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Anti-Perfectionism and Autonomy in an Imperfect World: Comments on Joseph Raz's *The Morality of Freedom* 30 Years On

Abstract: There are numerous ways to conceptualize autonomy and to account for its value. Of particular poignancy is the question of whether autonomy has value for those people and cultures that apparently reject liberal principles, otherwise considered. The answer one gives to that question has implications for whether autonomy-based liberalism can or should be seen as a perfectionist political philosophy. I consider these issues by looking again at Joseph Raz's influential account of autonomy and its relation to his liberal perfectionism. I defend a proceduralist, non-perfectionist account of autonomy that, I argue, improves on Raz's original view but in ways that are in keeping with its general spirit.

Keywords: Raz, autonomy, liberalism

1 Introduction

There are numerous ways to conceptualize autonomy and to account for its value. The two tasks are in fact related, as the conception of autonomy one offers affects claims one can plausibly make about the value it has.[1] For some, autonomy has been understood somewhat strictly as a personal ideal marked by individualism and independence in the pursuit of valued forms of life. Such a view shows clearly why self-government, in this sense, is thought to be valuable, but it also means that such an ideal likely fails to resonate with many people's conceptions of their own flourishing because of their living more traditional lives centered on obedience and communal conformity say. And at the other end of the spectrum one might define autonomy in a more value-neutral way which enables one to claim that such a characteristic is consistent with the self-

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[1] For a general discussion of the concept, see Christman (2003).

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understanding of a broader array of persons and cultures, but then the question is left open why autonomy so defined has any value at all.

This echoes a distinction between what have been labeled *procedural* accounts of autonomy, sometimes called *content-neutral* views, and *substantive* accounts. The latter category includes accounts of autonomy that require that the autonomous person have certain convictions, such as the value of their own independent thinking or independence from the control of others.[2] On the other hand, proceduralists attempt to define autonomy in ways that remain broadly value-invariant so that the capacity to govern oneself is specified independently of debates about the good life. In this way, a self-governing person might pursue any manner of obedient, constrained or self-abnegating life paths and retain that status of being labeled autonomous.

What must also be discussed are the social settings in which autonomy is to be evaluated, specifically acknowledging the non-ideal conditions that mark such settings. As we will see, Raz puts much store in the idea that autonomous lives are valuable in modern liberal societies where such an ideal is a 'fact of life' for many or most people. But as I will discuss below, that observation becomes troubled when certain abiding features of such societies are acknowledged and emphasized, specifically the highly heterogeneous nature of their populations (including many groups that do not embrace autonomy as a value) and the presence of people and groups who constantly struggle for respect for their individual and social identities. In light of such factors, we may have to think somewhat differently about the value of autonomy and/or how we should conceive of it.

These background issues will come into play in our examination and appraisal of the view of autonomy developed by Joseph Raz. Raz's magisterial work, *The Morality of Freedom* (1986), has had such a profound impact on moral and political philosophy since its publication that it clearly deserves further study, even after three decades of commentary. In that spirit, I want to use that masterful work as a focal point for a broader discussion of the nature and value of autonomy, both to continue the discussion of the many themes of that book as well as to propose a view of autonomy that can be seen as in some ways an elaboration of Raz's view as well as a departure from it. I want to focus on Raz's view of autonomy here, and specifically the view worked out in *The Morality of Freedom*, but I do so knowing of course that many questions and criticisms can

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2 Though views also can be *weakly* substantive in that they contain conditions that indirectly or contingently imply that autonomous persons will hold certain values, such as the view that self-government requires critical reflection on one's motives and such reflection operates only when a person sees value in so reflecting.

be answered with attention to much other work produced by Raz in the intervening years.

My plan in what follows is to first briefly sketch Raz's account of autonomy in order to emphasize certain features of it. Following that, I will take a brief foray into a description of the kind of non-ideal theorizing that I am undertaking here and of the social imperfections to which the principles and values we are describing must respond. After this, I will lay out a parallel account of self-government that shares many aspects of Raz's view but places them in a different light as well as deviates from it in certain ways. In Section 5, I will then draw out the implications of such reformulations and deviations that, depending on how we should understand Raz's view, either amounts to a criticism or a friendly extension of his original account. I conclude with some reflections on how this parallel account fits into an anti-perfectionist, political theory of democratic legitimacy and hence departs from Raz's perfectionism in significant ways.

2 Raz's perfectionist approach to autonomy

Raz's conception of autonomy is, of course, well known. However, I do want to focus on certain features that will be of interest. For Raz,

> [t]he autonomous person is (part) author of his own life. The ideal of personal autonomy is the vision of people controlling to some degree, their own destiny, fashioning it through successive decisions throughout their lives. (1986, p. 371)

This does not mean that one is the sole *source* of the conditions of one's existence, as many aspects of our lives are unchosen and in some ways uncontrollable in ways that do not undercut our autonomy. Who our parents are, for example, and the conditions of our upbringing, but also countless other aspects of our inherited social existence, are aspects of our identity that we find ourselves with and either accept or resist but clearly did not choose.

The major conditions of self-government, for Raz, are these: mental abilities that allow a person to form and act on her intentions and plans; independence from coercion and manipulation; and an adequate range of options. These mental conditions – what I and others label as *competence conditions* for autonomy – include rationality, the ability to comprehend the means required to realize one's goals, mental faculties necessary to plan actions, and so on.

Concerning the values that move one to action, as well as the conditions of the formation of those values, Raz is a bit less precise, but a general picture

emerges. He says at one point that autonomous persons *identify* with their choices, and he cites Harry Frankfurt as the source of such a requirement (1986, p. 382). He also says that a person who is 'alienated' from her motives and the forces that drive her to action is not autonomous. Later we will see that identification and non-alienation are not perfect compliments, at least not under some descriptions of identification.

The point here is that Raz is attempting to capture what have been called *authenticity conditions* for autonomy, namely the circumstances where a person's values, motives, and desires are truly her own and not the product of surreptitious or alien forces (see Christman 2003). Raz says at another point that a person's history matters for her autonomy, in that how she came to develop her values, etc., matter to whether she is self-governing (1986, p. 371). The idea is that a person's choices over the course of her life largely shape the person she becomes and these choices are based on her own authentic values.

What authenticity comes to mean, however, will need more spelling out as we proceed, since Raz himself admits that while all of this is a matter of degree, it is often a tricky issue where to draw the line between the autonomous and heteronomous life. However, while I am focusing on the view developed in *The Morality of Freedom*, some guidance on this issue might be provided in Raz's later essay 'When We Are Ourselves' where he is concerned to distinguish being active and being passive in our lives (1999, pp. 5–21). There he argues that the key to being 'active' in directing our lives is responsiveness to reason. We are ourselves, he writes, when we are properly responsive to reason as we see it. While this is helpful, it is not sufficient to capture the authenticity condition for autonomy that we need (nor did Raz likely intend it to do so), for we may well respond to reason as we see it while acting on values and motives that are not our own, that is, which are the result of ideological conditioning, brainwashing or undue social pressure. Raz's reference to history cited earlier will likely help here, and I will return to that.

Further guidance comes from the condition of independence, specifically non-manipulation. For there, Raz argues that manipulation involves not interference with choices but rather externally introduced processes that '[pervert] the way that a person reaches decisions, forms preferences or adopts goals' (1986, p. 378). Also, Raz's account of manipulation is such that manipulative processes are always the result of another person's will. I would argue, however, that many processes of self-development that undercut autonomy will not be the result of anyone's intentional action, even if persons are involved. That is, while it is true that in many cases another person's intentional actions are the source of the manipulation in question (and consequent loss of autonomy), often more diffuse and impersonal social forces conspire to produce this result. Given that

all our values have developed as a response to social conditioning, education, and cultural factors, the question is which ones of these support and which undercut the development of authentic selves? What we will need, is a fuller accounting of what Raz means there by 'perverts the way a person reaches decisions': that is, what are the proper processes of self-governing personal development and which are autonomy-undermining?

Continuing with Raz's view, one of the most important conditions he adds to the account of autonomy he defends is the requirement of having *adequate options* from which to choose during the course of one's life (1986, pp. 374f). The specification of the range of such options is driven by examples – of a person whose only choices are trivial (The Man in the Pit) and one who faces nothing by highly treacherous choices (The Hounded Woman). In both cases the range is inadequate because it does not allow the person to pursue what he or she takes to be good projects or may take to be good in the future.

Raz says that for his purposes he does not need a 'general doctrine' of the adequacy of options. However, he does say that such a range must enable the person to exercise 'all the capacities human beings have an innate drive to exercise, as well as to decline to develop them' (1986, p. 375). This last caveat about declining the exercise of innate capacities helps Raz distinguish autonomy from self-realization, for a self-governing person may well choose to leave many of her talents undeveloped. Further, he claims that such a range must include choices with long term consequences as well as short-term effects; and it must include enough variety to allow the person to exercise discernment in guiding her life by her own lights.

Besides this, however, Raz does not specify the general parameters of a proper range of options required for autonomy. No doubt this is because such a range will be highly variable and contingent on any number of local factors. Below I will try to fill in this picture in a spirit suggested by his remarks that may help with this specification.

Now for Raz, the necessity for having a range of open options follows from his conception of pluralism (or more precisely *competitive pluralism*, where different ways of life have incommensurable value and include virtues that are inconsistent with the virtues of the others, see (Raz 1988, p. 164)). It is also linked to the idea that for autonomy to have *value* it must be such that the autonomous person is able to pursue the good, or at least one of a number of goods available for her in her society. And the societies we are imagining wherein autonomy has such value are those that are organized around the assumption that people can and should be able to direct their own lives for themselves.

But here is the focal point from which we will pivot to an alternative variation on the concept of autonomy in the next section. For Raz claims that autonomy has value in modern industrialized ('Western') societies as a constitutive conditions of the social values available in such settings: 'The value of personal autonomy is a fact of life' he writes '[s]ince we live in a society whose social forms are to a considerable extent based on individual choice, and since our options are limited by what is available in our society, we can prosper in it only if we can be successfully autonomous' (1986, p. 394). The broad social environment of such societies is built around the primacy of choice over major aspects of life, such as whom to marry and what lifestyle or career to pursue.

One problem with basing the value of autonomy on this observation is that no such 'western' society is homogeneously organized this way. Within all of them are significant segments of the population who don't share this view, who reject the value of autonomy as defined here. Raz, of course, acknowledges this, as his moral pluralism commits him to the view that there are irreconcilably rival ways to lead a flourishing life. However, a society built around the importance of individual choice will produce certain significant *disadvantages* to those who do not see the inherent value of a self-authored life, and we may want to account for such disadvantages in the basic contours of the political morality we favor.

This issue picks up on the distinction between substantive, value-laden, accounts of autonomy and procedural views (which purport to be broadly value neutral). For to specify the kinds of options definitive of autonomy with too much of a specification of their value is to utilize a conception of autonomy that will be highly contentious and allegedly parochial. Raz's commitment to competitive pluralism indicates a need to gravitate toward the proceduralist perspective, but as we will see, this is not as easy for him to navigate as might first appear.

Of course, this is no criticism of Raz's pluralistic outlook itself, for he readily accepts that ways of life that feature open options and are centered around individual autonomy certainly conflict with those which emphasize obedience, tradition and conformity. He gives the example of a system of arranged marriage to show the contrast with the social structures of liberal cultures that value individual choice over one's marriage partner (1986, pp. 392 f.).

However, I will suggest a slightly different tack, one quite in keeping with the general tenor of Raz's overall view but with some crucial departures I will note. That is, I want to offer a parallel account of autonomy that places the condition of adequate options in a slightly different light, and in so doing will count many of those who participate in obedient, traditional and conformist cultures as themselves autonomous after all.

Before getting to that, however, let me take a very brief detour concerning non-ideal theory that will help support these conclusions.

3 Non-ideal social conditions

I want to emphasize that although the 'modern, western' societies that Raz intends his views to apply to can generally be described as liberal democracies, there are aspects of them that should be emphasized in our appraisal of the value of autonomy in such settings. As we know, all societies, including liberal democracies, include people and groups who have suffered and continue to endure abject social disadvantage. Of relevance to our present concern are the ways that groups are systematically denigrated and marginalized in the broad social dynamic of these societies. Discrimination, segregation, and exclusion plague many persons and groups in advanced democracies despite the general commitment in those societies to equality of opportunity and formal anti-discrimination, as well as varying levels of welfare state support for struggling populations.

For such persons and groups, the enjoyment of autonomy requires social support: affirmative policies of recognition and respect to counter these malignant social tendencies. Members of marginalized groups require both material and social resources that afford them greater capacity to act on the value of their identities and ways of life, as well as a degree of social recognition needed for them to effectively pursue life plans that they value in the social settings in which they live and work. Consider support for language skills and cultural practices: open options are inadequate in the service of self-government unless positive support is provided to enable people to effectively evaluate and pursue options open to them.

This is hardly news, of course, and Raz's own views about multiculturalism and national self-determination (as well as the social nature of human interests) indicate his sensitivity to such phenomena (see Raz 1994). However, we should note in this regard that although autonomy, on his view, is tied to social structures that support it, he does not include 'social' or 'relational' conditions in his account of self-government itself. Such conditions have come in various forms, from Hegelian recognition in views such as that of Axel Honneth (and Joel Anderson) to feminist accounts of relational autonomy (see Anderson and Honneth 2005; see also Westlund 2009). Such conditions in general require that others' attitudes toward and treatment of individuals are a constitutive element of those latter individuals' autonomy. Only if others relate to us with a degree of

care, recognition and respect (depending on the view in question) can we be said to be self-governing on such theories.

Below I will offer a brief account of the relational elements of autonomy that, I think is broadly consistent with Raz's approach, but here I merely want to emphasize that for impoverished and marginalized persons, autonomy will be compromised not by the narrowness of their options, the lack of mental capacity or a lack of independence, but from the lack of support and recognition for their identities and ways of life. Alienation from people's social condition because of marginalizing, discriminatory, oppressive and violent reactions from others is as much of a fact of life in liberal democracies as is the valorization of choice, mobility, and individual self-authorship.

Again, there is nothing surprising here, but let us keep these observations in mind as we attempt to develop a view of autonomy that might properly respond to them as well as capture the core idea of self-government that views like Raz's attempt to foreground.

4 A proceduralist cousin of Razian autonomy

As I noted, Raz views autonomy as self-authorship, and he included requirements of mental capabilities, independence and adequate options in his account of that condition. We noted two elements of the account, however, that called for further theorizing, namely a specific view on how to determine when one's option range is 'adequate' and a fuller account of the authenticity of the values that drive autonomous choice. Let us turn to an alternative conception of autonomy that may help to fill in such descriptions.

On the view I want to sketch here,[3] autonomy includes competency conditions generally in keeping with Raz's view: the capacity to form and execute intentions, formulate plans, and choose minimally rational means to carry them out. I would add that certain capacities for affective responsiveness, empathy, and care will be required for a broad range of choices and roles, such as parenting, friendship, and love that require them.[4]

Moreover, there will be certain sorts of social and interpersonal *relations* that will be required for a person to develop the kinds of deliberative and choice-

3 What follows is a brief and revised version of the view I develop in (Christman 2009).
4 This is true not only for one to *succeed* in pursuing these role-defined pursuits but for one to undertake them in the first place. One cannot *be* a mother or a friend (under modern conditions) if one lacks any capacity for empathy and care for significant others.

making capacities that autonomy requires. Not only a caring and a supportive upbringing but ongoing relations of respect for one's normative authority will be required for a person to function as an effective decision maker in many or most contexts. Note, however, that the relational conditions I refer to here are not inherently required for self-governing agency (as some have claimed) as, for example, would be required by a Hegelian conception of the subject in which interpersonal recognition in part *constitutes* self governing agency. Rather, my view is that such relational dynamics are *contingently* related to the core capabilities of deliberation and effective choice named in the model because they are, generally speaking, instrumentally necessary for them (the core capabilities) to function (see, e. g., Mackenzie 2008).

What is needed in addition, however, are conditions that specify when the values and motives that move a person's choices are authentically her own. Central to the account of such authenticity, I think, must be a conception of the *self* involved in the exercise of agency, specifically the contours of the agent to indicate what is truly her or part of her life and identity as opposed to what happens to her or what is imposed on her. More specifically, we need an account that captures such a person's *perspective*, the particular way she has of leading her life. To capture this sort of evaluative orientation of the person, I make use of the concept of *practical identity*, an idea I take from Christine Korsgaard but adapt in several ways. Practical identities, in Korsgaard's sense, are those self-descriptions under which one sees one's life as worth pursuing (see Korsgaard 1996). Such a self-schema can be characterized by a set of identity categories that carry with them core normative commitments. To be this or that type of person – a professor, a parent, a loyal friend – is to be committed to a set of values that provide reasons to act in particular ways. I would insist, further, that such identities be understood diachronically in that they can only be conceived over a span of time that makes sense of memories but also organizes future plans.

Further, the value orientations that function over time in this way are generally capacious enough to allow for change and growth, so that if I conceive of myself as an educator and scholar, this is consistent with a decision later in life to change fields, or to retire from institutional settings and pursue an unstructured and solitary life. On the other hand, if I were to undergo a more radical change, morphing, say, into an anti-social, anti-intellectual hedonist who plays video games all day and never picked up another book, we would say that I have, practically speaking, changed identities. In which case, what were once options that were necessary for me to pursue what I valued would no longer count as such and hence would be irrelevant to my autonomy.

In addition, practical identities that guide our reflective evaluations in this way, and as such they do more than provide a propositional basis for arguments in support of our lower order judgments, such as our decisions to treat particular desires as action guiding. Practical identities perform this function in fact – when they are articulated in this form they often are part of practical syllogisms comprising our reasons for actions. But more than this, basic commitments of this sort perform what we can call an *orienting* function: they order the moral world in a way that sets the stage for our evaluations themselves. This is akin to what Barbara Herman called 'rules of moral salience' (1985), though I think they function more broadly as evaluative structures and not simply moral ones. Also, I am not sure they are best understood as 'rules'. Still, Herman describes these normative factors as aspects of the self that

> structure an agent's perception of his situation so that what he perceives is a world with moral features. They enable him to pick out those elements of his circumstance or of his proposed actions which require moral attention. (Herman 1985, p. 418)

A committed Catholic looks at (and swallows) a consecrated host as the body of Christ; such a person does not merely have as a belief that 'this object is the body of Christ' she *experiences* that wafer as a holy object. Were it to fall to the ground or be stomped on by an unconcerned passerby, she would be shocked and offended, in a reaction that shows the function of a practical identity as ordering her mode of understanding the world, not merely a set of beliefs that she can consider as propositions. One's practical identity operates as one's overall evaluative sensibility.

This functional feature of practical identities is important in understanding how they can speak for the agent. Other features of practical identities ground this point further: First, practical identity structures and guides reflection, so that when we consider our motives and decisions we do so in a way that manifests our basic commitments. Such identities explain and rationalize our motives over a variety of conditions and over time. Practical identities also organize memory, in that having a working self-concept structured by value commitments of this sort is necessary to engage in active construction of narrative first-person memories.[5]

Reference to diachronic practical identities (our evaluative orientations) stands in for other theorists' attempts to ground self-reflection in agency. For

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5 This claim has been made explicitly in the psychological literature on memory: 'Another way to put this is that normal autobiographical memory and reflective, temporally extended agency, is mutually constitutive' according to (Klein et al. 2004). For discussion of memory and its relation to self-concept and autonomy, see (Christman 2008).

example, Harry Frankfurt famously claimed that second order identification with our motives secured our autonomy (freedom). And in his later view, Frankfurt argued (1988) that only if such identification is grounded in the agent's fundamental *cares* can she be autonomous. The difference between cares and practical identities as I use the term, however, is that the latter are described functionally, as processes by which a person orients her evaluative judgments, and not commitments that she has or fixed relations with loved ones that simply amount to what Frankfurt calls volitional necessities. Second, the view of autonomy built on practical identities is fundamentally diachronic and hence 'historical' in a way that Frankfurt explicitly rejects. On my view, a person is autonomous if she can reflectively accept her motives *in light of their history* without alienation, grounded in her ongoing practical identity. How that identity was formed is a crucial factor in determining whether such a person is self-governing or not.

So on the view sketched here, a person is autonomous if from the perspective of her diachronic practical identity she can reflectively accept her motives given her history and social condition. By 'accept' here, I mean fit into an intelligible personal narrative that consistently guides her actions and grounds her reasons for acting without alienation. And by 'alienation' I mean without feelings of self-abnegation, deep and painful conflict, and internal resistance.

This idea of alienation, by the way, is similar to Raz's description. He writes, a 'person who feels driven by forces which he disowns but cannot control, who hates or detests the desires which motivate him or the aims that he is pursuing, does not lead an autonomous life' (1986, p. 382). However, he makes this observation just after he asserts that the autonomous person must identify with her choices, citing Frankfurt as the source of such an idea. But as many have pointed out, identification is problematic as a condition of autonomy, mostly because it is ambiguous between the overly weak requirement that we simply acknowledge this or that trait of ours *as* ours (including our compulsions and addictions) or the overly strong idea of identifying with an ideal or a hero. What I am claiming here is closer to Frankfurt's later view that we must *accept* our motives without feelings of resistance and repulsion as part of our evaluative orientations and self-narratives.[6]

Now the reflection envisioned here need not be ongoing, as this view is consistent with the obvious fact that much self-governed activity is undertaken automatically, passionately and with immediate commitment that leaves no room for reflective consideration. This is similar to Raz's view. The autonomous person has the capacity to reflect and is disposed to reflectively accept her

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6 For discussion of these objections, see (Christman 2003).

actions, though she may not explicitly do so in many cases. What matters is that she is not alienated in forming and acting on her intentions grounded in her diachronic identity.

Much more needs to be said to fill out this account. For now, however, I merely want to emphasize two points: First, notice that the model makes no direct reference to open options or an adequate range of choice. That is because the range of options required for autonomous agency is a fully *derivative* condition, one contingently attached to the requirements of self-government defined in terms of practical identities. The options required to pursue projects grounded in that identity will vary according to their demands.

Other factors, however, will affect the range of options required by autonomy: The first is that in order to adequately reflect on one's values one must be able to respond to reasons. This responsiveness implies that one must be in a position to resist aspects of one's identity that come to seem unreasonable or untenable upon reflection.[7] In many cases, the possibility of change, *were one to make this judgment*, must be available to the person. (But notice the conditional nature of this requirement: without the judgment that one is alienated, options to change are irrelevant to one's self-government, at least at this level.)

Second, there are innumerable ways to pursue aspects of one's practical identity, even as it remains relatively stable. There are different ways to be a mother, a philosopher, a plumber. Having all of those ways closed off but one, say, would rob one of the ability to shape one's way of life for oneself. Therefore, autonomy-supporting social structures should include enough variation in modes of personal existence that one can say that one is acting on one's identity oneself and not merely being forced into a role.

But again, the adequacy of those options cannot be given in the abstract. What must be worked out in practice is a mode of social organization and policy structure that allows people to lead reflectively self-accepting lives. Having options will depend entirely on what's needed for that. The argument for this approach is that what will *count* as a restraint or an option will be a function of the agent's practical identity – her evaluative perspective – for without reference to such perspective, it is entirely indeterminate whether any particular object or open space should be classified as an obstacle or option. Are my options increased when the desk across the room is moved to a different spot? Perhaps, if events conspire so that I must move in a path that the desk blocks. But absent even oblique reference to plans, action sequences and (hence) values

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7 This is to adopt the version of reason responsiveness that Raz uses, namely that it's responsiveness to reason as one sees it.

and preferences by actual agents, the counting up of options will be meaningless.[8]

So far, one might see this as a trivial shift in emphasis, entirely in keeping with Raz's stated view (though he might object to particular details). But this different emphasis will matter to how we determine the social policies and practices in a given location that are needed to provide support for people's capacity for and exercise of autonomy. To claim that having a range of options is an independent criterion for autonomy might imply that opening up options and encouraging change is a first priority in an autonomy-supporting society; while seeing autonomy as reflective self-acceptance, with opportunities for alternative paths in life a secondary and derivative requirement, will not have this implication. More on that point in a moment.

Another more direct point of contrast with Raz's view, however, concerns the relation between autonomy as I define it here and value. For notice that on the proceduralist view laid out here, there is no requirement that the autonomous person must pursue the good, except in the sense that she pursue things that mesh with her ongoing evaluative orientation (so in that sense she must aim at what she herself takes as minimally good). But there is no requirement that she aim at *the* good, either for autonomy to obtain or for it to have value.

Raz defends his claim that autonomy has value only when exercised in pursuit of valuable options. He argues for this at one point by asking the rhetorical question, 'Is the autonomous wrongdoer a morally better person than the non-autonomous wrongdoer?' (1986, p. 167). But as Jeremy Waldron points out, the status of the autonomous *person* is not at issue, it is her autonomy. One could similarly question whether intelligence and sensitivity are valuable traits by pointing out intelligent and sensitive murderers (Waldron 1989). The point is that being self-governing is a value for the person enjoying that characteristic.[9] What she does in the enjoyment of that valuable trait is another matter.

Raz's view on this point is connected to one of the central tenets of his practical and political philosophy, his perfectionist pluralism. In particular, he claims that the political duty to promote valuable ways of life and to repress repugnant ones is tied to the value of autonomy because such value rests on the possibility of such valuable pursuits. Raz's views on such matters are complex and wide ranging, and I don't have time (or expertise) to appraise them generally here. However, I think the connection between autonomy and this kind of

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8 For further defense of this point, see (Taylor 1985) and (Christman 1991).

9 By that I don't mean it is a value from *her* point of view; rather it is a value for her from any point of view.

pluralist perfectionism remains controversial, and in the following section, I want to briefly describe how a non-perfectionist account of the value of autonomy might be given.

5 Implications for non-ideal conditions

In the view of autonomy I defend, then, we meet the authenticity condition of autonomous agency when we can reflect on our motives and characteristics as an intelligible personal narrative structured by our practical identities, without alienation. Also, since a practical identity involves basic value orientations and moral commitments, such structures often reflect social roles and socially defined positions in the world, such as being a mother or member of the military or philosophy professor.[10] Respecting the autonomy of another, then, implies acknowledging the importance of those social identities. For were an individual to reflect on her personal characteristics, actions, memories, and the like, in the way required of autonomy, she must use concepts gleaned from the language(s) she speaks and the subtleties of meaning provided by the social world within which that language is developed. The degree to which that self-interpretation is unified or meaningful turns on the degree of understanding achieved in one's interaction with actual and potential 'interpreters' of that account. What is needed for the level of self-intelligibility required by autonomy is that the subject of a life is a reflecting subject whose self-interpretations make enough sense of her judgments and actions that a relatively coherent character can be seen at their center.

As we will see in a moment, seeing autonomy in this way has implications concerning social priorities in the protection of the self-government of the members of various cultural groups. What must be noted here, though, is how some people might at first glance *reject* the value of autonomy as it has traditionally been understood in the liberal tradition. That is, many do not embrace the idea that being the author of one's own life – even in the minimal and fluid sense that Raz appears to intend – is a value for them. They might, for example, see their lives as flourishing only insofar as it is shaped according to

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10 Such value matrices are complex and, as I mentioned, may well include unresolved tensions. Gloria Anzaldúa describes in sensitive detail the ways that one's identity along one dimension (for her, her status as a Latina) will systematically conflict with one's identity along another (for her, being a lesbian). See (Anzaldúa 1987).

the demands of God or the traditions of their community or by the requirements of strict social roles.

Raz acknowledges such social complexity and indeed has done much to show how a liberal society can include practices of toleration and freedom that properly protects the interests of such groups.[11] He also accepts the idea that many will reject the value of autonomy in modern societies, though he argues that in such societies autonomy (as a value) is a 'fact of life' and one can flourish there only if one accepts that the requirements of autonomous living are supported.

However, I think it may be too hasty to conclude that people who see their lives as fundamentally guided by obedience to others (or an external force) rather than self-directed have adopted a value scheme that rejects autonomy. For on the view of autonomy that I have sketched, many of those who see their lives as flourishing only in carrying out the law of God or following tradition, and so on, will in fact count as autonomous. That is because if they can reflectively accept the narrative identities that guide that perspective, and do so without alienation and in light of how these identities developed, they count as self-governing in my view. This is because, among other things, the view I sketch is procedural and not substantive. It makes no demands on the content of the value commitments embraced by autonomous persons (except weakly and indirectly in that values that would undercut the competence to reflect on oneself must be ruled out).

Moreover, viewing autonomy as grounded in persons' practical identities helps us respond to a standard objection raised about liberal political theories, namely that they problematically valorize choice and mobility over stability and tradition. This worry comes in many forms, from the old communitarian objections to more recent claims of liberal insensitivity toward non-liberal cultures. But note that, in a way that can be contrasted with Raz's presentation of his view, my conception of autonomy sees the importance of open options as derivative from the core idea of self-government, the ability to lead self-accepting lives in a socially supportive space. Therefore, insofar as persons and groups need social resources to *support* their self-defining practices and identities rather than stressing the need for critical reflection and change, then respect for their autonomy requires that support rather than expanding options for escape and self-transformation.

This point helps us respond as well to the worries raised about marginalized and victimized groups. It may well be that mobility, choice, and opportunities to refashion oneself are not values that have a high priority for people who are

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11 "Liberal Multiculturalism" Raz (1994). See also (Margalit and Raz 1990).

struggling to simply exist in a respectful environment. Rather, they require social support and recognition in order to function as self-governing agents.

For example, we can reflect on the current and past experiences of members of the gay (and LGBT) community, for example, whose identities have been (and still are) systematically denigrated in many parts of even liberal democratic societies. The ability of many such persons to pursue self-governing lives is threatened by a social environment that fails to recognize their identities as dignified. What is not lacking, however, is a range of options other than their chosen identity, while what is needed is support for that path itself. So stressing the ability to pursue *other* options – to act as a straight person for example or to remain as a biological male or female rather than transitioning – is an insulting form of social rejection and not a respectful acknowledgement of their identity-based needs. Autonomy, in this case, requires affirmation and support not the option to change.

Similarly, certain traditional religious ways of life that stress obedience and conformity have faced their own brand of denigration and marginalization. In societies where personal choice and mobility are so stressed, members of communities that don't emphasize those values face unique and profound challenges to their ability to lead their own self-accepting lives. Providing more options and stressing the importance of critical reappraisal of all of one's commitments, as many accounts of autonomy central to liberalism have traditionally done, does little to respond to these challenges.

This relates closely to what Kymlicka called the 'social confirmation argument' (1989, pp. 61 ff., though also, 1991). Kymlicka considers the claim that social conceptions of citizens require that "considerable social confirmation" is needed to have confidence in their abilities as reflective agents. This entails that governments should 'encourage certain communal values, and discourage non-conforming values, in order to ensure that [...] judgments are confirmed by society' (1989, p. 61). Individualist liberalism, critics contend, not only protects choice-making and the questioning of social ties, it supports social institutions that *encourage* such individualized questioning, thereby weakening of the very social connections that give meaning to the lives of those citizens.

Kymlicka's reply is that this is really a sociological question and cannot be determined up front by political theory. Moreover, liberal theory implies that supporting people's sense of their own effective sovereignty take place through the empowerment of their abilities to rationally reflect upon and appraise their social connections, while alternative, community-based methods of shoring up social connections bypass those reflective processes and work 'behind the backs

of the individuals involved – i. e., it generates confidence via a process which people can't acknowledge as the grounds of their confidence' (1989, p. 62).

However, there is no reason that political institutions designed to promote the socially-structured self-respect that citizens as social beings may require need not operate 'behind the backs' of these citizens. Clearly, a conception of the person which includes basic interests that require social support, as when we postulate that citizens are socio-historically structured, can be a publicly acknowledged provision in the design and normative structure of political institutions. It can be part of the design of a democratic polity, for example, that social groups can receive special representation so as to support those social or cultural practices that give the needed context for the pursuit of basic interests guaranteed by state institutions.

None if this is very new, and in fact Raz himself has defended the support of cultural practices in liberal societies in parallel ways. He writes,

> There should be a generous policy of public support for autonomous cultural institutions, such as communal charities, voluntary organizations, libraries, museums, theatre, dance, musical or other artistic groups. Here (as in education) the policy calls for allocation of public resources. (1995, p. 190)

However, in defending this kind of multiculturalism and social support for groups, Raz does not tie it directly to the requirements of individual autonomy. Indeed, he argues (with Avishai Margalit) that a case for national self-determination should not rest on the inherent value of cultures and the tie between such value and political activity (Margalit and Raz 1990, pp. 542 f.).

His view, as I understand it, is that various collective ways of life that have value for people, including those that stress tradition and conformity, can and/ or should be promoted as part of advancing the well-being of citizens and providing meaningful options for them to choose and pursue. However, on the view I am developing, no claim need be made about the inherent value of ways of life; the only value in question is autonomy (for these purposes), and the argument is that the ability to continue with one's self-defining way of life is required for the reflective self-acceptance definitive of that trait and so for these reasons such social forms should be given special support (subject to a number of qualifications and caveats of course).

As I said, this may merely be a difference in emphasis with what Raz has written on the subject. But as I said, Raz ties his views on these matters to his perfectionist pluralism and the duty of societies to advance valuable ways of life. And my view of autonomy is anti-perfectionist. Indeed, the question of the value of autonomy in the minimal procedural sense that I define it rests on political

considerations, not on the kind of perfectionist theorizing that Raz favors. Let me close, then, with a few words about this deviation from Raz's theory.

Raz emphasizes the irreducible plurality of valuable forms of life, and he stresses that values are tied in many ways to social context and history. He claims, however, that in liberal cultures, flourishing depends on accepting the fundamental importance of individual autonomy, and as we saw his view of autonomy features the need for open options of a certain sort as a basic component of self-government. Protecting individual choice, mobility and opportunities to change one's circumstances are basic values in such societies.

However, on my view, autonomy is part of a vision of *democracy* rather than liberalism per se, and the commitment to democracy is seen as political rather than perfectionist. In outline, the view is the following: Since selves are, in variable ways, socially constituted and values are defined in terms of interaction with others, our abilities to pursue valued ends are both defined and constrained by the social dynamics in which we engage in those pursuits. Political structures and other institutions of power shape and codify those dynamics in broad and robust ways. That power is legitimate only if it can be seen as the outcome of collective processes of which we are a part or our basic interests are properly represented. These processes and the values that shape them must be seen as minimally harmonizing with our own judgments, our perspectives about what is valuable to pursue given the fact that we live among people with contrasting values and who (like us) are products of the contingencies of history, both their own and society's.[12] The legitimacy of these social processes must rest, then, on the way they are controlled and produced, and only if citizen's perspectives and interests are properly represented in those processes will that legitimacy be attained.

The view here is broadly Rawlsian in spirit but, again, it stresses the centrality of democracy rather than liberalism in the traditional sense. Others following Rawls have claimed that basic institutions of justice reflect the autonomy of citizens in significant ways. In particular, theorists of deliberative democracy have stressed that the processes of public deliberation by which basic institutions are legitimized collectively embody the self-government that individual autonomy manifests. Joshua Cohen, for example, claims that

> by requiring justification on terms acceptable to others, deliberative democracy provides
> for a form of political autonomy: that all who are governed by collective decisions – who

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12 This claim can be understood to be supported by Rawls's observations about what he called 'the burdens of judgment' which will be discussed further below. See (Rawls 1993, pp. 54–58).

are expected to govern their own conduct by those decisions – must find the bases of those decisions acceptable. (1996, p. 416)

Now recall that Raz's perfectionism rests in part on the view that autonomy has value insofar as self-governing people pursue the good, and governments have a general duty to promote ideals of the good as part of protection of autonomy. On my view, there is no such duty in any direct way, since autonomy is seen as valuable not because of its relation to the pursuit of the good but in its relation to the values connected with collective self-government (democracy). People who live in such settings are committed to the value of autonomy just insofar as it is one of a family of related values which together must be accepted as mutually supporting for citizens to see the institutions based on them as legitimate. Specifically one must accept the value of the equal status of autonomous citizens in the collective determination of social policies and all of the correlative rights and values connected to the proper functioning of these collective institutions. The force of the 'must' here (in 'one must accept') is not simply moral, based on the moral superiority of democratic ways of life, but a requirement of legitimacy based on the requirements of collective acceptance of the institutions that shape one's social existence.

Of course, such a view presupposes that people's commitment to equality and shared governance is already secured in the population, at least in the abstract, since it is not derived from some free-standing moral argument. However, the postulate that people in certain (most) modern locales already share that commitment has a status similar, I think, to Raz's conjecture about the dominance of the value of choice in contemporary liberal societies. It is a firm and abiding component of many or most people's deeply held political morality and as such can provide the basis for a political argument for the value of its component parts.

So, in sum, I have spelled out Raz's account of autonomy and noted two areas where more detail about the conditions for self-government were needed, namely what counts as authentic value development and what determines the adequacy of the range of options needed for autonomy. By developing an alternative approach to autonomy I tried to show how those gaps might be filled. However, the particular view I develop emphasizes the support for authentic identities over the need for open options (though the latter are related to the former), and it deviates from Raz's perfectionist account of political morality. On this latter issue, I merely outlined what a non-perfectionist account would look like but did nothing to defend it against various objections that have been raised about similar approaches.

This obviously skirts any number of complex and expansive questions about perfectionist and political approaches to the justification of principles, most of which have been asked and answered in the broad and profound work of Jospeh Raz. If nothing more, I hope these remarks at least stimulate further careful consideration of his immensely important contributions to the practical reflections of our age.

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