

AUTONOMY AND THE MORAL AGENT

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## ABSTRACT

The development of personal autonomy is often considered to be an important objective of education in general, and moral education in particular. This paper is an attempt to clarify what is meant by the concept of personal autonomy, to justify its promotion as a personal and educational ideal, and to examine the connection between personal autonomy and moral agency.

Four conditions are found to be necessary for the possession and exercise of personal autonomy: freedom of choice, authenticity, rational reflection and strength of will. The promotion of personal autonomy is justified on at least four kinds of grounds: for its extrinsic value, for its intrinsic worth, for its educational significance, and for its close conceptual connection with the notion of moral agency. The criterion of 'relating to other people's interests' is taken to be the most important factor in distinguishing between ordinary autonomous acts and acts of moral agency.

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## INTRODUCTION

Most educators believe that the development of personal autonomy is an important educational objective.

The importance of personal autonomy is particularly stressed by those who are concerned with moral education. The purpose of this paper is:

- (1) to clarify what is meant by personal autonomy,
  - (2) to justify the promotion of personal autonomy, and
- to examine the conceptual connection between personal autonomy and moral agency.

The term 'autonomy' embodies a host of many different, interrelated concepts. Inspection of the etymological origin of the word reveals that the Greek word autonomia was commonly applied to the city state. The state had autonomia if it was a self-governing, independent entity, free from external rules and controls. We often speak of an autonomous nation in reference to a self-governing country, a country that has political independence but not necessarily economic or any other form of independence. When we speak of a colony gaining its independence or autonomy from a mother country, we sometimes speak of the dependent state gaining its freedom. 'Freedom' used in this sense does not necessarily imply the absence of constraint for private citizens however, since a strict dictatorship may also be a free country in the sense that it is a self-governing, autonomous nation.

'Autonomy' may be used in reference to institutions. We may speak of an autonomous school (e.g. a private school or a parochial school, independent of the public school system), university or religious organization. The term is also used in botany to refer to a condition which results from internal causes; it is used in biology to refer to parts of the nervous system, formerly thought to function independently of the central nervous system. Autonomy is a multifaceted concept used in many different senses. In this paper we shall focus on that aspect of autonomy which has the greatest educational significance, and which may be referred to as personal autonomy.

The concept of personal autonomy and the popularity of the term 'autonomy' are often attributed to Kant:

A man was autonomous on Kant's view if in his actions he bound himself by moral laws legislated by his own reason, as opposed to being governed by his inclinations. And no doubt Kant is the source for Piaget's employment of the term.

Our analysis of the concept of personal autonomy (henceforth to be referred to simply as autonomy) goes beyond Kant's view that one is autonomous if he binds himself by moral laws legislated by his own reason, to include those situations in which one might bind himself by considerations of aesthetics, etiquette, expediency, prudence etc. We will see that autonomy is conceptually connected to moral agency, but that many situations arise in which autonomy may be exercised out of the moral realm.

There often exists, among teachers who value the promotion of autonomy as an educational objective, a great deal of confusion over what autonomy entails, and how it may be properly taught, promoted, developed or instilled. Some teachers mistake manifestations of something resembling a state of anomie in students for the exercise of autonomy. Others often accept as fact the assumption that the best way to develop autonomy in students is to treat them as if they are already autonomous. In some cases students are given a carte blanche to decide for themselves what they will do as if the ability to make autonomous decisions comes naturally to those who are given the opportunity to exercise freedom of choice. Teachers who make this assumption seem to be equating freedom of choice with autonomy while ignoring the other necessary conditions (specified in Chapter One). Conceivably, an individual could require sound structure and firm direction to measure himself against before he is able to reach a highly autonomous level of development. Another possibility is that development in achieving autonomy could be impaired as a result of the imposition of too much freedom of choice on growing individuals who operate at low levels of autonomy with regard to making authentic, well-considered choices. In any case, the educator must be aware that since people are not autonomous when they are born, and since many people reach old age without attaining very high levels of autonomy, some learning process which is not purely maturational is involved in becoming autonomous.<sup>2</sup>



The teacher must, of course, concern himself with those methods of teaching and learning which most effectively enhance this process. Although considerations about effective methodology are empirical matters, some light may be shed on them by the analysis of the concept of autonomy and the justification for its promotion as an educational objective. Whether the work of the philosopher can provide very much assistance to the empirical researcher or not, we may be certain that valuable educational research on how autonomy may be promoted is virtually impossible without a clear understanding of the kinds of conditions included and excluded by the concept of autonomy. Chapter One is concerned with the delineation of those conditions.

Whether the educational objective under consideration is the promotion of Latin, English grammar, arts and crafts, mathematics or autonomy, it requires justification. Chapter Two is concerned with the justification of the promotion of autonomy on four kinds of grounds: as something that is extrinsically valuable, intrinsically worthwhile, educationally significant, and central to the concept of moral agency. The connection between autonomy and moral agency is specified at length in Chapter Three.

## FOOTNOTES

1. R.F.Dearden, "Autonomy and Education," in R.F.Dearden, P.H.Hirst and R.S.Peters (eds.), Education and the Development of Reason, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, p.448.
2. R.S.Peters, "Freedom and Development of the Free Man," in James F.Doyle (ed.), Educational Judgments, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 126.

## Chapter 1

### THE CONCEPT OF PERSONAL AUTONOMY

Difficulties arise in analysing the concept of personal autonomy because ordinary usage does not provide consistent and clear-cut examples of how the term 'personal autonomy' may be applied. The following delineation of the necessary conditions of the concept is based partly on common usage and partly on the usefulness of the definition in the educational setting. Frankena describes the autonomous person as someone who is "capable of judging, acting and thinking on his own in art, history, science, morality, etc."<sup>1</sup>

Riesman says:

The autonomous are those who on the whole are capable of conforming to the behavioral norms of their society - a capacity the anomics usually lack-- but are free<sup>2</sup> to choose whether to conform or not.

What does it mean to say that someone is capable of judging, acting and thinking on his own? What does it mean to say that someone is capable of conforming and yet free to choose otherwise? To ask these questions is to ask what conditions are necessary for the presence of personal autonomy.

Autonomy, or self-rule, is in direct opposition to the notion of heteronomy, rule by others. Heteronomy

may take the form of passivity on the part of an individual agent who could be so easily conditioned or indoctrinated that he rather thoughtlessly does what he is told to do, or believes what he is told to believe - by advertisers, by people in authority, by relatives, friends, neighbours, anyone who is able to influence him. This other-directed man typically takes his cues from other people not only in matters of "faith and morals", but in prudential concerns as well. Heteronomy can also take the form of neurosis or psychosis as in extreme cases of Riesman's inner-directed person, who is ruled by internalized 'others' in such a way as to preclude the use of rational reflection. The inner-directed person is heteronomous to the extent that he is ruled by factors which, though not external to him, are external to his own rationally and justifiably held beliefs. Four conditions appear to be necessary to distinguish the autonomous from the heteronomous person. Unless otherwise stated, arriving at autonomously held beliefs, judgments, decisions etc. is included in the following discussion in the category of autonomous acts.<sup>3</sup>

### FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Inherent in the concept of autonomy is the notion of freedom of choice. The free will problem from the hard determinist position need not concern us here. The contention that all acts have causes in no way interferes

with the distinction we make between unavoidable acts, the causes of which have a compelling quality, and those acts in which neither overt nor covert compulsion is significant. When we speak of freely chosen acts, we are speaking of those acts for which the agent can supply reasons - real reasons, not just rationalizations. Nor does the view that reasons are causes disturb the distinction. All our actions may have causes (if reasons are causes), but not all our actions have reasons which have been deliberated upon in some way by the action's agent.

As Benn and Peters point out, we do not attribute the exercise of autonomy to anyone whose freedom of choice is constrained either outwardly or inwardly, i.e. either objectively or subjectively.<sup>4</sup> The objective conditions of freedom of choice include all those conditions which are external to the agent, and typically imply the absence of certain physical constraints. A person can hardly be said to be exercising autonomy or freedom of choice if it is demanded of him at gunpoint that he hand over the contents of his wallet to a thief. Similarly, a man tied up to a lamp post against his will cannot be said to be choosing freely or acting autonomously in failing to rescue a drowning person who calls for help from a nearby swimming pool. In such situations the objective conditions for freedom of choice are not satisfied. The absence of such conditions is usually more readily identifiable in most situations than the absence of subjective conditions.

The subjective conditions of freedom of choice include all those conditions which are internal to the agent. Peters claims the subjective conditions of freedom of choice are absent in any of the following circumstances:

- (1) if one is driven towards a particular goal as the drug addict or alcoholic is driven to seek relief from some present condition of acute deprivation,
- (2) if one is incapable of weighing the relative merits of positive and negative consequences before deciding on a particular course of action, as a hysteric would be incapable of doing,
- (3) if one cannot change one's beliefs in the light of new and relevant evidence, as a paranoid or a person suffering from other kinds of obsessions and delusions would be unable to do,
- (4) if changes in one's beliefs fail to produce changes in one's decisions, as in the case of the psychopath,
- (5) if changes in one's decisions fail to produce changes in one's actions, as in the case of the kleptomaniac or some other kind of compulsive.<sup>5</sup>

George du Maurier's Trilby O'Farrell, for example, could hardly be said to be acting autonomously in putting on musical performances that repeatedly moved her audience to tears, because, under the hypnotic influence of Svengali, the subjective conditions of her freedom of choice were minimized, if not absent altogether.<sup>6</sup>

Trilby could not satisfy conditions (1), (2), or (3) of Peter's analysis. Not only was she driven to sing for Svengali, she was both incapable of weighing the merits of the possible consequences of her actions and incapable of using any information as a determining factor in deciding on a particular course of action. Trilby did what she was told to do and that is all she did. Questions about changes in her beliefs affecting changes in her decisions, as well as changes in her decisions affecting changes in her actions do not even arise. She followed Svengali as blindly as anyone could.

Peters does not state whether or not he intends his list to be exhaustive, but it appears to cover all those situations in which we normally withdraw imputations of moral or legal responsibility on the grounds that the agent could have acted otherwise. An agent could not have acted otherwise when his action is the unavoidable result of some internal cause. (From this point of view reasons are not taken to be causes.) In other words, Peter's list specifies five kinds of circumstances in which the causes of a person's actions not only lie within the person himself, but result in unavoidable responses. Acting under the influence of hypnosis, brainwashing, indoctrination, conditioning, insanity, and so forth, falls well within the limits of his list. No doubt a complete enumeration of specific conditions which fall within these limits would have to remain an open

set, although the list itself appears to be complete. Even if it could be shown to be incomplete, any addition to Peter's list would have to be an example of internal compulsion, the presence of which is, in brief, what we mean when we refer to the absence of the subjective conditions of freedom of choice.

Numerous volumes have been written on the problem of freedom of choice and on such topics as what it means to say 'X could have acted otherwise'; but it is beyond our present purposes to examine this matter further. Ordinary usage dictates that one cannot act autonomously when physically or mentally compelled.

Freedom of choice, then, in the sense that implies the absence of relevant forms of objective and subjective compulsion is a necessary condition for the exercise of autonomy, but it is not a sufficient condition. Imagine the situation of someone who thoughtlessly adopts his beliefs, values, morals, etc. from the dictates of majority opinion in the community where he lives, or from the advertising media, or even from his best friend. When he makes a decision based on one of his beliefs or values, he may well be exercising freedom of choice in the sense that it is described above, but we would hesitate to refer to him as an autonomous decision maker because his beliefs are not his own; they have been adopted simply because someone else says so rather than because the agent himself holds them to be true. Something else is necessary then, before we can call a person autonomous. Peters refers to the second



criterion as authenticity.<sup>7</sup>

### AUTHENTICITY

In discussing authenticity, we will deal first with those actions which comprise one's overt behavior, and then with specific mental acts such as choosing and reasoning. For an overt action to be described as authentic, it must be the result of one's own decision to act, not someone else's.

Peters describes the conduct of the authentic person as follows:

The rules which he lives by are not just those laid down by custom and authority.... This asserts positively that there must be some feature of a course of conduct, which the individual regards as important, which constitutes a non-artificial reason for pursuing it as distinct from extrinsic reasons provided by praise and blame, reward and punishment, and so on, which are artificially created by the demands of others.<sup>8</sup>

If Peters means that a person who is extrinsically motivated to perform a certain action cannot act authentically, then he is, I think, mistaken. A person seeking employment, for example, probably acts authentically in applying for a job as a garbage collector, although he does it not for the intrinsic rewards of the job, but for the remuneration (extrinsic rewards) he will receive. If, on the other hand, Peters is hinting at the necessary presence of an interim decision on the part of an agent to comply with the demands of others before performing an action dictated by those demands, then he is probably correct. This is the crucial point. One's actions are authentic if they

are the result of one's own, conscious decisions to act, but where an act conforms to the demands of others, the authentic act is distinguished from the inauthentic act by a particular decision on the part of the agent to comply with those dictates before actually doing so. Without such an interim decision, one is in some sense being pushed and pulled about by others, rather than acting independently.

The point about interim decisions is most easily made in considering examples involving obedience to authority.

Suppose Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones are two law-abiding citizens who, in their observable behavior, differ very little in the way they obey the rules and regulations of the community in which they live. Neither Smith nor Jones has ever been remiss in paying his taxes, neither exceeds the speed limit on the roads and highways, and both always declare every purchase they have made when going through customs offices at border crossings. Suppose the difference between Smith and Jones is that Smith has made a particular decision to obey the authorities before performing his acts of obedience. His interim decision might be the result of any number of considerations. He might be convinced that a particular rule prescribed by the authorities is a useful rule to follow and one which he would prescribe for himself in any case. Or, he might obey the law regardless of its demands because he believes that he would be contributing towards chaos and anarchy if he did not. Or, he might simply wish to avoid the inconvenience of a fine or a jail sentence. In distinguishing

authentic from inauthentic acts, the nature of one's reason for acting does not matter (although some reasons for acting are obviously more morally praiseworthy than others). The important thing in the case described above is that Smith conforms for some reason other than the simple fact that he is told to conform. If Jones, on the other hand, obeys authority in a stimulus-response type manner, without any advance decision to obey before performing the act of obedience in question, then we could hardly call his action authentic.

Suppose one were indoctrinated with a certain set of beliefs which later become consciously operative reasons for performing certain acts. Could such acts be considered authentic? Given the present account of authenticity, the answer to this question is emphatically yes. Such acts would not necessarily be autonomous acts, but they would have to be considered authentic if they are the result of a conscious decision to act on the part of an agent. A conditioned response, on the other hand, would not be authentic since conditioned responses are not the result of one's own decisions.

So far we have been discussing authenticity in those contexts where there is some question as to whether one's observable behavior is, at least in part, the result of a decision to act in a particular way on the part of an individual agent. What about unobservable "behaviors" such as acts of choosing, deciding, judging, reasoning,

concluding, etc.? How can the terms 'authentic' or 'in-authentic' apply to these kinds of acts? We will consider how the notion of authenticity could apply to two kinds of unobservable acts: choosing and reasoning.

One sometimes comes across the point of view that the nature of the criteria one uses in determining what choices to make is the crucial factor in distinguishing authentic from inauthentic choices. We are told that the criteria one uses must be one's own if a choice is to be considered authentic. If we demand, however, that the criteria for making choices be so 'authentic' as to be entirely divorced from any grounding in one's cultural heritage or accumulated knowledge, we arrive at the existentialist dilemma of making criterionless choices. Since we are all at least the partial products (some would say the total product) of our genetic endowments and environmental influences, the whole notion of a criterionless choice renders the concept of authenticity both vacuous and inapplicable. There appears to be no way out of this dilemma. Feinberg alludes to the possibility of a solution when he says, "Our standards must be high enough to exclude subtle counterfeits of authenticity, yet not so high as to render authenticity an empty or unrealizable ideal,"<sup>9</sup> but he does not suggest any criterion that could be used to distinguish an authentic from an inauthentic act of choosing. Any criterion we could think of, such as:

- (1) a decision must not be the result of indoctrinated beliefs,

(2) a decision must be deliberated upon in a rational manner by the agent, or

(3) the criteria one uses in making a decision must be internalized before it can be considered one's own, is inadequate. It is either an instance of some other necessary condition of autonomy (the first criterion refers to freedom of choice and the second to rational reflection), or so vague (as in (3) above where we cannot properly specify without complete knowledge of the workings of the mind, what counts as internalized ~~used~~ criteria) that we are led to the conclusion that the use of the terms 'authentic' or 'inauthentic' in reference to acts of choosing, does not add anything new to the account given here of autonomy. As we shall see, rational reflection (which is discussed in the next section) is taken to be the third necessary condition of autonomy.

Similarly, acts of reasoning can be described only much too loosely as acts of authenticity. Consider the use of 'authenticity' in the following selection:

A former colleague of mine, a sensitive and gifted analytical philosopher, once announced to me that after many years of teaching the philosophy of religion he had gradually come to believe in God. My friend had prepared an elaborate and complex rationale for his important new conviction such that I could not doubt the authenticity of his reasonings.<sup>10</sup>

What possible criterion could satisfy the attribution of authenticity to acts of reasoning in some cases and inauthenticity in others? We might distinguish between those who reason well

and those who reason poorly by making reference to such principles as objectivity or logical consistency, but there seems no justification for labelling such criteria as features which distinguish authentic from inauthentic reasoning. It appears that 'sincerity' might be substituted for 'authenticity' without disturbing the meaning of the above passage, but this move would not provide us with any more insight. It would be logically odd to suggest that an act of reasoning could be insincere and remain an act of reasoning rather than rationalization or deception. Despite the many different uses and senses of 'reason', inherent in the concept is some kind of "due regard for truth":

...whatever particular definition of the faculty of reason we may, implicitly or explicitly, adopt, it seems unavoidable that it will be attempted thereby to distinguish this faculty from others as being that by the exercise of which we can perceive, or arrive at, truths of some particular kind or kinds; and this kind of truth, or these kinds of truths, will in turn be distinguished from other kinds on logical or epistemological grounds.<sup>11</sup>

If seeking truths is part of what is entailed in reasoning, then speaking about the authenticity of one's reasonings in a sense that is synonymous with sincerity, seems redundant. Even if 'authentic' were coupled with some other mental term such as 'belief', it is difficult to conceive of any criterion that might distinguish authentic from inauthentic beliefs without reference to some other condition of autonomy, namely, rational reflection.

Since the notions of authenticity and inauthenticity appear to be superfluous in the present context when used to describe unobservable "behaviors" or mental acts (that is, if

they refer to anything at all in such cases, it is to the presence or absence of other conditions of autonomy such as freedom of choice and rational reflection), then we must be content to restrict our use of the terms in discussions of autonomy to observable human actions. Even if 'authentic' were coupled with some other mental term such as 'belief', it is difficult to conceive of any criterion that might distinguish authentic from inauthentic beliefs without reference to some other condition of autonomy, namely, rational reflection.

The next consideration is whether the necessary conditions of freedom of choice and authenticity (where applicable) together constitute a sufficient condition for the presence of autonomy. Riesman points out that some other condition is required before a person can be attributed with possessing autonomy. He distinguishes the inner-directed person from the autonomous person, even though the former may possess freedom of choice and authenticity.<sup>12</sup> Riesman's inner-directed person, however, conforms irrationally to the dictates of a 'conscience' that will not modify its demands in the light of new and relevant information. Imagine the case of a fairly intelligent individual who behaves normally in most aspects of his life, but who continues to believe and profess that the moon is made of green cheese in spite of convincing evidence to the contrary. Such an action (i.e. the observable action of professing that the moon is made of green cheese), may be freely chosen (we must assume the agent is not obsessed with his belief, and that he has demonstrated the ability to change his mind in light of

new information in other similar circumstances) and authentic, but we would hesitate to regard the act as that of an autonomous person unless the agent could supply us with good reasons for adopting the view that the moon is made of green cheese. Consideration of the unreasonable, inner-directed person leads us to a third condition of autonomy which Peters refers to as rational reflection.<sup>13</sup>

### RATIONAL REFLECTION

The Oxford English dictionary defines 'reflection' as the action of deep and serious consideration, and 'rational' as having the faculty of reasoning as well as exercising one's reason in a proper manner, having sound judgment, being sane and sensible, etc. The term 'rational' comes from the Latin ratio meaning reason. The adjectives 'rational' and 'reasonable' are often used interchangeably in everyday usage and even in philosophical discourse. Professor Pole uses 'the rational' synonymously with 'Reason' in his article "The Concept of Reason."<sup>14</sup> However, he opposes 'rational' only to 'non-rational', reserving the term 'irrational' to refer to people who reason but who reason very poorly. Max Black, on the other hand, uses 'irrational' to mean something rather different from 'unreasonable'.<sup>15</sup> Black points out a fine shade of difference between the two concepts when he says, "...we talk about an 'irrational impulse', but surely not - or not so freely - about an unreasonable impulse."<sup>16</sup> Black implies that 'irrational' refers



not to poor reasoning but to the absence of reasoning.<sup>17</sup> In any case, in saying that rational reflection is a necessary condition of autonomy we are saying two things:

- (1) that one must have reasons for one's acts, and
- (2) that one's reasons must be, in some sense, reasonable.

We will deal in turn with each of these criteria of rational reflection.

Suppose, for instance, we meet someone who has just dragged himself up twelve flights of stairs to the upper story of a large office block, and we ask him, "Why didn't you take the elevator?". Our normal expectation is that we will be supplied with an answer that comprises some consciously held, causally operative reason for the action such as, "The elevator was too crowded," or "I needed the exercise," or "There is no elevator in this building." If, however, the response we receive is, "I don't know. I have no idea why I did that. How foolish of me!", then we might regard the action as impulsive, but we would not regard it as autonomous. The action may have been motivated by some unconscious drive, but unconscious drives are causes of actions, not reasons for acting. Reasons are considerations employed as justifications for performing certain actions, holding certain beliefs, proving certain points, etc.

That rational reflection requires one to have reasons for one's choices does not mean that one's reasons must be silently reviewed by an agent each time he performs an action.

Many of our actions are performed in a somewhat habitual manner. Having reasons and constantly reminding oneself of those reasons are two different matters. One might not be consciously mindful of the reasons why one gets out of bed as the alarm clock rings at seven o'clock each morning, but very likely one could supply these reasons if asked to do so. Rational reflection requires that one must have reasons for acting, but not that one be constantly mindful of them.

That a rationally reflective person must have reasons for his actions is easily granted, but the more difficult point to explicate is that one's reasons must be, in some sense, reasonable. What counts as a reasonable reason for acting and what does not? To look for someone's telephone number in the directory when you know that he has no telephone is one of Black's paradigm cases of unreasonable action verging on the irrational.<sup>18</sup> Another instance of unreasonable action might be to complain that someone is ungrateful for an injury you have done him.<sup>19</sup> In either case the individual concerned might have reasons for what he does, but he does not reflect upon them, presumably, or he would realize that his reasons are inadequate. The unreflective person we regard as anomic or impulsive, but not autonomous. The first requirement of a reasonable reason, then, is that it be deliberated upon by the agent. Obviously, some courses of conduct are of sufficient import (such as choosing a religion, a career, or a home) to require much more deliberation than others (such as choosing

which shirt to wear today or which movie to watch tonight). In time of crisis or emergency however, there is often no time to deliberate upon one's reasons for acting - no time to weigh up the pros and cons, no time to consider all the possible consequences of one's action in detail. The rationally reflective person is able to distinguish those cases in which a considerable amount of deliberation is appropriate from those cases in which only a minimum of deliberation is called for.

It is possible though, that one could reflect upon one's reasons for acting without being autonomous. Unless a person's reasoning conforms to certain minimum standards we are likely to regard him as indoctrinated, mentally retarded, demented, psychotic, conditioned or what have you. The standards to which one must conform are those of objectivity, relevance, logical consistency, impartiality, etc. One probably could not have a reasonable reason to punish a child for stealing a water pistol just to "teach him a lesson" if one knew that he did not steal it. Similarly, it would not be reasonable to claim that one ought to be dealt with honestly by others when transacting business agreements, but that one need not deal honestly with others himself. To be reasonable is to assess beliefs and behaviors non-arbitrarily.

One's ability to reflect rationally on one's principles, aims, motives, goals and so on, presupposes the presence of some settled and undisputed criteria by means of which one is able to examine the validity of the point of view or course

of action being reflected upon. Of course one can ask such questions as "Why bother taking all the relevant data into consideration when making a decision?" or "Why bother trying to be logically consistent?" but, as Feinberg points out, "If we take autonomy to require that all principles are to be examined afresh in the light of reason on each occasion for decision, then nothing resembling rational reflection can ever get started."<sup>20</sup>

The existentialist considers reason to be a threat to autonomy on the grounds that if an individual becomes a slave to the demands of such reasonable principles as logical consistency, he becomes a mere "passive onlooker(s) of self-propelled reasonings."<sup>21</sup> Several responses might be made to this claim. First, if an individual chooses to make use of rational reflection in deciding on a course of action at the expense of the satisfaction of his inclinations, he is indeed exercising autonomy in making that decision. This response is not wholly satisfactory, however, since it attributes autonomy to those acts which are not rationally reflected upon as well. Secondly, if the existentialist wishes to equate the unreasonable, anomic character with the autonomous person, then there would be no point in holding up the chaotic condition of autonomy as a personal ideal or an educational objective. Thirdly, we simply cannot make intelligible the notion of a criterionless choice. If one did not make use of settled rules and principles in making decisions and examining beliefs, one's

judgments would be arbitrary, based only on whim or impulse. A state of 'cognitive anomie' could hardly be considered desirable. Making use of settled principles to guide one's reasoning is not only no threat to autonomy, but a prerequisite to it.

One who engages in rational reflection then, not only has reasons for his actions, but deliberates upon them (or has at some time deliberated upon them) in accordance with certain minimum standards. His conduct is typified by exercising an ability to alter his beliefs in the light of new evidence, or change his attitudes as circumstances change, as well as to consider the consequences of his actions before he acts. The rationally reflective person uses language correctly; he is objective and does not make unnecessary judgments on the basis of irrelevant and inadequate evidence. He is able to arrive at non-arbitrary conclusions resulting from reflective deliberations as opposed to the arbitrary whims of the undeliberative agent. This is not to say that he who reflects rationally will always make the most reasonable decision, but he will at least be aware of what the most reasonable decision appears to be. (We will return to this point in a moment.) One may decide to follow a whim or an impulse in any number of situations, but an individual acts autonomously in such cases to the extent that he has engaged in rational reflection before making a decision to act unreasonably or irrationally in any given circumstance. If an individual did not go through the process of rational reflection before deciding to abandon the enterprise and follow a whim instead, we would be inclined to call

him an impulsive or an anomic character, although it would be difficult to decide in any particular circumstances whether one is anomically following a whim or autonomously doing so.

The question arises as to what degree of objectivity or logical consistency is necessary in one's reasonings before one can be attributed with acting or thinking autonomously. Although it may be impossible to draw a mathematically precise line to distinguish cases where rational reflection is present, but of very poor quality, from those in which we would say it is absent altogether, it does not follow that the distinctions we normally make in this regard ought to be disregarded. We do not require that one's beliefs be true or one's reasonings wholly accurate before we attribute the possession or exercise of autonomy to him. What is necessary is that the agent think the beliefs he holds are true. This follows logically from the fact that part of what it means to hold a belief is to regard it as true. A belief may be questioned, examined or scrutinized in the light of new evidence or conflicting beliefs, but it ceases to be a belief when it is no longer held to be true.

An individual could spend thirty years studying the pyramids of Egypt and eventually arrive at an elaborate theory about how they were constructed. The theory might be false, but we would not deny that the agent had presented us with a good example of autonomous thinking. Neither false beliefs nor errors in judgment necessarily constitute a threat to autonomy in the way that an inability to distinguish what might

count as a reason for acting from what would not count as a reason for acting, correctly constitutes such a threat. In the latter sort of case one might be denied attribution with the possession or exercise of autonomy not only on the grounds that rational reflection is absent, but also on the grounds that the subjective conditions of freedom of choice are conspicuously absent.

So far, freedom of choice, authenticity and rational reflection have been discussed as necessary conditions for the exercise of autonomy. Do these conditions, when taken altogether, comprise an exhaustive list? Consider a case in which a man would like to obtain a divorce from his wife. Suppose he is not compelled in any way to obtain the divorce, but freely decides to do so for reasons of his own after many weeks of rational reflection on the matter. Suppose he then fails to act and spends the rest of his life in misery, always wishing he had acted otherwise, because he did not have the inner fortitude to carry through with his decision in the face of the anxiety created by pulling up roots. For purposes of the argument we may assume there are no children, financial difficulties, religious affiliations or other responsibilities involved in the situation which the agent would have to consider. Surely we would hesitate to say that such a person acted autonomously. This consideration brings us to the fourth criterion of autonomy which Peters calls strength of will.<sup>22</sup>

## STRENGTH OF WILL

The presence of strength of will in any given situation depends to some extent upon the presence and strength of counter inclinations. If counter inclinations offer relatively little interference with one's purposes, goals, aims and decisions, then one is usually attributed with having determination and strength of will. If one is easily swayed by counter-inclinations, one is said to be weak willed. The weak willed person is closer to a state of anomie than his stronger willed counterpart since his various beliefs, values, principles, inclinations, etc. are constantly in conflict, as opposed to the strong willed person whose beliefs, values, principles, etc. have been systematically ordered into a hierarchical structure of well defined priorities. The stronger willed person is the one we often refer to as the self-disciplined person. The more self-discipline one has, the stronger is one's will and the further one is removed from a state of anomie. This is not to suggest that the strong willed, self-disciplined person will never experience inner conflict. Often, it seems that the more one engages in rational reflection, the more one is likely to experience inner conflict. The difference between the strong willed and the weak willed person, however, is that the strong willed person usually resolves his conflicts and dilemmas, or



at least comes to terms with them, so that a new state of equilibrium results, enabling the individual to make autonomous decisions without living in a perpetual state of inner turmoil. The weaker willed person is less able to put his beliefs, values, goals, purposes, inclinations, etc. into hierarchical patterns out of which priorities arise. The weak willed person is easily swayed by whims and impulses which run contrary to his reasoned principles. "The strong-willed man," says Peters, "like the independently minded man, sticks to his principles in the face of ridicule, ostracism, punishment and bribes."<sup>23</sup>

We have now arrived at a sufficient condition of personal autonomy; namely, the conditions of freedom of choice, authenticity, rational reflection and strength of will when taken altogether. The next task is to consider why autonomy ought to be promoted as a personal or an educational ideal.

## FOOTNOTES

1. William K. Frankena, "The Concept of Education Today," in James F. Doyle (ed.), Educational Judgments, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 30.
2. David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, Garden City: L.I. Doubleday-Anchor, 1954, p. 278, cited in Alan Gewirth, "Morality and Autonomy in Education," in Doyle, op. cit., p. 40.
3. In some sense there is something odd about referring to autonomously held beliefs, or decisions that are made autonomously. Overt actions (and individual agents) are more easily described as autonomous or non-autonomous than mental acts. This is due to the inapplicability of authenticity and 'strength of will' (two necessary conditions of autonomy) to mental acts. One way out of this difficulty is to suggest that in the case of mental acts the presence of the other two necessary conditions of autonomy (freedom of choice and rational reflection) is sufficient to refer to them as autonomous acts. Another solution might be to exclude mental acts from the class of autonomous acts - in which case we would still require some way to describe the difference between, say, arriving at beliefs which are freely held and rationally reflected upon, and arriving at indoctrinated beliefs. The former solution seems more reasonable because such a definition would be useful in the educational setting and derived at least in part, from the ordinary usage of 'autonomous' and 'non-autonomous' in our language. It could be reasonably argued however, that mental acts are borderline cases of those acts which may be correctly described as 'autonomous' or 'non-autonomous'. The final solution to this problem is extraneous to the central purpose of this paper.
4. R.S. Peters, "Freedom and the development of the Free Man", in Doyle, op. cit., p. 122.
5. Ibid. pp. 122-123.
6. George du Maurier, Trilby, London: Collins, 1953, (originally published in 1894).
7. Peters, op. cit., pp. 123-124.

8.     Loc. cit.
9.     Joel Feinberg, "The Idea of a Free Man", in Doyle, op. cit., p. 162.
10.    Loc. cit.
11.    G.J.Warnock, "Reason", in Paul Edwards (ed.), The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., VII, pp. 84-85.
12.    Riesman, op. cit.
13.    Peters, op. cit. p.124.
14.    D.Pole, "The Concept of Reason", in R.F.Dearden, P.H.Hirst and R.S.Peters (eds.), Education and the Development of Reason, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, pp. 154-155.
15.    Max Black, "Reasonableness", in R.F.Dearden, P.H.Hirst and R.S.Peters (ed.), op. cit. p.199.
16.    Loc. cit.
17.    If 'irrational' refers not to poor reasoning, but to the absence of reasoning, then the phrase 'irrational impulse' appears to be redundant since an impulse is typically characterized by the absence of reasoning.
18.    Max Black, op. cit., p.200.
19.    Ibid. p.201.
20.    Joel Feinberg, op. cit., p.166.
21.    R.F.Dearden, "Autonomy and Education", in R.F.Dearden, P.H.Hirst and R.S.Peters (eds.), op. cit., p.459.
22.    R.S.Peters, op. cit., p.124.
23.    Ibid. p. 125.

## Chapter 2

### JUSTIFICATION OF THE PROMOTION OF PERSONAL AUTONOMY

The promotion of personal autonomy can be justified on at least four kinds of grounds:

- (1) for its extrinsic merits, i.e. the beneficial consequences of its promotion,
- (2) for its intrinsic merit as an inherent part of human dignity,
- (3) as an educational objective, and
- (4) as central to the notion of moral agency.

The first three aspects of the justification of autonomy will be dealt with in turn, while (4) will be dealt with at length in Chapter Three.

The first consideration is what kinds of beneficial consequences the promotion of autonomy might have. Questions regarding the actual consequences of the promotion of autonomy are empirical, and not to be considered here. However, the analysis of the concept of autonomy can admit the possibility or the likelihood of the occurrence of certain consequences of its promotion while precluding the possibility or the likelihood of the occurrence of certain other consequences.

It might be argued, for instance, that the promotion

of autonomy will have economic and material benefits in a society where the production of goods depends to a large measure on individual initiative and resourcefulness.

Possession of the four necessary conditions of autonomy is closely related to what it means to have initiative.

It might also be argued that autonomous people are needed to form the cortex of the entire body politic, if man is to progress in a worthwhile direction and gain control over this environment. People are generally aware of the problems of increasing pollution, over population, alienation, inflation, the proliferation of nuclear weaponry and the like, but so far very little has been done to remedy these situations. We can assume that autonomous people are better equipped to seek solutions to problems than non-autonomous people, since one usually has to engage in rational reflection in order to find solutions to problems. One must also possess the freedom of choice and strength of will to implement these solutions. This argument could be at least partially defeated, however, by a demonstration that programmed robots might be better at finding solutions to the world's problems than human beings. Autonomous people might still be required as programmers, but it is conceivable that the world could make do with only a very small number of autonomous persons. Stronger justification is needed, therefore, if autonomy is to be promoted on any large scale.

A third argument about the extrinsic merits of the promotion of autonomy might be referred to as the satisfaction argument. Few people want to be pushed, bossed, ordered about and subjected to the "unknown inconstant, arbitrary will of another human being." Even very young children feel insulted and resentful if their opinions are always discounted, if they are treated like objects instead of people. There is a strong sense in which it is not the exercise of autonomy which has to be justified, but instead, any interference with it. Great satisfaction is gained not only in thinking for oneself and making one's own decisions, but in being treated by others as someone who is capable of thinking for himself and making his own decisions.

The satisfaction argument might be countered by Eric Fromm's popular, empirical claim that human beings are basically afraid of exercising autonomy. Fromm's psychological thesis is that freedom makes people insecure. People would rather be led by others than determine their own destinies. They prefer someone else to take responsibility for them. The point is well taken if it is made in reference to non-autonomous persons, but it is difficult to conceive of a strong willed, authentic, free choosing, rationally reflective individual who prefers, in general, not to exercise his autonomy. In fact, by definition, Fromm is discussing the non-autonomous person. As we have seen, the autonomous person is

strong willed enough to put his judgments and deliberated conclusions into action. If Fromm's view is basically an argument against the possibility or the desirability of the majority of people becoming autonomous, it is vulnerable on at least two counts. First, since the claim is empirical, it could be refuted by research which brings to light evidence to the contrary. Secondly, a point not to be disregarded is that the sources of satisfaction of the non-autonomous person can and do change as autonomy develops. But the satisfaction argument is vulnerable from other positions as well. If "Brave New World" were a technologically viable alternative to present life styles, the satisfaction argument would be defeated. "Brave New World" does not admit the possibility of dissatisfied citizens.

Dearden points out that nearly every human being is an exerciser of autonomy to some extent, no matter how small. "Even in acting under the strictest orders, some minimal active intelligence is called for."<sup>1</sup> Even if one lived his entire life by following some externally imposed set of rules, an individual is required to decide whether a situation he encounters is an instance where a particular rule applies or not. The use of language in anything other than a parrot-like fashion requires at least some minimal ability to reflect rationally. However, it is certainly within the realm of possibility that one could maintain a fairly happy existence, even without "Brave New World," without exercising anything more than a very minimal amount of

autonomy. If happiness is taken as the ultimate goal of life, then autonomy will be valued only in so far as it is instrumental in promoting human happiness. But the "contented cow" approach can be countered by considerations which are often regarded as more important than happiness. This leads us to the justification of the promotion of autonomy on the grounds that it is intrinsically worthwhile.

The exercise of autonomy is commonly regarded as fundamental to the possession of human dignity or worth. Our approval of desirable modes of conduct increases in direct proportion to the degree to which the four conditions of autonomy are present in any given circumstance. We might applaud a tenth grade student for enrolling in a difficult course in chemistry if several easier alternatives were open to him, but we would consider the choice to have lesser worth if the student's freedom of choice were limited to the extent that he is compelled to choose only between chemistry and biology, while enrolling in the chemistry course would carry no merit at all if such enrollment were compulsory. We regard obedience to authority, when it is done for a reason, as more meritorious than a conditioned response to a badge or a uniform. If the reason for obedience has been thoughtfully reflected upon such that its groundings in moral and political philosophy are clear, we would usually regard the act of obedience as possessing more worth than an act of obedience which is fulfilled simply to



avoid punishment. We regard the same act of obedience as more praiseworthy when it is done from the exercise of strength of will rather than from personal preference or inclination.

To possess human dignity is to be a person in the full sense of the word. Not all human beings could be fully described as persons. "'Person' in our usage is a more precise term [than 'human being'] implying the possession of capacities (to be self-determining and rule-following)...."<sup>2</sup> To be both self-determining and rule-following is what it means, very loosely, to be autonomous. If 'to be a person' can be loosely equated with 'to be autonomous', then the moral principle of respect for persons (to which all other moral principles appear to be related) becomes loosely synonymous with respect for autonomy. To show respect for others is to take their behavior seriously and to assume that it is rational i.e. that reasons rather than rationalizations can be supplied by the agent for it. Part of what it means to have respect for oneself is to engage in purposive behavior without undue dependence on others. Downie and Telford deal at length with the notion of respect for persons in their book Respect for Persons in which the relationship between the moral principle and the conditions of freedom of choice, authenticity, rational reflection and strength of will are discussed, albeit sometimes using different terminology.<sup>3</sup>

B.F. Skinner and other behaviorists hold that the distinction we make between human beings and persons, between

acts which are manifestations of greater and lesser degrees of human worth and dignity, is a distinction we should not make since all behavior is genetically and environmentally determined. From this point of view the elements of human volition are environmentally determined too. One cannot escape the control of factors which determine one's behavior whether those factors are deliberately designed by others or randomly determined by forces which are less apparent. Some kinds of controls result in beneficial consequences and some do not. Instead of branding all control as wrong, which is nonsense anyway, says Skinner, we should simply eliminate those forms of control which have aversive consequences and encourage those forms of control which are beneficial.<sup>4</sup> Skinner's argument can be defeated in at least two ways. First, even if everything, including the elements of human volition, is environmentally determined, we find it very useful to make distinctions among different kinds of behaviors depending on the nature of the determining factors involved. We find it useful to distinguish between those acts which are rationally reflected upon, for instance, and those which are not, even if we believe that an agent could not have acted otherwise unless the circumstances of his action were different. We use such distinctions as bases for praising and blaming, for encouraging and discouraging certain kinds of behaviors that we consider to be more beneficial or detrimental than others. If this means that human dignity and hence autonomy, are to be valued

for their beneficial consequences in the long run (extrinsic as opposed to intrinsic merit), little ground has been lost, and the case for the justification of the promotion of autonomy on the grounds that it is extrinsically worthwhile has been strengthened. The point here is that we do not require 'X could have acted otherwise' to mean 'even if all the circumstances of the situation had been exactly the same, X could have acted otherwise' in order to continue making the useful distinctions we have made in the past.

Secondly, if all behavior is a matter of responding to stimuli or sets of stimuli, which are simply responses to other sets of stimuli, then the wheels of destiny are already in motion, and we are all the pawns of forces beyond ourselves. The introduction of any new stimulus into the system (that is not already a response within the system from some other stimulus within the system, ad infinitum), is logically impossible. What will be will be. The perpetuation of this point of view has the unhappy consequences of destroying motivation and initiative especially with regard to those duties we would rather not perform. "Why shouldn't I," one could sensibly ask, "give up behaving responsibly and merely follow my inclinations?" Even if free will does not exist in any metaphysical sense, it is questionable whether metaphysics can offer any viable direction for human conduct.

Skinner also suggests, in Beyond Freedom and Dignity,

that we should concentrate on making better environments instead of better men.<sup>5</sup> Surely Skinner regards men as part of the total environment - as potentially effective stimuli. If this is so, we are improving the environment for everyone by improving individual persons.

One of the most important justifications of the promotion of autonomy from the educator's point of view lies in the fact that there is a close conceptual connection between what it means to be educated and what it means to be autonomous. The notion of autonomy is logically connected to the concept of education. Two conditions are generally recognized in philosophy of education as necessary conditions of the concept "education." The conditions are (1) desirability and (2) knowledge. "Educating people suggests developing in [them] states of mind which are valuable and which involve some degree of knowledge and understanding."<sup>6</sup> Since the logical connection between autonomy and education is made through the knowledge condition of education, the desirability factor will not be discussed, although the interested reader might be referred to at least two sources which explore this avenue in detail.<sup>7</sup>

What does it mean to say that knowledge is a necessary condition of education? Obviously, if a person possesses a skill or a knack in a particular area, no matter how valuable a knack it is (such as an ability to crochet, or to grow beautiful roses), some additional condition is required before we would

have sufficient grounds for calling that person educated.<sup>8</sup>

The educated person must also possess a certain amount of information. The rose gardener would have to have detailed information about different kinds of roses, optimum conditions for growth, and the effects on growth patterns produced by varying climatic changes, soil conditions, etc. The mere possession of information though, is also insufficient for someone to be correctly described as an educated person. An understanding of the interrelationships among the facts which comprise one's repertoire of information on roses would also be required, i.e. what is needed is an understanding of the 'reason - why' of things. People who have gained an understanding of the 'reason - why' of things with regard to growing roses are described as knowledgeable in botany, or in that branch of botany in which the rose grower specializes. Professor Coombs makes clear what is meant in this context by 'knowledge':

It should be clear that 'knowledge' as Peters is using the term, does not mean mere information. To have knowledge is, at the least, to have a true belief and an understanding of the evidence which warrants it. Having knowledge, then, involves having rational belief, supported by reasons.

The important point in establishing the connection between autonomy and education is that having belief supported by reasons, which is an inherent part of the knowledge condition of education, is central to the third condition of autonomy,

that of rational reflection. The connection between the rational reflection condition of autonomy and the knowledge condition of education might be strengthened by pointing out that the possession of true beliefs without an understanding of the evidence which warrants them, would count more as indoctrination than education. Indoctrinated beliefs can count neither as knowledge nor as autonomously held beliefs. Arriving at beliefs which are rationally reflected upon, presupposes the absence of any physical or mental state which might interfere with the reflective process. The condition of freedom of choice then, as well as rational reflection, is logically connected to the concept of education. Since the notion of authenticity applies only to autonomous actions where these might be distinguished from unobservable "behaviors," strength of will appears to be the only condition of autonomy which we can sensibly suggest has no connection with the knowledge condition of education.

The promotion of personal autonomy has been justified, so far, on the grounds that it has beneficial consequences both for individuals and for the human race in general, on the grounds that it is basic both to the notion of human dignity and to the moral principle of respect for persons; and also on the grounds that autonomy is basic to the concept of education. Another argument is that the promotion of autonomy is justifiable on the grounds that autonomy is conceptually connected to moral agency. In Chapter Three the nature of the connection between moral agency and the conditions of autonomy will be examined in detail.

## FOOTNOTES

1. R.F.Dearden, "Autonomy and Education," in R.F.Dearden, P.H.Hirst and R.S.Peters (eds.), Education and the Development of Reason, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972. p.460.
2. R.S.Downie and Elizabeth Telferd, Respect for Persons, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1969, p.35.
3. Ibid.
4. B.F.Skinner, Beyond Freedom and Dignity, New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1971, p.43.
5. Ibid. p.20.
6. P.H.Hirst and R.S.Peters, The Logic of Education, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, p.13.
7. See P.H.Hirst and R.S.Peters, op. cit., or see R.S.Peters, "What is an Educational Process?" in R.S.Peters (ed.), The concept of Education, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1967. pp. 1-23.
8. This analysis of the knowledge condition of education closely follows that of R.S.Peters in "What is an Educational Process?", op. cit., pp. 6-9.
9. Jerrold R.Coombs, "Concerning the Nature of Moral Competence," Yearbook, II, 1975, p.7.

## Chapter 3

### AUTONOMY AND THE MORAL AGENT

There is one sense of the word 'moral' in which it is used as the opposite of 'immoral'. In this sense 'moral' is used "to make appraisals about the actions or character of persons."<sup>1</sup> The other sense in which 'moral' is used is that sense in which moral considerations are distinguished from the realms of aesthetics, prudence, science, and so forth. For our purposes, the word 'moral' is used in this second sense, and 'moral agent' is taken to mean one who is morally responsible for his actions. The opposite of moral agent in the sense in which we are using it is non-moral agent. It should be clear that immoral behavior belongs to the realm of moral agency. The non-moral agent is one to whom the notion of moral responsibility does not apply either because:

- (1) his action does not fall within the moral sphere (e.g. deciding to wear running shoes rather than brown oxfords), or
- (2) his action falls within the moral sphere but the ascription of moral responsibility does not apply to him because of the presence of one or more excusing conditions.

The task of Chapter Three is to specify some of the necessary conditions of moral responsibility, thereby outlining the connection between autonomy and moral agency. Feinberg makes



the statement, "Moral responsibility, I dare say, is a subject about which we are all confused."<sup>2</sup> This chapter is an attempt to reduce some of that confusion.

Feinberg uses several examples to illustrate the truth which underlies his statement in the article "Problematic Responsibility in Law and Morals."<sup>3</sup> There is a general presupposition, claims Feinberg, in favor of the view that moral responsibility, could not ever be wholly a matter of luck. After all, luck is a matter of chance and, to suggest that one could be morally responsible for a chance action is to misunderstand the application of the ascription of moral responsibility. On the other hand, moral responsibility is dependent to some extent on conditions which are external to the agent, and the nature of those conditions can sometimes be a matter of luck. Consider the following situation:

One man shoots another and kills him, and the law holds him responsible for the death and hangs him. Another man with exactly the same motives and intentions, takes careful aim and shoots at his enemy but misses because of a last minute movement of his prey or because of his own bad eyesight. The law cannot hold him responsible for a death because he has not caused one: but, from the moral point of view, he is only luckier than the hanged murderer.<sup>4</sup>

Is the second man as morally blameworthy as the first?

Both men are obviously morally responsible for the intention to kill, but the first man is morally responsible for actually killing, whereas the second is not. We cannot speak of moral

responsibility for a killing if there has been no killing. Consequently, the shooter with the poor eyesight appears to bear a lighter burden of moral responsibility than the hanged murderer, and this lighter burden is wholly a matter of chance in some external condition. The point is of course debatable. Some would hold that both men are equally morally blameworthy, but that we might advocate different punishments for them on utilitarian grounds.

The case for the presence of a fortuitous element in ascriptions of moral responsibility is somewhat less debatable where inner states are concerned. Feinberg points out that "responsibility for one's own inner states...would in some circumstances be wholly a matter of luck."<sup>5</sup> Consider the following situation:

...a moral agent is called to account by his own conscience. The question before the inner court is...responsibility for some past intention, which may or may not have issued in effectual action. Suppose that the following facts have been certified by the inner court: the intention in question was to slap Smith in the face; it was formed in the agent's mind as a consequence of (1) his rather unusual sensitivity to remarks of a certain sort stemming in turn from a basic insecurity and lack of confidence, (2) a slightly abnormal disposition to strong anger attributable to a hyperactive adrenal system, (3) a stomach disorder sufficiently disagreeable to put him on edge and weaken his self control, and (4) highly provocative and deliberately abusive remarks by Smith.<sup>6</sup>

The question is whether and to what extent the agent is morally responsible for his intention to slap Smith in the face. One

of the contributing factors to the formation of the intention, the agent's unusual sensitivity, is an aspect of the man's character for which we would normally hold him morally responsible. But the other contributing factors are external to the agent. They belong either to his body (stomach disorder and hyperactive adrenal system) or to someone else (Smith's abusive remarks). We would face a very difficult task if we tried to specify how much moral responsibility the agent could rightfully assume for his intention to slap Smith. "As a consequence, the precise determinability of moral responsibility is an illusion."<sup>7</sup> The question then arises as to whether the precise determinability of moral responsibility is an important issue. Possibly it is not. After all, one's moral record:

...can be used for any variety of purposes - as a basis for self-punishment, remorse, or pride, for example: but a person can avoid putting it to these further uses, leaving responsibility simply a matter for the record.<sup>8</sup>

Given the fact that we are not omniscient beings, perhaps the precise determinability of moral responsibility is impossible, but such a state of affairs does not prevent us from making both useful and justifiable attributions of moral agency under certain conditions and refraining from doing so under other conditions. The presence or absence of the conditions of autonomy are highly relevant considerations in making such distinctions. Moral worth has to do with an individual's worth

as a person in some very final sense. Moral responsibility "is to be liable not to overt responses, but to a charging against one's record as a man."<sup>9</sup> When we say that an action is morally praiseworthy or blameworthy, we do not necessarily mean that its agent should be rewarded or punished (considerations of the utility value of punishment as well as the moral justification for reward and punishment would count as relevant here), but simply that the act adds to or detracts from the agent's final worth as a person.

By way of introduction to the specification of the connection between autonomy and moral agency, John Wilson provides us with some important insights. He equates the moral agent with one who is morally responsible for his actions, i.e. one who acts intentionally as well as one who is rational.<sup>10</sup> To act intentionally is to deliberately follow a rule, not just to act in accordance with it.<sup>11</sup> It is to be morally educated, not just morally conditioned. Wilson explains the notion of rationality as follows:

The degree to which an action or a belief are [sic] rational is connected with how far they are really our own: that is, how far they are the result of facing facts and responding freely, rather than compulsively, to them. Insofar as our actions approximate to mere reactions or reflex movements, and our beliefs to sets of words which are merely parroted or accepted solely on authority, to that extent we fall away from acting and thinking as moral agents.<sup>12</sup>

We can see that the conditions of autonomy are closely

connected with what it means to be a moral agent. Clearly, one cannot act intentionally unless one has freedom of choice. One cannot authentically follow a moral rule, as opposed to simply acting in accordance with it, unless there is moral agency. One cannot face the facts and act accordingly unless one is rationally reflective to some extent, and surely one cannot act at all unless one has the strength of will to do so. Some elaboration on these points is necessary to clarify the connection between autonomy and moral agency. We will now see how the four necessary conditions of autonomy apply to the moral agent.

#### FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND MORAL AGENCY

It seems fairly obvious that where freedom of choice is lacking, so is moral agency. Part of what it means to act morally is to act intentionally, that is, to possess some degree of freedom of choice, otherwise one is not acting in the full sense of the word at all, but rather one is being acted upon, or reacting. It is logically odd, or at least counter-intuitive, to apply any aspect of the concept of moral responsibility unless freedom of choice is present. If physical or mental compulsion signifies in any particular case of rightdoing or wrongdoing, the imputation of moral agency is changed to non-moral agency. A bank teller cannot be held morally responsible for giving the bank's money away if thieves demand at gunpoint that she do so, or if she is suffering from some mental delusion by which she is compelled to slip an extra \$100

to every customer who comes to her wicket. In courts of law, unless the situation is one of strict liability, people are often excused for their acts if they can show that at the time the crime was committed, they were acting under some form of physical or mental constraint. Legal responsibility in such cases is often diminished because moral responsibility is diminished.

Wilson points out that "moral words are all tied down, in varying degrees, to the notion of intention."<sup>13</sup> We do not make a promise if someone is holding a gun at our backs ordering us to utter the words 'I promise'. A promise has to be made freely and intentionally. "The point here [where freedom of choice is absent] is that my moral responsibility is diminished, because my responsibility for what happens is diminished; what happens is not something that I (freely) do."<sup>4</sup>

#### AUTHENTICITY AND MORAL AGENCY

The point to be emphasized in the discussion of authenticity and moral agency is that one cannot act authentically or inauthentically in the moral realm without first being a moral agent. In Chapter One the terms 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' were shown to apply to overt behaviors only, rather than mental acts. Authenticity was taken to refer to an interim decision on the part of an agent to perform a certain action. Perhaps the most we can say about the notion of authenticity in regard to acts of moral agency is that one must at

least believe that one is doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do, or one must at least believe that one is doing the wrong thing while wilfully disregarding what is right, before an act can qualify as an authentic act.

Agency of any kind seems to require that one behave intentionally, that one possess awareness, particularly self-awareness. An agent does not simply 'go through the motions'. Moral agency implies the possession of agency in general, with the added requirement that one must possess awareness of moral issues. The possession of moral agency implies such conditions as having an awareness of right and wrong, recognizing that 'I ought' is different from 'I like', and having some understanding of moral rules. Clearly, one cannot act authentically in the moral realm (in the way that authenticity is described above) unless one is already acting as a moral agent. Our aim here, is not to define the concept of moral agency in as much detail as we have defined the concept of personal autonomy, but only to show the close connection between the conditions of autonomy and what it means to be a moral agent. It might be emphasized at this point that 'moral agent' is taken to refer to one who is morally responsible for his actions. Ascriptions of moral responsibility are normally made when <sup>an</sup> agent is attributed with possessing either moral praiseworthiness or moral blameworthiness. The notion of moral responsibility is almost always applicable in morally hazardous situations, but rarely in morally innocuous ones.

In some situations, imputations of moral praiseworthiness

or blameworthiness are withdrawn where authenticity is absent.

Consider the following example:

...if a person distributes sweets to children in a fair and equitable manner, we can no doubt say that he is 'acting justly': but if we learn that his only reason for doing this is that he is frightened of what the children's parents will say if he doesn't do it, then we should say that he is not acting out of a belief in justice, but out of fear: and certainly that he is not necessarily a just man.

If the act was not performed from a desire to adhere to the principle of justice, the act is not morally praiseworthy, although there may be some utility value in praising acts which appear to be just whether or not they are authentic. The question then arises as to whether the act is morally blameworthy. We may regard it as symptomatic of a low level of moral development, or we may regard the person concerned as cowardly, but we would probably not regard him as morally blameworthy unless he went out of his way to misrepresent himself as a just person, pretending he was adhering to a principle to which he was not really adhering at all (in which case he would be regarded as authentically dishonest).

Imputations of moral responsibility are not always withdrawn however, when authenticity is lacking. In fact, we often hold people morally responsible for their actions where authenticity is absent, but could reasonably be expected to be present. If John Jones fails to consider whether action X is right or wrong, and if action X occurs in some



morally hazardous situation, we might hold Jones morally responsible for failing to act authentically in those situations in which he could reasonably be expected to do so. For example, if Jones were to engage in anti-racist marches simply because "it's fun", or because "my buddies march", not only would we withhold moral praise from Jones, but we would probably blame him for failing to consider the serious moral injustice involved in racism. In cases like this, authenticity and moral agency appear to be very closely connected. In similar cases such as those in which an agent deceives himself and rationalizes his behavior, considerations of whether or not an act is authentic feature prominently in determining whether an act is morally praiseworthy or morally blameworthy. This is clearly an area where much work remains to be done.

#### RATIONAL REFLECTION AND MORAL AGENCY

Moral views are different from scientific beliefs. They are typically expressed in value statements, not factual ones. They may be supported by factual statements but they are not factual statements themselves. No number of facts can ever "prove" that killing is wrong in the same way it can be proven that a particular swimming pool holds 75,000 gallons of water. This does not mean that moral views are wholly arbitrary however, or that one moral view is as good as any other. A moral view that is based on prejudice, false evidence and muddled thinking is hardly to be commended as one based on rational

reflection, impartiality and consideration for others might be.

If one is committed to a particular moral view one holds certain beliefs with regard to the worthwhileness of it. The beliefs on which such a commitment is based, says Trigg, like scientific beliefs or any other kind of beliefs, can be either true or false.<sup>16</sup> Some commitments are obviously better supported than others depending on the objective truth or falsity of the beliefs which underlie the commitment. Though the moral relativist position holds that there is no such thing as the objective truth or falsity of a moral belief, a brief examination of some aspects of various relativist positions may help to throw some light on the place of rational reflection in acts of moral agency.

One relativist position holds that individual judgments about truth are 'wrong' if they are contrary to those of the majority in the society. Trigg points out the incoherence of this point of view by saying that society is not something which exists independent of the individual, but is instead, an association of many individuals.<sup>17</sup> Since at some point the thoughts of an individual or a few individuals must precede the thought of the society as a whole, it seems foolish to define truth in terms of what a particular society thinks is true.

The subjectivist holds that what is true for one individual is true for him, and what is true for another is true for him. Neither is wrong even though their positions and beliefs may directly contradict each other. The sub-

jectivist may also be a conceptual relativist.<sup>18</sup> Conceptual relativism is the view that one is incapable of understanding a system outside one's own particular set. Hence, one is supposedly incapable of passing judgment on the truth or falsity of the beliefs of someone from a different conceptual system. It is possible, holds the conceptual relativist, to enter into another conceptual set, but only by internalizing the beliefs and concepts of the new cultural mode, not by studying it from the outside. The argument is that when one internalizes the beliefs and concepts of the new cultural mode the truth of that mode becomes apparent. If it does not become apparent, one has not really entered into the new conceptual set, in which case one is incapable of passing judgment on the truth or falsity of the beliefs in that set. The argument is circular and would seem to imply that the study of sociology and anthropology is useless.<sup>19</sup> According to the conceptual relativist position "truth becomes a consequence of belief or commitment and not a reason for it."<sup>20</sup> One includes or excludes evidence for or against a certain belief to the extent that the evidence meshes with one's commitments.

Some philosophers hold that there are different kinds of reasoning.<sup>21</sup> Religious reasoning and scientific reasoning, for example, are like two different games and the rules of one cannot apply to the rules of the other. If we take this position to its logical conclusion we would be forced to admit that there is no fundamental difference between a justifiable moral belief and a satisfying superstition or even an illusion. Yet we know

there is a basic difference and the distinction we make between justifiable moral belief and satisfying misconceptions is fairly commonplace. The relativist's position on the non-existence of any ultimate, absolute truth or reality need not disturb that distinction any more than the hard determinist position can disturb the distinction we make between compulsive acts and reasoned choices. When we speak of one moral view being better than another, we do not mean that it is more representative of some metaphysical absolute, but that it is more in keeping with the principles of impartiality, relevancy, logical consistency, consideration for others, and so forth.

For an agent to be acting morally he must be acting for a conscious reason. This reason, says Wilson, "must also be causally operative: it must not be a rationalization."<sup>22</sup> Using the subject of cannibalism as an example, Wilson makes the point as follows:

Thus a man might never eat human beings, be able to give excellent reasons why eating them was wrong, and think that these reasons were what influenced his behavior: yet it might still be true that what really stopped him eating people was some unconscious feeling of guilt or taboo. We could indeed say in one sense that what he did, considered by itself, was rational: that is, that reasons could be given for it. But in a more important sense he would not be acting rationally.<sup>23</sup>

What is the objection to calling someone a moral agent who usually rationalizes his behavior, or who, perhaps, does not reflect on his actions very much at all, provided he consistently acts in accordance with the mores of the society

in which he lives? If he refrains from stealing, lying, murdering, breaking promises and so on, then isn't it irrelevant, one might ask, whether he engages in rational reflection. The point is that if one refrains from taking someone else's property because one has been conditioned in some way to refrain from such behavior, one is not refraining from stealing but only from taking someone else's property. 'Stealing', like other moral terms, involves the notion of intentionality which in turn involves freedom of choice, authenticity, some degree of rational reflection and even the 'strength of will' to perform the act or we wouldn't call it stealing."...if intentionality is required for moral action, then we cannot make people act morally."<sup>24</sup> Whether the element of moral language under consideration is stealing, kindness, meanness or murder, the category of moral agency usually does not apply to people in whom rational reflection is lacking (unless it could reasonably be expected to be present). Where moral language is used, some minimal amount of rational reflection is called for on the part of the user of such language, because to call something 'good' or 'bad' or 'right' or 'wrong' presupposes the existence of criteria for making that judgment; but, where moral language is used appropriately, some minimal amount of rational reflection is also called for on the part of the person being judged.

An act of moral agency must have causally operative reasons which direct it, but this is not to say, of course, that any causally operative reason will do. An employer may exercise freedom of choice in deciding to treat his employees justly

and, let us assume, he is perfectly free to carry out whatever acting justly might involve in his particular situation (e.g. with regard to distribution of wages, adequate working conditions, company pension schemes and other benefits). Let us also assume that his decision to be just is authentic, that is, resulting from a desire to adhere to the principle of justice for its own sake, rather than simply because it will make him more popular with the workers to do so. The presence of freedom of choice and authenticity are not enough however, to ensure that the employer will act as a moral agent. He must also attend to the facts of the particular case. His decisions about which employees are to receive the highest wages and the most benefits must be consistent and impartial. In other words, for his decisions to be considered acts of moral agency, they must be based on conformity to the rules and principles of rational reflection which may be described loosely as:

- (1) sticking to the laws of logic,
- (2) using language correctly, and
- (3) attending to the facts.<sup>25</sup>

If one regards a particular action as morally correct, he must also regard it as morally correct for anyone in like circumstances, otherwise he is not being consistent or impartial. "For a reason to be a good moral reason, it must point to some facts in the external world which make it reasonable to commit oneself to a universalizable rule."<sup>26</sup> Being rational and reasonable, however, does not imply that one should coldly

disregard emotions in arriving at moral beliefs or in acting upon them. "Being rational or reasonable...does not mean disregarding one's feelings, but trying to assess, guide or direct them in some coherent way."<sup>27</sup>

It would be incorrect to say that the presence of rational reflection is always a necessary condition of moral agency, because we often hold people morally responsible for acts of wrongdoing in cases where they fail to reflect rationally, but could reasonably be expected to do so. Suppose I take six young children out for a canoe ride down a fast flowing river. Suppose also that the canoe overturns and the six children drown. If I was so unreflective that I failed to consider the facts that none of the children could swim, none had lifejackets, the canoe was too small for seven people, and the river was too treacherous for canoeing, then, all things being equal, I would be morally responsible for six deaths on the grounds that I did not exercise proper rational reflection.

"Only because man has the capacity to reason about his choices can he be said to stand under a continuing obligation to take responsibility for them."<sup>28</sup> In so far as a person is incapable of rational reflection (e.g. very young children and people who are mentally ill) we do not hold him morally blameworthy for his actions, but in so far as a person is capable of rational reflection but fails to exercise this capacity he is morally culpable for acts of wrongdoing. The presupposition exists that one has an obligation to take responsibility for

one's actions unless a relevant excusing condition is applicable. One of the problems with excusing conditions though, in both legal and moral responsibility, is that there does not seem to be a great deal of agreement as to what factors govern one's capacity to control one's behavior. This problem cannot be solved either by the philosopher or by the psychologist alone. Each needs the help of the other.

We have seen that the presence of rational reflection has the quality of increasing the value of morally praiseworthy acts to the extent that it is present in any given situation. Its presence also intensifies the moral blameworthiness of acts of wrongdoing. That is why premeditated murder is considered to be more wicked than murdering someone in a fit of temper. The absence of rational reflection in situations where it could be present also has the effect of intensifying the moral blameworthiness of acts of wrongdoing. We can summarize the whole situation by saying that either the presence of rational reflection or the presence of a situation in which an agent could reasonably be expected to engage in rational reflection is a necessary condition of moral agency.

#### STRENGTH OF WILL AND MORAL AGENCY

It is conceivable that someone may rationally hold what he believes to be a morally praiseworthy belief, be free to act upon it, and yet fail to do so, although this issue is still seriously contended among philosophers. Some writers



hold that if one does not perform a certain action when free to do so, then it really makes no sense to say that he believes action X to be the best thing to do. At least two responses can be made to this claim. If 'best' is taken to mean 'right', then we are led to the conclusion that it makes no sense to talk about anyone acting immorally. If we can never do anything we believe to be wrong, then clearly the concepts of moral agency and moral responsibility are vacuous. If, on the other hand, 'best' is taken to mean expedient, advantageous, gratifying, pleasurable, etc., then the point is simply that moral considerations are sometimes ignored in favor of ego-centered aims - a commonplace contention. It is beyond our present purposes to enter into a detailed discussion of this issue. Suffice to say that any contention that we cannot knowingly do anything wrong is, at the very least, counter-intuitive. In any case, our normal expectation is that unless certain excusing conditions are applicable, or unless the sacrifice required is too great in relation to the amount of good which might accrue from it, people should act upon their decisions to do what is right and avoid what is harmful. If they fail to act in such cases, we regard them as cowardly, weak-willed, lazy, or even morally blameworthy if sufficient harm results from the non-action in question, provided some supererogatory deed is not required to prevent the ensuing harm.

Strength of will is also required to put morally

blameworthy decisions into practice. This sounds odd because the notion of strength of will usually carries favorable connotations with it, but all we mean by strength of will in the context of moral agency is the ability to put thought and decision into action - whether the action is morally praiseworthy or not. Strength of will, then, is a necessary condition for the presence of moral agency except of course, in cases where it is absent but could reasonably be expected to be present.

#### OTHER PEOPLE'S INTERESTS AND MORAL AGENCY

So far we have been unable to distinguish the autonomous person from the moral agent, except in those cases in which we attribute moral agency to someone in whom authenticity, reflection or strength of will are lacking but could reasonably be expected to be present. Whereas the presence of the four conditions we have discussed comprises both a necessary and sufficient list in the case of autonomy, the list is far from sufficiently exhaustive in the case of moral agency.

Some philosophers have put forward the view that the possession of autonomy necessitates the possession of moral goodness on the grounds that one cannot fully abide by the principles of rational reflection without being a morally praiseworthy agent. They claim that there is a strong connection between justice, adherence to the principle of which is part of what it means to be morally praiseworthy, and impartiality, adherence to the principle of which

is part of what it means to be rationally reflective. Alan Gewirth tries to point out that autonomy implies moral goodness when he says:

If...the self in question is regarded as having to meet certain rational requirements, then autonomy can be positively and indeed necessarily related to moral goodness because these requirements are also the criteria of morality.<sup>29</sup>

Gewirth's position is, I think, a little too confining. Although we expect people to be rationally reflective to some significant degree before we are willing to say that they are acting as autonomous persons, we do not require that an autonomous person must act impartially or unselfishly, although in failing to do so he may be acting as a moral agent. It is often said that master minds behind criminal operations are notoriously autonomous, and we would have little difficulty conceiving of a case in which we would want to call an individual autonomous, yet be quite certain that he was acting immorally. Imagine a highly intelligent, freely acting, authentic and reflective individual who is the master mind behind an internationally operated, underground organization, the purpose of which is to promote the sale of narcotics to children. We would probably want to say that such an individual is sufficiently rationally reflective to be regarded as autonomous rather than anomic, since he has to think about what he is doing in a way that someone who merely follows impulses does not. This kind of example indicates that the possession of personal autonomy

does not necessitate the possession of moral goodness. However, once an autonomous act is performed in other people's interests and for the sake of other people's interests, it becomes a morally praiseworthy act. If John Jones gives \$5000 to a Crippled Children's Fund because it will result in his having to pay less income tax, the act might be autonomous but it is doubtful that we would regard it as an act of moral agency since it is neither morally praiseworthy nor morally blameworthy. It would, of course, be morally praiseworthy if it were done for the sake of crippled children.

To take another example, if John Jones goes to Africa to work in a leper colony simply because doing so enhances his reputation as a missionary, the act would hardly be considered morally praiseworthy unless his reasons for going to Africa included a sincere desire to help lepers. The point made here is that morally praiseworthy acts are distinguished from non-moral autonomous acts by the fact that they are performed in accordance with what happens to be (or is thought to be) in other people's interests. What of morally blameworthy acts? We usually attribute moral blameworthiness to people who fail to act in accordance with other people's interests when they could be reasonably expected to do so. We will now turn briefly, to the question of moral beliefs.

Wilson holds that it is perfectly possible to hold a moral belief that is not defended by reference to people's interests,

but he points out that there is something very odd about doing so.<sup>30</sup> He claims that a moral belief that does not relate to people's interests remains a moral belief provided it fulfills the following five criteria:

- (1) It must be freely held.
- (2) It must be rational in the sense that there are causally operative reasons for holding such a belief.
- (3) It must be impartial.
- (4) It must be prescriptive.
- (5) It must be overriding i.e. take precedence over other kinds of beliefs.<sup>31</sup>

Wilson's argument is that a belief which fulfills these five conditions but does not relate to people's interests is a moral belief but not a rational one. His argument is confusing because he uses 'rational' in at least two different senses. When he says that a belief which does not relate to people's interests can be a moral belief but not a rational one he is not using the word 'rational' to refer to a belief for which causally operative reasons are in effect as he does in (2) above. Instead, use of the term 'rational' in this context refers to a moral view which is supported by reasons relating to people's interests.<sup>32</sup> Wilson uses the example of an art lover who holds that the preservation of works of art is more important than saving human life.<sup>33</sup> If the art lover supports his view with the

contention that art works are just so beautiful they should be preserved even if doing so cost the life of every human being, Wilson wants to hold that his view is a moral one (though not rational) provided the art lover holds it freely, has causally operative reasons for holding it, and means it to be impartial, prescriptive and overriding. If we accept Wilson's position, we are committed to allowing the possibility that one who holds that the preservation of postage stamps or machine guns or nuclear weapons is more desirable than the preservation of human life, holds a moral view provided it is prescriptive, overriding, etc. There appears to be considerable disagreement among philosophers as to what constitutes a moral view and what does not. Our aim is not to solve that problem, but only to show how autonomy is a necessary, though not a sufficient condition of moral agency. The notion of basing one's decisions on consideration of how those decisions relate to other people's interests has been used as an example of another acceptable necessary condition of moral agency.

Acts of moral agency are based on various moral rules and principles such as freedom, justice, respect for persons (moral principles), and refraining from lying, killing or stealing without good reason (moral rules). Moral principles are generally upheld on the grounds that they are in people's interests while moral rules are justified to the extent that they are manifestations of moral principles. Difficulty arises

when a moral rule (e.g. refrain from lying) is regarded as a self-evident truth independent of people's interests. The example of Kant's stipulation that it is always wrong to lie readily comes to mind. To use a well-known argument, suppose madmen with machine guns come to the door asking whether we are harboring a particular innocent stranger in our basement. Ought we to lie? Kant says no, the morally praiseworthy agent does not lie, but it is difficult to make sense of this position unless one took the rule utilitarian point of view that in the long run people's interests are best served by everyone adopting the maxim 'Never tell a lie'. To adopt a maxim or rule of thumb and stick to it regardless of how people's interests are best served seems closer to fanaticism than anything else.

There are, of course, numerous problems relating to the question of people's interests. If what people need and what people want are not synonymous, does 'people's interests' refer to wants, needs, some compromise between the two, or does this vary with circumstances? Who has the right to decide what another person really needs? In many situations short and long term interests militate against each other. Should each person's interests count equally, or should some people's interests count more than others? Most of the moral dilemmas people face over issues like abortion, capital punishment, or civil rights are the result of either direct opposition between what is in the interests of one party and what is in the

interests of another, or confusion and conflict over the whole issue about what is in people's interests and what is not. We encounter all kinds of philosophical and practical problems when engaging in moral deliberation. The actual judgments we make, however, may be defined as moral judgments or judgments from the moral point of view if they:

...are judgments of actions based on a consideration of how people are to be treated, how their interests are to weigh against one's own. The point of making a moral judgment is to adjudicate a conflict of interest, typically human interests. Were our interests never in conflict there would be no occasion for making moral judgments or having moral principles.<sup>34</sup>



## FOOTNOTES

1. Jerrold R. Coombs, "Concerning the Nature of Moral Competence," Yearbook, II, 1975, p.9.
2. Joel Feinberg, "Problematic Responsibility in Law and Morals," Doing and Deserving, Princeton: University Press, 1970, p.37.
3. Ibid. pp.25-37.
4. Ibid. pp.31-32.
5. Ibid. p.34.
6. Ibid. p.36.
7. Ibid. p.37.
8. Ibid. p.30-31.
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11. Ibid. p.53.
12. Ibid. p.52.
13. Ibid. p.46.
14. Loc. cit.
15. Ibid. p.58.
16. Roger Trigg, Reason and Commitment, Cambridge: University Press, 1973. Since the points of view referred to are presented repeatedly throughout the book, no page reference is cited.
17. Loc. cit.

18. Loc. cit.
19. Loc. cit.
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25. Ibid. p.76.
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30. Wilson, op. cit. pp.79-82.
31. Ibid. p.77.
32. Ibid. pp.78-79.
33. Ibid. pp.79-80.
34. Coombs, op. cit., p.9.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have seen that the possession and exercise of personal autonomy includes the possession and exercise of freedom of choice, authenticity, rational reflection and strength of will. The promotion of personal autonomy may be justified on the grounds that it is extrinsically worthwhile, intrinsically valuable, educationally important, and significant in the exercise of moral agency.

An interesting philosophical question which arises from our discussion is whether and to what extent, it is more desirable to be an autonomous moral agent (but an immoral one) than a non-autonomous, non-moral agent. Peters makes an interesting point that Hegel and others have made before him when he says that some philosophers regard punishment (as opposed to rehabilitative treatment) as a criminal's fundamental right, that is, as a tribute to his moral autonomy.<sup>1</sup>

Others have repudiated the reformative approach because they feel that it treats the person who has the capacity to make his own rational decisions as if he were a lunatic or a child.<sup>2</sup>

One might judge from such a comment that it is more desirable, because it is more in accord with human dignity, to be a wicked moral agent than a non-autonomous agent. Unfortunately, such a point of view would probably be of little comfort.

to someone who pleads 'Not Guilty' on the grounds of insanity in criminal court if he is found guilty and punishable as a tribute to his autonomy.

Other interesting philosophical questions arise from the discussion of autonomy and moral agency. It is widely recognized that a certain amount of indoctrination is required when teaching children who have not yet reached the age of reason to abide by certain rules for their own protection and the protection of others. Sometimes such indoctrination is not regarded as real indoctrination in the strict sense of the word, since it is not intended to interfere with the child's capacity to reason for himself later on. Nevertheless, if we can justify interference with the free choice of a four year old to play in the traffic on the grounds that his choice would obviously put him into a potentially harmful situation, can we justify interfering with the free choices of relatively non-autonomous adults on the same grounds? The answer to this question, if there is an answer, is worthy of exploration and would have far reaching implications in the area of political philosophy.

Of more immediate import are the educational implications of the analysis of autonomy and moral agency. How the promotion of autonomy and moral education may be most effectively conducted is largely an empirical question upon which light is shown through the research of such people as Lawrence Kohlberg.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that philosophical analysis is useless to the classroom teacher without massive scientific research projects

to answer the empirical questions which philosophical analysis raises. If teachers are made aware of the conditions of autonomy as well as those of moral agency and the connection between the two concepts, there are means and methods a teacher might employ in fostering autonomy and moral agency - means and methods which might be dictated by common sense until such times as conclusive scientific data is available. But the teacher must first be very clear about the nature of the ideal he is trying to promote. Many teachers refrain from engaging in honest dialogue with students because they seem to make the existentialist error of equating anything other than a criterionless choice with an indoctrinated choice, or some other kind of compelled choice. Of course there is always the tendency to promote one's own beliefs if one is concerned with promoting truth because, as we mentioned earlier, part of what it means to hold a belief is to regard the belief as true. On the other hand, part of what it means to have a "due regard for truth" is to value the means by which one justifiably arrives at a certain belief as much as, or more than, the belief itself.

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2. Loc. cit.
3. See, for instance, Kohlberg's "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education," in C.M.Beck, B.S.Crittendon and E.V.Sullivan (eds.), Moral Education: Interdisciplinary Approaches, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971. pp. 23-92.

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