions, values, ideals, principles and, as we shall see, *figures* which set up personal standards of evaluation. All these are in themselves more intricate and structured; they fashion similarly intricate webs of influence for which the mapping feature of the hierarchical model cannot then account.

To understand Stevens we cannot analyse him merely, for example, as having a *desire* to attain dignity and a higher-order preference in favour of this desire. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, dignity is too substantial a concept, too value-laden, to be termed a desire or preference. We should remind ourselves too, that “although one simply *has* desires, one *adopts* or *pursues* ends” (Richardson:52), for which we can give reasons. Secondly, Dworkin’s terms cannot account for the phenomenological force Stevens’s values and projects have for him - dignity is not a desire, it has the force of an imperative; professionalism is not an optional preference, it has the force of necessity. Thirdly, in order to understand his motivations and evasions, we must see the place and influence of dignity in his life, the way it structures his responses and sense of identity. If he identifies in any relevant sense, then he does not simply identify with that end; the identification expands to include ways of behaviour, ideals of response, demeanour and discourse. I shall therefore not restrict the objects of identification to the terms Dworkin and the hierarchical model find most natural. I shall refer variously to more complex, evaluative terms when necessary, with the intention of capturing motivational and evaluative force, and with the understanding that the terms can refer to a complex of responses and attitudes. We shall see later that this has implications for our concept of the self and whether *it* (rather than merely its states) can be understood in a linear, hierarchical way.

Bearing these conclusions in mind, we can return to Dworkin’s account of autonomy. D-Autonomy sets out formal and general conditions only. In *Remains* we have a character that fulfils them and yet is not autonomous, so the problem must have something to do with the particular nature of individual cases. Through the novel we can explore the particular nature of Stevens’s identifications and of his reflections and see what such substantial considerations tell us about autonomy.

The content that Stevens gives his values prevents his considering himself in the

¹⁴ I thank Marius Vermaak for bringing this to my attention.

way required for autonomy, and from exercising the requisite control over his life. What brings Stevens's autonomy into question is whether, despite his capacity for reflection, he is really practically able to change or discard these autonomy-impeding values and to what extent this possibility depends on his identification with the role of butler. Exploring this point will lead to a better understanding of the nature of identification and of the type of critical reflection required for autonomy. I look firstly at identification, arguing that Stevens's identification with a certain butler-figure prevents him from being able to discard his autonomy-preventing values. My account agrees with Dworkin's in claiming that the fact of identification is not sufficient to confer autonomy, but I also make the stronger claims that (i) because of their content, certain instances of identification in fact hinder autonomy, and that therefore (ii) the fact that a person identifies with her beliefs and values is not automatically favourable for the development of autonomy. Secondly, I offer an alternative account of a type of critical reflection which I argue is fundamental for autonomy. The two discussions are related because the nature of one's identification can impact on the effectiveness of one's reflection and this allows us to make substantial claims about the content of identifications.

Identification

The fundamental fact of Stevens's identity is that he is the butler of Darlington Hall. According to Dworkin, identification is necessary for autonomy, yet in Stevens's case the nature of the identification is highly problematic. We therefore need a more precise account of identification: in what way it *is* necessary for autonomy, as well as a realisation of how certain kinds can be detrimental. This will then help us to understand whether or not Stevens is really able to change or discard his butler-oriented values, the challenge mentioned above. My claim is that in Stevens's case, the nature of his identification prevents him from being able practically to discard the values which so impoverish his life, and he is therefore prevented from achieving dispositional autonomy.

Let us begin with examining the *ability* that has so often been mentioned. What does it mean to say that a person lacks the ability or capacity to change or abandon her

values and beliefs? Alfred Mele uses the phrase, ‘practically unsheddable’¹⁵, to refer to values which cannot be eradicated or attenuated, because the conditions which would enable this are beyond one’s control. In other words, one’s psychological condition precludes one’s voluntarily producing those conditions which would enable one to shed them. This does not mean such conditions are logically impossible, however. For example, while I may be so psychologically constituted that I could never in normal circumstances disregard or eradicate my vegetarian principles, in extreme situations of survival or conflict with other crucial values, I may in fact disregard them, or change them permanently if the situation were that extreme. Similarly, Bernard Williams, discussing what he calls ‘moral incapacity’, writes:

With other incapacities, while the agent cannot remove these at will, he may coherently set about trying to remove or overcome them, but with a moral incapacity he cannot do this, because a fundamental way in which a moral incapacity expresses itself is in the refusal to undertake any such project. (1995:54)

Citing possible world scenarios in which this ‘undsheddability’ or ‘incapacity’ would break down does not make it any less true that in *my* world, I cannot act contrary to my unsheddable values or do what I am morally incapable of doing¹⁶.

The fact that one’s values are unsheddable does not in itself entail that they are non-autonomously possessed, nor that they are necessarily problematic for character. ‘Practical sheddability’ does not come with evaluative strings attached; further considerations - involving the *content* of the values - are needed before moral judgement can be passed. A theory of autonomy which required sheddability would assume a highly implausible view of the self. It would be a self which could consciously and intentionally shed the values which often most fundamentally structure the life it leads, or which are constitutive of the very idea of being this unique individual rather than that one. Such a view is deeply opposed to my sense of who I am. *My* self is constituted by my vegetarianism, my valuing art and philosophy, my dislike of narrow-minded parochialism etc. Without them, I would be a different self. This does not deny the plurality of commitments and roles making up my self; as Michael Walzer reminds us, the self “speaks with more than one moral voice” (1994:85). However, selves cannot assume and shed values at will. This does not deny that sometimes one *should* become another self: Mr Stevens is unhappy and unfulfilled;

¹⁵ 1995:153ff.

¹⁶ Of course, practical sheddability and moral incapacity are not identical concepts, although they capture a similar idea. Sheddability is predicated on values, beliefs, etc; incapacity is a property of persons.

shedding his values may change this, but then he would no longer be the same Mr Stevens - and this would be a positive transformation. Before practical unsheddability becomes a symptom of dubious character, therefore, one needs to evaluate the content of those unsheddable values. Only if they are independently problematic is the fact of unsheddability also problematic. We can note here in passing¹⁷ how dependent considerations of autonomy are becoming on substantial factors, in contrast to Dworkin's formal concept of autonomy.

In what follows, and remaining with Mele's terminology, I will understand practical sheddability in Stevens's case to refer both to the role of butler, as well as to the values themselves which he associates with this role and which are coloured by it. I shall argue the following: Stevens's values – ie. the particular conceptions of dignity and professionalism - which so restrict his life are practically unsheddable for him. This is because he identifies himself with being essentially a butler in a very specific way: he sets up a certain butler-ideal as a *figure* in the sense explored by Amelie Rorty¹⁸, which he then takes himself to *be*. Because of the nature of Stevens's identification, the butler figure is also practically unsheddable for him¹⁹, thus rendering the values it structures and to which it gives content similarly unsheddable. Furthermore, the substance of the figure renders the unsheddability significant in explaining Stevens's lack of autonomy. More specifically, the problematic nature of the unsheddability is a result of the figure, so it is ultimately Stevens's identification with this figure which prevents him from attaining autonomy. As mentioned above, nothing is problematic in the fact of unsheddability alone. Dignity is in itself a respectable end and identification with an ideal often builds character positively. The problem arises from the content Stevens gives the figure, the character the figure then confers on dignity, and the limits the figure imposes on Stevens's cognitive openness, objectivity and the options he recognises for himself. So it is both the formal nature of this case of identification – that it is identification with a *figure* - as well as its content that is significant in explaining Stevens's lack of autonomy.

In examining these claims, I borrow from various sources. One is Robert Young (1986), whose account of identification builds on a Freudian analysis by Richard

¹⁷ A point to which I shall return.

¹⁸ 1976.

¹⁹ The implications of this for the nature of critical reflection will be examined in the following section.

Wollheim²⁰. On this account, identification is understood in terms of imaginatively playing out a role. To identify with another is “to write a part for oneself, based upon that other, with a view to being carried away by the performance when one acts it out” (Young:44). In identifying with one’s *own* values, one may imagine oneself doing some action or living some particular way. What is then required for non-neurotic identification, is that one “stand back from these imaginings, survey them and respond to them” (ibid.), either rejecting or accepting them²¹.

Based on his conception of the perfect butler, Stevens has certainly ‘written a part for himself’ and his masterful performance structures his life. The novel suggests that he has internalised the ideal butler in a way explored by Williams and Rorty. Williams writes of the internalised other which is in part “a representative of an independently identified social group, and whose reactions the agent can respect” (1993:102). Stevens does have external ‘role models’ in his life - his father is one - but he has also abstracted from these and imagined an ideal butler. Rorty calls such an ideal a ‘figure’²² and its function is precisely to act as an exemplar or idealisation. Originally represented by an external other, the figure becomes internalised - for Stevens, it sets up an inner standard before which he judges his every act and motivation, and which has screened out every impulse which is not a part of that figure. Stevens’s self-respect is therefore dependent upon his likeness to the figure. That one can identify in this way is a further indication that Dworkin’s model of identification is inadequate: it is not merely beliefs, desires or even values with which one can identify, but also more complex entities like figures and models.

The fact that Stevens identifies with a *figure* in this specific sense is already significant in explaining why his autonomy-preventing values are unsheddable for him, before we even turn to considerations about the substantial nature of the figure. People can identify with values represented by other people, fictional characters, or imagined internal ‘others’ quite unproblematically, as long as they remain objectively distanced enough to distinguish themselves from those ‘people’. However, in Stevens’s case, the figure is not merely the embodiment of a healthy standard of self-appraisal. Instead, he takes what is essential about his self to be represented by this figure. Stevens has not only ‘imagined’ an internal figure which he can respect, and thus ‘identified with’ it, but rather,

²⁰ Eg. 1984.

²¹ I shall argue that this is also required for autonomy-conferring, not only non-neurotic identification. I return to this later.

and more drastically, has identified his self *as* this figure²³. In so far as he does so, we can in fact say that he takes himself to *be* the figure, existing only in so far as he instantiates its defining features. According to Rorty, figures are defined by a distinct and static role, function or idiosyncratic trait²⁴. In trying to become the figure, Stevens's character and values are similarly static, and with regards to personal growth and self-knowledge he is drastically hindered. He cannot accept any feelings or beliefs which do not belong to the defining characteristics of the figure as a legitimate part of himself. It is here that the substantial nature of his conception of the butler-figure becomes important, because it also defines his ideal self-image. His 'self' is distinguished by the "emotional restraint" (Ishiguro:43) he so admires, is controlled by values and a sense of duty which require constant re-enforcement, which structure every response, and upon which his self-respect is grounded. Such a self is 'rigid' in Shapiro's terms because it displays a "purposiveness that does not brook deviation or distraction" (Shapiro:70). Iron-willed, it cannot condone any "unseemly demonstrativeness" (Ishiguro:29), and considers any show of emotion as weakness. Regarding his final end, the figure determines that it is the role-dependent conception of dignity for which he strives, rather than one based on self-respect as a human person. As we saw, this notion of dignity and his other values of professionalism and composure prevent him living fully, exploring all aspects of being an embodied person, and from controlling the course of his life in the way necessary for autonomy. Because the figure determines the substance of these values, for Stevens they are practically unsheddable.

The figure censors what Stevens can consciously think and feel, so certain mental states never appear to him in a form he can consciously appreciate. It has also determined

²² Rorty: 307ff.

²³ See Mele:117, discussing a point of Frankfurt's.

²⁴ In her 'Literary Postscript', Rorty offers an overview of our changing perceptions of the concept of a person. Tracing them through literature, we began with *characters*, which are "delineated; their traits are sketched; they are not presumed to be strictly unified" (ibid.). *Figures* are "characters writ large" (307). Later, as individuals were thought of as having a choice in their figurative identity, we get a shift to *persons*: "the idea of a unified center of choice and action" – evolving into a picture of persons as *souls* and *minds* (309) – and as "possessors of rights and powers" – evolving into *selves*. In unifying these two strands, we get *individuals*, who "actively resist typing.... are indivisible *entities*" (315). Individuals transcend and resist what is oppressive in society, they valorize authentic self-expression, personal integrity and insight. Finally, *presences* are "a mode of attending, being present to their experiences, without dominating or controlling them.... the absence of willfulness, or choice of roles..." (318). Rorty suggest that each of these conceptions "inhabits a different space in fiction and in society" (301-2) and that the "effects of each ... on us and our political uses of their various structures differ radically" (302).

the desires and beliefs which are possible for him to experience at all. His thought processes, his emotional and considered responses, the ends which give his life meaning, are all given in advance by the figure. In their conscious articulation they cannot admit new dimensions, so Stevens is a predictable vehicle for their expression, incapable of self-growth and exploration beyond the boundaries the figure rigorously maintains. The figure thus sets up a particular, rigid psychological structure which restricts the psychological resources available to him in the future.

Because the figure has determined his psychology, it is also self-supporting: nothing that could undermine its influence is allowed to enter Stevens's consciousness. Incompatible character traits - potential rivals - are screened out, so in this way the figure itself is practically unsheddable. In a sense, Stevens *could* not end his days differently because it would require mental resources he just does not possess, or which could not be activated by his conscious willing. In this way, the ending to his life-story is written for him in advance by the figure with which he identifies his self.

Regarding the narration of Stevens's story, it is interesting to see how the idea of the figure corresponds to Forster's distinction between flat and round characters in novels - which I raised briefly in my Introduction. Stevens attempts to instantiate certain definite and static characteristics as he directs the course of his life according to the demands of the butler-figure. Parallel to this, in the narration of his life-story he is a flat, rather than a round character; a type or caricature "constructed round a single idea or quality" (Forster 1967:225) rather than a fully rounded person. The unconscious secondary narrative thus in a way suggests possible properties and experiences which would render his life more that of a person, and so his life-story more that of a rounded character. The novel demonstrates how one's manner of expression both articulates one's self-image and in the process of doing so, partially constitutes or reinforces the features of that image. The examination of persons' means of expression – a task that literature is ideally suited for – can tell us more about their sense of self, the content of their values and how this impacts on the quality of their lives, than merely noting whether certain formal conditions are met.

There is nothing necessary about the content that Stevens gives a butler. An 'ideal' butler can be constructed in many different ways: as a master of organising "large occasions with conspicuous style" (30), like Mr Jack Neighbours, the 'new-style' butler Stevens

despises; he could be an active participant in his employer's affairs; he could indeed *control* his employer's affairs in the way fiction's other famous butler does - Jeeves, in P.G. Wodehouse's novels. Alternatively, a butler could see himself as simply doing a job which is entirely incidental to his sense of identity, a job he does not absolutely 'inhabit' in the way Stevens requires. None of these alternatives need be threatening to autonomy and this demonstrates how dependent autonomy is on the content of one's choices and life-plan(s). Stevens, however, gives his figure a content which inevitably renders him non-autonomous. The mere fact of identification, even if it is the result of assessment²⁵, therefore cannot exhaust the analysis necessary for judgements of autonomy.

Of course, with Stevens, this process of continuous and pernicious identification occurs largely without his conscious awareness. The Young/ Wollheim account is helpful in testing the adequacy of Dworkin's account of identification against realistic cases, because it permits the significance of unconscious²⁶ motivations on conscious identification.

Dworkin writes as if complications in the attitudes one takes to one's actions and motivations - eg. ambivalence, self-deception, confusion as to motives or preferences - are all in principle explicable in terms of the hierarchical model. But this assumes, firstly, that the complex of ends and beliefs making up one's motivational structure and one's sense of self can be mapped out into lower-order/ higher-order pairs. I doubt that such a model could untangle the web of relations existing between elements of Stevens's psychological complex. How, for example, could Stevens's motivational transfer from the emotions to professionalism, and his transference of grief to triumph be mapped into one-on-one, higher/lower pairs? The very phenomenology of his immediate reactions subtly transforms as they become consciously articulated. There are no discrete mental 'events' or objects which can be isolated independently of his entire psychology and articulated sense of life. But perhaps it is in principle possible to map some such relations, so let us grant it. What cannot be granted is the further assumption that the entire structure is unproblematically accessible to the person. Dworkin's account requires a psychological transparency that is just not plausible. Stevens cannot know himself in

²⁵ And even assuming that the (revised) procedural independence condition is met.

²⁶ I use 'unconscious' loosely in what follows, not only with its psychoanalytic meaning - ie. those mental events which cannot become conscious at all in their original form.

this way because the subjective nature of his actual experiences is blocked from his immediate awareness. Only his language betrays it: Through his choice of style and imagery, through his silence, those experiences narrate their own story without him ever appreciating it.

Both the formal nature of Stevens's identification – that he identifies himself *as* a figure, or takes himself to *be* a figure – and the implications of its content are unconscious to him. This is a feature that the hierarchical model of psychological structure and Dworkin's own brief comments on identification fail to capture. Literature, however, is well-equipped to accommodate and explore it.

To summarise the discussion of this section: Not just any type of identification is compatible with and necessary for autonomy. Complete identification of one's self with a *figure* will prevent autonomy, and the *content* of the identification is also crucial for its possession. Because Stevens identifies himself essentially as a figure, he is prevented from practically being able to shed his autonomy-hindering values and because it is self-supporting, the figure itself is also practically unsheddable. Furthermore, because of the content he gives the figure, his incapacity to shed the values renders him non-autonomous as well. This returns us to the formal/substantial debate surrounding autonomy: If the preceding discussion is sound, then there is strong evidence for taking autonomy to be dependent about substantial factors. One cannot, in other words, merely set up formal conditions which the lives of persons should fulfil; instead, the content of those lives require evaluation and in many cases it will be that content which prevents a person from living an autonomous life.

As Dworkin claimed, identification is not sufficient for autonomy. I claim further that not any type of identification is necessary for autonomy. Identification simply understood as the opposite of alienation is indeed necessary: Alienation from what motivates one, disgust or distance from what one seems just to 'find' oneself feeling or believing is just as unhealthy as Stevens's identification is. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this does not mean that I must approve every desire with which I can be said to identify. We can, instead, make the distinction between appropriation and endorsement: I can appropriate certain desires within my sense of self and identity without endorsing them all²⁷.

²⁷ There is perhaps an asymmetry here, however, with values: can one really value something without

I do not argue, then, that *actual* identification – rather than alienation - with one's ends and desires is unnecessary for autonomy, as Dworkin claims in his later work. Thinking in terms of an internalised figure is a helpful (metaphorical) device of seeing what is wrong with a certain type of identification, cases of which on Dworkin's account pass the test for autonomy. Instead of having a standard of self-appraisal or a value to which one aspires and with which one identifies in the way explained above, one may take oneself to *be* that internalised figure. If this happens, one cannot accept any feelings or beliefs which do not belong to the defining characteristics of the figure as a legitimate part of oneself. Because of the nature of Stevens's identification, with its rigidity and lack of objectivity, he cannot consciously shed the role without destroying what he takes to be essentially his self, despite the fact that a legitimate part of himself and a crucial part of what it is to be human is ignored. The sadness in Stevens's case is that in his inflexibility with respect to external situations he is simultaneously closed off from recognising the dissonance between his conscious structure of ends and the unconscious responses that structure renders silent. In openly confronting the new world through which he passes, Stevens would be forced to acknowledge the silent voices of his lower-order emotional responses, which are as legitimate a part of personhood as our rational capacities. If Stevens allowed their story to be heard, or more specifically, if he allowed that their story is a part of the narrative of his own life, they would undermine his carefully constructed higher-order system. Because the butler figure cannot allow this, Stevens cannot fully engage in the world, realise his capacity for personal interaction, and share in "human warmth" (Ishiguro:245). Opportunities for self-exploration and growth are closed, but he never consciously realises the poverty of the figure he sets up as his ideal.

Ishiguro shows us that the conditions under which it is objectively possible for Stevens to shed his ends are present, but also that he could never have consciously willed and now cannot explore them, because his pernicious identification significantly limits the scope of his self-reflection. The internalised other ensures that he cannot 'stand back from his imaginings, survey them and respond to them' as Young requires for non-neurotic identification. He is not "sufficiently distinguishable from [his] norms" (Richardson:142)

endorsing it? Mere appropriation of *X* cannot capture the force implicit in claiming to *value X*. The fact that people's identifications are made up of a complex of phenomena which are structurally and phenomenologically more complicated than mere desires, demonstrates how necessary it is to bring in substantive considerations when evaluating their role in supporting autonomy.

for reflection to be constructive or potentially disruptive. Although he has analysed his end, it has been from the inside, so to speak, of the very system of thought which justifies the content he gives it, and in the terms it sets up for itself. The figure cannot allow any self-criticism, because it then risks undermining itself. So, impulses or beliefs which threatens to undermine the values of this ideal are not allowed to emerge into the primary narrative of his life. Instead, they set up their own potentially revolutionary counter-narrative for themselves.

When Stevens reflects on his lack of interest concerning Lord Darlington, whose naive, well-intentioned friendliness towards Germany led to his disgrace, he says that it is “in practice, simply not possible to adopt... a critical attitude towards an employer and at the same provide good service” (200). Furthermore, it is an “inescapable truth” that “the likes of you and I will never be in a position to comprehend the great affairs of today’s world” (201). This suggests the importance of critical reflection which deliberates on the higher-order values and structures which co-ordinate the rest of one’s activities and values, instead of reflection merely on what that higher order sets up. I now examine this.

Critical Reflection

On the Young/ Wollheim account, Stevens identifies with the figure of the butler because he imagines it as an internal figure he can respect, and structures his responses in accordance with the role it personifies. He therefore acts out through his life the story of such a butler. This acting is not a conscious activity - the origin of the figure of identification according to these psychological accounts is an external authority figure in childhood (in Stevens’s case, his father) and the person’s subsequent adoption of it need not be conscious or voluntary. However, the distance and assessment Young requires for non-neurotic identification is presumably necessarily conscious. Young does not merely want the *possibility* of such distance and reflection; he characterises non-neurotic identification in terms of an *actual* process of assessment and an actual response of “rejection or acceptance” (Young:44). In this respect, his account differs from Dworkin’s revised formulation of the authenticity condition - that it is only the “*capacity to raise the question* of whether I will identify with or reject the reasons for which I now act” that is crucial to autonomy (Dworkin 1988:15). Where both accounts agree, is on the insistence

that healthy identification is the result of a process of critical assessment, rather than simple approval.

Like identification, critical reflection cannot be of just any kind for autonomy. The fact that someone reflects upon her motives, beliefs and values, as Stevens does, does not necessarily confer autonomy even if the other autonomy-conferring conditions have been met. What type of reflection, then, is necessary in order to achieve dispositional autonomy, and how does Stevens fall short of it?

Because of the self-supporting nature of the butler figure, Stevens lacks what Berofsky terms *objectivity*²⁸ and argues is a necessary component of autonomy. The idea captured by objectivity is that of “the immersion of the agent in a situation he appreciates accurately and responds to appropriately” (Berofsky:203). It requires that the agent’s responses be governed by the way the world ‘really is’²⁹. One should ideally take into account the state of the external world as one adopts ends or evaluates one’s beliefs and responses. Ends and beliefs can be judged as rational or irrational, appropriate or inappropriate to the extent that they match a reasonable account of the world. Objectivity, then, is characterised by the extent to which the acquisition of information is “independent of subjective principles or non-universal physiological defects” (Berofsky:185). One component of objectivity is *flexibility*, the “disposition to change one’s behaviour, views, and responses in the light of new and relevant information” (Berofsky:188). Flexibility is opposed to rigidity, obstinacy and self-complacency, rather than integrity. Integrity demands some kind of accountability and reasonableness in what one is constant towards and one cannot account rationally or reasonably for one’s beliefs and values if they fail to take into account facts, or at least a sensible interpretation of things.

That Stevens lacks both objectivity and flexibility is shown by his behaviour on his journey. He is faced with people and situations which require a fundamental alteration in outlook, as the novel’s readers recognise, yet he is psychologically incapable of changing in response to them. He lacks flexibility because he lacks objectivity and he lacks objectivity because his ‘process of information’ and subjective view on the world is governed by the principles and psychological structure formed and maintained by the butler-figure. So, his reflections operate within a system that itself requires revision, and serve merely to justify

²⁸ See 183ff; Berofsky takes the term from Shapiro 1981.

²⁹ Or, “at least as a normal, competent, impartial spectator would [see the world]” (Berofsky:185).

his firmly-held convictions. This was apparent in his reflection on the opinions proper to those within his “professional realm” (Ishiguro:201). Stevens would therefore only be capable of objectivity and flexibility if he were capable of assessing and criticising the butler-figure itself.

There is what Richardson calls ‘mutual support’ among those of Stevens’s commitments that stand “firm on reflection” (1994:176). However, this support is self-maintaining rather than flexible with regard to the situations confronting him, and the reflection is crucially limiting. Because of this, Stevens lacks the capacity for lucid engagement with the variable world and remains trapped, instead, in a self-limiting narrative. He lacks, then, the flexibility and ‘clairvoyance’³⁰ with regard to self and the external world characteristic of the autonomous agent.

Objectivity captures a crucial feature of autonomy-conferring critical reflection. For autonomy, self-reflection cannot simply be a matter of finding justifications for deeply-entrenched responses and evaluations. Autonomy-conferring reflection is not sufficiently met if one’s long-standing commitments ‘stand firm upon reflection’ *when* the terms in which this reflection is undertaken remain unexamined. As uncomfortable as it may be, autonomy often demands assessment of the values which logically ground one’s other commitments – in Stevens’s case, this would be the butler-figure. This type of reflection Charles Taylor calls ‘radical re-evaluation’³¹: a Nietzschean-inspired re-evaluation of the most basic evaluations. While re-evaluation begins with given terms and material, it is undertaken “with a stance of attention” and “with a readiness to receive any gestalt shift in our view of the situation” (Taylor 1976:297) – Berofsky’s more prosaically named flexibility.

To meet an obvious objection head-on: This view need not demand constant, obsessive self-analysis. We cannot undertake regular exercise in Cartesian doubt, despite the implications of ‘radical re-evaluation’, nor should we dissect our every motive or structure our every response. An account of autonomy should take note of Williams’s worry: “How does one deal with the fact that the life that best honours the proper role of deliberation is likely to be one that is not too meticulously deliberated?” (1995:28). Similarly, Wollheim notes that the “attempt that a person makes to understand his life [through self-examination] may interfere with his leading it” (1984:162). Obsessive self-

³⁰ Charles Taylor’s illuminating term in many works (eg.1976, 1989).

analysis can be as neurotic, as limiting, as no self-examination at all. As we shall see with Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, this worry needs to be taken seriously, but it does not undermine the necessity of objective and flexible reflection for autonomy. Autonomy-conferring reflection demands (i) openness, (ii) flexibility and (iii) sensitivity when external situations impose new considerations to take into account, or when internal dissonance clearly demands it. The absence of these features will be an indication that autonomy is missing. We saw, for example, that Stevens does not demonstrate flexibility in his analyses of Lord Darlington's views and the opposing views of the people he meets on his journey. He finds ways to justify his original conclusions, which are based on a picture of the world that simply is no longer the case – the social stratification and status-dependent world represented by Darlington Hall has vanished and Stevens is not equipped to change his outlook to correspond to this indisputable fact. On a personal level, he is professionally inflexible with regards to his relationship with Miss Kenton and his father. Because of his lack of sensitivity towards Miss Kenton and his own emotions, he fails to respond to the indications of unhappiness that surface in disguised form into his consciousness. In fact, his lack of sensitivity and flexibility ensures that he *cannot* recognise them and interpret their signals. The motivational transfer that we looked at is a sign of internal dissonance; as is his inability to comfort Miss Kenton despite his desire to do so.

The tendency, lacking in Stevens, to be open to such situations (flexibility), and then to respond to them in the correct spirit (objectivity) is helpfully understood as a disposition rather than an actual continuous process of criticism. Taylor's phrase – 'clairvoyant stance of attention' – captures such an attitude nicely. Stevens's background suggests that he was never encouraged to develop such a disposition, and now lacks the mental resources to cultivate it himself. Because of the self-supporting nature of the butler-figure, it cannot be radically assessed, so Stevens is psychologically incapable of the type of reflection necessary for autonomy. As a result, his stance towards the world and his own consciousness is one of blindness, rather than clairvoyance, and of neglect rather than attention.

We have, then, two ways of characterising the type of reflection necessary for autonomy: Firstly, as a radical re-evaluation of the principles and beliefs which act as a framework of justification for other, less fundamental beliefs and ends; secondly, as an

³¹ 1976:296ff.

attitude one adopts towards the world, an attitude of ‘clairvoyant’ attentiveness and flexibility.

Understanding the relation between these two dissolves a further worry which needs addressing. The worry is that the first characterisation of reflection, just mentioned, has the danger of making reflection appear too intellectual and rational. We may get the idea of a “regimented, compulsive person”, in Joseph Raz’s words (1986:370), as the paradigm of the rational agent. On such an account, endorsement is uni-directional - from the higher-order, more reflective ends to lower-order direct responses to some external state of affairs, thus giving only the higher-order principles autonomy-conferring status. And it is precisely this tendency in Stevens to ignore his direct, emotional responses that I have suggested (partly) explains his *lack* of autonomy. Earlier, too, I suggested that a hierarchical, uni-directional model of mapped-out desires and preferences is inadequate to illuminate a person and her psychology. What is needed, then, is an account of reflection which takes into consideration these points.

In a way, Taylor’s remarks on radical re-evaluation provide the starting-point from which to address the problem. Radical re-evaluation, or ‘deep reflection on the self’, as he also terms it, combines both characterisations mentioned earlier: reflection on ultimate, grounding principles and an attitude of flexibility or openness. In order radically to reflect, a “stance of openness” is required:

I am trying to see reality afresh and form more adequate categories to describe it. To do this I am trying to open myself, use all of my deepest, unstructured sense of things in order to come to a new clarity. (Taylor 1976:298)

Such a stance would then require an awareness of all that motivates one and which contributes to one’s sense of self. The ‘deepest, unstructured sense of things’ will include one’s emotions and pre-reflective responses to the world. A ‘new clarity’ about one’s self and one’s world is only possible if these too are understood.

Christine Korsgaard notes that we may “need reasons because our impulses must be able to withstand reflective scrutiny” (1996:93), but so, too, must the content of our higher-order beliefs withstand scrutiny. Understanding those lower-order responses will include seeing their relation to higher-order principles and beliefs. There is no reason to believe that higher-order ends tell us more truly about the self or to what it should aspire than lower-order responses³². If higher-order commitments constantly deny the

³² Cf. Berofsky:101 and Friedman 1986.

significance of the emotions, for example, why presume that this rejection is any more indicative of an autonomous self than the silenced elements? Taking these silenced elements into account may, on the contrary, be just what is required for a *non-self*-supporting type of reflection, because by studying them seriously one also studies what they reveal about the nature of more intellectual responses. Stevens's yearnings to see Miss Kenton (disguised as they are in professionalism), the 'strange sensations' which arise so unbeckoned when he perceives that she is unhappy, his instinctive denials of his connection to Darlington Hall: all these reactions and impulses are "touchstones of a sort for the assessment of the adequacy of one's [higher-level] principles" (Friedman 1986:31). They therefore have potentially as rational and cognitive a function as higher-order evaluations.

We need, then, what Richardson calls *bidirectional* mutual support³³ among the elements of one's commitment structure. Remaining with the hierarchical model, the lines of support can travel in any direction, so both higher- and lower-order desires should be assessed by each other. If, however, we reject the simplicity of the hierarchical model and think in terms of webs of relations between elements, then the lines of support will flow in many directions, and the web's elements will constantly meet and influence each other. As Friedman notes, some elements may be more foundational or 'higher' than others, but only in a logical, not an ontological sense - they are the "most general and all-encompassing principles, providing articulated criteria for assessing all other standards and motivations" (1986:32). They are not ontologically significant in indicating the 'real' self and need not be characterised by intellectual modes of thinking rather than emotional means of apprehension. To prevent an over-intellectual, 'top-down' account of reflection and the autonomous agent, one's "[h]ighest principles must be assessed for their fit and appropriateness in light of what guides and motivates a person at the lower levels" (Friedman 1986:33), along with an assessment of one's 'impulses' from a more intellectual standpoint.

The preceding discussion is the starting-point of an argument in favour of seeing the emotions as having "an irreducibly important cognitive role to play", as Martha Nussbaum argues extensively in her work on philosophy and literature (1990:7). *The Remains of the Day* supports this conclusion, and it does so at least partly because of its formal narrative features. The audience believes that Stevens does not realise, does not

³³ Richardson:176f.

consciously and intellectually grasp, what he should. He is missing something - concerning his self and his life - that we know. His pedantic, rational narrative style demonstrates what character traits he considered important, it silences emotional language and thus demonstrates what it is that he is missing. When Stevens recognises the emotions at all it is only in a trivialised or naturalised sense. As Nussbaum says, “[s]tyle itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters” (3) and Stevens’s style insidiously betrays his own impoverished sense of ‘what matters’. The fact that these rejected responses still need to express themselves somehow, that there is, in other words, still a recognisable dissonance between what he self-consciously accepts as his motivations and how he unreflectively feels, suggests the artificiality, poverty and psychological danger in absenting parts of oneself as an ‘illusion’.

A better understanding of the complex, non-linear structure of mental phenomena will also lead us to reject the conception of the person implicit in this account – one shared also by Stevens. The hierarchical model assumes what Walzer describes as a “simple linear and hierarchical arrangement of the self, with a single critical ‘I’ at the top of the line and a single line of criticism” (91). Walzer’s rejection of this view correspond nicely with our discussion of *Remains*: Stevens is governed by such an “internal autocrat” (ibid.) which ignores the plurality of values and voices characteristic of one’s immediate awareness of selfhood. These voices are diverse critics, each making different claims, each with different expectations which are more or less removed from what one may actually be. Reflection upon one’s self therefore comes similarly from many sources, and not merely from the ‘stratospheric yearnings’³⁴ of one higher, more objective, rational, self. In its reflections and deliberations, then, the self is both the subject - the agent - of this process, as well as simultaneously the object of that process and this duality is possible only because of the essential plurality of the self. In his discussion on practical deliberation, Richardson supports Walzer’s view: “it is precisely because of [the] interaction of self-as-subject and self-as-object that the deliberator cannot sensibly take the stance of a disinterested judge with respect to her own desires and commitments” (140).

While one ‘disinterested’, impartial voice is normatively undesirable, this does not mean that any judgement on the self is impossible or similarly undesirable. In the case of

³⁴ The phrase is Thalberg’s (1978:214).

Stevens, the voices making up the secondary narrative are critics of the dominating non-pluralist voice in control. The ‘internal autocrat’ strives to be the essential Stevens and the ‘disinterested judge’ of all other voices, but this assumes that a person can be so reduced to a few essential traits - like the figures discussed by Rorty. Stevens attempts to *be* a figure, so he “yields everything, to a single all-powerful critic” (Walzer:99) at the expense of repressing other possibilities and other critics within his self. Dominated, rigid people “are *not listening*, deaf not only to outside voices... but also to inside voices” (Walzer:100). The self *is* thus divided, though ordered by a central, coherent ‘I’ which is “at the center of the confabulation” of critics, Walzer argues (98). These multiple voices, each with possible stories for the self, are what make up this central self; a view of the person and her psychology which ignores this plurality has once again ‘changed the subject’.

This chapter has explored the nature of autonomy by investigating instances where it is lacking. But the conclusions are not only negative. While the discussion on identification reached largely negative conclusions, it also offered the beginning of a substantial account of reflection, that emphasises the importance of a disposition towards critical reflection which is open to re-evaluations on any level. Identifications must be responsive to such evaluations and in that way critical reflection, rather than identification, is more fundamental to autonomy. My account of radical reflection presupposes the type of identification which is compatible with autonomy, and thus presupposes also that the identifications already pass the (revised) procedural independence condition. So, radical reflection incorporates both of D-Autonomy’s conditions. Is this new condition then sufficient to confer autonomy?

So far, we have been concerned with the psychological factors necessary for autonomy: skills, dispositions, a self-reflection characterised by objectivity and flexibility. However, in my Introduction, I suggested that external conditions can hamper one’s ability to translate beliefs and values into action, so despite a psychological capacity, autonomy as a condition of persons is impossible without *competence*. Unless competence is present, control over the direction of one’s life is impossible. Autonomy therefore requires both radical reflection and competence. I conclude this chapter by briefly addressing (i) the role of external social factors in hindering competence - a topic explored more fully in the next chapter, and (ii) the extent to which autonomy is conditional upon substantial considerations.

Concluding remarks: Towards Substantial Autonomy

The preceding discussion has shown the necessity of evaluating the content of persons' choices, plans of life and ends for a true understanding of whether or not they are autonomously possessed. Content, and ultimately of the tenor of an entire life, is significantly influenced by social and political factors. If autonomy is partly dependent upon content - ie. not just upon formal and procedural conditions - then it will also be dependent upon those external factors which mould that content. A conclusive study of autonomy will therefore require a critique of social institutions: the forms of life and conceptions of the person that they promote or maintain, what options and resources (material and psychological) are made available to persons, whether this influence is conducive to living in the way required for autonomy, and so on. One cannot become autonomous in a vacuum, so to speak. Mental capacities flourish or worsen depending on encouragement from others and from the resources made available to explore them. Furthermore, the mere possession of capacities has very little value if one cannot use them to fashion one's life and self within the inevitable limits imposed by the world. Being 'ruler' of one's life, the core idea of autonomy, requires that one have control over one's life that is free from unjustified interference. This negative freedom must be *given* by society and state before anything can be done with the positive freedom granted by one's mental abilities³⁵. Autonomy is therefore not a matter merely of cultivating a certain attitude towards the world and self. The internal conditions making such 'clairvoyance' possible are necessary, but so too are the conditions which allow such a disposition to flourish and be expressed.

The Remains of the Day, and as we shall see, *The Portrait of a Lady*, demonstrate the inescapable significance of external factors for autonomy. Stevens acquired his final end of dignity within a definite social structure which limited the original options available to him and now restricts the scope of his self-exploration. The internalisation of the standard of an ideal butler was maintained within the enclave of pre-war Darlington Hall, a monument to this social vision until it is transferred to a representative of the new world. Our discussion has demonstrated that within the 'old' world the possibility of achieving dispositional autonomy is limited. As Raz argues, this suggests that autonomy "requires that many morally acceptable options be available to a person" (378) and requires, equally,

³⁵ See Berlin 1969 for the classic analysis of these two types of freedom.

“a choice of goods” (379). A world in which one grows accustomed to thinking that “there is little choice other than to leave our fate, ultimately, in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services” (Ishiguro:244) is not a world which will allow one much scope “to control the course one’s life [takes]” (ibid.). Stevens must travel ‘beyond all previous boundaries’ before the possibility of gaining autonomy becomes real. That he does not, because in a significant sense he *cannot*, achieve dispositional autonomy is an indictment both of his character and of the society which influenced its formation. Because he was brought up in the old world of social and value hierarchies symbolised by pre-war Darlington Hall, the possible substance of his values was restricted from the start. Personal responsibility does not evaporate - we do hold Stevens accountable for the bleakness of his remaining days - but we must reject the value of forms of life and their sustaining institutions which make such stories possible and perhaps inevitable.

Mele suggests that “certain *kinds* of self-rule or self-government... are self-limiting, self-oppressing, and self-victimising in a way that is at odds with a robust autonomy” (126). Examples would include self-government through a value structure which prevents one from viewing oneself as an equal among moral agents, which circumscribes the options available to one, which prevents an exploration and expansion of self - Mr Stevens is a poignant example of the results of such self-government. Certain social institutions and forms of life can promote this, again suggesting that autonomy is conditional upon social structures.

If this is correct, one cannot be autonomous in conditions of repression or discrimination, in societies where one has no freedom to choose one’s form of life or pursue one’s good. This conclusion is at odds with Berofsky’s conception of autonomy, which allows that a person “trapped in an environment which denies him the resources he needs” to act freely may yet be autonomous (Berofsky:22). The frustrated slave, who struggles against his captivity, may be autonomous because his beliefs and desires remain his own and unconditioned, although he lacks the “closely related feature” – ‘proficiency’ - to translate his desires and beliefs into action (ibid.).

While one may conceivably retain some (very limited) sense of worth in such a situation, it is highly implausible to suggest that one can achieve dispositional autonomy, or even more local autonomy. We judge dispositional autonomy by examining the life led by the person in question - how did she act, how were her actions related to her values and desires, what measure of control did she exercise over her life? A slave cannot lead a life,

although she may live, because ‘leading a life’ requires the realisation of one’s self within the world. Berofsky himself says that “autonomous agents are beholden to the world. For life is action in that world” (226). He argues that “autonomy is essentially constituted by the manner in which an agent is engaged in her world rather than the metaphysical origin of her motivations” (1), and stresses the importance for autonomy of “the agent’s link to the world” (13). Given this, how can one be significantly autonomous if the world restricts who one can be and what one can do?

Competence requires a world in which one can act according to the values and beliefs which are the result of a process of, and continuing disposition towards, radical self-reflection. Through a reading of *The Remains of the Day*, we saw how the substantial nature of values and particular forms of life can hinder radical reflection and thus autonomy. Similarly, certain social influences and institutions will hinder one’s competence, and so the results of this reflection will never be realised in action. If autonomy is a value, this suggests a means of arguing both for social change and the evaluation of particular forms of life, and autonomy is therefore a substantial concept. And, bearing in mind Walzer’s conception of the plural self explored above, an autonomous, multi-voiced self - a ‘thick’ rather than a ‘thin’ self, in Rawls’s terms - will need a “thick, differentiated, and pluralist society” (Walzer:101). It is therefore not the case, as Dworkin notes, that there is only a *contingent* connection between autonomy and the substantive nature of one’s values, a conclusion that will receive further substantiation in the reading of Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* to follow.

Chapter 3

We saw in the previous chapter that someone can fulfil Dworkin's conditions for autonomy and yet fail to live in a way that is compatible with dispositional autonomy. In Stevens's case, his failure has to do with his lack of certain psychological capacities. I argued that although Stevens fulfils the first condition of D-Autonomy, a certain formal property of his identification – identification with a figure, in Rorty's sense – as well as the content of the figure and his values prevents rather than promote autonomy. What is necessary for autonomy is a radical type of reflection, that incorporates both conditions of D-Autonomy. It requires reflection upon one's fundamental evaluative framework and a stance of flexibility and objectivity towards one's self and the world. People psychologically incapable of this type of reflection are similarly incapable of being autonomous.

This chapter further investigates psychological skills and capacities before turning to the condition of *competence*, which I claimed is also necessary for dispositional autonomy. While radical reflection captures the psychological skills and capacities required for autonomy, the competence condition captures autonomy's dependency on external features as well as, again, considerations of content. Even if one possesses all the required psychological skills, one may still be prevented from controlling the course and character of one's life. Autonomy requires that one be able to translate the results of radical reflection into action, but this may be prevented by (i) factors external to one, eg. other people, social institutions and expectations, and (ii) conflict among one's values, beliefs and commitments. It may be the case that certain ends¹ cannot be realised or followed together – in practice, they may logically exclude each other, even if one could quite sincerely value all of them, or they may be of such a nature as to undermine themselves when consciously pursued in conjunction with others. And, if autonomy is just one value among others, it may very well clash with incompatible values and be sacrificed for them.

To investigate these claims, I turn to another novel – Henry James's *The Portrait*

¹ When necessary, to avoid needless repetitions, I shall sometimes use 'end' as a general term encapsulating values, beliefs, desires, principles etc.

*of a Lady*². The story of Isabel Archer demonstrates that despite possessing all the mental resources necessary, one may still not achieve dispositional autonomy. In Isabel's case, she fails to meet the condition of competency, in both ways mentioned above: Firstly, she assumes that if she cultivates a 'beautiful soul' and disposition for reflection, consciously values autonomy and has the means to be independent, autonomy will be achieved regardless of the state of the world through which she moves. Arnold Kettle writes that the portrait of Isabel Archer is "one of the most profound expressions in literature of the illusion that freedom is an abstract quality inherent in the individual soul" (1975:684). If we understand autonomy to be the 'freedom' central to discussions about the novel, Isabel's mistake is shared by accounts of autonomy that underestimate the significance of external factors: Both construe autonomy as depending significantly only upon internal psychological conditions. As Isabel's abstract, romantic views bump up against the facts of the world, we learn with her that the world can be less than accommodating. In particular, other people treat her merely as a means to their ends, and their manipulation results in her unhappy marriage. Secondly, Isabel experiences a clash between her values. While she values and strives for autonomy, she also values loyalty towards the choices and promises she freely made and for which she takes responsibility. Most importantly, these include her commitment to her marriage and perhaps her promise to her step-daughter to return to her³. Ultimately, she chooses to sacrifice the possibility of living autonomously in favour of remaining in her restrictive marriage, of honouring the "obligations... involved in the very fact of marriage" (481). It is the particular content of Isabel's conception of marriage that results in this conflict, and here again, substantial factors must be considered in assessing the presence or absence of autonomy. We thus learn with Isabel that autonomy is a far richer, 'thicker' notion that Dworkin's account allows.

² 1975 (1908 New York Edition). Unless otherwise stated, references in the text are to *Portrait*.

³ The ending to the novel is highly enigmatic and there are many possible interpretations for Isabel's decision to return to Rome. I shall focus on her commitment to her marriage as a possible reason, an interpretation which receives support from the rest of the novel, in which Isabel's desire to be a good wife and to take responsibility for her marriage is of central importance. It should be noted that my interpretation of Isabel's decision and my assessment that in future she will be prevented from achieving dispositional autonomy, is controversial and by no means the only possible one.

In investigating this, I proceed as follows: Firstly, I briefly introduce *The Portrait of a Lady* and discuss its significance for constructing an account of autonomy. Secondly, I return to the role of psychological factors and demonstrate both Isabel's shortcomings and her eventual achievement of the radical reflection condition. Thirdly, in the light of her ultimate failure to achieve autonomy, I explore the requirements of the competence condition, and finally, examine the substantial requirements of autonomy in more detail.

The Portrait of a Lady

From the mute and sombre remains of Mr Stevens's day, we turn to the prospects and failure of a "certain young woman affronting her destiny"⁴. Isabel Archer, "impatient to live" (56), dedicated to the "free exploration of life" (101) and with a "great desire for knowledge" (41), is the very antithesis of Stevens. Blessed with all the mental resources that he lacks - spirit, openness of mind, enthusiasm, sensitivity - she is provided, too, with the wealth to realise her ambitions and to "meet the requirements of [her] imagination" (160). And, as her cousin Ralph notes, Isabel has "a great deal of imagination" (ibid.).

The events of Isabel Archer's destiny are simple to relate: Brought to England by her aunt, Lydia Touchett, after her father's death, she is taken into the "rich perfection" (57) of the world of Gardencourt and charms its inhabitants with her vivacity and intelligence. Ralph, whose chronic ill health prevents him from living actively, becomes fascinated with Isabel. He recognises her fine qualities - she was "intelligent and generous; it was a fine free nature"; unlike most women, she "gave one the impression of having intentions of her own" (64) - and he amuses himself with imagining "a charming vision" and "high destiny" for her (291). Unlike Isabel, he is wise enough to know that in order to 'meet the requirements of one's imagination', one needs material resources; that the ability to live as one desires depends highly on one's social situation and material means. So, in order to "put a little wind in her sails" (160), he persuades his dying father to leave her his own portion of inheritance.

⁴ Henry James, in his Preface the 1908 New York Edition (1975:8).

Isabel's charms are not lost on Mme Merle, Mrs Touchett's engaging and accommodating friend. At first it is only Ralph, the novel's moral touchstone, who recognises the insidious nature of Mme Merle's apparent perfection. Describing her to Isabel, he says:

'...she pushes the search for perfection too far... her merits are in themselves overstrained. She's too good, too kind, too clever, too learned, too accomplished, too everything. She's too complete, in a word.'
(216)

Despite finding it difficult "to think of her in any detachment or privacy" (167), Isabel is fascinated by her friend's 'perfection', partly because she too strives to perfect her character. She fails to draw the same conclusion as Ralph, that Mme Merle, "too perfectly the social animal" (167), is "the great round world itself" (216) in her respect for convention and form. Isabel finds a way to excuse this deep conventionality, despite it being so at odds with her own vision of the world. In this, the appearance she gives initially of having a "clear perception" (26) of things is fatally undermined.

With her uncle's bequest and her own "great fund of life" (41), Isabel is "thrown upon the world" (161) to explore her imagination. She is intent on preserving her liberty, rejecting the "big bribe" (105) and "splendid security" (100) of a brilliant marriage to Lord Warburton even before she inherits the money that will make her financially independent. "If there's a thing in the world I'm fond of... it's my personal independence" (142), she declares to her persistent American suitor, Casper Goodwood, cautioning him to remember her "love of liberty" (143) if he ever hears rumours of her marrying. Moving in the charmed centre of the 'great hub of the world' denied to Stevens, in a time when the noble houses of England and Europe still provide moral security and structure, Isabel appears luxuriously well equipped to move easily within this world while escaping its conventionality and restrictions.

When Isabel's fortune is made, she travels to Florence to stay with her aunt. There, Mme Merle introduces her to Gilbert Osmond, an American expatriate, and his flawless, charming young daughter. We discover that Osmond is more than an old friend to Mme Merle - they were once lovers and she is the mother of Pansy, ostensibly the child of an earlier marriage. She 'marries' Isabel to him in order both to bring Osmond the wealth he publicly disdains, and to ensure an inheritance for Pansy. While Ralph and Mrs Touchett recognise that Osmond is "small", "narrow, selfish" (291), Isabel refuses to take their misgivings seriously. Like Mme Merle, Osmond lives purely for the world, beneath the guise of caring only for the

“aristocratic life” (361) of artistic pursuits. His apparent “sovereign contempt” (360) for the world really hides his complete dependence upon it. In the course of their life together in Rome, Isabel finally recognises that for Osmond:

... this base, ignoble world, it appeared, was after all what one was to live for; one was to keep it for ever in one's eye, in order not to enlighten or convert or redeem it, but to extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority.... She had thought it a grand indifference, an exquisite independence. But indifference was really the last of his qualities; she had never seen any one who thought so much of others. (ibid.)

In her extended reflection on her self and situation in the pivotal Chapter 42 of the novel (where the above passage appears), Isabel realises the magnitude of her mistake in marrying this “cold incarnation of taste” (291), as Ralph describes him. During her long night's reckoning, she retraces the steps that took her from the peace of Gardencourt to “the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation” (360) which is the Palazzo Roccanera:

She had taken all the first steps in the purest confidence, and then she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end. Instead of leading to the high places of happiness... it led rather downward and earthward, into the realms of restriction and depression... (356)

With all her mental and material resources and all her plans to do and be something great, Isabel thus ultimately faces the bitter realisation that she has “thrown away her life” (363) for a person who “wished her to have no freedom of mind” (386) at all. From her glorious ambitions of independence she must face the “darkness and suffocation” (361) of a life she regards having “looked [at] and considered and chosen” (340). Her actual situation is the complete antithesis of her original vision of independence, originality and authenticity. Instead of living unhindered by the shallow demands of society, doing something great with her money, Isabel finds herself a captive in the “beautiful mind” (360) of her husband, and with him, being “ground in the very mill of the conventional” (473). Despite this, Isabel's commitment to her marriage ensures that she tries to please Osmond.

When Isabel hears that Ralph is dying in England, she faces a momentous moment of choice. Osmond has always disliked Ralph; returning to Gardencourt would, he says, “be a piece of the most deliberate, the most calculated, opposition” (445). And given the “great undertaking of matrimony” (449), Isabel realises fully “the violence there would be in going when Osmond wished her to remain” (ibid.). However, her love for Ralph makes it necessary

that she travel to England. Before she leaves Rome, Osmond's sister tells her the truth of Osmond and Mme Merle's relationship and the fact of Pansy's parentage. After the shock of this revelation, Isabel visits Pansy in the convent in which Osmond has sequestered her and there meets and confronts Mme Merle. As a final act of assertion, Mme Merle tells Isabel of Ralph's part in her inheritance, which she had never known: "He imparted to you that extra lustre which was required to make you a brilliant match. At bottom it's him you've to thank" (464).

Having promised Pansy to return, Isabel leaves for the "much-embracing refuge" (465) of Gardencourt. On Ralph's death-bed, she finally admits her unhappiness - out of pride and a desire not to hurt him, she has up until now kept the truth of her circumstances to herself. After his funeral, she "lived from day to day, postponing, closing her eyes, trying not to think" (481). In the midst of her neutral, suspended existence, she is found by Casper Goodwood, who offers her a refuge from the "misery" and "poisoned air" (488) of her life with Osmond. Although he appeals to the ideals of independence and originality Isabel holds dear, and despite the immense attractions of his offer, she flees from him. Our last glimpse of her is her pausing on the threshold. We are told: "She had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path" (490). The final scene of the novel has Goodwood returning to Gardencourt two days later, to be told by Isabel's friend, Henrietta Stackpole, that the 'straight path' was Rome - Isabel had left that morning.

Given what we are told about Isabel's desire to be a good wife, to honour "the magnificent form" of marriage (446) and about her husband's malevolent nature, it is highly unlikely that she will be able to exercise the control over her life required for autonomy once she returns to him. Her future may allow her some self-respect and dignity because she chose it with no illusions; she may gain some comfort in having kept her promise to Pansy; Mme Merle and Osmond may never have the same power over her as they did when she was ignorant about their role in her destiny - despite all this, she will be refused the possibility of living autonomously because she returns to a marriage which is unfulfilling and psychologically damaging. Isabel fails to achieve what she, unlike Stevens, consciously sought as a value, with apparently all the mental and material resources necessary for success. At the end of her story she too faces a choice that will bear crucially on the possibility of living autonomously in the

future; unlike Stevens, she makes a choice - clear-sighted and free - but not in favour of the liberty and independence she held so dear to her sense of self. Her choice shows her 'a very straight path' to her chosen future - to return to the dead wall of her life with the "sterile dilettante" (292) who is her husband.

Unlike Stevens, Isabel is psychologically capable of the type of reflection necessary for autonomy, and in the second half of her story we see her illuminating exploration of her circumstances and changed self. Initially, her imagination and idealised view of autonomy prevent an objective and clairvoyant vision of her situation. However, in the course of her disastrous marriage she acquires the flexibility and knowledge and undergoes the lucid assessment of her self and circumstances necessary for autonomy. She thus fulfils my condition of radical reflection, as well as both conditions of D-Autonomy. However, her story demonstrates that that is not sufficient for autonomy, and thus shows the destructive illusion of construing autonomy in too abstract and formal a manner.

Again, investigating the life of a fully rounded and believable character allows us to test the adequacy of D-Autonomy in a way that captures Dworkin's concern with making sense of persons and lives. A character-based approach to the concept, through literature, thus allows exploration on the very terms the concept sets up for itself: ie. that it explain the quality of lives and persons, which are often complex and ambiguous. By giving us a sustained portrait of particular lives, lived in particular ways, we see the necessity of evaluating the content of ends before judging that autonomy is present or not. Literature is in this respect perhaps indispensable, because one cannot explore the complex implications and subtleties of the substance of a life through a traditional conceptual analysis, with its concern for logical relations and formal properties.

In *The Portrait of a Lady*, we are given different visions of how one should live and what one should strive to attain – concrete explorations of the Socratic question that defines the domain of ethics. Different fictional characters present alternative visions of the world and of the answers to these questions, and through them we can explore the implications of particular accounts of ethical concepts. Autonomy is, as I argued earlier (Chapters 1 and 2), an ideal of character as well as a judgement about the quality of a life – it is a property of a certain type of person, leading a certain type of life. As investigations of particular persons and lives,

novels are thus also suited for a character-based approach to ethical concepts – an approach that sees the character of persons as having irreducible ethical relevance and that argues that understanding actions requires, also, understanding the character of the person who performed them

In his Preface to the New York Edition, James writes that he envisaged “the centre of the subject” of *Portrait* as being “in the young woman’s own consciousness”; its concern will be “her relation to herself” (10-1). The concern of the novel is therefore Isabel’s consciousness: how she sees herself, others and the world; how her vision influences her choices and ends. Isabel’s initially naïve vision will come into conflict with the alternate visions of Mme Merle and Osmond, who are interested only what they can do with people for their own ends; with the practical, unromantic approach of Henrietta; the emotionless self-sufficiency of Mrs Touchett; and with the sympathetic yet far wiser vision of Ralph, truly the “apostle of freedom” (386). We learn with Isabel the consequences of these possibilities; we learn with her what is really required in order to live autonomously within a world of limitations. Being an exploration of a woman’s attempt to achieve autonomy, *Portrait* will demonstrate what an account of that concept must capture – the real obstacles in the path to autonomy and the way the substantial content of other values and ends can hamper one in achieving it.

The Portrait of a Lady is thus a portrayal of Isabel, of different attitudes towards the world and of the state of a particular social milieu. The reader can move between visions, assess their truth, explore their implications. Such a multi-faceted portrait emphasises the immersion of a subject within her world, and the extent to which her personal growth and the possible values she may choose to explore are dependent very much for their availability and success on that world. Autonomy must be achieved, if at all, within inescapable boundaries and in competition, sometimes, with other values which may ultimately prove subjectively more desirable than autonomy.

The rest of this chapter proceeds as follows: I turn, firstly, to Isabel’s character and why, despite her psychological ability, she will not achieve autonomy: There are, really, two Isabels: The first Isabel demonstrates great potential for attaining autonomy, but due to her ignorance and naivete she is led to her disastrous marriage. Exploring her initial limitations is instructive because it demonstrates how ignorance of competence can hinder the attainment of

autonomy. The second Isabel, however, is very aware of this as she finds herself trapped and damaged by the malevolence of another person. In the course of her marriage, she achieves the clear sight and objectivity necessary for fulfilling the ‘radical reflection’ condition of autonomy. However, given that she will not be able to control the course of her life in her marriage to Osmond, she does not fulfil the competence condition and so will not live autonomously. I will then, secondly, explore competence in the light of her failure, and from this, thirdly, examine further the substantial considerations relevant to autonomy.

Psychological Capacity - Further Considerations

Isabel Archer’s character is highly conducive to undergoing the type of radical reflection that dispositional autonomy requires. As we have seen, on Taylor’s view of radical re-evaluation, character and self-reflection are connected: In order to undergo the type of reflection that results in a “new clarity”, that articulates one’s “deepest unstructured sense of what is important”, a “stance of openness” is required (Taylor 1976:298). This attitude towards the world and one’s self can be thought of, partly, as a disposition towards Berofsky’s *objectivity* and *flexibility* - ie. a disposition to be sensitive to facts about the world and one’s own internal states, and open to changing one’s behaviour and beliefs in the light of new information. A person thus disposed will be in a good position to undergo radical reflection when circumstances call for it, and Isabel has such an open, perceptive character. Although this is the case, there are still obstacles in the way to the required psychological state required for autonomy. Let us then look at how Isabel’s character defines her reflections and her lucid assessment of the world. What is her ‘stance on the world’, how is she disposed to view herself? And how does this effect her process of critical reflection?

An immediately striking feature of Isabel is her imagination: her ability creatively to form images or concepts of the world and to picture herself in different situations. The first time we enter her consciousness is in a flashback to Albany, where Mrs Touchett first met her. Isabel was reading alone and our narrator’s first comment on her is that “her love of knowledge had a fertilising quality and her imagination was strong” (31). Later, we are told that she was “a young person of many theories; her imagination was remarkably active” (52) - in fact, “when the door was not open it jumped out of the window” (39). Her imagination is

fed by reading, but while she has “a great desire for knowledge”,

... she really preferred almost any source of information to the printed page; she had an immense curiosity about life and was constantly staring and wondering. She carried within herself a great fund of life, and her deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movements of her own soul and the agitations of the world.

(41)

On the basis of this description, it would appear that Isabel possesses the flexibility and objectivity necessary for autonomy. If she gladly feels the ‘continuity’ between her soul and the ‘agitations of the world’, this suggests that she consciously opens herself to the world around her and assesses its demands on her vision and beliefs. She enters the variable world imaginatively and with sympathy, we might suppose. And, unlike Stevens, Isabel consciously takes autonomy to be a significant end; even though she uses the terms ‘liberty’, ‘freedom’, ‘independence’, it is our concept of autonomy she is describing when she issues the following declaration of her ideal of character to Casper Goodwood:

‘... I try to judge things for myself; to judge wrong, I think, is more honourable than not to judge at all. I don’t wish to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me.’

(143)⁵

Even before she is made wealthy, she is intent on thinking and choosing for herself, of living independently – “I’m not a candidate for adoption” (30), she insists; this despite the inevitable obstacles in the way of independence for an unmarried and impoverished woman.

At this point, we may feel tempted to treat her to “the occasions of homage” (53) she tends to bestow on herself. However, despite the declaration of independence quoted above, Isabel is really governed by her agile imagination which constructs a particular and very limited view of the world. I quote at some length:

She spent half her time in thinking of beauty and bravery and magnanimity; she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action: she held it must be detestable to be afraid or ashamed. She had an infinite hope that she should never do anything wrong.... Sometimes she went so far as to wish that she might find herself some day in a difficult position, so that she should have the pleasure of being as heroic as the occasion demanded.

(54)

Her idealistic vision of the world and of her own place in it is clear. For this confident, naive

⁵ This is strikingly similar to Stevens’s judgement: “I can’t even say I made my own mistakes. Really - one has to ask oneself -what dignity is there in that?” (Ishiguro:243).

American girl, Europe represents possibilities for exploring and immersing herself in the life she has thus far only vicariously experienced. However, the world she is hungry to experience is the one of 'free expansion' and 'irresistible action' constructed by her imagination; it is not the limited world that Henrietta tries to force upon her attention, when she tells Isabel:

'The peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams. You're not enough in contact with reality - with the toiling, striving, suffering... sinning world that surrounds you. You're too fastidious, you've too many graceful illusions.' (188)

For Isabel, Henrietta "was chiefly a proof that a woman might suffice to herself and be happy" (55). As an independent, self-supporting journalist, Henrietta is well-equipped to warn Isabel about the 'sinning world'. But Isabel does not fully appreciate the difficulties facing a woman relying only on herself and neither does she recognise that her friend has achieved autonomy despite of - and within - inevitable obstacles and limits. She has what Isabel has only a vague, idealistic picture of, what Isabel wishes to achieve without too much effort, without grubbing herself.

Isabel's imagination constructs a beautiful illusion: a world where one can be autonomous, and do fine and heroic things fastidiously - without morally 'dirtying one's hands' or knowing the agony of having to sacrifice other values. Her horror of hurting people, of ever being in the wrong, her love of justice, require such a world; anything less accommodating may compel the type of action she so dreads. Henrietta perspicaciously notes: "You think we can escape disagreeable duties by taking romantic views - that's your great illusion.... You must be prepared on many occasions in life to please no one at all - not even yourself" (188).

Ralph similarly, though not as keenly as Henrietta, realises the danger in Isabel's great illusion, as the following conversation between the two cousins suggests:

'You want to drain the cup of experience.'
'I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I only want to see for myself.'
'You want to see, but not to feel,' Ralph remarked. (134)

Elsewhere, he tells her that she is fond only of "happy knowledge - of pleasant knowledge" (52). Isabel replies that "people suffer too easily.... It's not absolutely necessary to suffer; we were not made for that" (ibid.). Earlier, however, we are given a glimpse of her romantic view of even the painful aspects of life. Although hers had been a "very happy life" (39), it appeared to her that "the unpleasant had been even too absent from her knowledge; for she had gathered from her acquaintance with literature that it was

often a source of interest and even of instruction” (ibid.).

Isabel is therefore ambiguous towards suffering: On the one hand, she does not wish actively to suffer. She would prefer to see rather than feel, and while quite reasonable, this is also related to her desire that the world be free of sin and sordidness. On the other hand, her reading and imagination has imbued tragedy with some romance - how can one really *experience* life without suffering; how can one do heroic deeds in the absence of tragedy? As Paul Seabright notes, she fears being “the kind of character whom an author like Henry James would have thought insufficiently interesting to write a novel around” (1988:330). Isabel wishes, therefore, to be an interesting heroine in the fiction which fed her own imagination. She tells her uncle: “In a revolution... I think I should be a high, proud, loyalist. One sympathises more with them, and they’ve a chance to behave so exquisitely. I mean so picturesquely”(71). To be interesting, which for Isabel means to be ‘picturesque’ and ‘exquisite’, therefore requires opportunities for heroism and grandeur, it requires a nobility only discovered through suffering, she thinks. Isabel will certainly suffer; she will be changed by it, but she will also discover that it is not romantic. Even as she realises her great mistake, however, she still desires to act virtuously. “Whatever happens to me let me not be unjust... let me bear my burdens myself and not shift them upon others!” (340), she says. And declares: “When a woman had made such a mistake, there was only one way to repair it - just immensely (oh, with the highest grandeur!) to accept it” (ibid.).

So, for all Isabel’s eager awareness, the narrator very early makes her limitations clear: “the love of knowledge co-existed in her mind with the finest capacity for ignorance” (173):

Her thoughts were a tangle of vague outlines which had never been corrected by the judgement of people speaking with authority. In matters of opinion she had had her own way, and it had led her into a thousand ridiculous zig-zags. (ibid.)

For all her grotesque mistakes, however, Isabel sincerely desires to live beautifully. So, reposing in “her remarkable soul” (56), she attempts to make of her life “a work of art” (261), as Osmond notes later, worthy of the heroines who inspired her idealism. How does Isabel’s character then mould the personal reflections that she conscientiously undertakes?

Isabel finds the exploration of her “fine, full consciousness” (56) on the whole very pleasant:

Her nature had, in her conceit, a certain garden-like quality... which made her feel that introspection was, after all, an exercise in the open air, and that a visit to the recesses of one’s

spirit was harmless when one returned from it with a lapful of roses.

(ibid.)

Despite her admiration for Mme Merle and Ralph, she wishes always to decide things for herself. She tells her aunt:

‘Yes, I think I’m very fond of [my own ways]. But I always want to know the things one shouldn’t do.’

‘So as to do them?’ asked her aunt.

‘So as to choose,’ said Isabel.

(67)

Isabel wishes to discriminate correctly, to choose lucidly, to know herself. But she already has an idea of the self and world she wishes to know, and, despite her “passionate humility” (53) when she discovers her errors, she has “an unquenchable desire to think well of herself” (ibid.). On the whole, she is satisfied that the character she aims for she already, in essence, possesses. Her introspections are more celebrations of her perceived superiority than sustained attempts to bring her soul into line with the truth of her situation and possibilities, or to recognise her own limitations.

This, ironically, is despite her conscientious self-analysis, which demonstrates the dangers of a too zealous, too refined and continuous self-analysis - the criticism often brought against accounts of autonomy which emphasise the importance of critical reflection for achieving dispositional autonomy. Isabel was “was always planning out her development, desiring her perfection, observing her progress” (56). Ralph notes this and advises her: “Don’t question your conscience so much.... Don’t try so much to form your character.... You’ve too much power of thought - above all too much conscience” (192). Even Isabel admits to Ralph that she is engrossed in her ideal of self-perfection: “I’m absorbed in myself - I look at life too much as a doctor’s prescription” (ibid.).

Her history thus supports Paul Seabright’s persuasive argument that “a preoccupation with one’s own character can be subversive of that character” (Seabright:317). One may not in fact possess a certain moral quality if one’s “motive were the desire to have the moral quality in question” (Seabright:318). Isabel desires to be fine and virtuous and wishes her actions to be motivated by such a desire, but that is not the same as *being* fine and virtuous. Seabright argues that a conscious, regulating desire like that may in fact subvert rather than encourage the growth of the desired character: It encourages attention towards one’s self rather than towards external states of affairs; one is motivated by a desire to be motivated by virtue or by

one's desire to be a certain kind of person, rather than by a love of virtue for its own sake. In her reply to Seabright, Nussbaum compares this type of subverting motive to a *transparent* motive, which "is focused not upon the agent as the author of the act, but directly upon the act itself, and its valuable characteristics" (Nussbaum 1988:334). Instead of taking Ralph's advice to "[l]ive as you like best, and your character will take care of itself" (192), Isabel constantly reminds herself of how a virtuous person *should* live and be motivated and so becomes entangled in constant self-analysis. The object of her moral attention is her own character rather than other people and states of affairs - as she admits to Ralph: "I try to care more about the world than about myself - but I always come back to myself" (193). Focussed on herself rather than on the world, she is oblivious to the real intentions of people around her and to Osmond's character, which he never in fact hid from her. Like Seabright, Nussbaum relates this worrying tendency to Isabel's desire to make herself an interesting heroine:

Isabel is not capable of looking straight at the action itself.... Her imagination always takes the detour of imagining a certain sort of story of just action, in which she is a leading character; and she demands that this story contain the elements of drama, suffering, and conflict that she has come to expect of a good story (Nussbaum 1988:335)

Besides the self-subverting nature of her conscious search for moral perfection, Isabel also deliberates upon her actions and reflects upon herself within a framework which, like Stevens's, detrimentally influences her conclusions. This is her substantial conception of what autonomy entails. She refers all her choices and possible courses of action to her fundamental desire to maintain and increase her autonomy, but as Paul Armstrong notes, for her, "to be 'independent' means that she will *not* be dependent on anyone and anything; she will *not* be limited or tied down in any way" (1983: 106). In order to "see life" (133) on her terms, she requires absolute independence, freedom from contingency and restraint; any personal tie must therefore be rejected as a restriction. So, because her marriage proposals "seemed to deprive her of her sense of freedom" (104-5), she rejects both Goodwood and Warburton in order to "do something greater" (102) with herself than marriage.

Isabel's conception of autonomy also requires the complete creation of herself *ex nihilo*⁶ - "radically independent self-creation", in Berofsky's words (1995:112). She takes the

⁶ For the incoherence of this idea, see Feinberg 1989 and Meyers 1989.

core ideas of autonomy - self-government and self-creation - to entail independence from all convention and conventionality, anything constructed or given by society. In fact, the implausibility of this ideal probably stems from her confusion of necessary *conventions* with an attitude or lifestyle of *conventionality*, as a conversation with Mme Merle demonstrates. Mme Merle says that “[t]here’s no such thing as an isolated man or woman”; each person is constituted by a “whole envelope of circumstances” which express one’s ‘self’ (175). Isabel rejects this:

‘I don’t know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; everything’s on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one....

‘My clothes may express the dressmaker, but they don’t express me. To begin with it’s not my own choice that I wear them; they’re imposed upon me by society.’ (ibid.)

Mme Merle, that perfect woman of the world, replies: “Should you prefer to go without them?” (ibid.), a rejoinder that shows the absurdity of Isabel’s claims for absolutely authentic - ie. uninfluenced - expression.

Isabel’s great fear to “appear narrow-minded” (62) and her desire to escape restrictive conventionality leads her to reject all outer manifestations as inadequate to express her authentic self. Her idea of the self is one which exists prior to, and independently of, all social customs, all manifestations which society imposes. Her self is abstract, like her ideals; conventional means of expression either only misrepresent it, or never even encounter it. However, despite her explicit declarations of authenticity, the narrator also makes clear her own reliance on appearance, noting “her desire to look very well and to be if possible even better” (54). Isabel’s desire to be well thought of, to first *appear* fine and then to be so, never to displease others, paradoxically makes her dependent on the very social forms she explicitly despises. There is a very thin line between Isabel and Osmond and it is therefore both ironic and horribly fitting that she marries someone whose conception of liberty is “a thing of forms, a conscious, calculated attitude” (361), who “lived exclusively for the world” as its “very humble servant” (331).

While her worry is not ridiculous – one’s self-expression may indeed be restricted by social demands and a narrow range of means of expressions - the extent to which she takes it is. It leads her to embrace the unrealisable goal of what Berofsky terms *ideal* autonomy.

According to this, “the truly autonomous agent would be able to select any goals, unencumbered by a psyche limited by its interaction with an environment bent on circumscription” (Berofsky:112). To do this is impossible, as both Ralph and Henrietta know and as Isabel finally discovers as a married woman.

Because of her unrealistic ideal of unencumbered autonomy, she also is blind to the fact that one can only exercise one’s independence positively if one has particular, realisable projects - and these she lacks. Working as a journalist like Henrietta, for example, would presumably be inconceivable, because for all her claims to self-sufficiency, working in the ‘toiling, striving, suffering, sinning world’ would risk tarnishing her moral purity. As with her negative conception of freedom - it is the *absence* of any restrictions - Isabel has a better idea of how she does *not* wish to be than of any positive, particular thing she wishes to do. Her view of freedom is abstract, she enjoys theorising; but she does not know what to do with the real independence granted her by her wealth, despite the fact that “to be rich was a virtue because it was to be able to *do*” (182). Choosing one path, like committing herself to one partner, would close off opportunities in the future; she mistakenly thinks that embracing anything more concrete than simply ‘independence’ would require - we may speculate - a rigid life-plan, a “detailed blueprint for action stretching over the whole course of life”⁷. It is notable that despite her grand ambitions, neither the narrator nor Isabel ever mention concrete projects. For her, it is either abstract freedom and authenticity, or a regimented, restrictive plan of life. Filling in the details on the former option would render it indistinguishable from the latter. While Stevens’s character is over-defined because of his rigidity, Isabel’s is *under-defined*: Her ends are so expansive and vague that she does not know what to do with her resources.

Isabel is, in a way, paralysed by the immensity of her ideals and possibilities: she finds her new wealth “at first oppressive”, “she scrutinised her new power... but was not eager to exercise it” (182). With wealth she can realise her ambitions, but what are they? What is there to realise? When she considers action, her imagination once again takes over to hide the paucity of her actual schemes:

She lost herself in a maze of visions; the fine things to be done by a rich, independent, generous girl who took a large human view of occasions and obligations were sublime in the

⁷ To use the phrase that Rawls explicitly rejects as a description of a rational ‘life-plan’ (Rawls:1973:410).

mass. Her fortune therefore became to her mind a part of her better self; it gave her importance, gave her even, to her own imagination, a certain ideal beauty. (193)

So, in pursuit of the “free exploration of life” (101), she travels, escaping the restrictions even Osmond’s declaration of love makes on her. When she returns after several months, however, she accepts Osmond’s proposal. What has changed in her to do this?

Isabel returns to Florence, feeling “grave”, “positively more weighted” and “a very different person from the frivolous young woman” of before (270). Much to the dismay of her aunt and Ralph, she accepts Osmond’s proposal of marriage. When Ralph asks her why, because “[a] year ago you valued your liberty beyond everything. You wanted only to see life”, she replies, “I’ve seen it... It doesn’t look to me now... such an inviting expanse” (288). It is impossible to do “anything so general” as survey all of life, she realises: “One must choose a corner and cultivate that” (ibid.). Later, we are told that the “desire for unlimited expansion had been succeeded in her soul by the sense that life was vacant without some private duty that might gather one’s energies to a point” (297). It appears that Isabel finally knows the illusion of a vague, general idea of limitless independence. The world is not as inviting as her imagination desired it to be; she is tired of restless travel, so chooses to cultivate a particular project: “One has human feelings and needs, one has a heart in one’s bosom, and one must marry a particular individual” (293) she declares with impeccable logic. And yet, the reasons she gives Ralph for her decision to marry demonstrate her continuing romanticism and the misleading influence of her imagination.

Her justifications are noble and unselfish: She wishes to do something fine with her money, and has met “simply a very lonely, a very cultivated and a very honest man” (293), whose beautiful life she can further. Osmond has never “scrambled or struggled - he has cared for no worldly prize” (293), and, if one is to choose one’s corner, what nobler end than to devote oneself to a person who “has borne his poverty with such dignity, with such indifference” (ibid.), she asks? Isabel’s imagination constructs Osmond as an exquisite hero in a romance in which she can play a redeeming role; she can exercise the freedom granted by her wealth in the service of such a particular and ennobling project - she “should be able to be of use to him” (297). She is aware finally of the inevitability of personal ties and limits on one’s independence, and freely chooses to bind herself to a person who has lived a disinterested life

dedicated to art and culture.

But Osmond also seems to promise an opportunity to continue her pursuit of autonomy. His aesthetic taste and pursuits, his apparent contempt for the world, promise an 'aristocratic life' of seclusion from the sordidness of convention, in pursuit of "the cause of freedom, of doing as they chose, of not caring for the aspect and denomination of their life" (361), as she characterises her illusion to herself later. Isabel's imagination therefore still crucially defines her reflections upon herself and others. It blinds her to the machinations of Mme Merle and Osmond, to the insidious, "cultivated sweetness" of Pansy, who Osmond has "directed and fashioned" (267) into an object of passive perfection; to Osmond's obsessive interest in the very world he ostensibly despises; to her own misplaced romanticism. It renders her impervious to Ralph's warnings that in marrying Osmond, "you're going to be put into a cage" (288). For all her sensitivity, her vision is still corrupted by her imagination.

However, Isabel's reflections are still such as to allow for radical re-evaluation. The formal nature of her identification does not prevent self-expansion, nor the examination of her end of autonomy, and her reflections are concerned with cultivating a certain character, rather than reducing herself to a figure. Her ends are practically sheddable in Mele's terms; she possesses the ability to change them in the light of new information, but it is only when her imagination is corrected by experience that she can actually reflect in an autonomy-conferring manner. This occurs when she marries Osmond, and I now turn to the 'second Isabel'.

During the course of her marriage Isabel gains self-awareness and knowledge of the facts of her situation. It becomes clear in her night-long reflection in Chapter 42 that she has finally and painfully achieved objectivity and clear vision about her self and Osmond. Before, "she had imagined a world of things that had no substance. She had had a more wondrous vision of him, fed through charmed senses and oh such a stirred fancy! - she had not read him right" (357). She realises, too, that because of her character, she was in a way responsible – she had deceived Osmond herself, if not in intention then in fact (357). Wanting so to please him, she "had effaced herself when he first knew her; she had made herself small, pretending there was less of her than there

really was” (ibid.). Only once Isabel knows all the facts of her ‘destiny’ can she attend to her character and circumstances with that stance of attention and clearness of vision necessary for autonomy. Clear vision requires objectivity - a ‘fit’ between the way things really are and one’s beliefs and values. In the past, she lacked knowledge - of the limits of the world, the real intentions of people around her, of her own romanticised vision of things - so her beliefs and values did not truly reflect the way things in fact were, and she could not act appropriately.

She gains the final information about Mme Merle and Osmond’s role in her history just as she leaves for England and once there, she must choose whether or not to return to Rome. Her married life so far has thwarted her ambitions to be original and autonomous; in remaining in it, she will be similarly thwarted. This is because, firstly and most simply, Osmond prevents her from acting as she desires. Secondly, and more problematically, however, is the fact that Isabel chooses to accept him as her “appointed and inscribed master”. Although “she gazed at moments with a sort of incredulous blankness at this fact”, it still “weighed upon her imagination... constantly present to her mind were all the traditionary decencies and sanctities of marriage.” (386).

So, she fails to fulfil the competence condition because (i) another person prevents her from controlling her life – ie. external factors, and (ii) her substantial conception of marriage demands that she recognise her commitment to her husband as permanent, and recognise her husband as her ‘master’ – a conflict between the values of autonomy and commitment. In the light of this, I now turn to competence, investigating both these reasons for its failure.

Competence: (i) External Factors

Competence depends upon one’s environment and what it makes available to one. Isabel is ignorant of the necessity of competence for autonomy and so ignores a number of facts about the external conditions and character requirements upon which actual, achievable autonomy is dependent: Firstly, the world *will* just restrict her movements and the realisation of her ambitions (the concrete nature of which remain obscure). Without sufficient means, one cannot freely explore life; other people’s selfish interests will impinge; society will refuse

recognition of certain options or, more drastically, just not permit certain actions. Secondly, Ralph realises what Isabel is blithely blind to: that her ambition to live both autonomously *and* beautifully cannot be realised without material resources, if indeed it can be realised at all. One can only never harm anyone and maintain moral purity if one has the means to avoid conflict and to transcend limiting and particular obstacles. That is why he arranges for her to inherit the wealth he will never need. She does then have a greater freedom than she would as an impoverished, single woman. Ralph is thus far more aware than Isabel of the importance of external factors in achieving autonomy. Besides the abstract qualities of her beautiful intentions and fine intellect, the brute facts of material and social necessities - which Isabel would rather ignore - are crucial.

Isabel learns all these facts as a married woman. At the mercy of another person, she is restricted in living her life according to her grand ambitions – defined or not. If competence requires that one mould one's life according to the ends which have passed through a process of radical reflection, and upon which one is capable of reflecting in the future; if it requires that the quality of one's life reflect what one really wishes to do and be – then it is obvious that in her marriage Isabel does not possess competence. Even as she slowly requires a true understanding of her position, she cannot act in the way she desires, or only in a careful, highly thought-out and restricted manner. She has to do things for Osmond which she would never in good conscience choose to do willingly - for example, when she was expected to arrange Pansy's marriage to Lord Warburton, despite Pansy's love for another man; when she could not visit Ralph frequently; and when she had to acquiesce to Osmond's sending Pansy back to the convent. Then, "what one had to do for Osmond" made her feel "hideously insincere" (393,392). Despite this, Isabel still wants to be a "good wife": "she wanted to be able to believe sincerely, and with proof of it, that she had been that" (348). The quality of her life does not reflect the high value she places on autonomy, of acting sincerely and in good conscience.

As mentioned above, the simplest cause of Isabel's failure to achieve autonomy is that her incorrect vision landed her in a situation where she is at the mercy of her husband. His judgement on her - that "she had too many ideas" - means, she discovers, that he dislikes everything about her: "her character, the way she felt, the way she judged" (359) : "The real

offence... was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his - attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park" (362). Earlier, the reader was given a glimpse of Osmond's own view of Isabel: It would indeed be an advantage to possess a "quick, fanciful mind which saved one's repetitions and reflected one's thought on a polished, elegant surface" (296), he thought. So, from her ideals of thinking for herself, of cultivating her own fine soul, Isabel becomes trapped in Osmond's "beautiful mind" (360).

Both Osmond and Mme Merle are interested only in what they can do with people; in Kantian terms, they treat people purely as means to their ends, rather than as ends in themselves. Images of objects, tools and use abound in descriptions of their relation to others. Mme Merle tells Osmond, "I don't pretend to know what people are meant for.... I only know what I can do with them" (207). Osmond thought originally that if Isabel had not had 'too many ideas', "she would have been as smooth to his general need of her as handled ivory to the palm" (259); he can in any case "tap her imagination with his knuckle and make it ring" (296). He wishes his wife, as his daughter is, to be "like a sheet of blank paper" (238) on which he can write, to be a reflection of his exquisite taste - a portrait "to figure in his collection of choice objects" (258). She must therefore become a static portrait of a lady, at which Osmond can gaze at his pleasure. Later, Isabel faces the "dry staring fact that she had been an applied handled hung-up tool, as senseless and convenient as mere shaped wood and iron" (459) to her husband and his former lover.

A mere tool to the needs of Osmond and Mme Merle, Isabel's actions and intentions are severely circumscribed. She lacks competence because she cannot translate her ends into action and cannot mould her life in such a way that it reflects her character. Berofsky claims that competence – what he calls 'proficiency' - is only a "closely related feature", rather than a necessary condition, or constitutive of, autonomy (Berofsky:22). As I argued in the previous chapter, however, one cannot have the control over one's life required for autonomy if one is prevented by external conditions from translating one's ends into action. If the core ideas of autonomy are self-governance and control over one's life, then being competent is part of what it *means to be* autonomous.

This holds true whether or not one retains a measure of self-respect from a source other than autonomy. Isabel may ultimately maintain self-respect, but she will only in a trivial

sense be able to control the course of her life when she returns to Osmond – before their breach, at least, she could always “come and go; she had her liberty; her husband was perfectly polite” (360)⁸. Despite this, her interaction with her friends and family was already circumscribed because Osmond disliked them, so we can safely assume it will only become worse; she will always have to honour the ‘form of the thing’ and live within the bounds of propriety and convention so valued by Osmond. Authentic self-expression, action in accordance with her principles, the company of people she loves, will all be denied her. An autonomous person need not always exercise the psychological skills and capacities captured by the radical reflection condition; there may be substantial areas of her life in which it is not necessary or called for. However, in areas which crucially express one’s sense of self and values, a person must be able to control her actions and motivation in order to be autonomous, and this Isabel will not be able to do. Her stance on the world and her attitude towards her self and her behaviour will always be judged (by herself and by Osmond) against the framework of the particular content she gives the convention of marriage. In times that matter, she will not be able to translate her values and beliefs into action, and to be autonomous is to be able to exercise certain psychological skills when it is important to one.

So, despite her hard-won knowledge and the maintenance of her self-respect, in such circumstances Isabel cannot be self-governing and self-creating in the way required for a significant degree of dispositional autonomy. While Stevens fails to be autonomous because he is psychologically incapable of undergoing the required process of radical self-reflection, Isabel fails to be so because she was originally manipulated and left ignorant, and now is under the control of another person. She cannot govern herself and direct the course of her life, because the competence to do so has been taken away from her.

Competence: (ii) Conflict of Values and Substantial Considerations

However, there is more to a lack of autonomy than the presence of hampering external factors. We may ask ourselves why Isabel chooses to remain in her restrictive and dismal

⁸ Isabel may have *local* or *episodic* autonomy in this case. But this does not suffice for control over the course and character of one’s life.

marriage. Why does she not assert her independence and reject a situation in which she cannot realise her conscious ambition to be autonomous? Some commentators on the novel argue that in fact Isabel *does* express a newly-acquired freedom or autonomy when she chooses to return to Rome. Armstrong, for example, while admitting the bleakness of Isabel's future, argues that because Isabel now realises the impossibility of achieving ideal, unbounded autonomy, she accepts the "limits of the actual" and her return to Osmond "presents her with a test of what she will make of her newly discovered well-grounded freedom" (Armstrong:133,134). Although I too think that Isabel's final choice is an expression of integrity and self-respect, I do not think it is explicable in terms of achieving some freedom she previously lacked, or of demonstrating that only now, with her full knowledge and clairvoyance, can she be 'authentically' autonomous. Arguing that would be to make the same mistake that Isabel originally made, and against which Kettle warned, in assuming that a certain sublime state of mind alone suffices for autonomy.

At the end of the novel, we may conjecture that Isabel decides to maintain her integrity by honouring the commitment she freely entered. There is thus something other than autonomy that ultimately expresses her sense of self and in remaining 'whole' and true to herself- in retaining integrity, that is – she must act in accordance with that value. That competing value is loyalty towards her commitments. Her central commitment - "the most serious act – the single sacred act – of her life" (386) is her marriage. Despite Mme Merle's manipulation, she considers that she freely chose to marry Osmond, and so must now stand by that decision. Her integrity and self-respect depend essentially on honouring this and this fact explains the narrator's comment that she was "free" (489) after finally resisting Goodwood, as well as her earlier claim that in remaining loyal, it is "not of [Osmond] that I'm considerate – it's of myself!" (407). She is, in other words, being constant to the value that she feels is essential to, because constitutive of, her identity – ie. loyalty to her freely chosen commitments. She agrees in principle with Osmond when he says that "we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honour of a thing!" (446). For Isabel, these words, "represented something transcendent and absolute.... He spoke in the name of something sacred and precious - the observance of a magnificent form" (ibid.). The thought of violating this "filled her with shame as well as with dread" (386).

This competing value involves honouring the social form of marriage, which she construes in a particular way. She accepts the view of marriage conventional for the time, and the *content* of this social form prevents her from asserting her capacity for autonomy. Like Stevens's particular view of 'butler-hood', Isabel has a particular, contingent view of what is expected of a woman in marriage and this explains her submission to another person. In deliberating whether or not to go to Ralph, she reflects that "the great undertaking of matrimony... meant that in such a case as this, when one had to choose, one chose as a matter of course for one's husband" (449). Isabel is faced with a real dilemma: her desire to honour her marriage places an obligation on her that does not simply dissolve because her love for Ralph, a far finer man, also demands certain action from her. That is why she fully recognises "the violence there would be in going when Osmond wished her to remain" (449); it requires her betrayal of something she holds central to her sense of self and integrity. Isabel had characterised the "odious and monstrous" ceremony of opposing her husband's wishes as an occasion "when she should have to take back something she had solemnly bestowed" (386). The fact that she eventually 'returns' herself to Osmond at the end of the novel demonstrates how central to her identity and self-respect is her commitment to her marriage.

The value that Isabel places on autonomy therefore clashes with her loyalty to her marriage. This conflict is not necessary: it is only because of the way that Isabel defines the form of marriage, so once again, considerations of content are crucial for determining the possibility of living autonomously. Loyalty in itself is not autonomy-preventing, neither is responsibility for one's choices. It is what one is loyal or responsible *towards* that is significant. In Isabel's case, it is loyalty to her marriage. But it is also marriage defined as obedience to one's husband, who is one's "appointed and inscribed master" (386), a culturally contingent view of marriage. Under this description, loyalty to marriage indeed conflicts with control over one's life and self-governance. Isabel will thus be unable to participate in Raz's vision of autonomy: "the vision of people controlling, to some degree, their own destiny, fashioning it through successive decisions throughout their lives" (1986:369).

The simplest explanation for Isabel's lack of competence, we saw, is that she will be prevented by another person from controlling and fashioning her life; more problematic was that because of the value she places on loyalty, she chose to remain in that autonomy-hindering

situation. The condition of competence thus encapsulates both external factors and considerations of content. The core idea of autonomy is that of self-rule; it cannot exist when one's master is another person, even if that master is appointed by oneself. If one accepts the legitimacy of values which require one's submission to the will of another, then one cannot achieve a great degree of autonomy. The content of one's ends and beliefs therefore plays a central role in autonomy. For Isabel, the particular nature of her other values ensure that she will remain in a situation which will prevent her from fully controlling her interaction with the world. It is therefore unrealistic in the extreme to view autonomy as independent of the content of those values which define one's identity. However, in saying that certain values may be autonomy-hindering is not to say that we have a list of independently judged values. We do not accept or reject values as autonomy-enhancing or hindering before considering their role in particular lives, for particular persons. I now want to look at this in more detail.

Substantial Autonomy

As we have seen (in Chapter 1), Dworkin places no constraints on the content of that which one can autonomously be or do, so his account of autonomy demonstrates what Friedman (1997) terms *substantive neutrality*: As long as the authenticity condition is met, and there is *procedural* independence in the process by which the person came to identify with her ends, substantial concerns about the actual nature of the type of life or values embraced are irrelevant for considerations of autonomy. The presence of autonomy should not depend on judgements about the worth of the values chosen, and judgements concerning autonomy should therefore be neutral between competing conceptions of the good.

Dworkin is worried that making autonomy conditional upon content will render autonomy inconsistent with other values. As we noted, he suggests a contingent connection between autonomy and a person's values - a disposition towards critical reflection will tend to create suspicion of beliefs and values that "rely on uncritical acceptance of authority, tradition, and custom" (Dworkin 1988:29). However, he argues that if the objects of identification are required to fulfil certain substantial conditions, the resulting conception of autonomy is unlikely to be shared and many quite valid conceptions of the good may thus fail to be possible

candidates for autonomous adoption and pursuit. “The autonomous person gives meaning to his life”, but this can be achieved in many different ways (Dworkin 1988:31).

This is an appreciable worry. However, I have argued that one cannot adequately explain autonomy by pointing to logical, formal processes and conditions only. They do not tell the whole story; we need to ask questions about the character of one’s beliefs and values, and the forms of life supported by social institutions. Through literature, we can ask how their content affects one’s critical reflections and ability to interact with the world. We can separate two distinct but related points here in order to get a better focus on the substantial considerations relevant for autonomy: Firstly, concerning the effect of content on one’s psychological capacities and thus one’s stance on the world; and secondly, concerning the connection between social factors and the acquisition of a certain content.

The first point is that the content of the complex of values, ends, beliefs etc. with which a person identifies⁹ influences the stance she takes towards herself and the world, the ideal being characterised in my account of radical reflection. Because I have argued that the exercise of, and continuing disposition towards, radical reflection is necessary for the achievement of autonomy, content can thus hinder or promote autonomy depending on how it supports radical reflection. My direct concern is therefore with the way the substantial nature of a person’s values affect her sense of self in relation to other persons, her knowledge of the world, her ability to undergo radical reflection and govern her actions. If autonomy is of value, then we do indeed have one way of evaluating the worth of beliefs or values which prevent its achievement because of their substantial nature. Note that other values like loyalty, integrity, communal feeling do not necessarily and automatically conflict with autonomy: As we saw with Isabel, their content is relevant for whether or not this is the case – what one is loyal towards, the content of the values on which one’s self-respect and integrity depend, the nature of the community of which one feels a part etc. Only if their substantial nature obstructs one’s psychological skills or prevents control over one’s life, do they hinder autonomy. We do not have an already constructed list of autonomy-compatible values, ends beliefs etc. before the examination of concrete lives. Neither do we automatically decide in favour of autonomy if

⁹ I shall in future refer to these as ‘identification-objects’.

there is a conflict. There may be independent reasons for favouring those other beliefs and values, despite their autonomy-preventing quality. Autonomy is a value, as I shall argue, but it is not the only value, nor does it necessarily always ‘trump’ other values. I shall return to this in the Conclusion.

The second point, which I raised in Chapter 2, is that there is an important connection between external factors - in this context I mean social and perhaps political pressures and forms - and the content of one’s identification-objects. One’s social and family background, the opportunities and resources (physical/material as well as psychological) made available to one significantly influence the adoption of beliefs, values and ends. We saw with Mr Stevens that his psychological structure was probably inevitable given his personal background and the social milieu in which he developed and worked. Isabel Archer’s view of marriage and her role as wife is the conventional one of her time; for all her originality and intelligence, she adopts it. If this is the case, and if autonomy is of value, we have at least a *prima facie* justification for criticising social systems that actively enforce autonomy-preventing beliefs and values.

Note that in both these points, our concern is directed towards a person’s ability to control her engagement with the world in the light of her reflectively endorsed beliefs and values. This is the focus of our attention, so the debate over whether autonomy is substantial or formal is also focused on this. It does not matter whether what one believes or values is individualistic or community-directed; narrow and perhaps selfish in focus or broadly other-directed; secular or religious. It matters only whether those ends substantially prevent one from critically reflecting and directing one’s life. So, the content of one’s ends and beliefs are not judged worthwhile or otherwise independently of their contribution to the possibility of one’s achieving autonomy. For different people, similar beliefs or values may influence their ability to be autonomous differently; it will depend on the entirety of each person’s mental structure and the particularity of her social environment.

In arguing for the significance of content for autonomy, my aim is not to defend certain *socio-political* conceptions of the good over others. Certainly, some social institutions and political systems will allow self-expansion, will encourage critical reflection, objectivity and flexibility more than others. They will therefore allow people more scope for translating their mental capacities into actions, into directing their lives as they reflectively see fit. The

autonomous life depends “on the general character of one’s environment and culture” (Raz:391). But, when the contents of a person’s identification-objects are criticised because they prevent her from achieving dispositional autonomy, it is not against a framework of already accepted or rejected options.

That said, control over the course of one’s life is a *prima facie* value in any viable political theory and for any theory of the worthwhile life. If we have good reason to accept the value of autonomy, then we do have a means of criticising social and political institutions if they hamper its acquisition. We can recall Walzer’s argument that “thick, divided selves are the characteristic products of, and in turn require, a thick, differentiated, and pluralist society” (1994:101). Autonomy is a characteristic of such ‘thick’ selves, perhaps partly constitutive of that kind of self. We therefore need to be autonomous in order to maintain our plurality and flexibility. If this is indeed our sense of personhood and if it can be supported, then we can argue for the pluralist society demanded by liberalism.

Admittedly, certain forms of life will probably just always be autonomy-reducing. A life based on strong communal and religious values may require that a person sacrifice a significant degree of dispositional autonomy; if she does not do so, it probably is not the case that she fully identifies with the group. Berofsky states the case well:

An autonomous agent is free to commit herself to another person or group so long as she retains the ultimate authority to withdraw from the commitment when the going gets sufficiently rough. She is, therefore, barred from feeling the depth of community sentiment and the sense of belonging unique to those groups in which self-expression *is* the expression of the community. (213)

So, there are forms of life based on values which, in order that they be fully identified with, require the sacrifice of one’s ability to exercise one’s autonomy in crucial instances. Based on the previous discussion, this allows us to question their choiceworthiness. It does not yet allow us to reject them as necessarily an irrational option or devoid of any value. I have been careful to say only that autonomy provides us with *a* standard, not the *only* standard, by which to evaluate institutions, forms of life and values. This leads us directly to the value of autonomy, and I turn now, finally, to consider it.

Conclusion: The Value of Autonomy

My discussion has emphasised the centrality of radical self-reflection for autonomy, while also insisting on the importance of being able to translate the conclusions of this reflection into action. Autonomy requires that one exercise control over the course of one's life, otherwise one's account of autonomy is an unrealistically abstract, formal one. I termed this ability to translate decisions and values into action, *competence*.

If we wish to give a formula for autonomy, then, we could say that autonomy requires

- (1) *radical reflection* and
- (2) *competence*.

Competence is conditional upon radical reflection. By this I mean that the control over one's life must be based upon the complex of beliefs, ends, desires, values etc. that are the result of this type of reflection. In this way, reflection is central to my account of autonomy because it is logically and causally prior to competence. I have also argued that autonomy is *substantial*, and this means that considerations of the particular nature of one's identification-objects as well as the particular nature of one's environment can either support or prevent the fulfilment of both conditions. It is therefore not enough simply to understand the formal processes and meet formal conditions for autonomy; autonomy itself must be understood and judged present or absent against a framework of other particular, substantial psychological items and external situations.

This account is very different from Dworkin's formula of identification/authenticity *plus* procedural independence. Both his conditions are included within my understanding of radical reflection, because that type of reflection depends upon non-neurotic, reflective and procedurally independent identification. Like Dworkin, I have not argued for a particular content of that with which one identifies, but I have said that certain contents in particular circumstances will adversely affect one's ability to be autonomous.

My two conditions for autonomy are individually necessary, and given the generality of the competence condition and the reliance of both conditions on many other substantial factors concerning the person, they are probably jointly sufficient. I have, however, arrived at these conditions in a way other than conceptual analysis: Through literature, I have explored the influential, formal account of Dworkin and

argued that the two novels give us good reasons to construe autonomy differently. By testing his theory and alternative accounts against the very factors autonomy is required to explain – namely, persons and their lives – we are led to construe autonomy in a far thicker and context-sensitive way than Dworkin does.

If the core ideas constituting the concept of autonomy are self-governance, self-creation and control over one's life, then, in order to capture them, a particular conception of autonomy has to demonstrate the significance of external factors for allowing one to control one's life and character, to stamp one's authentic character onto the quality of one's life. If one possesses and maintains dispositional autonomy, one has both the psychological resources to reflect upon one's character and situation and decide how one wishes to fashion one's life, as well as the material resources and negative freedom to be able to translate the conclusions of this personal reflection into action. One has sensitive, clairvoyant vision and a world in which one is free to exercise one's capacities to render concrete one's ends.

Given the analysis of the preceding chapters, how should we understand the value of autonomy? Again, literature is useful here: through our responses to the protagonists' futures we can examine why we value –or should value – autonomy. The suggested bleakness of Isabel and Stevens's futures already suggests that something significant is missing from their lives, something we would choose to have.

I have argued that Stevens and Isabel both fail to achieve significant dispositional autonomy. We pity them and we judge their lives to be less than choice-worthy. They lack something we would choose to have if possible, and that is authentic (uncoerced, fully appreciated) control over the course of their lives. However, although neither are autonomous, they each fail to fulfil a different necessary condition for autonomy. This asymmetry explains why, apart from pity, our reaction to Isabel is different from our response to Stevens, and it may help to explain what is valuable about autonomy.

Stevens fails to fulfil the reflection condition; Isabel is prevented from being competent. Stevens never tries to be autonomous and only dimly grasps its value; Isabel consciously recognises it as a value and attempts to achieve it. Stevens is thwarted by his own psychological limitations; Isabel, after she has gained self-knowledge, is prevented by external factors and the content she gives to the institution of marriage. We pity both characters, but we lose a measure of respect for Stevens, not Isabel. This has to do with the fundamental role of critical reflection in the ideal of autonomy and the idea of the self that it embodies. Stevens, in failing to be radically reflective, fails also to

realise a feature central to our conception of what it is to be a mature, responsible agent. He therefore falls below a standard we recognise as worth striving for. Although Isabel also fails to achieve autonomy, she fails only in the proficiency condition - she maintains her capacity for self-reflection even though she may not be able to exercise it when it matters. We maintain our respect for her because she still in principle demonstrably possesses a characteristic we feel is a condition of eliciting respect.

I now want to examine the reflection condition and its role in conferring value on autonomy. Many philosophers have emphasised our capacity for self-reflection as in some way central to our notion of personhood or the self¹. In Frankfurt's influential paper on freedom of the will, for example, he writes that only 'man' "appears to have the capacity for reflective self-evaluation that is manifested in the formation of second-order desires" (1971:7). Taylor has argued extensively that

... human subjects are capable of evaluating what they are, and to the extent that they can shape themselves on this evaluation, are responsible for what they are in a way that other subjects of action and desire... cannot be said to be. It is this kind of evaluation/responsibility which many believe to be essential to our notion of the self.
(1976:282)

Works of literature which present us with character-portraits are useful in investigating this assumption: How *do* we respond to people who fail to realise their capacity for self-reflection? As I have argued, Stevens identifies himself *as* a figure, in Rorty's sense. To do this successfully, he must limit his responses and motives and become fixed as a set of predictable traits. His attempt to be the figure of the dignified butler prevents self-expansion and change. This is because the figure prevents Stevens from reflecting radically upon itself; it silences the plural voices of criticism which are central to what it is to be a person. He therefore tries, and largely succeeds, to be a figure rather than a person who is open to the alternative possibilities suggested by his own internal voices. A figure is fixed, its role is defined and static; it *cannot* undergo radical reflection because that is not its function. Stevens defines himself in terms of his function - to serve the great gentlemen with dignity. His entire existence is crystallised around the fulfilment of that function to the best of his ability. He cannot think of himself apart from that, and in this way, has turned himself into a figure.

By embracing 'figurehood', Stevens attempts to evade responsibility for his life. We do not think that does excuse him from responsibility; on the contrary, we are more

¹ I use these terms interchangeably in what follows.

inclined to blame him because of it. Autonomy is not a necessary condition for being held responsible, although it adds an extra depth and dimension of responsibility. Stevens cannot say he made his own mistakes, he neither chooses to change himself, nor to retain the same values. He does not choose at all; his ultimate justifications and actions are not the result of a responsible, active process of self-reflection at all, and we lose respect for him because of that.

As Taylor argues in 'Responsibility for Self', because self-reflection and 'self-resolution' is "something we do":

...when we do it, we can be held responsible for ourselves; and because it is within limits always up to us to do it, even when we don't - indeed, the nature of our deepest evaluations constantly raises the question whether have them right - we can be called responsible in another sense for ourselves whether we undertake this radical evaluation or not. (1976:299)

In contrast to Stevens, Isabel demonstrates this responsibility and in doing so, retains our respect even though she fails to achieve the autonomy for which she strove. This is because she underwent radical reflection - her final choice to reject autonomy is ironically a result of a long process of such reflection - and will maintain her ability to do so, even if she will be denied the opportunity to exercise it. Isabel takes responsibility for her character and the quality of her life. After lucidly assessing her circumstances she acts with integrity and clairvoyance and will at least return to Rome with clear vision and no illusions. Although we may disagree with her final choice to return and be saddened by the extent to which she accepts the particular, contingent view of marriage she does, we respect her for *making the choice* after deep reflection on herself and her circumstances.

Autonomy, then, taps into a central feature of mature, responsible personhood. The ability to reflect deeply on one's values and take a more fundamental (not simply causal) responsibility for them because of that lends people who exercise that ability a particular quality that demands our respect. If they possess competence as well they can govern their lives according to values and beliefs that they have made their own. We then treat them as worthy of a respect that blindly obedient, manipulated or non-reflective people fail to elicit. We may pity such people; there may be other qualities of theirs to admire, but, all things being equal, we would not choose their lives.

The *caveat*, 'other things being equal', is important. I have argued that because of the centrality of radical reflection for autonomy, autonomy confers an added

dimension to respect in people. However, there are a number of points for which I have *not* argued, and examining them will demonstrate the scope and limitations of autonomy:

Firstly, I have not argued that only autonomous lives can be valuable, nor that only autonomous agents are intrinsically valuable. A person who non-reflectively, or even reflectively but without procedural independence, commits herself to caring solely for others may bring great happiness to herself and others. We may find much to admire in her dedication and selflessness. We certainly, too, owe every person consideration and recognition as ends in themselves.

Secondly, I have not argued that autonomous lives are always valuable. On my account, it is conceivable that an autonomous agent could do great wrong, could possess a thoroughly unpleasant character (although, given my emphasis on lucid and sensitive awareness, it could be argued that this is unlikely). Autonomy is only valuable when exercised in the pursuit of something valuable. An autonomous murderer does not gain moral points for at least doing wrong autonomously - on the contrary, we hold that person more responsible, and therefore more blame-worthy, than non-autonomous wrong-doers. This point in fact just supports my claim that autonomy confers added responsibility on persons because it demands that they act as the result of conscious and deliberate self-analysis. Mme Merle and Osmond are arguably autonomous; their deep respect for convention and the 'form of things' is perhaps the result of reflection. They do not, however, possess appreciable characters and their autonomy would not count in their favour.

Thirdly, then, we also see that autonomy is not the only value. The story of Isabel Archer demonstrates that other values may rationally prove more decisive for a person than autonomy. So although autonomy is a value, it is one of a complex of values for which we may strive as part of a worthwhile life and it may not always prove decisive when values conflict. In this, I agree with Dworkin when he says that while autonomy is "both important normatively and fundamental conceptually", this does not preclude "the possibility that other concepts are both important and fundamental" as well (1988:32).

However, 'all things being equal', an autonomous life is more choiceworthy than a non-autonomous life. In leading our lives according to character ideals and rational plans we reflectively think best express who we wish to be, we express, too, our individuality. A satisfying life is thus granted an added dimension of choiceworthiness if it also autonomous: the autonomous person's character is richer

and more fully authentic than the non-autonomous person's, she can claim to have had a say in her character-formation and she controls her interaction with the world in a manner which is flexible and objective. Autonomy, as I conceive it, is an *achievement* and thus indicative of a certain type of character: Incorporating a state of mind and a set of skills which a person has to work to achieve, its presence demonstrates that she has undergone deep radical reflection and lives lucidly in an environment suited to expressing its conclusions. It is, perhaps, one's good moral luck if one has the capacity for autonomy. However, it is also an achievement gained through one's own – often painful – efforts, and in this way dependent upon one's own character-creation and hard work.

We must not forget that autonomy is realisable only within certain conditions. Although it is an ideal of character, it is conditional upon external factors and here, perhaps, a measure of good moral luck enters again. Because autonomy is not only an internal condition, its possession demonstrates that one's environment is also of a certain type - one which allows us to become the kind of person we reflectively wish to be. To be autonomous therefore indicates that we have the best of both possible worlds - external conditions favourable to self-expression as well as the psychological conditions that enable us to take full advantage of that fact.

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