AUTONOMY AS AN IDEAL OF THE GOOD

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Introduction

Autonomy, as the other chapters in this volume make plain, is a complex and contested concept. Among other things, it can refer to a condition of agency (Mele 1995) a duty to think for oneself (Wolff 1970), a right to self-determination (Feinberg 1986) or an aspect or component of a good human life (Raz 1986). This chapter discusses the latter idea. It characterizes autonomy as an ideal of the good life and discusses some of the more puzzling conditions for its realization.

1. Clarifying the Target

The first order of business is to say a few words about the target of our discussion. In claiming that autonomy is an aspect or component of a good human life, I do not mean simply that autonomy is good for people insofar as, and in virtue of the fact that, they desire to realize it. I mean something stronger than this – the realization of autonomy is objectively good, something that contributes to making human lives go better.

To be sure, some doubt that there are any objective human goods. The human good, they claim, is fully subjective. I do not address their skepticism here. But I do want to say this. If there are some objective human goods, and if autonomy is an objective human good, then it plausibly is not the only such good. Autonomy, understood as an objective good, presupposes the existence of other objective goods (Raz 1986). Relatedly, and significantly, people do not typically aim at autonomy itself. They realize autonomy in their pursuit of other goods that they consider to be valuable or worth pursuing.

Autonomy almost certainly has instrumental value for some people in some circumstances, enabling them to realize other objective goods that make their lives go better. But my concern here is with autonomy’s purported intrinsic value. Still, many mundane things, such as the pleasure one experiences while sun-bathing on a summer afternoon, contribute, or likely contribute, in some small (intrinsic) way to the goodness of a life. Presumably, autonomy’s value is more substantial than this. Consider then some stronger, and more contentious, claims.
A Autonomy is a substantial and weighty component of a good human life.
B Autonomy is a necessary or essential component of a good human life.
C Autonomy always adds value to a human life.

Each of these claims, in turn, can be taken to apply to all human beings under all social conditions, or to only to some human beings under some social conditions. For example, it is sometimes said that autonomy is an appropriate ideal only for people who have reached a certain level of moral development or who live in modern societies that have established social forms that are conducive to its realization.1

This chapter proceeds on the weaker proposal that autonomy is a good for a significant number of people who live under modern conditions. Whether it is good for all human beings under all social conditions raises large issues that can be avoided for present purposes. Even if (A), (B) and (C) are qualified in this way, the truth of any of them would be significant and interesting. The discussion that follows supports (A), remains agnostic about (B) and denies (C).

Turn next to the notion of a good human life. This notion contains a significant ambiguity. A human life can be good simpliciter, or it can be good for the one who lives it, or both. By way of illustration, consider a talented artist whose commitment to excellence enables her to create masterpieces, but in the process causes her emotional turmoil and mental breakdown. No doubt her artistic achievements improve the value of her life, but we can wonder whether these achievements come at the expense of her well-being. If she were to accomplish less with her art, we ask, might she live a life that is better for her?

The claim that something contributes to the goodness of a human life, accordingly, can be understood along two dimensions. The first concerns the quality of the life, where the quality of the life is a function of factors such as its moral worth, the excellence of its achievements and/or its aesthetic properties. The second dimension concerns only the well-being of the life in question. Granted, the distinction here is not sharp, since the factors that contribute to the quality of a life also can contribute to its well-being. The excellence of our artist’s work plausibly contributes to her well-being, even if on balance it would have been better for her if she were less driven and so produced less excellent art.

Autonomy, it has been claimed, is “an excellence, to which people can approximate in varying degrees, and the perfection of which is a rarely realized ideal” (Benn 1988: 176). Described in these terms, the achievement of autonomy might be no part of our well-being, augmenting only the value or excellence of our lives. Alternatively, autonomy might be thought to be a good but only insofar as it is an element of personal well-being. In all likelihood, if autonomy is a genuine ideal, then it contributes both to the quality of a life and to the well-being of those who realize it. In what follows, I will be primarily concerned with the idea that autonomy furthers the well-being or flourishing of those who achieve it, but I will come back to the possibility that it also enriches the quality of their lives.

Autonomy understood as an ideal of the good is a property of a life, or substantial portions of it. It is an ideal for temporally extended agents. True, we do often speak of autonomous decisions and choices. And an autonomous life, of course, will consist of autonomous decisions and choices. But the contribution that an autonomous choice makes to the well-being of the chooser depends on its relation to his larger goals and plans.2 For this reason, one can agree with Mill in holding that the autonomy of a choice to relinquish or destroy one’s future autonomy may add no value at all to the life in question.

The target of our discussion is the claim that autonomy is an aspect or component of a good human life. Having clarified this claim, I turn now to the notion of autonomy itself.
This ideal consists of different components that implicate a range of psychological, agential and environmental conditions. Reflecting on these components can further clarify how autonomy could be a significant human good.

2. The Standpoint of Self-Governance

No effort will be made here to present a complete account of the mental capacities that are integral to autonomous agency. My focus will be on a central psychological component that encompasses a number of more specific psychological conditions. I will refer to this component as the standpoint of self-governance. To be an autonomous agent, a human being must govern himself in an appropriate way, and to do this he must have a standpoint that guides his self-governance. This standpoint is a system of judgments, valuings and volitional commitments – a system, and not merely a set, since the standpoint is responsive to consistency and coherence pressures.

Philosophical discussion of the standpoint of self-governance often views it as a question about the metaphysics of agency. In characterizing the standpoint, writers need not view self-governance as contributing to the good of human beings. But our concern in this chapter is with autonomy understood as a human good, and so our characterization of the standpoint of self-governance is responsive to this background orientation.

People realize autonomy in the manner by which they pursue other goods. They adopt plans, pursue goals and participate in activities that they judge to be worthwhile, and they realize (or fail to realize) autonomy in the manner by which they do these things. The standpoint of self-governance, accordingly, is largely one of practical reasoning. To be self-governing, I must lead my life in line with my judgments about what is worth doing. Now suppose that, given my character, talents and circumstances, there were only one path that it would be good for me to go down. Practical reasoning for me would be a matter of discovery. I would need to identify the life that was best for me and stick to it. In this imagined scenario, my self-governance might seem unimportant. What matters would not be that I govern myself, but that I successfully track my good. However, self-governance assumes greater significance when we consider a situation in which people confront a plurality of objective goods with no determinate ranking among them. Call this situation creative pluralism. It obtains when there is not

one uniquely correct objective ranking of [objective values], one optimal (feasible) mix of them, one fixed desirable schedule of tradeoffs among them. There is some open range within whatever partial rankings of value are objectively correct. Individuality is expressed in the interstices of the objective rankings of value, in the particular unified patterning chosen and lived; this itself will be objectively valuable . . .

(Nozick 1981: 448)

If creative pluralism describes the situation we actually confront, then the standpoint of self-governance must consist of more than evaluative judgment. It must be able to guide us “in the interstices of the objective rankings of value.”

How might it do so? Following others, we can distinguish valuing from value judgment. Example: I judge ballet to be a valuable activity, one that contributes to the goodness of a human life, but it leaves me cold. I find I have no inclination to engage with it either as a participant or as a spectator. Ballet, I say, is valuable, but not something that I value.
Valuations reflect judgments of value, but also configurations of the will. Valuing, as one writer explains, “comprises a complex syndrome of interrelated dispositions and attitudes, including, at least, certain characteristic types of belief, dispositions to treat certain kinds of considerations as reasons for action, and susceptibility to a wide range of emotions” (Scheffler 2010: 29). Dispositions to treat certain kinds of considerations as reasons for action in particular engage the will. Valuing fuses judgment and volition.

Given creative pluralism, the standpoint of self-governance is not simply a standpoint for tracking the good, but a standpoint for deciding what to value. Consider another example. A person is trying to decide whether to make a career change, which would require moving to a new city. He is torn. On the one hand, he desires to make the change. The new career would present rewarding opportunities. On the other hand, he is reluctant to make the move. He loves the city he is in, and he wishes to remain close to his family. Stepping back from these conflicting considerations, he tries to weigh the pros and cons of the decision he confronts. But he comes to the conclusion that, while both options are good, he cannot place one above the other. Now he must simply decide what to do. And, in making this decision, he will be discovering or settling what he values more.

The example illustrates how different elements of the standpoint of self-governance can complement each other, making possible a kind of self-fashioning that is responsive to practical reason, but not determined by it. But consider next the difference between valuing and merely caring about something. When we value something we judge it to be good or worth caring about, but we can care about something, even if we think it is not valuable. Example: you judge that you care too much about a particular sport (viz. boxing), but you find that you have no inclination to alter your commitment to it. At the bar of evaluation, you judge you should stop caring about the sport. It is a bad use of your time, and it is wrong for you to take enjoyment from it, given the brutality it exhibits. But you also find that, when you think about it, you remain motivationally fully behind your loving the sport. Here, evaluative judgment and volitional caring stand opposed, and a question now arises as to which of these states of mind best reflect your standpoint of self-governance.

Here is a tempting response. Both evaluative judgments and volitional cares contribute to an agent’s standpoint of self-governance. The magnitude and nature of their contribution depends on how they are integrated with his larger plans and purposes extended across time. Roughly, the idea here is to “tackle the problem of where the agent stands at a time” by appeal to the roles his attitudes play in forging his identity over time (Bratman 2007: 32). Granting this response, it remains the case that if the standpoint of self-governance is a standpoint of practical reason, then evaluative judgment takes priority over volitional caring. Assuming that your judgment about boxing is correct, then what you have reason to do is to stop caring about it. This suggests that in perverse cases, such as the boxing example, the standpoint of self-governance lies with evaluative judgment and not with what one cares about.

Two further points can be made about this example. First, it is possible that you have erred in your judgment. Boxing may have features that make it genuinely worth caring about. If so, then you may not, in actuality, have reason to stop caring about it. Second, you might find that you are unable to stop caring about something you judge that you should not care about. Try as you may, you cannot help but love the sport of boxing. Reflection on the first of these possibilities highlights the difference between self-governance and rational self-mastery. Rational self-mastery is an ideal of reason-responsiveness. To achieve it, one must judge rightly and value what is worth valuing (Wall 2021). A self-governing person may not value what he has reason to value. But so long as he leads his life in ways that are
appropriately responsive to what he judges to be worthwhile, he will be self-governing, even if he fails to achieve rational self-mastery.

The second possibility illustrates the phenomenon of “volitional necessity” (Frankfurt 1988). The standpoint of self-governance, I have been claiming, is a standpoint of practical reason. Volitional necessities that conflict with one’s evaluative judgments run counter to this standpoint, but are unmodifiable by it. They seem nonetheless to be part of where the agent stands. They constitute a breakdown in the standpoint of self-governance much as akritic action constitutes a breakdown in an agent’s efforts to lead his life in accord with this standpoint.

3. Self-Direction and Deference

People who have well-formed standpoints of self-governance can fail to realize autonomy in their lives. They may fail to take the reins, viewing their own life as a spectator might view it. Or they may fail to lead their lives in ways that are consistent with their standpoint of self-governance. Akritic action is one such failure. But there are others. The standpoint of self-governance itself could speak against self-directed activity. For example, one might judge that one has conclusive reason to submit to the will of another, to outsource all of one’s major decisions to someone who, one judges, would make better decisions for one than one could make for oneself (Valdman 2010). Whatever wisdom there may be in such a plan, it is plainly not the plan of an autonomous person. Still, it presents a puzzle.

The notion that an autonomous person must make his own decisions and not defer to others has been taken by some to establish that autonomy and deference to authority are fundamentally at odds. “For the autonomous man there is no such thing, strictly speaking, as a command,” it has been argued. But if this were correct, then the realization of autonomy would conflict with we have reason to do, since, at least sometimes, we have compelling reason to submit to authority. Should we then submit to authority whenever doing so will improve our compliance with what we have reason to do? This is an attractive thought but it brings us back to the puzzle. Why should we not turn over all of our decision making to others if doing so would enable us to make the best decisions about our lives?

Three replies to this puzzle can be ventured here. First, if autonomy is an objective human good, then it can explain why something would be lost if one were to outsource all of one’s major decision making to others. Compare two lives that are otherwise equally good, but one results from self-direction and the other from deference to others. The first life seems better. If that is right, then it is plausible that some reduction in good decision making could be a price worth paying if it were necessary to realize autonomy. This point is consistent with allowing that autonomy might be on balance bad for certain people. For example, those for whom decision making generates crippling anxiety might be better off letting others make decisions for them (Griffin 1986: 54). But, even in this case, something would be lost. The best life for them, we might say, is missing something important.

The second reply complements the first. One reason why self-direction is valuable, it holds, is that people should not be alienated from their own lives. Suppose I defer to a wise advisor and she continually makes decisions for me that run counter to my standpoint of self-governance. Now I must lead my life in a way that conflicts with what I judge I have reason to do. This kind of alienation between standpoint and the life one is leading is independently bad, thereby providing support for the claim that we need to make on-going decisions about the direction of our lives. It might be thought that this point can be resisted by reconceiving the role of a wise advisor. Such an advisor, it might be claimed, must tailor
her recommendations to the subject’s standpoint of self-governance. By doing so, she could ensure that her advisee was not alienated from the decisions she would make for him. But now the service the advisor provides is substantially curtailed. She does not direct her subject to adopt better goals or pursue more valuable plans. Instead, she merely helps him do better in executing the goals and plans he has adopted himself. Still, by letting the advisor make his decisions for him, the advisee would do better in achieving his goals than if he tried to make these decisions himself.

This brings us to the third reply. Recall creative pluralism. On this picture, practical reason can run out. Within the “interstices of objective value” we must decide or settle on what to value. Here an advisor could select a path for her advisee, but she could not claim that her selection is the most reasonable one for him to make. Might the subject simply imagine the options before him and then make a decision in his mind’s eye, before turning his decision making over to the advisor? Possibly; but sometimes, perhaps often, what we have reason to do is settled by the decision that we make. Prior to the decision, it is indeterminate whether we should do one thing or another and prior to the decision, we may not even know what we will do. After the decision, we will have settled what we value and where we stand. Thus, in constructing a standpoint of self-governance, we need to do more than think about what decisions we would be inclined to make under various circumstances. We must actually make decisions about what we should do, thereby directing our own lives.

These replies obviously do not tell us how, in all circumstances, we ought to balance the potential gains from deference to others against the loss of independence that comes with that deference. They are meant to establish only that the realization of autonomy is not fundamentally at odds with reasonable deference to others. That point is especially important in the present discussion, since if the realization of autonomy required us to be practically unreasonable, then its claim to be an objective human good would be called into doubt.

Return to the puzzle. The standpoint of self-governance, which is a standpoint of practical reason, could counsel deference to others. At the extreme, it could counsel letting others make all (or most) of one’s important decisions for one. I tried to indicate how self-direction and reasonable deference to others can be reconciled, even in the unlikely scenario where a wise advisor was on hand with the competence and motivation to direct one’s life better than one could oneself. But in pressing this point I did not focus on the substantive content of the standpoint of self-governance of the agent in question. And we can imagine people, for whom it is true, that their standpoint of self-governance itself comprehensively rejects self-direction. To give an example, a person’s stable and coherent judgments and valuations might support living the life of a cloistered monk, a life that affords few opportunities for self-directed decision making and action. This imagined person, absent a radical conversion experience, could not realize the good of autonomy. In this respect, he would be like those for whom self-directed decision making produces crippling anxiety. If autonomy is a genuine objective good, then this person’s life is deficient in this respect. It does not follow that autonomy would add value to his life, for the realization of autonomy might be incompatible with the goods that his way of life enables him to realize.

For people who live in modern societies marked by social mobility and technological change, and that have social practices that celebrate individual choice, many will develop standpoints of self-governance that affirm the value of self-direction (Taylor 1985; Raz 1986). For them, they cannot live according to their own understanding of what they have reason to do without making their own decisions about the conduct of their lives. Autonomy-supporting social practices shape the self-understandings of those who participate in them. If autonomy is an objective human good, then there is reason to value these
practices, but the existence of the practices, in turn, contributes to the formation of stand-
points of self-governance for those subject to the practices that makes the realization of
autonomy a central component of their flourishing.

4. Options and Independence

Turn now to the conditions of an autonomy-supporting social environment. Such an en-
vironment must contain, in Mill’s words, “a variety of situations” (Mill 1859: 70). Variety
connotes more than number. The options provided by the environment must be of different
kinds; and people must be aware of them. Yet, the realization of autonomy does not require
that people have access to, and be aware of, an option set that is maximally various; however,
that notion might be understood. The option set, it can be said, need only be sufficient in
number and adequate in variety. This is true, but unhelpfully vague. Is there a sharper test
for the adequacy of an option set? Here is one proposal.

To be autonomous and to have an autonomous life, a person must have options which
enable him to sustain throughout his life activities which, taken together, exercise all
the capacities human beings have an innate drive to exercise, as well as to decline to
develop any of them.

(Raz 1986: 375)

This test may be too broad. There may be capacities that human beings have an innate drive
to exercise that are too trivial to contribute to autonomous agency. Much depends here on
how the relevant capacities are characterized. The more serious issue is that the test is insuf-
ficiently informative. The test leaves out of account all the important options that matter to
our self-determination. These are socially constituted options, like the option to get mar-
ried, to pursue this or that career, or take up one hobby or another.

Different societies provide their members with different options. A test of adequacy for
an option set that is not culture bound, such as the one proposed above, allows us to make
comparisons across them. That is its appeal. Yet, to know whether people in a society have
access to an adequate range of options, we must know quite a lot about the goals, plans and
projects that they have adopted. Take a simple example. Suppose that a man has organized
his life around family farming. For him to lead his life on his own terms, he must continue
to have the options that this way of life provides. If market pressures drive family farms out
of business, then he will no longer have access to these options. Does he now cease to have
access to an adequate range of options? In some cases, the answer is plausibly yes.

The longer and the more deeply one is committed to one’s projects the less able one is
to abandon them (before completion) and pick up some others as substitutes. But even
if such a change is possible, denying a person the possibility of carrying on with his
projects, commitments and relationships is preventing him from having the life he has
chosen.

(Raz 1986: 411)

An autonomy-supporting environment thus has a conservative dimension. Too much rapid
change undermines the conditions of autonomous self-direction, denying people options
that they must have, given their past commitment and investment in them, to lead their lives
on their own terms. Yet, at the same time, an autonomy-supporting environment must be
open to change. It must not ossify existing ways of living and prevent the emergence of new patterns of choice.

Societal efforts to prevent cultural change invariably limit options that are valued by some even if they succeed in protecting options valued by others. Efforts to preserve valued options thus run up against efforts to welcome and support new ways of living. Taking the full measure of this problem – the problem of balancing stability and change – may reveal that there is no option set that is adequate for the autonomy for all the members of a modern society. If this is indeed the case, then the idea of an autonomy–supporting environment that provides all of its members with an adequate set of options must be recast. Our family farmer may have a strong autonomy–based interest in being able to carry on with his way of life, but whether he has a claim on others to secure these options for him is another matter. In general, whether an interest can ground a claim depends on the costs the recognition of the claim would impose on others. With this in mind, an adequate option set could be understood as one that provides all the members of a society with all the options to which they have a claim to, given their different and sometimes conflicting autonomy–based interests.

The proposed distinction between an interest in and a claim to options has an unsettling implication. It suggests that the realization of autonomy can require access to morally unacceptable options for those who have adopted morally suspect projects and become deeply committed to them. We are inclined to reject such a view. If your projects involve treating me wrongly, then you cannot object that your autonomy will be set back if you are not allowed to continue pursuing them. But while you cannot persuasively press this objection, you may be able to claim with force that your interest in autonomy would be set back if you are prevented from continuing with your projects. In reply, it can be said, that “autonomy is valuable only if exercised in pursuit of the good” (Raz 1986: 381) and so one’s interest in autonomy would not be set back if one could not continue with one’s valued, but wrongful, projects. On this reply, it is not in one’s interest to pursue immoral projects. But notice that the idea of something being in one’s interest with regard to one’s autonomy is equivocal between two ideas.

i  Having access to a morally bad option could be necessary for one to realize autonomy
ii  Having access to a morally bad option could be necessary to further one’s prudential interest in realizing autonomy

I have claimed that one can lead an autonomous life, even if one pursues bad ends. The autonomous life is not the same as the life of rational self-mastery. However, in allowing that one could have an autonomy–based interest in having access to a morally bad option, we need only accept (i). We can deny (ii). We can say that while one can have an autonomy–based interest in having access to a morally bad option, one’s autonomous engagement with the option would add no value to one’s life.

Is this plausible? The person to imagine here is one who believes that his projects are valuable. He seeks to lead his life in line with his evaluative judgments and valuations. He is not like the akratic person who does what he judges he should not do. If he is deeply invested in a morally bad project, thereby grounding an interest in having access to morally bad options, then what should we say about his interest in autonomy? Different possibilities need to be distinguished. This person might be engaged in a project that is intrinsically evil or worthless, one with no redeeming features. If so, then we can agree that his engagement with the project would not make his life go better for him. Still, if he pursues the project autonomously, and if his pursuit of this project is central to his way of living, then his autonomous
pursuit of it might add value to his life. His realization of autonomy in this case might be analogous to the excellence displayed by a courageous soldier in an unjust war (Waldron 1989: 1127–1128). Better for him if he did not fight the war, but his courage in fighting the war remains admirable, improving in one respect the quality of his life.

Another possibility is that the person in question pursues a project that is genuinely valuable, but the execution of which involves immorality. Consider Bernard Williams’ portrait of Gauguin (Williams 1981). The painter abandons his family to live in Tahiti, thereby enabling him to produce his masterpieces. Assuming that it was wrong for him to abandon his family, his project of moving to Tahiti to pursue his artistic ambitions was an immoral project. But it is not at all clear that the pursuit of this project was on balance bad for him, or that the autonomy that he realized did not add value to his life. Suppose next that Williams’ Gauguin would have lived a better life if he had remained with his family. His decision to abandon them was not just immoral, but contrary to his own good. Even on this supposition, we may think that the autonomy he realized in his life added value to it. “Autonomy is only valuable in pursuit of the good” does not imply that “autonomy is only valuable in pursuit of what is most good.”

The distinction between an autonomy-based interest in and an autonomy-based claim to having access to immoral options allows us to explain these reactions. People have no autonomy-based claim to immoral options, but if they are denied access to them, then their autonomy, and even their good, may be set back. Claims to have access to options can be expressed in terms of rights. For someone to have a right to have access to an option, or a set of particular options, she must have an autonomy-based interest in having access to them that is sufficiently strong to justify holding others to duties to provide them, or secure them, for her. When you have such a right, then the failure of others to do what they are duty-bound to do to secure it for you, sets back your autonomy. But it does more. It also damages your relations with them. In failing to respect your autonomy-based rights, others not only set back your good by setting back your autonomy, but also by making it impossible, or at least more difficult, for you to have valuable relations with them.

The last point provides a clue to solving one last puzzle regarding options and independence. It is widely thought that a reduction in our options due to the wrongful behavior of others is worse for our autonomy than an equal sized reduction of such options due to natural events. But why should this be? Is not our autonomy set back by the reduction of the needed options, irrespective of how the reduction comes about? Some writers appeal here to expressive considerations to explain why coercion and manipulation are especially damaging to autonomy. “The natural fact that coercion and manipulation reduce options or distort normal processes of decision and the formation of preferences has become the basis of a social convention loading them with meaning regardless of their consequences” (Raz 1986: 378). Still, when such a social convention is in place, it requires explanation. For any given society, the explanation will need to appeal to sociological facts. But can a normative explanation of the convention be given? We might be tempted to say that people have rights against interference from others. But this just pushes the question back. What interests ground the rights that purportedly lie behind the convention? Not simply our interests in having access to options, for these interests can be equally set back by natural events. However, as mentioned above, we also have interests in having valuable relations with others and these interests are set back when others wrongfully interfere with our lives, whether their doing so closes off options we need or not. Autonomy is an objective human good, but it is also a social good. We realize it by cooperating and interacting with others, and its contribution to the goodness of our lives is augmented or diminished by the quality of the social relations in which its realization is embedded.
Notes

1 The first of these thoughts is expressed by Mill (1859), discussing what he terms “individuality,” and the second is expressed by Raz (1986). By combining them, one could hold that autonomy is good for those who have reached a certain level of development and who live under modern conditions.

2 Writers who deny this claim often understand autonomy not as an ideal of the good, but as a right of self-determination, holding that one can have a right grounded in self-determination to destroy one’s capacities for self-determination. See Feinberg (1986).

3 “People value their autonomy because they value choosing projects and a way of life for reasons. They do not value it in spite of this aspect; they value it precisely because of the opportunity it provides to shape their lives themselves in accordance with the reasons that they apprehend” (Waldron 1989: 1128–1129).

4 Autonomy is “an ideal of people deciding for themselves what is a valuable life . . .” (Colburn 2010: 19). More precisely, we can say that autonomy is an ideal of people judging what is valuable and deciding what to value for themselves.

5 This could be the case for a variety of reasons. The two options may be viewed as equally worthwhile, on a par, incommensurable, or the agent may think one option is better than the other, but not be able to judge with any confidence which one is better. See the essays in Chang (1997).

6 This is an example of what Watson (2004: 169) has termed “a perverse case.”

7 See Wolff (1970: 15). Note however that Wolff construes autonomy as a duty, not as an ideal of the good.

8 For a fuller statement of this line of argument, see Wall (2016).

9 One possibility is that incommensurability applies here as well. It may be indeterminate, from the standpoint of living well, whether one ought to defer to another on some important matter or make the decision oneself. (Raz 2009: 139 – making this point in the context of justifying practical authority.)

References