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The Practical Dimension of Autonomy

So far in this book, I have been primarily concerned with the decisional dimension of autonomy. In this chapter though, I shall move away from considerations pertaining to the decisional dimension of autonomy, towards what I described in the introduction as the ‘practical’ dimension of autonomy. This dimension pertains to an agent’s ability to act in pursuit of their chosen ends. My aim in this chapter is to explain both what it is for an agent to be practically autonomous in this way, and how this dimension of autonomy relates to the cognitive and reflective elements of the decisional dimension of autonomy (pertaining respectively to the kinds of beliefs and reflection on one’s motivating desires that decisional autonomy requires). In particular, I shall suggest that the boundaries of the cognitive element of decisional autonomy, and of what it is for a belief to be decisionally necessary, are elucidated by considerations pertaining to the practical dimension of autonomy.

I shall begin by defending the claim that an adequate theory of autonomy should incorporate conditions pertaining to the practical dimension of autonomy. In section 2, I shall consider some prominent understandings of the nature of freedom, before going on to suggest, in section 3, how much freedom an agent must have in order to be minimally practically autonomous. In section 4, I shall argue that practical autonomy requires holding certain true beliefs; in doing so, I shall suggest that this informs how we should draw the boundaries of the cognitive element of decisional dimension of autonomy, a claim that that I shall consider further in my discussion of informed consent in Chapter 6. In section 5, I shall explain the relationship between the reflective and practical dimensions of autonomy, and argue that an agent’s beliefs about what they are free to do importantly influences their decisions. Finally, in section 6, I shall consider the implications of my arguments for the enhancement and development of autonomy.

1. Introducing the Practical Dimension of Autonomy

The bioethical principle of respect for autonomy incorporates a negative obligation that enjoins us to not restrain the autonomous actions of others. As Dan Brock points out:

...interference with self-determination can involve interference with people's deciding for themselves, *but also interference with their acting as they have decided they want to act.*¹

This negative obligation suggests that there is a practical dimension to the concept of autonomy as we understand it in bioethical discussion, a dimension that pertains to the agent's ability to act in pursuit of their ends.

This understanding of the practical dimension of autonomy overlaps to some extent with well-known conceptions of freedom in political philosophy. Isaiah Berlin famously outlined a conception of negative liberty that we use in attempting to answer the question 'What is the area within which the subject—a person or group of persons—is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?' For Berlin, negative liberty contrasts with a positive sense of liberty, a sense that pertains to the kind of freedom required for what I have called decisional autonomy, or what Berlin suggests is the sense of freedom involved in being 'the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that'.

Whilst Berlin's conception of negative freedom has been highly influential, the conception of the practical dimension of autonomy that I shall outline departs from it in some important ways, as I shall explain below. Briefly here, rather than being concerned with what or who is preventing the agent from acting, I shall suggest that the practical dimension pertains to an individual's ability to act effectively in pursuit of their ends. Some initial clarifications of how we ought to understand this claim are immediately necessary. First, in claiming that autonomy requires that agents are able to act effectively in pursuit of their ends, I do not mean to claim that they must be *successful* in their endeavours; one can of course fail to achieve one's ends and yet still be autonomous. Rather, the point undergirding the practical dimension of autonomy is that being unable to act effectively in pursuit of one's ends is inimical to one's autonomy all things considered, if we understand 'being able to act effectively' to simply mean that an agent (or an authorized proxy for that agent)² is not precluded from achieving the goal that she autonomously wants to achieve by the absence of certain kinds of freedom. I shall say more about this below.

Second, the decisional dimension of autonomy is theoretically prior to the practical dimension with regards to our understanding of an agent's all things considered autonomy. If an agent lacks autonomy with respect to their decision about what to do, then they still lack autonomy all things considered, even if they have the freedom to act effectively on the basis of that non-autonomous decision. For instance, one would not be autonomous if one performed an act motivated by a manipulated desire, even if one was not hindered in successfully performing that act. Accordingly, although we might agree with the philosopher Thomas Hobbes that irrational beings may appropriately be described as free in the physical sense that he famously describes,³ they may not appropriately be described as autonomous on the approach that I am defending, in so far as they lack decisional autonomy. For the purposes of

¹ Brock, *Life and Death*, 29. Emphasis added.

² In the interests of brevity I shall henceforth omit this qualification.

³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 139.

this chapter, unless otherwise stated, I shall henceforth assume that the agents under discussion are autonomous with respect to their decisions.

Philosophers are sometimes sceptical of the claim that a theory of autonomy should incorporate conditions pertaining to what I am calling the practical dimension of autonomy. For instance, John Christman writes:

The ability to act – successfully and as planned – cannot be (a necessary condition of autonomy). I am often prevented from acting or completing my plans Such circumstances make me less free (in a certain sense of freedom), but they do not make me less autonomous, at least if this latter term is to retain any of its conceptual distinctiveness.⁴

Christman is certainly correct to deny that autonomy cannot require that we are successful in achieving our goals. However, dismissing considerations pertaining to the agent's ability to act from one's theory of autonomy on this basis is to discount an important aspect of autonomy due to the inadequacies of an implausibly strong understanding of it. It is entirely plausible to deny that autonomy requires the ability to act successfully, whilst maintaining that it may yet require some lower threshold ability to act in pursuit of one's goals. This is the kind of condition that I shall defend in this chapter.

In fact, the failure to accommodate a practical dimension into one's theory of autonomy leads to an impoverished discussion of autonomy in bioethics. Three points speak in favour of this view. The first follows on from my above discussion of the principle of respect for autonomy; the way in which we use the concept of autonomy in bioethical contexts suggests that we implicitly understand it to incorporate a practical dimension. For example, we can coherently say that the fact that euthanasia is illegal severely undermines the autonomy of terminally ill individuals with decision-making capacity who wish to end their suffering. If we believe that a theory of autonomy for use in contemporary bioethics should be congruous with our widespread use of the concept in that context, then it seems that our theory of autonomy should accommodate a dimension of the concept that it is implicitly understood to incorporate in our bioethical discussions.

The second point in favour of this view is that acknowledging the practical dimension of autonomy seems to be necessary if we are to account for the high prudential value that we afford to autonomy. I shall consider the value of autonomy in greater detail in Chapter 9; at this point though we might observe that there would seem to be little prudential value in being autonomous with respect to one's decisions if one was perpetually frustrated in one's attempts to pursue one's autonomously chosen ends. If we believe that autonomy bears high prudential value because we

⁴ Christman, *The Politics of Persons*, 154. Some philosophers are more explicit than others in this regard. For instance, Taylor rejects the claim that autonomy incorporates a practical dimension, and instead claims that being able to act effectively in pursuit of one's ends may increase the *value* of autonomy (Taylor, *Practical Autonomy and Bioethics*). Coggon and Miola explicitly draw a distinction between autonomy and what I call the practical dimension of autonomy in Coggon and Miola, 'Autonomy, Liberty, and Medical Decision-Making'. However, this tendency is also apparent in the more subtle way in which philosophical discussions of autonomy typically concern only what I have termed the reflective element of decisional autonomy. See Oshana, 'Personal Autonomy and Society', 83–6, for an analysis of this tendency in the philosophical literature.

have a fundamental interest in ‘living a life that is our own’ (as I shall claim in Chapter 9), then it seems that we should be able to *act* on the basis of our decisions, as well as making those decisions in an autonomous manner. John Harris puts the point in the following, typically forceful, way:

Agents are quintessentially actors; to be an agent is to be capable of action. Without agency, in this sense, decision-making is . . . both morally and practically barren.⁵

The third and perhaps strongest point in favour of the view that autonomy incorporates a practical dimension is one that I shall develop over the course of this chapter. To put it simply here though, if we fail to acknowledge the practical dimension of autonomy in our overall theory of autonomy, it is not clear that we can adequately account for considerations that are important for cashing out elements of decisional autonomy. In the previous chapter, I noted that coercion serves to undermine decisional autonomy because the coercing agent subjugates her victim’s will by controlling their practically available alternatives. In this chapter, I shall also argue that considerations pertaining to our practical freedoms should play an important role in understanding the boundaries of the cognitive element of decisional autonomy, and the way in which our beliefs about what we are free to do can have crucial effects on our choices. In this regard, whilst we should acknowledge Berlin’s insight that considerations of decisional autonomy (or what he calls positive liberty) often conflict with considerations of practical autonomy (or what he calls negative liberty), we should not overlook the ways in which there can be other positive interactions between these two dimensions of autonomy.

The fundamental point that grounds this view is that, *we make our choices, and sustain our motivating desires in the light of our beliefs about what is practically realizable*. Indeed, the significant implications of these beliefs for motivation, agency, and choice have been empirically demonstrated in the literature of self-efficacy.⁶ If one is to account for this crucial theoretical point, one cannot ignore considerations pertaining to the practical dimension of autonomy in one’s overall theory. Moreover, a theory of autonomy that incorporates this feature will be better able to accommodate key insights of relational autonomy. Our ability and freedom to act, and our beliefs in our self-efficacy are not just a function of our own capabilities; they are also mediated by our social circumstances and relationships, as I shall explore below.⁷

This last feature suggests that in investigating the relationship between freedom and autonomy, we must distinguish the implications of one’s freedom at the point of action from one’s freedom at the point of decision. I return to this distinction below; first though, I shall explain two different senses of freedom that might be employed in this discussion.

⁵ Harris, “ . . . How Narrow the Strait!”, 249.

⁶ Bandura et al., ‘Self-Efficacy Beliefs as Shapers of Children’s Aspirations and Career Trajectories’; Axelrod and Lehman, ‘Responding to Environmental Concerns’; Krueger and Dickson, ‘How Believing in Ourselves Increases Risk Taking’; Bandura, ‘Perceived Self-Efficacy in the Exercise of Personal Agency’. Further, for a discussion of how medical therapy can alter self-perceptions of authenticity and autonomy by enhancing agency, see Haan et al., ‘Becoming More Oneself?’

⁷ Oshana, ‘Personal Autonomy and Society’, 95.

2. Positive and Negative Freedom

If an agent is to be able to act effectively in pursuit of their ends, they will need to have certain sorts of freedoms. As such, a natural starting point for an investigation into the practical dimension of autonomy is to carry out a consideration of different understandings of liberty or freedom (like Berlin I shall use the terms interchangeably).⁸

As I outlined in the previous section, it is commonly claimed that there are two separate understandings of freedom. First, freedom understood as the absence of constraint represents a negative conception of freedom; negative freedom may broadly be construed as freedom from interfering debilitating forces that prevent the agent from acting. This description of negative freedom represents the first way in which my conception of practical autonomy departs from Berlin's conception of negative freedom; unlike Berlin, I do not claim that the freedom in question here can only be negated by *agential* forces. On the conception that I am developing here, forces of hazard, such as disease or disability,⁹ can be understood to restrict an agent's practical autonomy in the sense that they can impede agents from being able to act effectively in pursuit of their ends. In this sense, the conception of practical autonomy that I am developing is apolitical; I have noted the relevance of agential intentional influences on decisional autonomy in previous chapters.

There is a second sense in which my conception of practical autonomy is broader than negative freedom as it is commonly construed. On some occasions, we may have the requisite negative freedoms to pursue our goals, but still be unable to do so because we lack certain abilities.

Such cases suggest that we also have a positive conception of *practical* freedom, in which freedom is constituted not by the absence of restraint, but rather by the presence of capacities or conditions that enable the agent to be effective in the pursuit of their ends.¹⁰ Again, I shall depart from Berlin's terminology and follow others in using the term 'positive freedom' to refer to this element of practical autonomy, rather than to considerations pertaining to the control required for decisional autonomy.

Bernard Berofsky aims to capture the essence of this alternative conception of positive freedom by claiming that this sense of freedom is constituted by those personal traits that are '... essential or highly useful to the satisfaction of a wide range of activities and decisions'.¹¹ However, this conception of positive freedom is too broad. Whilst it is true that many abilities are generally useful for the pursuit of a wide range of goals, an agent's ability to pursue her ends may require very specific

⁸ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 34. See Pitkin, 'Are Freedom and Liberty Twins?' for a discussion of ways in which one might distinguish between the two terms.

⁹ For a discussion of how mental disorder can undermine practical (and also decisional) autonomy, see Bolton and Banner, 'Does Mental Disorder Involve Loss of Personal Autonomy?'

¹⁰ Of course, Berlin famously understood positive freedom in a broader sense; however, as Miller points out, Berlin's concept of positive freedom incorporates 'a number of quite different doctrines' (Miller, 'Introduction', 10). In order to avoid a lengthy exegesis of Berlin's essay here, I shall instead consider Berofsky's narrower conception of positive freedom.

¹¹ Berofsky, *Liberation from Self*, 16.

freedoms that are not essential to widely pursued activities. For instance, although having 20/20 unaided vision is not useful for the pursuit of a *wide* range of goals (assuming that we have easy access to visual aids such as spectacles and contact lenses), a person with slightly impaired vision who wants to become a military fighter pilot nonetheless lacks a physical capability that is necessary for them to achieve their goal. Agents can thus lack positive freedoms that are important for the pursuit of *their* goals, but that are not essential for the pursuit of a wide range of activities.

Conversely, agents might lack freedoms that are important for the pursuit of a wide range of goals, and yet still have the positive freedom to act in pursuit of what it is that they want to do. To illustrate consider the case of the slave-philosopher Epictetus. In view of the fact that he was born a slave, Epictetus clearly lacked negative freedom of the sort that is necessary for the effective pursuit of the vast majority of life-plans. Yet, even supposing this, Epictetus was nonetheless free, in both the negative and positive sense, to pursue his goal of living a life of philosophical reflection. *Pace* Berofsky, positive freedom of the sort that is central to an agent's practical autonomy is constituted by those traits and capacities that she requires in order to pursue an end that she herself is motivated to achieve.

Although the distinction between positive and negative freedom is widely adopted, it is somewhat problematic. In some cases, it may be unclear whether some factor is an element of positive or negative freedom; for example, it may not be clear whether we should understand intelligence as a constituent of positive freedom, or a lack of intelligence as a barrier to negative freedom.¹² In questioning the utility of the distinction, Joel Feinberg argues that we can have a comprehensive understanding of freedom as being constituted by freedom from preventative causes, given a sufficiently nuanced analysis of such causes, and the constraints to which they give rise. He suggests that we should analyse preventative causes as giving rise to the following two sorts of constraint:

- (1) A negative constraint = A preventative cause constituted by the absence of some enabling factor.
- (2) A positive constraint = A preventative cause constituted by the presence of some debilitating factor.¹³

Once these distinctions are made, it seems that we might obviate the need for a distinction between positive and negative freedom; freedom is just constituted by freedoms from different sorts of constraints.¹⁴

I am sympathetic to this view. Nevertheless, since I lack the space to further defend this alternative conception, and given the prevalent use of the vocabulary of positive and negative freedom, I believe that the clarity of the following discussion will be best served by adhering to an understanding that employs this distinction. However, I shall use the language of positive and negative freedom in the attenuated sense that Feinberg suggests is harmless, whereby positive freedom is characterized as the

¹² *Ibid.*, 42. See also MacCallum, 'Negative and Positive Freedom'.

¹³ See Feinberg, *Freedom and Fulfillment*, 5–6.

¹⁴ This sentiment is shared by MacCallum's account in MacCallum, 'Negative and Positive Freedom'.

absence of a negative constraint, and negative freedom is characterized as the absence of a positive constraint.¹⁵

The conception of the practical dimension of autonomy is thus broader than Berlin's conception of negative freedom. It can be impeded by non-agential forces, and it incorporates elements of a sense of 'positive freedom' which is quite distinct from Berlin's understanding of that term. To conclude this part of the discussion, we can observe that a better historical precedent for the element of autonomy that I am seeking to identify here is Hobbes' understanding of physical freedom rather than Berlin's conception of liberty, where 'physical freedom' is defined in the following way:

a Free-man is he that, in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to.¹⁶

3. Autonomy, Freedom at the Point of Action, and the Modal Test

The question of how much freedom autonomy requires is a complex one, not least because of the difference between the two conceptions of freedom identified in the previous section. A further difficulty arises due to the fact that the question can be raised at two salient points.¹⁷ First, we might raise it at what we may term 'the point of action', when the agent has *already* decided to act in some way. Raised at this point, the question of freedom is primarily relevant to the practical dimension of autonomy. However, the question may be raised prior to the point of action, at what we might term the 'point of decision', that is, prior to when the agent has decided what it is she will do. Raised at this point, an agent's beliefs about what she is free to do may also impinge on the decisional dimension of their autonomy, as I shall go on to explain.

As such, in order to answer the question of how much freedom autonomy requires, we must carry out two separate investigations. In this section, I shall begin by considering how much freedom an agent requires at the point of action in order to be able to act effectively in pursuit of their ends. I shall consider how much freedom may be required at the point of decision in section 5.

We can begin by observing that practical autonomy cannot require absolute negative freedom (at the point of action), that is, the absence of all possible positive constraints on action, since we can be positively constrained from doing something without that constraint being inimical to our ability to achieve our ends. For instance, consider this example:

Harry has been asked by Jane to look after her dog. Suppose that Harry would instead like to visit the nearby pub. However, Harry decides to stay and look after the dog because he wants to prove his dependability to Jane. Now, suppose that Jane locks Harry in the house with the dog,

¹⁵ Feinberg, *Freedom and Fulfillment*, 7.

¹⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 139.

¹⁷ This distinction maps onto Berofsky's distinction between freedom of action and freedom of decision. Berofsky, *Liberation from Self*, 26–7.

because she is aware that Harry will have spotted the pub on his way in. However, Harry does not realize he is locked in, having *already* resolved to stay in the room looking after the dog.¹⁸

In this example, Harry is positively constrained from leaving the room. However, although he seems to lack a significant negative freedom, Harry still has the negative freedom to *do what he is motivated to do*; he is not positively constrained from looking after the dog. Now, although it might be correct to claim that Harry would enjoy greater freedom if he were not locked into the room, it is not the case that having this freedom would render him more able to effectively pursue his end. Assuming, as is the case in the above example, that prior knowledge of a lack of negative freedom is not impinging on Harry's decision about what to do, his lacking the freedom to leave the room does not seem to reduce his autonomy in any significant way.

The contrast between freedom at the point of action and autonomy is also highlighted by cases in which agents sacrifice certain negative freedoms as an expression of their autonomy. To illustrate this, consider the case of Odysseus and the Sirens:

Not wanting to be lured onto the rocks by the sirens, (Odysseus) commands his men to tie him to the mast and refuse all later orders he will give to be set free. He wants to have his freedom limited so that he can survive.¹⁹

Here, if the crew removed the positive constraints preventing Odysseus from leaving the ship, this would hinder his ability to pursue his goal of hearing the sirens' song without being lured from his ship. We can interpret this case as one in which the agent autonomously decides to limit their own negative freedom to do certain things, on the basis that having such freedoms would hinder their effective pursuit of their chosen goal. Far from enhancing his practical autonomy, removing the positive constraint on Odysseus' action whilst the ship sailed past the sirens would have been inimical to his practical autonomy, and allowed him to act instead on a compelled desire to swim to his death, a desire with respect to which he would not be autonomous. Similarly, in order to participate in civilized society, we may also have to sacrifice a number of freedoms as part of our social lives. However, we may be understood to implicitly consent to the sacrifice of certain freedoms (such as the freedom to commit acts of violence), on the basis that our doing so is a condition of the social contract that affords us a number of strong and important protections that better enable us to pursue our own independent goals.

These cases suggest that what is important with regards to the negative freedom that practical autonomy requires at the point of action is not the number of options that one has the negative freedom to pursue, but rather whether one has the particular negative freedom to pursue the end that one has decided to pursue. In order to be able to act effectively in pursuit of their end, an agent cannot be positively constrained from doing so.

¹⁸ This is a Lockean variant of a so-called Frankfurt example. See Frankfurt, 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility' and Locke, *An Essay on Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter XXI.

¹⁹ Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*, 14–15.

There are perhaps some limits to this; for instance, we might claim that we should not allow an agent the negative freedom to completely abandon their future negative freedom, by selling herself into slavery say. However, we should be clear about why this matters for autonomy. On the account that I am defending, the reason that selling oneself into slavery is problematic is that in doing so, the agent abdicates their negative freedom to act in accordance with a *future* desire that they might develop to not live as a slave.²⁰ Whilst respecting the agent's locally autonomous decision here requires that we do not positively constrain her from becoming a slave, we might still positively constrain her from doing this in the name of her *global* autonomy. This, I suggest, is a case in which respecting local and global autonomy might require different things of us; I shall consider other such cases in Chapter 9. However, the mere fact that the slave desires to subjugate herself to another's authority for the rest of her life is not *necessarily* incompatible with her global autonomy on the view I am defending in this book, as some theorists have maintained.²¹

As is the case with negative freedom, lacking certain positive freedoms need not always be inimical to our practical autonomy. After all, we all lack certain capabilities, but this does not necessarily preclude the possibility of our practical autonomy. Most obviously, some freedoms are just irrelevant to our ability to pursue our ends. For example, if I do not enjoy listening to or playing music, the fact that I lack perfect pitch does not seem to prevent me from being practically autonomous. My above discussion of positive freedom also suggests that different agents might require different positive freedoms to act in pursuit of their goals. Whilst there may be certain abilities that most agents require to do this, it seems that an agent with suitably esoteric goals could require very different sorts of positive freedoms from other agents.

With these reflections in mind, and being mindful of the fact that a plausible theory of autonomy cannot require that agents are always successful in achieving their ends, I am now in a position to explain what it means for an agent to be able to act effectively in pursuit of their ends in the sense that I invoked when introducing the practical dimension of autonomy. In some cases, positive constraints that take away an agent's negative freedom will preclude the agent from pursuing a certain goal in *any* sense; for example. The question of whether an agent has the requisite negative freedom for practical autonomy may thus seem to be a binary question; it is either the case that a debilitating factor that precludes the pursuit of a goal is present, or it is not.

An analogous claim could be made with regards to *some* positive freedoms; if an agent lacks certain enabling factors, they may be precluded from acting effectively in pursuit of their goals in *any* sense. For instance, I shall argue below that an agent may lack practical autonomy if they are informationally cut-off from achieving their goals by virtue of holding certain false beliefs. Call these sorts of freedoms *discrete*

²⁰ This is how Dworkin explains the wrongness of selling oneself into slavery. See Dworkin, 'Paternalism'.

²¹ See Oshana, 'Personal Autonomy and Society', 86–9; Waller, 'Natural Autonomy and Alternative Possibilities'. For a similar reply to the one given above, see Sneddon, 'What's Wrong with Selling Yourself Into Slavery?'

freedoms. With regards to discrete freedoms, we may say that an agent is only able to act effectively in pursuit of a goal whose achievement requires certain discrete freedoms, if they actually have those freedoms.

However, many of our freedoms admit of degrees. For instance, it seems plausible to claim that the pursuit of different goals might require different degrees of intelligence. Scalar freedoms such as intelligence present something of a theoretical problem with regards to practical autonomy, since it cannot be the case that an agent must have the *maximum* degree of some particular scalar positive freedom in order for it to be appropriate to claim that they are able to act effectively in pursuit of their ends; this would make the standards of autonomy far too demanding. Therefore, in cases in which the pursuit of some goal requires a scalar freedom x , it seems that we must stipulate that there is some threshold level of x that the agent must reach in order to be practically autonomous. However, as I pre-empted above, in stipulating the relevant threshold here, we must also allow for the possibility that an autonomous agent could have the threshold level of this scalar positive freedom and yet fail to achieve their goal. If practical autonomy is not to be too demanding, it cannot require that the practically autonomous agent must always *succeed* in their endeavours.

One plausible way of cashing out the notion of ‘having the necessary positive freedom to be able to act effectively in pursuit of some goal’ in a way that meets these criteria is to apply a modal test. First, we may appropriately be said to have such freedom, if there is some nearby possible world in which we have the same degree of positive freedom, and in which we *do* successfully achieve our goal. However, if there is *no* nearby possible world in which the agent has the same degree of freedom under consideration, and in which they successfully achieve their goal, it is plausible to claim that their failure to achieve their goal in the real world may be attributable to their lacking this freedom.²² We may say that lacking the degree of freedom in question is thus sufficient (although perhaps not necessary)²³ for establishing that the agent lacks practical autonomy; they are modally precluded from successfully achieving their goal by the lack of this particular freedom. This formulation gives substance to what it means to have the necessary scalar positive freedom to be able to act effectively in pursuit of some goal, without committing us to the view that being practically autonomous requires that the agent must *succeed* in the pursuit of her goals, or that she has the maximum degree of a particular scalar positive freedom.

Accordingly, at the point of action, the freedom (in both the positive and negative sense) that is required for practical autonomy is the freedom to act effectively in pursuit of one’s own ends in the manner that I have delineated above.²⁴ This view

²² For a seminal discussion of the role of possible worlds in the logic of counterfactual conditional statements, see Stalnaker, ‘A Theory of Conditionals’.

²³ I am leaving open the possibility that agents who are not modally precluded from success could nonetheless lack practical autonomy for other reasons.

²⁴ One potential objection to this account is that it might be understood to entail that agents who have a preference to achieve an outcome that cannot possibly be achieved (say of flying unaided) can be said to lack practical autonomy. I am prepared to accept this point, but only because it has limited force. The reason for this is that on the account of autonomy that I developed in Chapter 2, agents will not be autonomous with respect to such preferences, in so far as preferences are understood to be action-guiding. Recall that on the theory that I developed in Chapter 2, preferences are understood to be rational desires for

resonates with relational and embodied approaches to understanding autonomy. We act in the world as embodied agents, and this unavoidably shapes the boundaries of our freedoms in quite obvious ways; consider the example of a patient suffering from locked-in syndrome.²⁵ Furthermore, many of the resources and freedoms that we require to live in accordance with our autonomous desires are socially mediated.²⁶ Whilst it is true that we all need social resources such as education to enable us to pursue our goals, as Anderson and Honneth point out, vulnerable individuals may be particularly reliant on social conditions for their practical autonomy, as this discussion makes clear:

Consider, for example, the autonomy of people with mobility-limiting disabilities. Unless physical accommodations are made for such persons—wheelchair ramps, accessible vehicles, and so on—their ability to exercise their basic capabilities will be restricted in a way that constitutes a loss of autonomy. In general, the argument here is that the commitment to fostering autonomy—especially of the vulnerable—leads to a commitment, as a matter of social justice, to guaranteeing what one might call the material and institutional circumstances of autonomy.

It is important to acknowledge the exact extent of the claim that practical autonomy requires the freedom to act effectively in pursuit of one's ends. First, this claim pertains only to the freedom required at the point of action, and only to ends that the agent decides to pursue in accordance with the conditions of decisional autonomy.

Second, in making the above claim, I am seeking only to give an account of the freedom required for practical autonomy, and not an account of the nature of freedom itself. This is important, since defining freedom *itself* as relative to an agent's desires or motives seems to involve a conceptual confusion. To see why, consider the example of Tom Pinch discussed by Joel Feinberg.²⁷ Tom Pinch is gifted with the freedom to do everything but act effectively in pursuit of the one end that truly matters to him. Feinberg points out that Tom Pinch does not lack freedom *per se*; after all, *ex hypothesi*, Tom Pinch enjoys almost every conceivable freedom. Rather, Feinberg claims that Tom Pinch lacks only contentment.²⁸ In view of my arguments above, whilst we should agree that Pinch is free, we should also note that Feinberg conflates contentment and the practical dimension of autonomy in claiming that Pinch lacks only contentment. In addition to my arguments regarding the practical dimension above, two further points speak against Feinberg's interpretation of the

a certain motivating desire to be *effective* in moving one to act. I also argued in Chapter 2 that an agent's preferences must cohere with their non-irrational acceptances. The problem then with the preferences that I am considering here is that they will fail to cohere with an important set of the agent's acceptances; namely, their beliefs concerning their freedom at the point of decision. I shall discuss this in section 5. Notice that this view is compatible both with the claim that agents may autonomously harbour 'pipe-dreams' in a non-action-guiding sense, and the claim that they can be autonomous in pursuing these goals if they (non-irrationally) believe that they can be achieved.

²⁵ For further discussion of the significance of embodiment to autonomy, see Christman, *The Politics of Persons*, 10.

²⁶ Oshana, 'Personal Autonomy and Society'; Anderson and Honneth, 'Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice'; Young, *Personal Autonomy*.

²⁷ Feinberg, *Freedom and Fulfillment*, 38. ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 38–9.

example. First, one can fail to achieve one's goal despite having the freedoms necessary to its effective pursuit; thus, having the requisite freedom does not entail contentment in the way that Feinberg's interpretation seems to suggest. Second, one may be mistaken in thinking that achieving a certain goal will bring contentment; having the freedom to do what one most wants to do is thus not guaranteed to bring contentment.

The problem for Tom Pinch is that he lacks a freedom that is necessary, at the point of action, for his practical autonomy. This is not to say that the freedom that autonomy requires at the point of action exhausts the concept of freedom; the nature of freedom goes beyond the freedoms that are necessary for practical autonomy. Although we may say that Tom Pinch is generally free, he is not practically autonomous because he lacks the freedom to act effectively in pursuit of the one end that he actually wants to achieve. If this conclusion is correct, then we might observe one of its corollaries, namely the implication that our freedoms can be increased in ways that are inconsequential to our practical autonomy at the point of action. For example, recall the example of Harry above. Suppose that Jane returned to her room after half an hour and, again unbeknownst to Harry, unlocked the room that Harry was in. This would increase Harry's freedom, but it is far from clear that it would increase his autonomy in staying in the room.

This suggests something interesting about the relationship between practical autonomy and freedom. If, as the above discussion suggests, all that matters at the point of action is whether the agent has the freedom to act effectively in pursuit of the ends that they have decided to achieve, then the agent's freedom to do otherwise is inconsequential to their practical autonomy *at the point of action*. One might worry that this claim is in tension with another popular view, namely the view that autonomy requires freedom of choice. For example, Hurka assumes that 'autonomy involves choice from a wide range of options',²⁹ and Raz claims that an autonomous person must have 'adequate options available for him to choose from'.³⁰ Although I shall suggest that Raz and Hurka are not entirely correct here (for reasons that I shall explain in section 5), their claims above are not in tension with my conclusion that the agent's freedom to do otherwise is inconsequential to their autonomy *at the point of action*. Indeed, Raz and Hurka might agree with this conclusion; instead, they would claim that freedom of choice is crucial for autonomy at the *point of decision*.

Before considering the relationship between autonomy and choice at the point of decision, it is prudent to address the way in which holding certain true beliefs seems to be necessary for the effective pursuit of many of our ends. In doing so, I shall consider one way in which considerations pertaining to the practical dimension of autonomy have implications for our understanding of decisionally necessary beliefs that play a central role in the cognitive element of decisional autonomy.

²⁹ Hurka, 'Why Value Autonomy?', 362.

³⁰ Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 373. See also Oshana, 'Personal Autonomy and Society'.

4. True Beliefs, Autonomy, and Modality

An agent's beliefs play an important role in decisional autonomy. In order for an agent to regard an outcome x as good in a reason-implying sense in the manner that reflective autonomy requires, she must hold certain beliefs about the descriptive features of x , and about the good. In Chapter 2, I argued that an agent must meet a minimum threshold of theoretical rationality in holding these beliefs if she is to qualify as being autonomous with respect to the motivating desires that she sustains on their basis.

However, in the introductory chapter, I suggested that decisional autonomy also incorporates a cognitive element pertaining to the agent's understanding of their action or decision. This element reflects the Aristotelian claim that actions performed from reasons of ignorance are non-voluntary; the thought here is that decisional autonomy requires that agents hold certain *true*, and not merely theoretically *rational* beliefs.

In bioethical contexts, it is natural for theorists to suppose that there is some important relationship between autonomy and true beliefs, by virtue of the commonplace assumption that autonomy is closely related to the doctrine of *informed* consent, and the criterion of understanding incorporated into the standard account of autonomy in bioethics. However, the claim that there is an important relationship between autonomy and true beliefs is not universally endorsed in the recent philosophical literature.³¹ Wilkinson captures a common sentiment when he writes:

A person may have false beliefs about his or her options without his or her autonomy being affected; who has true beliefs about all their options?³²

Wilkinson uses this observation to motivate his claim that an agent's lack of autonomy may only be attributable to their holding false beliefs if they have been intentionally deceived into holding them. What matters for Wilkinson is how the agent comes to hold these beliefs, and not the content of the beliefs themselves.³³ I argued against this view in Chapter 3. Here though, I wish to reiterate the point that the quoted observation provides insufficient support for Wilkinson's own position. The mere fact that autonomy is compatible with *some* false beliefs does not entail (and provides little support for) the claim that decisional autonomy is compatible with *all and any* false beliefs.

What is needed then is a nuanced account of the different sorts of beliefs that can affect our decisional autonomy. Aristotle also recognized this in his discussion of the sense of voluntariness that is undermined by ignorance. Aristotle does not make the mistake of over-generalizing this claim, taking care to note that not all forms of ignorance undermine voluntariness. First, he notes that ignorance does not undermine voluntariness if the agent herself is responsible for her state of ignorance; this

³¹ For two examples of theorists who claim that false beliefs do not undermine autonomy, see McKenna, 'The Relationship between Autonomous and Morally Responsible Agency', 208–9; Arpaly, 'Responsibility, Applied Ethics, and Complex Autonomy Theories', 175; Wilkinson, 'Nudging and Manipulation'.

³² Wilkinson, 'Nudging and Manipulation', 345.

³³ *Ibid.*

amounts to acting *in* ignorance, rather than acting *from* ignorance.³⁴ More pertinently for my purposes here though, on the Aristotelian conception, only ignorance of *particulars*, that is, of ‘the circumstances of action and the objects with which it is concerned’³⁵ can undermine voluntariness. This is to be contrasted with ignorance of *prohairesis*, which has been translated by some commentators as ‘moral purpose’, and ignorance of universal truths, neither of which undermine voluntariness for Aristotle.³⁶

Instead, Aristotle lists a number of examples of particulars, an agent’s ignorance of which would undermine the voluntariness of their action; these include ignorance of who one is, of what one is doing, of the sphere in which or to what one is doing it, what it is that one is doing it with, of what it is for, and of the way in which one is doing it.³⁷ However, he does not provide a principled basis for including these particulars but not others. Yet, it is clear that voluntary decisions can be made from ignorance concerning some particulars of one’s decision; Wilkinson is absolutely correct on this point. For instance, we can clearly make voluntary decisions despite our ignorance of what future states will actually obtain. The fact that I do not know whether a coin will land heads or tails does not preclude the possibility that I may voluntarily make a bet that it will land heads.

We thus need to provide an account of the limitations to the scope of forms of ignorance that can undermine voluntariness. The claim I want to make in this section is that there is a principled way in which we can appropriately delimit this scope, grounded in considerations of practical autonomy. I shall claim that ignorance of particulars is sufficient to undermine voluntariness if the particulars in question are such that the agent *must* hold true beliefs about them if her action is to be appropriately connected to the pursuit of her intended end. Such a claim, if true, shows that there is an important relationship between the decisional and practical dimensions of autonomy, and thus that an adequate theory of autonomy *in toto* should incorporate at least some considerations pertaining to practical autonomy.

In order for an agent to be able to act effectively in pursuit of the end that she is motivated to achieve, it is clear that she must have certain true beliefs about how to go about achieving that end. Indeed, if an agent acts in a manner that she is incorrect in believing will serve as a means to achieving her chosen end, her action will be importantly disconnected from that motive, and the values underlying it. Thus, as Suzy Killmister observes in discussing the significance of false beliefs to autonomy:

No matter how autonomous an agent’s motivations are, the action itself cannot be autonomous unless it is appropriately connected to the motivation behind it.³⁸

Since our decisions are made partly on the basis of our descriptive beliefs about the world, if these beliefs are false they can serve to sever the connection between our actions and our underlying motivations and values. Alfred Mele also captures this sort of thought when he suggests that being ‘informationally cut-off’ precludes one from autonomous agency. He writes:

³⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110b 25–9. ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1110b 34–1111a.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1110b 30–1111a. ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1111a 3–6.

³⁸ Killmister, ‘Autonomy and False Beliefs’, 521.

[A] sufficient condition of S's being informationally cut-off from autonomous action in a domain in which S has intrinsic pro-attitudes is that S has no control over the success of his efforts to achieve his end, *owing to his informational condition*.³⁹

To illustrate this thought, consider the following example, which I considered in an earlier chapter (but for a different purpose this time). Suppose that Sheila wants to quench her thirst, and pours a clear liquid from her kitchen tap into her glass. Accordingly, let us assume that Sheila has decisive apparent epistemic reason to believe that the glass contains water, and that the water will quench her thirst. However, suppose that she is mistaken in her belief; the liquid is, in fact, contaminated.

In view of my arguments in the previous chapter, Shelia meets the conditions of reflective autonomy with respect to her motivating desire here: She does what she believes she has strong self-interested reason to do. She is also theoretically rational with respect to the beliefs that ground this desire. However, her (theoretically rational) false belief undermines her ability to act effectively in pursuit of her intended end, by severing the connection between her chosen end, namely to alleviate her thirst, and how she actually attempts to achieve it.⁴⁰ She is not wholly self-governing in her conduct because we can plausibly attribute her failure to achieve her desired end to the fact that she held that particular false belief.

Some theorists are critical of informational conditions on autonomy because they take them to entail that one must be *successful* in one's actions in order to be autonomous with respect to them.⁴¹ This of course would make the standards of autonomy far too demanding. However, the claim that I am advancing here is compatible with the claim that an agent can be autonomous when she fails to achieve her end. The point is that the agent's poor informational condition should not *thwart* the possibility of her being successful in achieving her end, by virtue of disconnecting her act from her intention. Successful action can be thwarted by false beliefs, and a failure to hold certain key true beliefs.

To illustrate why this is not problematic, consider Suzy Killmister's example of a woman, Jill, who attempts to intentionally kill a man, Jack, by hitting him over the head with a crowbar.⁴² Although Jill fails, Killmister claims that she is nonetheless autonomous, because her failure to achieve her end is not *due* to her poor informational condition. Killmister herself does not elaborate further on how Jill differs from someone like Sheila in my earlier example with regards to her poor informational condition, and why Jill is autonomous when Sheila is not. On the approach that I am advocating here though, this is a crucial point; in order to ascertain when ignorance

³⁹ Mele, *Autonomous Agents*, 181, emphasis added.

⁴⁰ One can describe Shelia's actions in ways that make it appear that she is practically autonomous. If we describe the end that Shelia is hoping to achieve as 'getting the liquid in the glass to her mouth', then her act of picking up the glass and putting it to her mouth is clearly connected to her motive in an appropriate way. However, to the extent that we identify the end that 'getting the liquid in the glass to her mouth' itself serves as a means to (i.e. alleviating her thirst), we see that this act is not appropriately connected to her motive, given that the glass contains contaminated liquid. This illustrates the importance of precision in how we individuate the agent's acts when we are assessing her autonomy.

⁴¹ See McKenna, 'The Relationship between Autonomous and Morally Responsible Agency'.

⁴² Killmister, 'Autonomy and False Beliefs', 525.

undermines voluntariness, we need to have some way of establishing that the agent's failure to achieve her end is due to her poor informational condition, and when it is not.

Here, I suggest that we can militate the sort of modal test that I described above regarding positive freedom. We may say that Jill's failure is not attributable to her false beliefs if there is a nearby possible world in which Jill holds the same set of beliefs in the relevant circumstances, and in which she successfully achieves her end. Whilst this is true of Jill, it is not true of Sheila. The modal test thus allows us to identify the sorts of beliefs that can preclude autonomy by severing the vital connection between the actions we take to realize the ends that we value.

False beliefs about future states of affairs that we nonetheless previously had strong epistemic reasons to think would obtain, do not pass this modal test. To illustrate, suppose that I rationally believe that some bad future outcome of very low probability will not occur, say an extremely adverse side-effect of a medical treatment with a <1 per cent chance of occurring. On the basis of this belief, I consent to the treatment because I believe that it will be effective, and that it is necessary for safeguarding my health. Let us suppose that, unfortunately for me, the improbable negative side-effect does in fact occur; my belief that it would not occur turned out to be false. The point about the modal test is that this is not the sort of false belief that precludes my decisional autonomy in consenting to the procedure. The reason for this is that there are a large number of nearby possible worlds in which I held the same belief (that the side-effect would not occur), and in which I was successful in achieving the goal I had chosen to pursue by initiating this course of action.⁴³

We can use the modal test to identify other particulars that the agent must hold true beliefs about if her action is to be appropriately connected to the pursuit of her intended end. If there is a nearby possible world in which the agent either holds false beliefs about some particular (or is simply ignorant of true information about that particular in the relevant circumstances), but is nonetheless successful in achieving her desired end, then her ignorance about this particular in reality does not provide sufficient grounds for her failure to achieve her end. If, however, there is *no* nearby possible world in which this is the case, then ignorance about that particular is sufficient to undermine voluntariness. The particular in question can then be said to be the object of a *decisionally necessary belief*.

Two further things are worth noting. First, autonomy may plausibly be undermined even when an agent is not completely ignorant of some decisionally relevant particular. An agent may be aware of some relevant piece of information, but fail to adequately grasp its implications for their decision. This is particularly salient in the medical context; the understanding that autonomy requires is not the mere awareness of material information about one's condition or proposed treatment, but also the *appreciation* that this information applies to oneself. Accordingly, we might

⁴³ There may be some cases in which a very rare side-effect is a guaranteed product of some extremely abnormal unknown feature of one's physiology (such that it would obtain in every world in which one's physiology remains the same). Would a failure to believe that the side-effect will occur in one's circumstances amount to being modally precluded in the sense I have outlined? I believe not, on the basis that there are very nearby possible worlds in which this abnormal physiological feature does not obtain.

further suggest the understanding that autonomous decision-making involves might require the 'vivid imagination' of what future states of affairs that may be brought about by our choices will be like *for us*.⁴⁴

Second, we may also note that instances of theoretical irrationality can similarly modally preclude agents from achieving their ends. Theoretical irrationality can also rupture the connection between the agent's decision and the values that are operative in their particular choice context. I explored how such irrationality can undermine decisional autonomy in Chapter 2 in my discussion of Rebecca Walker's illuminating examples. Failures of theoretical rationality can undermine one's ability to accurately assess the extent to which a particular belief coheres with one's other beliefs about both descriptive and evaluative features of the world; this too can preclude one from acting effectively in the sense that I have been outlining here.

I noted at the beginning of this section that contemporary philosophers and bioethicists are divided over the question of whether holding false beliefs undermines autonomy. The framework that I have adopted in this book may help to explain why this is the case. I have explained that holding false beliefs can render an agent ineffectual in pursuing the ends that she is motivated to achieve. I have also claimed that this phenomenon can offer us insights into the forms of ignorance that may appropriately be described as undermining one sense of voluntariness, as identified in the Aristotelian distinction. However, whilst such false beliefs affect the cognitive element of decisional autonomy, they need not affect the *reflective* element of her decisional autonomy.

As such, it seems that the diverging intuitions concerning cases of false beliefs can be explained as follows. If one believes that the reflective element of decisional autonomy can tell the whole story of autonomous agency, then having epistemically rational false beliefs concerning the means that are necessary to achieving one's desired end need not undermine one's autonomy. On the other hand, if we claim that an adequate theory of autonomy also includes a cognitive element of decisional autonomy, whose boundaries should be informed by considerations pertaining to a practical dimension of autonomy (as I have argued here), then it is clear why even epistemically rational false beliefs can undermine autonomy; they will do so when they render the agent ineffectual in her pursuit of the ends that she is motivated to achieve, in the way that I have described in this section.

To conclude this discussion, it is important to be clear about the scope of the claims that I am making here. The modal test that I have outlined here is intended to identify a *sufficiency* condition for when ignorance about a particular undermines voluntariness. It does not identify a *necessary* condition. In other words, it leaves open the possibility that there may be forms of ignorance that would *not* entail an agent's failure to achieve her end in all nearby possible worlds, but which we may still find it plausible to claim undermine voluntariness.⁴⁵ For instance, ignorance of risks

⁴⁴ Recall that Savulescu stipulates vivid imagination as a condition of autonomous choice. See Savulescu, 'Rational Desires and the Limitation of Life Sustaining Treatment'.

⁴⁵ It might be further argued that there are some beliefs concerning which the following two statements can be true. First, an agent can be autonomous with respect to a decision without holding the belief in question (i.e. the belief is not decisionally necessary). However, it may also be the case that being

attending a medical procedure might plausibly fall into this category. I shall take up this question when I turn to the cognitive element of decisional autonomy and informed consent in Chapter 6. In the remainder of this chapter though, having established one relationship between decisional and practical autonomy, I shall return to the question of the freedom that autonomy requires at the point of decision, and describe another important relationship between these two dimensions of autonomy.

5. Freedom at the Point of Decision

At the end of section 3, I suggested that practical autonomy requires that the agent has, at the point of action, the positive and negatives freedoms that are necessary for them to act effectively in pursuit of their ends. In this section, I shall consider the freedom that autonomy requires *at the point of decision*. In considering the agent's freedom at the point of decision, we are considering the freedom that she believes herself to have prior to making a decision about what to do; as I shall explain, it is important to consider the agent's freedom at this point, because an agent's beliefs about their freedoms can impinge on their decisional autonomy.

Let me begin by again stressing the observation that we make our decisions about what to do in the light of what we believe to be practically realizable.⁴⁶ James Griffin puts this point as follows:

We do not, as a matter of fact, form our plans of life as if they were, in effect, choices from a Good Fairy's List – 'whatever you want, just say the word'. Our desires are shaped by our expectations, which are shaped by our circumstances.⁴⁷

When we are in the process of deciding what to do, our decision is informed by what we believe we are free and able to do. For example, when a person considers which career path they want to pursue, they will make their decision having assessed the capacities that constitute their positive freedom to pursue certain careers, and having considered any positive constraints on their negative freedom to pursue others. It may be the case that their beliefs about what they are and are not free to do are false; however, it is not the freedom that one *actually* has that one takes into

intentionally deceived to *not* hold the belief in question may nonetheless undermine autonomy. Some theorists seem to hold the view that this is true of all beliefs. See Wilkinson, 'Nudging and Manipulation', 345. For the reasons discussed here, I deny this claim, but the modal test suggests a reason for why this might be true of some set of beliefs. In some cases, when we fail to hold a particular true belief, there will be some nearby possible worlds in which we do come to hold it, by virtue of refining our beliefs in accordance with the requirements of theoretical rationality, or by discovering new evidence. However, intentional deception serves to narrow the scope of the possible worlds in which this will be the case; intentional deceivers will often make efforts to ensure that we do not come to hold the relevant beliefs. This is similar to the point that Yaffe makes with regards to intentional coercers and manipulators tracking compliance in their targets as discussed in the previous chapter. Yaffe, 'Indoctrination, Coercion and Freedom of Will'. The point here is that intentional deception may modally preclude agents from achieving their ends in a manner that mere ignorance does not.

⁴⁶ This is a point that Aristotle acknowledges in his assertion that prohairesis is a deliberate desire for things in our power. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1113a 9–10.

⁴⁷ Griffin, *Well-Being*, 47.

consideration in one's practical deliberations. Rather, it is one's *beliefs* about the freedoms that one has.

This point is familiar from the empirical literature concerning self-efficacy beliefs. The phenomenon explained above has also been referred to as 'conscious character planning' in the philosophical literature.⁴⁸ Unless we are wholly sceptical of the possibility of autonomy, it seems that we must claim that conscious character planning does not undermine autonomy.⁴⁹ The fact that normal humans have limited freedoms and tailor their preferences in accordance with them cannot be inimical to their autonomy with respect to those preferences, if autonomy is to be possible. To claim otherwise would be to rule out the possibility of autonomy at the very outset, given the nature of the world we live in, in which environmental forces contribute to the shape and limits of our freedoms. The absence of certain freedoms at the point of decision merely shapes the contours of our choice domains.

In conscious character planning, an agent's awareness of the limitations of their freedoms *informs* their decisions about what to do, but it does not preclude their decisional autonomy. However, an agent's beliefs about their freedom can threaten their decisional autonomy if they believe themselves to have extremely limited freedoms. To see how, it is illustrative to contrast the case of Tom Pinch (considered above) with the example of Martin Chuzzlewit:

Suppose that Martin Chuzzlewit finds himself on a trunk line with all of its switches closed and locked, and with other 'trains' moving in the same direction on the same track at his rear, so that he has no choice at all but to continue moving straight ahead to destination *D*. . . . But now let us suppose that getting to *D* is Chuzzlewit's highest ambition in life and his most intensely felt desire. In that case, he is sure to get the thing in life he wants most.⁵⁰

Whether or not Chuzzlewit is autonomous here depends on the extent to which his lack of freedom is the *reason* that he came to sustain his motive to go to *D*. For Chuzzlewit to be reflectively autonomous with respect to his motive to get to *D*, he must have come to adopt it on the basis of a (non-irrational) belief that his getting to *D* would be good in a reason-implying sense. However, our disposition to adopt motivating desires on the basis that their content is good in a reason-implying sense can be compromised in situations in which we believe that our freedoms (at the point of decision) are severely restricted. If we believe that *only* one course of action is available to us, our lack of alternative possibilities may dissuade us from engaging in any sort of reflection about the value of the available outcome; rather, we may adopt the motive to pursue that outcome on no other basis than the fact that it is the only option available to us.

In contrast to conscious character planning, this phenomenon is known as adaptive preference formation.⁵¹ Adaptive preference formation may be defined as the 'unconscious altering of our preferences in light of the options that we have

⁴⁸ Elster, *Sour Grapes*, 117–19.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, and Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, 25.

⁵⁰ Feinberg, *Freedom and Fulfillment*, 38.

⁵¹ Elster, *Sour Grapes*; see also Sen, *Development as Freedom*; Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*.

available'.⁵² To illustrate the phenomenon of adaptive preference formation, let us alter the case of Harry the dog-sitter above so that Harry forms an adaptive preference:

Suppose that Harry forms the desire to leave the house and go to the pub upon Jane's departure. However, he then hears Jane lock him into the house. Upon hearing this, Harry resigns himself to staying in to look after the dog, but convinces himself that this was really his preference all along.

Unlike conscious character planning, adaptive preference formation *does* seem inimical to autonomy.⁵³ On the theory that I have developed over the course of the preceding chapters, the reason for this is that in cases of adaptive preference formation, the agent no longer endorses their motivating desire on the basis of a belief that the outcome of the desire is good in a reason-implying sense; rather they sustain this desire because the outcome it concerns is the *only* option available to them. However, the fact that an outcome is the only one available does not make that outcome good in a reason-implying sense. Moreover, the self-deceptive nature of the way in which this preference is formed may preclude later critical reflection on the value of the outcome.

Although lacking freedom at the point of decision is an obvious causal factor underlying adaptive preference formation, it is not clear that lacking such freedoms must *necessarily* lead to adaptive preference formation. After all, the fact that only one option is available to an agent does not make it impossible for them to endorse that option on the basis of its reason-giving content (rather than its mere availability). For example, it is (to all intents and purposes) practically impossible for a passenger to jump out of a commercial airplane in mid-flight. Yet, even if Smith believes that he has no alternative to staying in a plane for the duration of a flight, this does mean that he cannot regard the outcome of staying in the plane as good in a reason-giving sense. As long as Smith (non-irrationally) believes that the content of his motivating desire to stay in the plane is good in a reason-implying sense, then he can be reflectively autonomous with respect to that desire, even if he also believes that he lacks the freedom to do otherwise. However, Smith will lack autonomy in this situation if he adopts the motivating desire to do something, *just because* he believes he lacks the freedom to do anything else.

This has implications beyond this somewhat contrived thought experiment. Each of us has a number of attachments and commitments that it would be extremely costly for us to give up. We are in a meaningful sense not free to abandon them. However, as Christman highlights, it would be a mistake to deny that we can be autonomous with respect to these commitments on the basis that we are not free to

⁵² Colburn, 'Autonomy and Adaptive Preferences', 52. Note that an agent's options can be restricted by virtue of social oppression. For this reason, adaptive preference formation has been of particular interest to theorists who are concerned with autonomy as a social ideal. See Mackenzie, 'Three Dimensions of Autonomy', 30.

⁵³ See also Elster, *Sour Grapes*, 20; and Colburn, 'Autonomy and Adaptive Preferences', 61–71.

give them up.⁵⁴ On the contrary, these commitments can represent our deepest values and strongest reasons. Similarly, in bioethical contexts, we are often considering whether people are making autonomous decisions in desperate circumstances, where they have severely restricted choice sets. Again, the fact that an individual is facing restricted choices, does not entail that they cannot decide rationally in that context. Nonetheless, when we believe we have *no* choices available to us (not even unattractive ones), we may find it difficult to summon the motivation to engage in somewhat otiose rational deliberation about what to do.

With this understanding of adaptive preference formation in mind, let us return to the question of Martin Chuzzlewit's autonomy. The way in which Feinberg phrases the example makes it ambiguous as to whether it is best to interpret Chuzzlewit's being motivated to get to *D* as an instance of adaptive preference formation. The fact that Chuzzlewit 'finds himself' on the particular trunk line does not tell us whether he regarded getting to *D* as being good in a reason-implying sense prior to finding himself on the track, or whether he forms the motive to get to *D* on the basis that he has found himself on the particular trunk line that leads to *D*. In the latter case, Chuzzlewit lacks autonomy because he does not adopt his motive on the basis of its reason-giving content, but rather on its mere availability; he has thus formed an autonomy undermining adaptive preference. However, if Chuzzlewit had formed a preference for *D* prior to finding himself in this curious position, and his lack of freedom had not otherwise impaired his reflective autonomy with respect to his motivating desire, Chuzzlewit could be reflectively and practically autonomous.

Of course, if we believe that we have more freedoms at the point of decision, then in many cases the extent to which we direct our choices through rational deliberative processes will be enhanced. Although it is possible for Chuzzlewit to view *D* as good in a reason-implying sense without having further freedoms, the absence of other freedoms may jeopardize the likelihood that he will rationally deliberate on the value of *D* in this way. In contrast, if other alternatives (*E*, *F*, and *G*) are eligible for choice, then the agents are more likely to be drawn to a justificatory evaluative stance. It is not just that the agent will choose *D* because there are reason-giving facts about *D*; rather she will choose *D* because she believes that it is *better* than the other available alternatives, and this is a choice for which she is responsible.⁵⁵

There are of course limits to this, since having too many available choices can impede rational decision-making processes. I shall discuss this point further below. Whilst recognizing this limitation, it is nonetheless plausible to postulate that giving people choices can sometimes serve to increase the scope and power of their rational deliberation about what to do. In allowing individuals to choose from a greater number of alternatives, we can sometimes increase the extent to which their choice is a reflection of their values rather than their circumstances.

This represents a further important way in which autonomy is an inherently relational phenomenon, as the choices that are available to us at the point of decision

⁵⁴ Christman, *The Politics of Persons*, 160. As such, I believe that there are limitations to the extent to which Friedman is correct to claim that autonomy requires that we are able to envisage alternative possible courses of action, or to imagining oneself otherwise. Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, 9.

⁵⁵ Hurka, *Perfectionism*, 150.

will typically be socially mediated. Most obviously, the societies in which we live may provide us with more or less available options to choose from. For instance, women in Saudi Arabia have a far more restricted choice set regarding potential professions than their counterparts in the United Kingdom, due to the former's restrictive labour laws.

In the bioethical context, we may also note that physicians can exert a considerable degree of control over their patients' autonomy by virtue of the control they can exercise over the treatment options that are made available to a particular patient. Of course, considerations of justice and beneficence may considerably dictate these decisions; physicians will only offer treatment options that are in a patient's interests, and which can be provided in accordance with the constraints of a just allocation of scarce medical resources. Nonetheless, there are some cases in which medical professionals may limit autonomy with less convincing justifications. Consider, for instance, the fact there is evidence to suggest that young childless men with decision-making capacity are more likely to be accepted for sterilization surgery than young childless women with decision-making capacity.⁵⁶ Here it seems that broader social attitudes and expectations about women may be serving to influence medical professionals with regards to what sorts of medical treatments options are and are not appropriate for a particular demographic.

In this example, women's choice is restricted in a quite direct sense, in so far as certain women cannot access a medical procedure. However, social forces can shape an individual's available options in perhaps more insidious ways. They can serve to undermine an individual's self-esteem, and their capacity to view certain desired options as valuable in their social context. For example, Anderson and Honneth point out that in societies where being a 'stay at home dad' is regarded as a euphemism for 'unemployment', it is difficult for male members of that society to regard full time parenting as a valuable option that is eligible for choice.⁵⁷

Another way in which a lack of freedom can negatively affect decisional autonomy is that restricting another's freedom can serve as a method for undermining forms of social recognition that play a key role in capacities that are plausibly necessary for autonomous decision-making.⁵⁸ For instance, in addition to self-esteem, Honneth and Anderson emphasize the importance of 'self-respect' and 'self-trust' for autonomy. The former concerns an agent's capacity to understand herself as an agent capable of rational deliberation and whose choices deserve moral consideration. The latter pertains to the agent's capacity to place trust in her own affectively mediated commitments, and to view these commitments as authentically her own.⁵⁹ Both self-trust and self-respect are acquired and maintained in the context of interpersonal relationships. Indeed, amongst the many ills of societal inequality, oppression, and discrimination, these features of society amount to failures to engage in forms of

⁵⁶ See McQueen, 'Autonomy, Age and Sterilisation Requests'. For further discussion of this phenomenon, see Mertes, 'The Role of Anticipated Decision Regret and the Patient's Best Interest in Sterilisation and Medically Assisted Reproduction'; Pugh, 'Legally Competent, But Too Young To Choose To Be Sterilized? Practical Ethics'.

⁵⁷ Anderson and Honneth, 'Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice', 136.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 132–5. ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

social recognition that allow individuals to regard themselves as people whose choices matter, whose choices are their own, and whose choices deserve respect.⁶⁰

The above interpersonal influences have been highlighted by those theorists who are particularly interested in how autonomy can be impeded in and by society in general. There are of course lessons for the role of autonomy in bioethics here;⁶¹ as the example of voluntary female sterilization suggests, medicine can be susceptible to social forces that influence the opportunities for choice afforded to individuals. We may also note that the way in which we seek to safeguard autonomy in bioethics may already implicitly incorporate considerations of relational autonomy. For instance, when it functions correctly, the institution of informed consent may serve to facilitate the forms of social recognition stressed by Honneth and Anderson. It can serve as a formal recommendation that the patient is someone whose views about treatment matter, who is competent to make those decisions, and whose decisions warrant respect.

However, as I mentioned in the introduction, we need to take care not to simply assume that *all* of the conclusions regarding the nature and value of autonomy in broader social contexts transfer straightforwardly to the bioethical context. In particular, we might plausibly deny that a minimum threshold of autonomy for local decision-making in the bioethical context must require the same variety of choices stressed by social theorists of autonomy with regards to individuals' global autonomy in liberal societies.⁶² We might agree with the latter that those in power have a duty to organize societies in a manner that enables their citizens to (equally) enjoy broad spheres of autonomy, with a variety of alternative options available to pursue different conceptions of the good. However, when we are talking about autonomy in the bioethical context, a plausible account must allow for the possibility that people can make locally autonomous decisions when they face very limited choice sets. For instance, recall the example of Alan from the previous chapter. More broadly, if we claim that agents can only make autonomous decisions if they have a variety of options available to them, then we may be committed to the view that a patient who will die unless they receive a life-saving medical intervention cannot autonomously consent to it; after all, even if the patient in such a case could choose to forgo treatment, if anybody lacks an adequate variety of options, surely this individual does.

6. The Enhancement and Development of Autonomy

In this chapter, I have argued that an adequate theory of autonomy in bioethics should incorporate a practical dimension pertaining to the agent's ability to act

⁶⁰ Mackenzie and Sherwin, 'Relational Autonomy, Self-Trust, and Health Care for Patients Who Are Oppressed'.

⁶¹ For a broader discussion of extending the discussion of autonomy in bioethics to consider broader social and relational patterns, see Dodds, 'Choice and Control in Feminist Bioethics'; Jennings, 'Reconceptualizing Autonomy'; Sherwin and Stockdale, 'Whither Bioethics Now?'

⁶² Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*; Hurka, 'Why Value Autonomy?'; Oshana, 'Personal Autonomy and Society'.

effectively in pursuit of their ends. In particular, I claimed that having certain sorts of true beliefs will often be necessary for practical autonomy. In turn, this illuminated an important relationship between practical autonomy and the cognitive element of decisional autonomy; the sorts of ignorance that undermine voluntariness are partly defined by considerations pertaining to the agent's ability to act effectively in pursuit of her ends.

I also claimed that there is an important relationship between decisional autonomy and the practical dimensions of autonomy, in so far as agents decide to sustain their motivating desires in the light of their beliefs about what is practically realizable for them. Taken together, these discussions suggest an important reason why an adequate theory of autonomy in bioethics should incorporate a practical dimension. A theory that does not incorporate a practical dimension may lack a principled basis for delimiting the forms of ignorance that undermine voluntariness, and such a theory cannot adequately explain the effect that our beliefs about what we are free to do can have on our decision-making. Below, I shall explain how this discussion also has important implications for considerations of how we can increase autonomy through increasing agents' freedoms.

This concludes my purely theoretical discussion of autonomy. I can now outline the following supplementary rationalist conditions on decisional autonomy and practical autonomy that I have developed over the course of the previous chapters. I have suggested that the two elements of the decisional dimension of autonomy should incorporate the following conditions:

Cognitive: An agent must not be modally precluded from acting in pursuit of her ends by her informational condition, by virtue of theoretical irrationality or a failure to hold decisionally necessary beliefs.

Reflective: The autonomous agent's motivating desires must be rational in the following sense:

They must:

(a) Be endorsed by preferences that are sustained on the basis of the agent's holding (non-irrational) beliefs that, if true, would give the agent reason to pursue the object of the desire.

And

(b) These preferences must cohere with other elements of the agent's character system.

I also suggested the following condition for the practical dimension of autonomy:

Practical Dimension: An agent must have both the positive and negative freedom to act effectively in pursuit of the end that she is motivated to achieve.

To conclude, I shall offer some brief reflections on the extent to which we might seek to enhance autonomy beyond these thresholds by increasing freedom.

It may appear to be straightforwardly true that increasing an agent's freedoms will always serve to enhance their autonomy. In the bioethical context, this sort of assumption is often made by supporters of using biotechnologies for the purposes of human enhancement. For instance, Nick Bostrom claims that an individual who used enhancement technologies would '... enjoy more choice and autonomy in her

life, if the modifications were such as to expand her basic capability set' since such blessings 'tend to open more life-plans than they block'.⁶³ However, there are reasons to doubt this apparently plausible claim.

(i) *Increasing Freedom and Enhancing Autonomy*

Prima facie, the question of how to enhance the practical dimension of autonomy seems quite straightforward; if we increase an agent's positive and negative freedoms so that they are able to act *more* effectively in pursuit of their ends, then this will serve to enhance their practical autonomy. Furthermore, since agents often come to change their preferences over time, they may come to require different sorts of freedoms in order to act effectively in pursuit of ends that they later decide they want to achieve. Accordingly, enjoying a diverse range of freedoms promotes practical autonomy, in so far as having such freedoms accommodates the possibility that agents may come to change their goals.

However, giving an agent additional freedoms or options can in some cases hinder their pursuit of their goals. Most obviously, providing an agent with additional extraneous freedoms may involve replacing their freedom to do what they want. For example, suppose that I have decided that I want to enjoy a particular brand of beer, but my local pub has stopped serving that brand in favour of serving fifty other beers that I do not like; here, increasing my overall positive freedom by increasing the number of beers that I can drink at this pub has failed to enhance my practical autonomy, since doing so has taken away my freedom to enjoy the beer that I actually want to have. Similarly, as I pointed out above, agents sometimes limit their own freedoms in order to enable them to effectively pursue certain goals. This was the point of the example of Odysseus and the Sirens; removing the positive constraints preventing Odysseus from leaving the ship would serve to hinder his ability to pursue his goal of hearing the sirens' song without being lured from his ship. Increasing a freedom that the agent herself has herself chosen to limit (in order to facilitate her pursuit of some goal) would then undermine, rather than enhance her practical autonomy.

Increasing an agent's general freedoms can also affect their freedom to pursue their preferred option without strictly making that option unavailable. The addition of new freedoms may bring with it the cost of a new responsibility, such that the failure to choose the newly available option may now count against the chooser when previously it did not.⁶⁴ In such cases, agents may feel unable to pursue their preferred option because of this burden of responsibility. Some have claimed that this sort of phenomenon might arise if voluntary active euthanasia were legalized; the thought here is that giving people the choice to undergo voluntary euthanasia would serve to undermine the practical autonomy of individuals whose preference is to stay alive *as a default option*.⁶⁵

Increasing an agent's freedom to pursue one goal more effectively might also have a negative effect on their ability to pursue other goals. To illustrate, suppose that one

⁶³ Bostrom, 'In Defense of Posthuman Dignity', 212. See also Malmqvist, 'Reprogenetics and the "Parents Have Always Done It" Argument'.

⁶⁴ Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*, 67.

⁶⁵ Velleman, 'Against the Right to Die'.

valued having a successful career in business, and that one would be able to pursue this goal more effectively if one were more ruthless. In this case, whilst becoming more ruthless might enable one to pursue a career goal more effectively, it might also be detrimental to one's pursuit of another valued goal, like being a good parent for example. Accordingly, if increasing an agent's freedom to pursue some goal x is to enhance their practical autonomy, this enhanced freedom must either not diminish their efficacy with respect to their pursuit of another of their goals, y , or, if it would diminish their pursuit of y , then the agent must believe that they have a sufficiently strong reason to pursue x more effectively, at the cost to their efficacy in pursuing y that this might entail.

Perhaps it might be claimed that increasing an agent's freedom will more plausibly serve to increase her decisional autonomy, by virtue of the fact that this will serve to increase the number of competing reasons that they consider in their practical deliberations. In many cases, the more alternatives we entertain when we make a choice, the more that our choice becomes a reflection of our own will, rather than of our restricted circumstances. Susan Wolf puts the point succinctly when she writes:

The more options and the more reasons for them that one is capable of seeing and understanding, the more fully one can claim one's choices to be one's own.⁶⁶

Of course, one way in which we could increase an agent's decisional autonomy in this sense is by enhancing their ability to compute a greater number of the possible courses of action open to them. Whilst bioethicists are typically interested in the use of biomedical cognitive enhancements to achieve this,⁶⁷ we might also do so in far more mundane and familiar ways through the use of traditional forms of education, interpersonal dialogue, and the use of external decision aids.⁶⁸ Indeed, in the next chapter, I shall note that one of the challenges we face in the context of informed consent is that human decision-makers are prone to error, irrational biases, and simply being overwhelmed by information. Naturally, if it were possible to reduce these obstacles, then it would be possible for individuals to attend to the reason-giving facts associated with a greater number of alternative options.

Another way in which we could plausibly increase the number of alternatives that an agent considers in their practical deliberations becomes clear when we attend to the relationship between the practical and reflective elements of autonomy. Since agents form their desires in the light of their beliefs about what is practically realizable, and since considering more competing reasons will often increase one's decisional autonomy, we might also seek to enhance an agent's autonomy simply by making more options practically realizable for them; this I take it is the main thrust of Bostrom's point, outlined above. Increasing an agent's freedoms might be understood to indirectly increase an agent's reflective autonomy in so far as it leads them to consider more competing reasons in their deliberations. This is a key mechanism via

⁶⁶ Wolf, *Freedom within Reason*, 144.

⁶⁷ Maslen, Faulmüller, and Savulescu, 'Pharmacological Cognitive Enhancement—How Neuroscientific Research Could Advance Ethical Debate'; Zohny, 'The Myth of Cognitive Enhancement Drugs'; Bostrom and Sandberg, 'Cognitive Enhancement'.

⁶⁸ O'Connor et al., 'Decision Aids for Patients Facing Health Treatment or Screening Decisions'.

which society can shape the limits and contours of individual autonomy, and it is one that is often overlooked in bioethical discussions of the potential impact of biomedical enhancements.⁶⁹

However, it is implausible to claim that increasing an agent's freedoms will always serve to enhance an individual's decisional autonomy in this straightforward way. As I shall explore further in the next chapter, agents are often unable to process the large amount of information that is necessary to making rational choices amongst a vast number of options. Agents faced with a large number of options may simply be overwhelmed by their available choices, and thus become unable to make an autonomous decision;⁷⁰ this is the so-called paradox of choice.⁷¹

Furthermore, the additional choices that are made available will only serve to enhance an agent's autonomy if they are relevant to a choice domain of which the agent is part. For example, if a vegetarian is choosing between two different restaurants, the fact that one restaurant has a wider variety of meat dishes than the other has no direct bearing on which restaurant will offer the vegetarian more autonomy with regards to her decision about what to order. If greater freedom is to meaningfully enhance autonomy, it must make available choices that will enter into her deliberation as plausible alternatives. For that to be the case, they must thus concern outcomes that are good in a reason-implying sense for the agent in question.

Finally, having certain choices may undermine reflective autonomy in so far as they may invite social pressure to conform in a manner that threatens the voluntariness of one's choice.⁷² To illustrate this, Gerald Dworkin provides the example of giving university students the option to live in mixed-sex dorms. Whilst it might be claimed that students who do not wish to live in mixed sex dorms could simply choose not to, this fails to acknowledge the point that this new option introduces a social pressure on those who do not want to live in mixed dorms to conform to the social expectation of their peers. Accordingly, having the freedom to choose some alternative may undermine the voluntariness of one's choice, if having that option leaves one open to social pressure that can serve to exert controlling influence over one's decisions. This is importantly related to the way in which changing an individual's option set can take away their preferred status quo default option, since social pressure can often be introduced as a result of that default position being altered (as in the dormitory case).⁷³

(ii) *Freedom and the Development of Autonomy*

Freedom may be understood to play a particularly salient role in the development of autonomy in children. Many of the preferences and acceptances that come to constitute our character systems as adults were initially developed unreflectively in

⁶⁹ We might also note that increasing an agent's freedoms may serve as a guard against adaptive preference formation.

⁷⁰ Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*, 66. ⁷¹ Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice*.

⁷² Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*, 68. For a discussion of this issue in the context of human enhancement, see Vincent, *Enhancing Responsibility*; Chandler, 'Autonomy and the Unintended Legal Consequences of Emerging Neurotherapies'; Goold and Maslen, 'Must the Surgeon Take the Pill?'; Juth, 'Enhancement, Autonomy, and Authenticity'.

⁷³ Velleman, 'Against the Right to Die'.

childhood. However, in accordance with my discussion in Chapter 2, we can nonetheless become autonomous with respect to these features of our characters if we later reflectively choose to sustain them as part of a coherent character system. Of course, it is highly unlikely that this decision will constitute a single, discrete epiphany. Rather, making these kinds of choices is best construed as a continuous (and integral) part of the developmental process. Joel Feinberg captures a similar idea when he writes:

The child can contribute towards the making of his own self and circumstances in ever-increasing degree. Always the self that contributes to the making of the new self is itself the product of both outside influences and an earlier self that was not quite fully formed.⁷⁴

Beyond aiding the development of the child's general cognitive abilities, parents may cultivate their child's autonomy in a number of other ways. For instance, advocates of the self-determination theory of motivation in psychology have suggested that key aspects of autonomy support include, *inter alia*, providing explanations and rationales for behavioural requests, demonstrating interest in the child's own feelings, and offering children structured choices that reflect their feelings.⁷⁵ Furthermore, whilst children clearly lack the capacity to make autonomous decisions in a number of important domains (for reasons I shall explore in Chapter 7) part of respecting the child's autonomy is to recognize that they may deserve some limited domain of autonomy, and to seek to facilitate the exercise of their autonomy when appropriate.

However, one of the most important influences that parents can exert over the development of their child's autonomy is by shaping their freedoms and options. Whilst we may have some autonomy-based reasons to respect some of a child's current choices, respect for a child's autonomy often requires that we do not prematurely foreclose their options. This is the insight underlying Feinberg's claim that children have a 'right to an open future'.⁷⁶ The right to an open future is a kind of 'right in trust'; it is a general right that safeguards sophisticated autonomy rights for the child that they cannot currently take advantage of due to a lack of sufficient capacity, but which are to be 'saved' for the child, until she is capable of exercising them later in life. Nonetheless, the right to an open future can be violated before this time if the child's future options are prematurely closed. For instance, although a young child cannot physically exercise the right to reproduce, he will be able to exercise that right in the future, so it would be possible to violate his right in trust to do so by sterilizing him.⁷⁷

One sense in which observing a right to an open future safeguards an individual's autonomy is that it protects freedoms that they may require to pursue autonomously chosen goals at a later point. However, the right has a deeper role for the development of autonomy. One of the key themes of my discussion in this chapter has been that we form and sustain our preferences in the light of what is practically realizable;

⁷⁴ Feinberg, *Freedom and Fulfillment*, 96.

⁷⁵ Joussemet, Landry, and Koestner, 'A Self-Determination Theory Perspective on Parenting'; Mullin, 'Children, Paternalism and the Development of Autonomy'.

⁷⁶ Feinberg, *Freedom and Fulfillment*, ch. 3; see also Davis, 'Genetic Dilemmas and the Child's Right to an Open Future'.

⁷⁷ I take this example from Davis, 'Genetic Dilemmas and the Child's Right to an Open Future', 9.

accordingly, options that are foreclosed in childhood will not feature in the individual's later reflections on what sort of things to pursue in life. Furthermore, whilst I have suggested that autonomous choice is possible in the face of extremely limited option sets, I also noted that such limited option sets leave individuals vulnerable to adaptive preference formation, and make it less likely that they will come to reflect on the reasons they have to pursue what they are motivated to pursue. Accordingly, even if we agree that adult individuals can make locally autonomous decisions from a restricted range of option, this is quite compatible with claiming that having a wide range of options is crucial to the *development* of an individual's autonomy, in so far as it is necessary for prompting the development of the capacity to reflect on what one has reason to do, and to make a choice based on one's own reasons. If we are to later take ownership of the motivations and preferences that we develop uncritically in childhood, we must have the freedoms that prompt us to later consider 'why this, and not that'?

Despite its central role in the development of autonomy, the right to an open future should also be understood to be subject to the caveats that I have outlined above; *too* open a future may in fact be detrimental to the future adult's autonomy, for the reasons I have identified. Indeed, it is unrealistic to suppose that we can safeguard an *entirely* open future for any child.⁷⁸ The reason for this is that maintaining certain options will normally have the opportunity cost of foreclosing others; for instance, as a child progresses further through their education, they will usually drop certain school subjects (say in the arts) in order to specialize in others (say, in the sciences), thereby foreclosing certain future options. Maintaining some options requires a degree of time and commitment that necessitates ceding other options. Moreover, we might note that parents will quite naturally and perhaps even inadvertently restrict the availability of certain options by virtue of transmitting certain values to their child through their parenting style.

But how should parents make choices about how to shape the contours of a future that we might describe as 'reasonably' open? Above, I noted that individuals may decide to delimit their own future opportunities in this way as an expression of their autonomy. Yet, in the case of children, we must make such choices without knowing what the child will grow up to value. In light of this epistemic obstacle, one might be tempted to capture the spirit of an appeal to the individual's autonomy by invoking the notion of presumed consent. For instance, as part of a larger argument for the claim that prenatal genetic enhancements threaten the child's autonomy, Jürgen Habermas argues that there is a crucial moral difference between genetic therapies and genetic enhancements, on the basis that parents can presume consent for therapies that seek to avoid profound evils which are 'unquestionably extreme, and likely to be rejected by all',⁷⁹ but not genetic enhancements. We might similarly invoke the concept of presumed consent in order to determine the boundaries of how we may permissibly shape and delimit our children's future opportunities and capacities.

Notwithstanding other elements of Habermas' wide-ranging critique of prenatal genetic enhancements and their significance for autonomy,⁸⁰ let me conclude by

⁷⁸ Mills, 'The Child's Right to an Open Future?'

⁷⁹ Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 43.

⁸⁰ For a fuller discussion see Pugh, 'Autonomy, Natality and Freedom'.

explaining why this appeal to presumed consent fails to capture the spirit of autonomy in the manner that its adherents might think. When Habermas' considers whether we can presume consent for a genetic therapy, he asks us to consider whether 'all others' would be likely to consent to the intervention. However, if the concept of presumed consent is to capture the spirit of autonomy's value, then this is simply the wrong question to ask. If we are interested in facilitating the future child's autonomy, then we must consider not what 'all others' would think about the intervention, but rather whether the future child *herself* would consent. Yet, once we recognize this, it becomes clear that a presumed consent approach for interventions that delimit or expand the individual's sphere of freedom will almost inevitably prove both too much and too little. The reason for this is that the values that the child develops, and which would undergird her later retrospective endorsement of the intervention (for which we are now presuming consent), in some cases may depend on whether or not the intervention in question was carried out in the first place. That is, the performance and non-performance of the intervention in question may generate different future values, which in turn might respectively undergird a presumption of retrospective endorsement or repudiation.

The problem of invoking presumed consent to justify the manner in which we shape our children's freedoms is not merely the epistemic issue that we do not know what the child will come to value. Rather, the problem with using this theoretical apparatus to justify an intervention that will significantly affect the future child's freedom, is that whether or not the intervention is performed will likely have a significant influence on the values that the child will come to develop *and her view of the intervention itself*. Yet these are both things that we must ascertain if we are to be serious about 'presuming consent' on behalf of the future child. The theoretical apparatus of presumed consent is thus simply the wrong tool for the job. It can only serve as a useful guide for how to treat children once the child has developed some settled dispositions upon which we might base our presumption; the less developed the child, the less useful the apparatus of presumed consent. In the case of presuming consent on behalf of future children who are currently at an embryonic stage, I suggest that the apparatus of presumed consent can really tell us very little.

In light of this problem with the apparatus of presumed consent, I suggest that the most plausible strategy to adopt in shaping the child's freedoms is to prioritize a child's options to pursue goods that they will have impersonal reason to pursue when they have the capacity to exercise meaningful choice.⁸¹ To safeguard an impersonal good *x* is not to presume that '*x* is what the future adult will come to want, all things considered' or to presume consent per se. Instead, it is to presume that the future adult will have some defeasible reason to pursue *x*, and that we have reasons to retain that option in the individual's choice set over options associated with outcomes that the future adult may or may not understand to be reason-giving, depending on features of their future selves that are not yet evident to us.

⁸¹ For defence of a broadly similar approach, see Maslen et al., 'Brain Stimulation for Treatment and Enhancement in Children'.