Inclusive Pluralism

Meeting the contemporary challenges to realizing personal autonomy

Thesis Philosophy

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Preface

This thesis completes my studies at Utrecht University. A little more than six years ago I enrolled in a bachelors program in law, and at that time I did not expect to end my student life by handing in a philosophical essay. It took me some years to discover my latent passion for philosophy, and to work up the courage to pursue it without restraint. I have seldom made a more rewarding choice, and am very grateful for the time spent at the philosophy department.

I have found studying philosophy to be powerfully engaging, because it is always personal and deals with questions one struggles with every day. Often, I have also found it somewhat mysterious, because its ambition is boundless in attempting to answer questions which seem unanswerable from the start. Most importantly, I have found conducting philosophy to be extremely relevant, because it reflects on pressing societal problems, and attempts to remove the presuppositions which constantly plague society. This thesis discusses the idea of personal autonomy, and I hope that it offers an engaging, relevant and slightly mysterious read.

I want to thank Bert van den Brink, my supervisor, for the fruitful discussions we had and the vital guidance he offered. Furthermore, I would like to thank my dear friend Rutger Bregman, for always improving on my ideas and for reminding me of the way society actually works. Thanks are also due to my parents, who have supported me both mentally and materially, and withstood all my lecturing. Finally, I would like to thank my dearest Caroline, who stood by me through two theses and four research projects, which, I promise you, was no mean feat.

Contents

1.1 Introduction

The central principle of liberalism holds that each citizen is entitled to live his own life.[1] Liberals believe that because people are somehow valuable, they should have the opportunity to pursue their personal desires and goals, and shape an existence they can truly identify with.[2] This both means that people should be enabled to live autonomously, and that people should be prevented from dominating others with their own ideas and choices.[3] Liberal governments have an obligation to secure these goals: they must locate and realize the right balance between all their citizens' interests in constructing their own particular form of existence.[4]

At first sight, modern Western democracies, especially the European welfare-states,[5] seem determined to carry out the task of enabling their citizens to live autonomously. They feature expansive healthcare systems which ensure that each citizen is properly cared for, impressive educational facilities that, at least initially, all citizens have access to, and they allow all citizens to participate in the governance of their society.[6] As a consequence of these policies, societies seem to have been created in which people have many opportunities to lead an autonomous life, and where in truth many feel satisfied with their own appropriate existence.[7]

However, appearances can be deceiving. Citizens in Western democracies are experiencing difficulties which make it doubtful that the liberal concept of personal autonomy is really being effectuated. Interestingly, these difficulties are precisely caused by the fact that many people have been enabled to lead their lives autonomously. In a nutshell, the free interaction between autonomous individuals has led to changes in the social and natural environment which are in turn experienced as oppressive and restricting.[8] I will mention two examples.

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[1] Christman, John, 'Social and Political Philosophy, a Contemporary Introduction', Routledge 2002, pp. 209-211.
[2] In the remainder of this thesis, I will use the term 'personal autonomy' to refer to this ideal. Autonomy in the sense of a person's control over and responsibility for his actions will not be discussed.
[3] Christman, John, 'Liberalism and Individual Positive Freedom', *Ethics* 1991, Vol. 101, No. 2, pp. 343-359, pp. 344-346.
[4] Dworkin, Ronald, 'Chapter 8: Liberalism' in Dworkin, Ronald, 'A Matter of Principle', Harvard University Press 1985, pp. 190-196. Dworkin phrases this responsibility as the principle that governments must treat each person with equal concern and respect. What duties this responsibility gives rise to exactly cannot be clarified here; answering that question is part of the purpose of this thesis.
[5] The term welfare-state refers to countries which exhibit a high level of public services, such as Germany, Holland, Finland, Spain, and Austria.
[6] Eurofound, 'Third European Quality of Life Survey-Quality of life in Europe: Impacts of the Crisis', Publications Office of the European Union 2012, pp. 115-120. This survey found that the quality of public services, *as perceived by citizens*, was quite high in the EU (average grade in the EU: 7.1).
[7] Eurofound 2012, pp. 3-10. Although it's difficult to find any empirical research which measures people's autonomy, there exists a lot of research on people's quality of life, the most recent being the Eurofound survey. That survey indicates that people living in European welfare-states experience a high quality of life. This may well indicate a high level of personal autonomy, as the conditions for autonomy, which will be discussed in more detail later on, resemble those for the perceived quality of life – both demand a high degree of personal security, health, employment, education, etc.
[8] I will refer to 'the social and natural environment' as simply 'the environment'.

First, the Western world has contributed greatly in exploiting the earth's natural riches.[9] As a consequence, the earth's natural wealth, measured in terms of its biodiversity, is rapidly declining.[10] This decline presents a problem for realizing personal autonomy, for many citizens have a powerful connection with nature and will feel significantly restricted when they can no longer enjoy a certain beautiful forest or a rare animal. What's worse, humanity's exploitative practices have sparked a climate change, which will inevitably alter the environment many Western citizens live in.[11] Imagine how persons who love living in a certain characteristic landscape would be affected if that landscape was ravaged. Their autonomy would be diminished greatly.

Sadly, the current exploitation of nature is intimately tied with the in itself positive ideal of personal autonomy. The main reason people have for exploiting the earth is to secure those goods which enable people to live autonomously, such as food, medicine, housing, fuel and energy. Moreover, the exploitation of the earth itself consists of autonomous action. Entrepreneurship, building with the earth's resources according to one's own scheme, is the prime example of autonomous life. Ayn Rand chose well when she imagined the ultimately free man to be an architect, who viewed the earth as his personal construction site.[12]

Of course, it might be objected that it *is* possible to provide citizens with the essential goods in a more sustainable way, and remove unacceptable burdens on the environment.[13] However, although this would solve the first entanglement of exploitation and autonomy, it would not remove the second. Heavily restricting people's economic activities means restricting their life options and thus their personal autonomy. Therefore, it is inevitable to conclude that modern environmental problems exhibit a conflict between different elements of autonomy, namely the goal of enabling people to live autonomously, and the value of a rich environment all people can enjoy.

A second example of this conflict between different elements of personal autonomy can be found in the way Western governments have been responding to the recent economic crisis. To put it mildly, the widely professed solution to the economic crisis is rather one-dimensional. Governments consistently prefer to sacrifice investments in culture and the environment in exchange for promoting economic growth.[14] Politicians explain this policy by arguing that a flourishing economy is vital to

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[9]Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 'Synthesis Report', 2007, pp. 30-38.
[10]IPCC 2007, pp. 48-49.
[11]IPCC 2007, pp. 26-30.
[12]Ayn Rand, 'The Fountainhead', Signet 1971. Of course, I refer here to the character named Howard Roark.
[13]Stern, Nicolas, 'Stern Review: the Economics of Climate Change', 2006, summary of conclusions, p. vii, available at http://mudancasclimaticas.cptec.inpe.br/~rmclima/pdfs/destaques/sternreview_report_complete.pdf, consulted in juli 2012. Stern estimates the costs of arresting climate change to be around 1% of global GDP annually. This may seem small, and indeed does not stand in the way of structural economic growth, but it targets the sectors that need to change much more than others.
[14]See for a theoretical economic analysis of the crisis response of welfare states Vis, Barara, van Kersbergen, Kees, Hylands, Thomas, 'To What Extent Did the Financial Crisis Intensify the Pressure to Reform the Welfare State?', *Social Policy and Administration* 2011, Vol. 45, No. 4, pp. 338-353.

paying for social security, healthcare and education; those things that enable people to live autonomously.[15] At the same time, many of the practices that give meaning to people's lives are more and more regarded as mere hobby's – worthless when not economically viable.[16] As a consequence, the quality of the environment in which people live their lives is deteriorating.

These two examples indicate that current Western governments take quite a one-dimensional approach to autonomy, and that they do not seem sufficiently conscious of the balance between promoting a rich social and natural environment, and providing people with the tools to lead autonomous lives. However, this one-sidedness should not surprise us: I will argue that most modern liberal thinkers are guilty of the same mistake. They too emphasize the priority of enabling people to live autonomously, and ignore the fact that a horde of autonomous individuals may well stampede the fragile and complex environment in which they must necessarily build their lives.[17] What's more, their blindness is intentional; influential liberal philosophers such as Rawls and Gewirth felt there was good reason for ignoring the environmental side of personal autonomy.

They argued that a liberal government has to be neutral towards the different and conflicting conceptions of the good life citizens hold, because its policies have to be based on reasons *all* citizens can accept.[18] As a consequence, governments cannot intervene in environmental struggles which are characterized by a struggle between different morally acceptable conceptions of the good life. In this thesis, I will examine this doctrine of neutrality, and argue that it is flawed and needs to be revised. Building on Joseph Raz' argument that liberalism should not in any sense be understood as a neutral political doctrine,[19] I will present a different account of liberalism, which *is* able to make sense of the contemporary predicament of balancing the two sides of personal autonomy. In my view, governments

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[15]See for instance the correspondence between Volkskrant historian Rutger Bregman and liberal politician Wouter Koolmees: 'Beste Wouter Koolmees, zijn we soms nog niet rijk genoeg?', De Volkskrant, 27th of September, 2012, and 'Wouter Koolmees: Wie meer wil werken, moet dat wel kunnen', De Volkskrant, 28th of September, 2012.

[16]In Dutch politics, the term 'linkse hobby' has been coined, predominantly referring to the public funding of culture projects. See the article 'Wie gebruikte de term linkse hobby's het eerst?', de Volkskrant, 7th of January, 2011.

[17]Of course, this kind of criticism has also been raised by communitarians, see for instance Taylor's writings about 'atomism', Taylor, Charles, 'Atomism', in 'Philosophical Papers: Volume Two', Cambridge University Press 1985. I do not consider communitarian arguments in this answering this thesis, because I believe the most convincing idea of morality rests on a new understanding of the concept of personal autonomy, instead of relativizing its importance. Still, this paper's emphasis on the social and natural environment is similar to the communitarian's focus on a person's social embeddedness.

[18]Gewirth, Alan, 'Reason and Morality', University of Chicago Press 1978, pp. 9-12, 134-138, Rawls, John, 'The Priority of Right and Ideas of the Good', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1988, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 251-276, pp. 253-255. Importantly, they did not reach this conclusion for the *same* reasons. Gewirth's and Rawls' arguments are very different. The various ways of supporting the doctrine of neutrality, and the consequent concrete substance of that doctrine, will be discussed in paragraph two.

[19]Raz, Joseph, 'The Morality of Freedom', Oxford University Press 1986, pp. 128-133, 407-413. See also Raz, Joseph, 'Liberalism, Skepticism and Democracy', *Iowa Law Review* 1989, Vol. 74, No. 4, pp. 761-785, pp. 782-785.

should actively pursue an ideal that I will describe as inclusive pluralism, which urges that as many substantial options as possible for autonomous life should be promoted and made available.

My argument is structured in four steps. First off, I will attempt to define more closely the general contemporary problem people experience when attempting to realize an autonomous life. Second, I will delve deeper into the idea of governmental neutrality, and explain why such an understanding of liberalism cannot make sense of the autonomy-related problems we face today. Third, I will present Raz' criticism of neutrality, explicate his kind of political theory and see whether his ideas are able to solve the challenge of realizing autonomy. Lastly, I will evaluate Raz' account and present my own views.

1.2 The context of personal autonomy

Let's take a closer look at the two sides of the ideal of personal autonomy: the notion of enabling people to live autonomously, and the idea of an environment in which people can concretely build a life. One might say that part of enabling a person to construct his own way of living is precisely to secure an environment in which there are many possible ways of living. What then is the distinction between the two elements? The sense of enabling I refer to in the distinction is that of providing a person with the tools or instruments he needs to act freely. Think of having a healthy body, a sharp mind, a sense of self-esteem and a proper education.[20] All these capacities add something to a person, and are things which he truly owns – his mind and body are his to govern and employ. One can see in what sense a policy of helping people gain these tools is neutral: each person can decide for himself what sort of life he wants to craft with the tools he has been given.

Crucially, this sense of ownership is lacking when considering the second element of autonomy. A rich environment is possessed collectively – it is necessarily shared by all its occupants. Although we like to carve out our own personal space and live inside our own house on our own cozy plot, there is no escaping this notion of co-habitation. In fact, when we do appropriate a house or forge a friendship with someone, we take something another can't have any more, or can only have less, and change the relationship others have to that something.[21] This does not occur with possessing certain skills – our having them never precludes another from achieving them as well. In theory, we can all have a legal degree, a healthy body and a sense of self-esteem.

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[20]Gewirth wrote extensively about the basic goods a person needs to act freely and purposively, distinguishing between those that are more and less essential to a person's agency. Also he described the basic goods as capacities. See Gewirth 1978, pp. 54-60.

[21]Part of het meaning of social relationships is a kind of exclusiveness - can a person really be *my* best friend if he is everybody's best friend? Think also of a marriage, where two people 'take' each other as a spouse.

Moreover, our environment is not only shared, it is also fundamentally limited. There exists but a certain amount of matter, which at one time can only be used in a limited amount of ways. This is also true in a social sense: people can at one time only relate to each other in a certain amount of ways, and share a limited amount of practices. Economically speaking, our world is characterized by scarcity. The limited and shared nature of our environment turns humanity's joint interaction with it into something competitive – we know that if we take something, other people's chances to have something like it are reduced. This brings us to the contemporary problems in realizing personal autonomy.

In the shaping of the social and natural environment, people's ideas about life are bound to collide. One idea of how life should be led can be more widely shared or more powerfully advocated than another, and start to dominate the space in which people construct their ways of living. The aforementioned example of climate change exhibits such trends; one towards securing a welfare-state and also one towards solely valuing nature as a resource. The world's inhabitants are swept up by societal developments, and have very little influence on the changes they are put through. This involuntariness conflicts with the ideal that they may lead an autonomous, essentially voluntary life. Indeed, besides possessing the necessary personal tools, they need an environment which still offers some room for their conception of living.

Of course, phrased this way, the problem of a restricting environment does not seem contemporary or novel, but instead reflects an eternal predicament of individuals. For what power does a single person ever have in the face of overwhelming global developments? However, this point misunderstands the problem. Evidently, a single person has little influence, but this does not absolve governments of their responsibility to ensure for its citizens an autonomous existence. Indeed, the whole point of constructing the Western welfare states was to *empower* weak individuals to lead their own lives. Through the support of an intelligent societal organization, people would no longer be at the mercy of their circumstances, but have real control over how they interacted with the world. Developments like climate change give evidence of the fact that people are losing that control, and that governments are not succeeding in empowering them.

Moreover, such developments show that effective personal autonomy has to be understood in terms of power. An autonomous person is a person who has the power to do whatever he chooses to do. A crippled or mentally diseased person can never lead a fully autonomous life, because he has been stripped of some of that power. To live a life is to have an effect on one's surroundings, and the meaning people attribute to a life depends on the mark a certain person succeeds to make. Being autonomous consists of exercising one's power, and not being autonomous consists of external factors exercising their power over you. Translated to societal circumstances, the ideal of autonomy

commands that power and influence must be distributed in such a way that each person is equally able to follow his ideas about how to live.

It is safe to say that social interaction normally does not lead to an equal distribution of power and autonomy. As said, social interaction is by necessity competitive – people seek to live *their way* as much as they can, even though another's possibilities may diminish as a consequence.[22] The economic crisis clearly shows this dynamic, as bankers, who wield a lot of influence, seem to have more to say about its resolution than the poorer people who must suffer its worst consequences. Because of this naturally generated inequality, governments must artificially alter the social power-struggle in such a way that the weaker parties gain a stronger say, while stronger parties are weakened. However, difficulty arises when one considers that in fulfilling this task, governmental interference can also become a great danger to realizing personal autonomy.

If governments regulate social interaction too much, people's personal autonomy is made void. If interference by others is merely replaced with interference by the government, nothing has been gained. Governmental interference must therefore support autonomous behavior, instead of making it meaningless. At least two intuitions are important in striking this balance. First, people must remain responsible for their own choices. When someone makes a mistake, he must suffer certain consequences, and when he does something right, benefits should be his – a measure of competition between people, in which some lose and some win, has to be allowed. Second, governments must not dictate the personal ideals people attempt to realize in their lives.[23] Living an autonomous life means that one follows one's own conception of what a good life consists in. This does not mean governments have no moral authority over their citizens. It means that there should be enough room for people to act according to their own ideas, if those ideas are not too burdensome for others.

We have now touched upon the central elements of the contemporary challenge of realizing personal autonomy. In realizing autonomy, governments must provide people with the personal capacities for autonomy, secure a rich environment in which many action options are possible and, importantly, in doing all this not suppress individual autonomous behavior too much. The remainder of the thesis will be dedicated to combining these elements into a clear and convincing theory of liberalism.

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[22]This competitiveness also applies when people attempt to serve others – they then advocate an ideal of altruism, which competes with others possible ideals. People always follow their ideas, and attempt, consciously or not, to promote them.

[23]In the next paragraphs we will discuss extensively the different ways this intuition can be interpreted.

2.1 Autonomy, the right and the good

In the introduction I alleged that most modern liberals misunderstand the meaning of personal autonomy. In the remainder of this thesis I will refer to these liberals as 'traditional liberals', as they all hold a central normative claim which has dominated the history of liberalism, and that has always led us to define a political position as a liberal one. The driving idea behind this claim is that of personal autonomy: people must have the freedom to live their own lives. The claim stipulates that liberal governments must be neutral towards different substantive conceptions of the good life people hold, and must instead base their actions on principles of the right.[24] All traditional liberals find that, at least *in some way*, the principles which govern society are of a different kind than the principles which people follow in their everyday lives. However, precisely how they are different is a complicated question, on which traditional liberals differ significantly.

To answer it, we must therefore present a picture of the possible interpretations of the distinction between the right and the good. The way one construes this difference depends essentially upon the way one understands and values the idea of personal autonomy. Therefore, to explain the distinction, we must ponder the ways the concept of personal autonomy can figure in a liberal theoretical account. Put in meta-ethical terms, we must discover the different ways one can justify the value of personal autonomy, in order to figure out its meaning and to see how it in turn can justify and give meaning to the distinction between the right and the good. When dealing with normative notions, the process of justification determines the meaning a certain rule or concept attains.

Although there are lots of ways to construct a coherent meta-ethical account, I argue that there exist only two main approaches which are relevant to an autonomy-driven account of liberalism: an account based on some form of social agreement and an account which directly justifies the moral value of autonomy.[25] This dichotomy makes sense when one considers that if we approve of personal autonomy, we must necessarily also approve of the fact of moral pluralism: a situation in which different people act according to different beliefs about how they should lead their lives is necessarily a situation characterized by a plurality of moral convictions. Now, not many meta-ethical approaches can approve of a situation of moral pluralism. Indeed, if some moral view is true, doesn't that mean that every person should act according to it? Doesn't justifying one moral truth disqualify all others and thus end, at least conceptually, a situation of moral pluralism? Not necessarily.

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[24]Rawls 1988, pp. 252-254. See also Gewirth 1978, pp. 7-21.

[25]For a modern example of the former, see Waldron, Jeremy, 'Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 1987, Vol. 37, No. 147, pp. 127-150, pp. 139-150. For a contemporary example of the latter, see Gewirth, Alan, 'Dignity as the Basis of Rights', in Meyer, Michael A., Parent, William A., 'The Constitution of Rights. Human Dignity and American Values', Cornell University Press 1992, pp. 10-28, pp. 10-12. Gewirth justifies the value of enabling people to live autonomously by referring to the inherent dignity of human beings.

There are only two ways out of the conflict between endorsing personal autonomy and moral pluralism and claiming that there exists one moral truth – hence the dichotomy. The first option is to deny that any moral claim is in some necessary or objective sense true, and instead argue that all morality is merely based on a contingent agreement between people. Importantly, this agreement then allows each person to follow his own idea of the good life.[26] This move would solve the conflict, because while the form of a social agreement now functions as the moral truth, the substantive content of that agreement advocates a social situation of moral pluralism. The second option entails that one does claim that moral truths exist, and consequently that they indicate that each person should pursue his own idea of the good, as long as this conception does not conflict unacceptably with the lives of others.[27] Of course, this position does not approve of moral pluralism in any conceptual sense – it stipulates a moral code all must abide by. However, that moral code does approve of a situation characterized by moral pluralism, in the sense that within the framework of true morality, people are encouraged to follow their own contingent beliefs.

Are these two really our only meta-ethical options? Besides arguing that no moral claims are true, and arguing that an autonomy-informed morality is true, one could of course argue that some other ethical position is the right one. However, how would you justify the central importance of personal autonomy, and consequently accept a social situation of moral pluralism, if you believe that personal autonomy is not ultimately valuable? That would amount to a contradiction in terms. Imagine valuing personal autonomy instrumentally, for instance because it leads to social peace. You would still have to condemn behavior which endangers social peace, even if such behavior does not conflict with the ideal of personal autonomy. Evidently, such a condemnation would be contrary to personal autonomy and moral pluralism.

If there is a liberal truth claim to be made, it must be that personal autonomy is inherently valuable, meaning that it is valuable in itself that individuals can live in their own peculiar ways. Straying from that line of thought, and at the same time still believing in some moral truth, would be contrary to liberalism, and thus not relevant to the task at hand: figuring out how to make theoretical sense of all the sides of personal autonomy.

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[26]Rawls makes a similar move, arguing that in the original position people will agree to principles which protect each person's basic liberties. However, his meta-ethical account is more complicated; he separates political morality from morality in general. See Rawls 1988, pp. 252-255 and Rawls, John, 'A Theory of Justice', Harvard University Press 1971, pp. 136-150.

[27]Because of its strong affirmation of moral truths, Gewirth is the strongest modern representative of this kind of thought. See Gewirth, Alan, 'The Justification of Morality', *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 1988, vol. 53, No. 2, pp. 245-262, pp. 250-256. Think also of Korsgaard, Christine M., 'The Sources of Normativity', Cambridge University Press 1996, pp. 130-145.

2.2 Contractarian right and good

Let's examine these meta-ethical accounts, and find out what exact conceptions of the right and the good they give rise to. Contract theory, understood as meta-ethical approach, is widely known as the tradition of basing a system of morality on self-interest.[28] Contract theorists hold the assumption that humans are rational people, who will accept an agreement if it is clearly in their advantage.[29] Morality is such an agreement, and thus consists of regulations which are, on the whole, in everyone's advantage. Of course, contractarians do not always agree on which agreements are exactly in everyone's advantage.

For example, Thomas Hobbes, the founding father of contract theory, argued that without a powerful state policing everybody, people would be condemned to an endless power-struggle, in which even the weakest player would eventually have a chance to kill the strongest.[30] Therefore, it was rational to construct a state, as this would provide all with a unique form of safety.[31] Hobbes interpreted this rationale of self-interest rather radically: as long as people would still agree to the state, the state was justified in doing whatever it liked.[32] Modern contract theorists have improved on this conclusion by interpreting the rationale of self-interest the other way round: people would ultimately agree to the sort of state which would serve them in the most sophisticated way.[33] Depending on one's further interpretation of self-interest, even practices such as cultural pursuits, guaranteed medical care and education and jobs could be justified by the rationale of a contract.[34]

Importantly, the fact that contract theorists base their ideas on human self-interest reveals a rather skeptical perspective on morality – they do not believe in the existence of cognitive moral *truths*.[35] To their minds, all moral claims are simply subjective preferences which, unlike scientific predictions, cannot be proven wrong or right. This is a radical view, because if there are no moral truths, anything goes.[36] No one has any principal argument for either stopping another from doing

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[28] I expressly use the term 'self-interest', instead of 'consent', because I want to describe contract theory in its purest meta-ethical form. The concept of consent often presupposes a certain consideration for the person who must give his consent, which still has to be justified, see Waldron 1987, pp. 146 -147. The concept of self-interest refers to the descriptive logic of social interaction, in which people are thought to cooperate if that is in everyone's favor. That social logic does not presuppose something deeper, and *can* serve as a basis for an ethical account. See also Gaulthier, David, 'The Social Contract as Ideology', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1977, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 130-164, pp. 135-140.

[29] Hobbes, Thomas, 'Leviathan', 1651, available at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm, consulted in January 2013, Chapters XIII, XVII. Self-interest here explicitly indicates advantage to the self, or having one's desires fulfilled, not egoism. If a person desires another's happiness, achieving that person's happiness is also to his advantage.

[30] Hobbes 1651,Chapter XIII.

[31] Idem. See also Chapter XVII.

[32] Ibid., Chapter XVIII.

[33] Gaulthier 1977, pp. 138-145. See also Gaulthier, David, 'Political Contractarianism', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 2002, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp.132-148, pp. 133-138.

[34] Idem.

[35] Hobbes 1651, Chapter XIV.

[36] Idem.

something, or for making him live up to a certain rule. The only laws that truly bind people are the factual laws of the natural world – if one has the power to do something, one can.[37] Therefore, the only valid reason for constructing a moral system is that it corresponds with our innate drive to cooperate with something that is advantageous to us.

This view leads to the introduction of a separation between political and private morality, for while political morality is constructed on the basis of mutual gain, private moralities are built upon ideas of personal preference.[38] Some of those preferences may be shared, and can function as ground for political action, but other preferences people may fervently disagree on. The content of political morality thus depends on the actual mutual ground between people, which may change over time.[39] The task of contractarians is to track these mutual preferences, and organize them systematically. One could say that in the contractarian view, principles of the right are a subspecies of principles of the good – all these principles reflect subjective preferences. Principle of the right are those principles of the good which are shared.

So far we have not mentioned personal autonomy, but it is easy to see where this value fits in. Personal autonomy is of central importance, *if* the common ground between people can be characterized by a shared commitment to that value.[40] This would not be surprising. Person A might not agree with person B's ideas about life, but they can each understand that a society in which pursuing both views is possible is favorable to them – they could co-exist in peace, without having to fight over which truth has to be enforced by their government. However, this connection between self-interest and autonomy is not a necessary one. It could be that the common ground between people consists of wanting to live a specific kind of life, such as a life that is lived in harmony with nature.[41] Such a commitment places restrictions on autonomy, because certain practices involving a disharmonious interaction with nature will be forbidden. As a rule of thumb, one can say that while the concept of autonomy can function as a common ground in pluralistic societies, it cannot serve as such in a society which features one shared culture, except of course when that latter culture is characterized by a commitment to autonomy.

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[37]Idem.
[38]Rawls 1988, pp. 252-255.
[39]Rawls, John, 'The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus', *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 1987, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 1-25, pp. 2-6.
[40]Rawls 1987, pp. 18-21. Rawls believed the common ground in Western democracies was only partly characterized by autonomy, in the sense of guaranteeing people's basic liberties and securing a social cooperation based on mutual respect.
[41]See for instance, Taylor, Paul W., 'Respect for Nature', Princeton University Press 2011, pp. 40-48.

2.3 Moral truths, the right and the good

In contrast to the contract approach, the second kind of meta-ethics attempts to argue that values such as equality and autonomy do have significance, because moral truths do somehow exist.[42] Just as there are different interpretations of the idea of a social contract, there are many ways in which moral truths have been argued for. However, a line can be drawn between theories which rely on moral intuitions which people share, and theories which seek to prove that moral claims are based on reason, i.e., that all reasonable persons must accept certain moral claims.[43] Given the fact that many people have contrasting moral intuitions, the second approach to arguing moral truths seems the more promising, but this need not concern us here. The point is to explicate what kind of interpretation of the distinction between the right and the good follows from claiming the moral value of autonomy.

The thought underlying the moral value of autonomy is that each person is somehow valuable or morally relevant.[44] What's more, a person is not valuable because of the color of his hair or his talent for playing basketball, but simply because he is a human being.[45] Therefore, each human being should be equally recognized as having value or dignity and deserving the respect and consideration of others.[46] This means that when someone makes decisions which concern others, each person's interest should be taken into account. Moreover, because they possess a certain dignity, people deserve to lead a good life. However, when are other people's interests taken into account, and what does a good life consists of? Answering these questions brings us to personal autonomy.

Besides appealing to certain intuitions, there are two other ways in which autonomy can answer the questions what makes life valuable and what interests we should respect. The first is a principled valuation of autonomy, while the second regards autonomy as a practical solution to a pervasive problem of moral epistemology. According to the first view, human dignity resides in the fact that we are autonomous rational agents.[47] The idea is that because we are rational and autonomous, we must necessarily make certain ethical claims.[48] In a complicated argument Alan Gewirth argued that a person can only act purposefully and successfully if he credits himself with the

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[42]The verb 'exist' does not indicate an existence in an physical sense, but indicates *truths for people* which are somehow cognizable.

[43]For a discussion of the merits of intuitionism, see for instance Rawls 1971, pp. 34-40, and Prichard, Harold A., 'Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?', *Mind* 1912, Vol. 21, No. 81, pp. 21-37. See for a discussion of morality based on rational agency Gewirth 1978, pp. 129-140.

[44]See for instance Korsgaard 1996, pp. 125-130.

[45]A dominant way of describing the idea of human value is by stating that humans possess *dignity*. I will not discuss the complicated debate about human dignity, but instead use the term dignity to denote that humans deserve moral consideration. See Düwell, Marcus, 'Human Dignity and Human Rights', in Kaufman, Paulus, Kuch, Hannes, Neuhaeuser, Christian, Webster, Elaine (eds.), 'Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization, Human Dignity Violated', Springer 2011, pp. 221-223.

[46]Idem.

[47]Gewirth 1978, pp. 129-140.

[48]Ibid., pp. 48-60.

authority to decide on how to act, and with a moral worth that other agents must accept.[49] Correct or not, this type of reasoning leads one to claim that each person will demand that others respect his autonomy, and that the content of morality can be determined by locating a social situation in which each person's autonomy is respected equally.

The fact that we are rational agents thus determines the ethical claims we must make. According to Gewirth, these claims consist of everything that is needed for an autonomous existence: one will claim one's bodily integrity, freedom of conscience and speech, access to food and medical care, education, and so on.[50] Importantly, the claims a rational person makes are claims that every rational person will make; no person will state that he deserves to have all his specific preferences fulfilled, such as driving in fast cars or eating exotic fruits. The reason for this is that other rational agents, who do not share these preferences, do not see why they are necessary for an autonomous existence.[51] Thus, the content of morality is limited to claiming those goods which are necessary for all autonomous agents. These goods are usually described in terms of capabilities, such as the capability of being healthy or being able to use one's mind effectively.[52] The logic behind this term is that capabilities are like tools, which everybody needs, but which at the same time everybody can use for their own purposes. The concept thus strikes a nice balance between the inter-subjective necessity of moral claims and the subjective preference of ideas of the good.

The other way in which autonomy takes center stage in formulating the content of morality and the good of persons is through invoking a kind of epistemic abstinence.[53] In this case, one simply has no argument for concluding that one way of life is superior to others, as long as each way of life respects the claim that all humans share the same value. Why then not leave it to the people themselves to figure out how they want to live? Indeed, simply enable them to make their own choices and carve out their own life. This more pragmatic starting point leads one to construct an ethical system similar to the one proposed by Gewirth.

We can now answer the question at hand: to what distinction between the right and the good do these autonomy-based approaches lead? In contrast to the perspective of self-interest, these approaches lead to a principled distinction between the right and the good. The principles which should guide the state, the 'right' principles, are those which are morally true, while the ideas of the

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[49]Gewirth 1988, pp. 246-248.
[50]Gewirth 1978, pp. 61-70. Of course, these claims remind us of human rights, such as those stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, In later writings Gewirth consciously makes this connection, see Gewrith 1992.
[51]Gewirth 1978, pp. 104-115.
[52]Ibid., pp. 58-62. I do not refer here to the 'capabilities-approach', as advocated by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, because although their conclusions may be similar to Gewirth's, the employed method of argumentation is very different. See Nussbaum, Martha C., 'Capabilities and Disabilities', in Nussbaum, Martha C., 'Frontiers of Justice', Harvard University Press 2006.
[53]This approach is not without its difficulties, see Raz, Joseph, 'Facing Diversity: The Case of Epistemic Abstinence', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1990, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 3-46, pp. 3-10.

good which people pursue in their ordinary lives, unless they coincide with the 'right' principles, are not morally true and may not inform state action. When founded on human dignity and autonomy, morality consists of a set of rules which *frame* all human action, not the set of rules which normatively *determine* all human action. The state should guard the right moral framework, and its power is only limited by this moral framework. Note that this does not mean that the state becomes a totalitarian institution which controls everyone's lives. The morality which informs the state is based on autonomy, and consequently the state cannot breach a person's autonomy save for some urgent reason, such as that another person's autonomy is being limited severely by his actions.

In this second interpretation, the right is not a subspecies of the good, but instead forms its own independent category. The relationship between the right and the good is that of truth and contingency. The life of the person who loves soccer is no better than a life of contemplation, or a life of honest hard work. The only valid standard with which a life may be judged is the moral standard, which is true and which provides the basis of the government of society. Because of its principled nature, this standard will not change over time. Of course, different circumstances will demand a different application of the standard, but its core commitment to human dignity and autonomy will always remain.

2.4 The liberal blend

Thus far, two liberal pictures of the right and the good have emerged, accompanied by two different valuations of autonomy. In the first interpretation, principles of the right denote the normative common ground between citizens, while ideas of the good describe the various conceptions of the good life they do not necessarily share. Individual autonomy may function as the central notion of the common ground between all citizens, in which case the consequent society can been seen as liberal. Still, other ideas may typify the common ground, in which case liberalism will not be argued for.

The second interpretation of the right and the good is more principled. Whether argued for in a rational way or when relying on intuitions, principles of the right state the moral truth which must guide governments. Each citizen is to obey them, and other normative notions are of no consequence to the state. In the liberal scheme, the moral truth consists of a valuation of autonomy, either because it is the source of all normative claims, or because it is a pragmatic articulation of the inherent value of all persons. Ideas of the good are fundamentally different from ideas of the right – they are neither true nor false, but merely a contingent reflection of the subjective preferences people hold.

Most liberal thinkers do not rely on one of these two meta-ethical strategies, but combine them into a novel whole. John Rawls' theory of justice serves as a good example. His theory of justice revolves around a hypothetical contract which people agree to out of self-interest, but the

circumstances in which this contract is agreed upon are unusual.[54] Instead of imaging people to be located in an actual society, with features all kinds of inequalities between citizens, Rawls introduces the original position, which creates *fair* conditions in which each person is equal.[55] The latter concept of an original position is foreign to the contract tradition. However, it can be argued for quite easily from the perspective of moral cognitivism. Indeed, a fair negotiation is one way to articulate the equal inherent worth which all citizens share.

The novel mixture Rawls constructs shows that liberalism is not committed to one specific meta-ethical approach, but can instead rely on different routes and even combine them. The label of liberalism is based on certain conclusions, and conclusions can be reached in various ways. As said, that conclusion has to do with personal autonomy, and introduces some kind of distinction between the right and the good. The relevance of the meta-ethical approaches lies in defending this conclusion. Accordingly, if one wants to prove that this conclusion is wrong, and thus fundamentally criticize traditional liberalism, one must convincingly reject the possible meta-ethical foundations. However, before discussing theoretical criticisms to the foundations of traditional liberalism, it is vital to articulate why such liberalism cannot make sense of the modern challenges of autonomy.

2.5 Traditional liberalism and peculiar pursuits

Why is the traditional liberalism described above unfit to make sense of current struggles with autonomy? The problem lies in the fact that notions of neutrality, consensus or common ground play such a central role in defining the *concrete substance* of personal autonomy. Whether taking a route like Gewirth's or constructing a liberal system on the idea of an agreement, the principles of the right are always principles each rational citizen should be able to get behind. The rules which guide governmental actions are not those which are morally acceptable, but those that are morally right and thereby bind each citizen. Each person must at least potentially be able to acknowledge their validity, either because they are in his self-interest or for some other compelling reason. This demand of commonness or generality gives rise to a significant blind spot in understanding personal autonomy.

What traditional liberals forget is that people are very individual and peculiar beings that feature many specific interests. Indeed, they have all sorts of passions which they share with but a few others, and in some cases with no one. Painting, debating, gambling, sailing or curling – these are all pursuits which are important to the lives of some, but definitely not to the lives of all. Therefore, living autonomously does not only consist of having a healthy body, a feeling of self-confidence and a well-

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[54]Rawls 1971, pp. 118-125.
[55]Idem.

trained intellect. It consists essentially of engaging in one's own slightly strange activities.[56] Indeed, isn't the whole point of being healthy and skillful that we can engage in our own pursuits? Aren't those precisely the things which make our lives worth living? Only a moody skeptic would argue that the endeavor of 'staying healthy' is meaningful enough in itself.

In other words, valuing personal autonomy is not only about pursuing *morally right* policies, which provide people with the things they all need, such as healthcare and physical security, but also about *morally acceptable* pursuits, which we all uniquely engage in. Plurality and autonomy are two sides of the same coin, and one's idea of the conditions of autonomy should somehow feature the individuality and peculiarity of persons besides their general needs.

As argued in the introduction, the contemporary problems with realizing autonomy consist essentially of the suppression of people's own specific practices. Because of its power dynamic, society always tends towards the development of dominant social practices which make pursuing contrary habits and uses more difficult. A culture of personal autonomy is a culture in which this suppression is halted, even if the dominant practices do not have any negative effect on ensuring people's basic capacities. As traditional liberalism cannot justify and make sensible such policies, it is flawed and needs revising. In search of such a revision, we will now turn to a different perspective on personal autonomy: the one constructed by Joseph Raz.

3.1 Raz' definition of personal autonomy

Joseph Raz has argued that a liberal government should not be neutral towards different morally acceptable conceptions of the good life, and has rejected the traditional distinction between the right and the good.[57] To best understand his criticism, its useful to explain his conception of personal autonomy first. As most other writers, Raz believes that the ideal of personal autonomy consists of being the creator or author of one's own life.[58] However, in actual society, people are not immediately able to be achieve this ideal. Raz argues that there are three central conditions for leading an autonomous life: a person must have the appropriate mental abilities, his independence must be respected and he must possess an adequate range of options.[59] When these three conditions are met, a person can make his own choices and effectively build his life.

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[56]Harry Frankfurt described personal autonomy as consisting of powerful love connections which are unique to a certain individual. See Frankfurt, Harry, 'Autonomy, Necessity, and Love', in 'Necessity, Volition, and Love', Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 132-137.
[57]Raz 1986, pp. 128-135.
[58]Ibid., pp. 369-370.
[59]Ibid., pp. 372-374.

The first demand entails a capacity people must have to form certain intentions and plans that make minimal rational sense.[60] Indeed, if a person does not possess this capacity, he is simply acting randomly, and he cannot be identified as the purposive author of his own life.[61] The second demand indicates a social situation, namely the situation in which others do not make your choices for you, either by manipulating you, deceiving you or forcing you to do something.[62] Others may not be the author of your own life. The third demand is the most complicated and consists of several distinct elements. The first holds that a person only genuinely builds his own life when the environment in which he lives offers him both short-term and long-term choices. On the one hand, our choices cannot solely be trivial, such as those of a prisoner; we should also be able to affect the more serious and fundamental aspects of our life.[63] On the other hand, we also need trivial choices, such as how to move around and which words to use – a life solely focused on fundamental choices would be equally oppressive.[64]

The second element concerns the variety of choices. In the words of Raz himself:

'*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*' (p. 375).[65]

The environment which people inhabit must feature a plurality of life options. For instance, one could be a sportsman, an academic or a plumber. One could choose to have children, adopt them or instead refuse to procreate. In a rich environment, in the sense of possible ways of lives, people can choose something which truly suits their own needs and preferences. One part of building one's own life is building a distinct life, which is fundamentally different from many others.

The last part of ensuring adequate options consists of ensuring a variety of *morally acceptable* options.[66] Consider having a choice between doing something morally repugnant and something morally acceptable – is your personal autonomy secured by such options? Raz argues that when people choose option A in order to avoid performing the morally repugnant option B, their choice is forced.[67] An adequate range of options should therefore only include morally acceptable options. Note that the rationale of this argument depends on the moral views of the person in question. If a person

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[60]Ibid., p. 373.
[61]Idem. One can compare this argument with Harry Frankfurt's idea of a 'wanton', see Frankfurt, Harry, 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', *The Journal of Philosophy* 1971, Vol. 68, No. 1, pp. 5-20, p. 11.
[62]Ibid., p. 375.
[63]Ibid., pp. 373-374.
[64]Idem.
[65]Idem.
[66]Ibid., pp. 378-380.
[67]Idem.

perceives something as morally repugnant, he will attempt to avoid it. If he does not judge the option as such, there does not seem to be a problem. We will return to this point later on.

Regarding these three conditions, a couple of specifications have to made. Firstly, all the mentioned conditions of an autonomous life admit of degrees.[68] A person can be more or less autonomous, depending on the extent of his mental capacities, the variety of options available to him and the extent to which his independence is respected. This indeterminacy shows that the concept of autonomy does not directly answer questions about the way society should be governed. To what extent should people be autonomous? How do we fairly divide options between people? We will discuss these questions later on.

Secondly, the conditions of independency and adequate options seem to overlap – doesn't the problem of disrespecting a person's independence lie in the way that person's options are limited? Raz fiercely denies this observation:

'*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 actual consequences. They have acquired a symbolic meaning expressing disregard or even contempt for the coerced or manipulated people.*'(p. 378)[69]

Raz believes that the demand of independence signifies an important and widely shared value-judgment about personal autonomy, namely that it is a personal insult to interfere with someone's independence.[70] Even if because of interfering with a person's decision-making, the variety of his options actually increases, for instance because the subject in question is very stubborn, performing such interference would still be wrong.[71] Of course, there also exist socially convened exceptions for this rule; one may imprison criminals or stop someone from impulsively committing suicide.[72] But the fact that these exceptions exist does not relativize the importance of independence –that one needs such a good reason to interfere only emphasizes its special character.

3.2 Social forms and autonomy-enhancing culture

According to Raz, the interconnectedness between a person's autonomous life and his social environment goes much deeper than the observation that autonomy is dependent on the availability of adequate options. Options for action are not only dependent on the social environment for their factual

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[68]Ibid., pp. 408-412.
[69]Raz 1986, p. 378.
[70]Idem.
[71]Idem.
[72]Idem.

possibility, they are also constituted by that social environment.[73] People do not create their life plans out of thin air. On the contrary, Raz argues that people rely on existing 'widely practiced forms of behavior', dubbing these 'social forms'.[74] These forms make up the culture that people share and determine how individuals orient themselves in their social environment. What's more, these social forms are not constructed instantaneously, but grow and shift slowly throughout the long ages of human history. Persons living in the present have inherited a wealth of practices and ideas from past people. Raz notes that we learn most of our behavior patterns according to 'habituation', not 'self-creation'.[75] The originality of a person is dwarfed by the social traditions which constitute his ideas.

Still, there is some room for individuality. According to Raz, an individual construct his own particular variation on the themes his social environment features.[76] Indeed, he might even choose to go against most of the rules and ideals common to his background. Think of a catholic quitting church. However, Raz believes that such attempts do not show that a person is the sole creator and author of his existence. Even when rebelling he is indebted to the social forms which give meaning to his rebellion.[77] His life would not be a variation if not for the common theme, and could not be a kind of resistance if not for the ordinary way of doing things. Individuality is a very relative concept, and Raz seeks to challenge those who would endow it with a significance it does not possess.

Raz argues that traditional liberals are guilty of making this mistake. They focus too much on the mental and physical capabilities individuals need to live autonomously, and disregard the value of the collective traditions in which those individuals are nested.[78] People do not build their lives by themselves. Raz writes at the start of his work on liberalism:

'*If there is one common thread to the argument of this book it is its critique of individualism and its endeavor to argue for a liberal morality on non-individualistic grounds.*'(p. 18)[79]

The high point of traditional liberals' error is the way they rely on the rights individuals are thought to possess, and which governments must ensure and protect. Articulating moral claims in terms of rights makes collective goods seem to have only value to the rights-holder. Raz offers a completely contrary perspective. In his interest theory of rights, he argues that individual rights are not only justified by the interest of the right-holder, but also and often predominantly by the general interest all persons have in a culture of liberty and sophistication.[80] The right to free speech is not only useful to a person who

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[73]Ibid., pp. 308-313.
[74]Ibid., p. 308.
[75]Raz 1986, pp. 311-313.
[76]Raz 1986, pp. 308-310.
[77]Idem.
[78]Ibid., pp. 200-215.
[79]Ibid., p. 18.
[80]Raz, Joseph, 'Rights and Individual Well-Being', *Ratio Juris* 1992, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 127-142, pp. 134-137. See also Raz 1986, pp. 180-186, and Raz, Joseph, 'On the Nature of Rights', *Mind* 1984, Vol. 93, No. 370, pp. 194-214, pp. 207-210.

seeks to vent his opinions, but also crucial to ensuring a critical public debate all benefit from.[81] Collective goods are of vital importance to individuals, because they enable their life plans and because they consist of behavior patterns which give meaning to their lives.[82] For this reason, Raz states they do not only have an instrumental value to individuals, but an intrinsic value which governments must respect.[83]

Therefore, instead of basing his political views on the traditional account of individual capacities, Raz introduces the concept of autonomy-enhancing practices.[84] These are social forms, or widely shared behavior-patterns, which help fulfill the afore-mentioned conditions of autonomy: they protect people's independence, aid them in growing their mental and physical capacities and provide life options.[85] A school is a good example of such a practice, and so is a family in which children are taught to take care of themselves. But you can also think of a sports center or well-maintained natural environment. All these practices promote one or more of the conditions of autonomy, by offering us life options, safety, self-respect, etc. Therefore, Raz concludes that if governments are committed to enabling the autonomous lives of their citizens, they must promote these practices.[86]

Before further comparing this view with that of traditional liberalism, it is important to note one central proviso of Raz' account. Liberal governments may not secure autonomy-enhancing practices at all costs: they must always respect the personal autonomy of individuals.[87] If governmental action would encroach too much on the independence of citizens, the ideal of personal autonomy would not be respected.[88]Think of morally repugnant behavior such as cheating on one's lover, an act which surely disrespects the autonomy of the cheated person. May governments forcefully intervene to secure a social practice of honesty? Surely not: punishing the cheaters would amount to an enormous violation of *their* independence. Raz argues that coercion is only permissible if it is performed to ensure that people do not harm each other's fundamental capacity for autonomy.[89] Damaging a person's independence constitutes a grave wrongdoing; only in order to prevent even greater wrongs may governments employ their coercive power.[90]

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[81]Raz 1992, pp. 135-138, 250-260.
[82]Raz 1986, pp. 210-216.
[83]Ibid., pp. 205-210.
[84]Idem. See also pp. 390-395.
[85]Raz 1986, pp. 205-210, 308-312.
[86]Ibid., pp. 420-425. Remember that the range of options must be adequate, not complete. Governments must secure a social environment which offers an options range that fulfills the demands of variety, significance and moral acceptability.
[87]Ibid., pp. 415-425.
[88]Idem.
[89]Idem. Think of harming a person's body, or endangering his mental sanity.
[90]Idem.

3.3 Liberal perfectionism

As discussed, Raz believes that instead of overemphasizing the individual capacities people have, governments should promote, defend and even construct autonomy-enhancing practices.[91] Although this obligation covers the demands of traditional liberalism, it also greatly extends them. In contrast to the government of traditional liberals, a Razian government puts aside the restriction on promoting certain conceptions of the good life. Let's look at an example to clarify the implications of this point. Imagine a soccer club which is in dire financial need. Through mismanagement millions have been lost, and the club faces imminent bankruptcy unless it is bailed out by the government.[92] May the government lend its aid or not?

According to a traditional liberal perspective, involvement would be wrong. Remember that governments may not favor certain morally acceptable conceptions of the good over others, and supporting soccer seems a very particular ideal of the good. Many citizens do not share it, and have no interest in seeing their tax money invested in a soccer stadium. The government would break its commitment to neutrality by interfering. In contrast, a Razian government may interfere. Because it provides numerous life options, a soccer club can be considered as an autonomy-enhancing practice – it enables the life of a soccer player, a hardcore soccer supporter, a sports critic, and so on. There would be no principal reason to be against government involvement in saving the club. Evidently, the cost of interfering must not be that other people are seriously limited in their own personal autonomy, but Raz is convinced that this needn't happen.[93]

The distinction between Raz' account and traditional liberalism must not be understated. The Razian conception of autonomy makes governments responsible for the *whole* of society, not just for a certain *minimum framework* within which societal activity must take place. As autonomy-enhancing practices must be promoted, and other societal practices must be discouraged, governments must actively promote certain conceptions of the good, namely those that promote personal autonomy, and deny the traditional notion of upholding a neutral attitude. Put more conceptually, due to its dependency on social forms, Raz concludes that the ideal of autonomy is connected to the whole of morality – making a distinction between public and private morality would be confusing and theoretically incorrect.[94]

Because Raz allows no distinction between different kinds of moralities *and* argues that the government is responsible for guarding and enforcing morality, he dubs his view 'liberal

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[91]Idem. See also Raz, Joseph, 'Multiculturalism', in Raz, Joseph, 'Ethics in the Public Domain', Oxford University Press 1994, pp. 175-178, 188-191.
[92]In Dutch society these bail-outs have occurred quite frequently, for instance with soccer clubs PSV and Roda JC.
[93]Raz 1986, pp. 420-426.
[94]Ibid., pp. 213-216.

perfectionism'.[95] The term perfectionism refers to a lack of restraint, whether in perfecting one's talents or in pursuing political ideals. Razian governments feel no restraint in implementing the moral values of their society.[96] Contrary to traditional liberals, they do not make a distinction between morally right obligations and morally acceptable ideals. The conception of living autonomously is both good and right, and informs all considerations of moral importance. This notion of completeness explains why Raz' views his ideas as perfectionist: in a perfect situation, nothing of importance is excluded. A government's practical abilities aside, the only theoretical limit to governmental action lies in the ideal of personal autonomy itself.[97]

This concludes the presentation of Raz' idea of personal autonomy. Now that both his views and those of traditional liberals have been set out, the question remains whether Raz has been successful in presenting a better and more coherent perspective on personal autonomy, and whether that perspective can make sense of the contemporary problems people have in realizing autonomous lives. I will argue that Raz is only partly successful in refuting traditional liberals' arguments, and that answering the modern challenge of personal autonomy requires a modification of his account.

4.1 Individual well-being and the value of autonomy

At first sight, it seems that Raz has wiped traditional liberalism off the philosophical map. His ideas about social forms and the adequate range of options remind us of the harsh factual reality to which notions about right and wrong must be applied. At the end of the day, the empirical consequences of certain ideas matter the most, and if we overblow the individual capacity people possess for leading autonomous lives, our theory would become dangerously unrealistic. Moreover, Raz gracefully discredits the worry that a perfectionist government will actually *end* personal autonomy in rigorously pursuing its ideals – the value of personal autonomy always matters most. It thus seems clear that Raz places liberalism in a sociologically more sensible environment, and it might be that this realism presents the key to ensuring real personal autonomy today.

However, it can be doubted whether Raz' arguments succeed in discrediting the distinction between the right and the good *fundamentally*. Remember that this distinction was not born out of sociological considerations, but instead formed the conclusion of meta-ethical reasoning. Claiming a certain moral truth or social common ground involves distinguishing between claims which are found

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[95]Ibid., pp. 415-425.

[96]Ibid., pp. 110-112. In 'the morality of freedom' Raz offers an extensive discussion of doctrines of political neutrality which, although at some points similar, is different to the one offered in the second paragraph. Raz makes a distinction between 'neutrality between conceptions of the good' and 'neutrality as the exclusion of ideals'. For reasons of space I could not include this discussion in this thesis. See pp. 110-162.

[97]Raz argues that government solely have the responsibility to do something, if all things considered citizens could not do it better themselves. See Raz 1986, pp. 70-80.

to be morally right and claims which are found to be merely morally acceptable. Raz has persuasively argued that traditional liberals were wrong in suggesting that governments have nothing to do with that which is merely morally acceptable – those views are part of the social forms which enable people to live autonomous lives. But the fact that governments must concern themselves with social forms does not mean that the distinction between the right and the good is proven wrong. It only means that the principles of the right might indicate that some involvement with principles of the good is warranted. In other words, traditional liberals have mistaken the import of their meta-ethical justifications when applied to real societal circumstances.

Of course, Raz may refute the meta-ethical accounts traditional liberals employ, and in fact he does so. He does not believe the justification of moral claims can be found in self-interest or in a form of rational justification. Instead, he develops a conception of individual well-being, which both forms the foundation of and provides the rationale for moral claims.[98] The term itself is general and refers to the *activity* of having a good life, in contrast to the more static idea of possessing a certain character.[99] The purpose of morality is to articulate the demands of such a good life, and the purpose of politics is to secure people's well-being. Obviously, the question comes up exactly what sort of life is good and needs protecting. This question brings Raz to a historical approach of morality.[100]

Raz argues that besides certain basic biological needs which all people share, a person determines for himself what a good life consists of.[101] Nested in his social environment, each person develops his own views, and consequently strives to achieve his own goals.[102] Throughout history, these views have changed and evolved, making it difficult to compare one's well-being with that of someone two-hundred years ago. Therefore, Raz believes that the best way to promote the content of a person's well-being is by simply helping that person to be successful.[103] The idea is that no matter who a person is or in what time he lives, his well-being is always served when he succeeds in achieving his goals. This demand forms the structural content of morality: the right rules are those which help people achieve their goals.

The ideas of success and personal well-being are strongly connected with social forms. We already discussed that Raz believes that these forms influence people's conceptions of well-being, and that often a person's well-being consists of participating in a certain social form. A third connection emerges when we realize that to be successful, it is essential to have intimate knowledge of the existing social forms. Raz argues that to succeed in something one must follow the paths available in

[98]Idem., see also Raz 1986, pp. 288-305.
[99]Raz, Joseph, 'Duties of Well-Being', in Raz 1994, pp. 3-10.
[100]Raz 1994, pp. 170-172.
[101]See Raz 1986, pp. 288-305.
[102]Idem.
[103]Raz 1986, pp. 288-305.

one's social surroundings.[104] Social forms thus form an essential condition for people's well-being, which is why governments have a responsibility to promote them.

Raz' foundational notions of well-being and success also relativize the moral value of personal autonomy. Personal autonomy is valuable to people in modern Western societies, simply because our moral culture is essentially based on the idea of promoting people's autonomy. That culture in turn has been prompted by certain societal developments, which have made it necessary for people to be able to navigate their surroundings independently.[105] In the past two hundred years strict social communities have dissolved and welfare states have emerged. Members of those communities have changed into individuals who make right claims of their governments. Raz does not understand these developments as revealing certain moral truths – he understands them as changing the circumstances in which people can realize a successful life and secure well-being. Personal autonomy is therefore only valuable to people who live in a culture like that of modern Western countries.

Does Raz succeed in offering a viable meta-ethical alternative? Although once more his argument seems sociologically correct, it begs a very important question. Raz does not consider the option that moral claims *cannot* be justified, and that there is no reason to ascribe any worth to other people. To him, humans are simply moral creatures, who throughout their history have attempted to secure their well-being. That might seem like an irrefutable starting point, and almost all people might agree with it, but it cannot serve as the basis for a moral account. What if a person flat out denies that individual well-being is important, or that one person's well-being counts, but another's does not? We would still need some kind of rational argument to convince that person of the truths of our moral belief – the whole point of meta-ethics is to provide such a compelling argument. Because Raz does not provide this argument, he does not offer a viable alternative to the two traditional liberal accounts.

Moreover, besides its problematic justification, Raz' notion of individual well-being also leads to an unsatisfying valuation of personal autonomy. To him, personal autonomy is valuable because it is a successful life strategy. But isn't personal autonomy valuable because people should be enabled to follow *their own* passions and ideals? One can be successful but live a life that does not feel genuine and worthwhile. Indeed, quite often circumstances force people to live second-best lives, because it would not be feasible to follow their deepest desires. Raz does not seem to have a problem with this situation, he writes:

'*While autonomy requires the availability of an adequate range of options it does not require the presence of any particular option among them*'. (p. 410)[106]

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[104]Ibid., pp. 296-306.
[105]Raz 1994, pp. 170-173.
[106]See in this context Frankfurt 1998, pp. 132-138.

This attitude seems wrong. It does not only matter that people have a choice, it matters that they can live *the way they want*. Admittedly, this might not always be possible, but the ideal of personal autonomy seems to ask us to do all we can in taking people's passions seriously.

Raz' meta-ethical stance makes him a conservative thinker.[107] To enable personal success and well-being, governments have to support the *existing* social practices.[108] Raz explicitly claims that social practices must be viable, in the sense of being able to survive independent of government intervention, to be recognized as morally relevant.[109] His stance on marriage exhibits this attitude. The legal rules about marriage governments must explicate and enforce depend upon the self-sufficient social forms already present in society.[110] Thus, if there exists a very strong heterosexual community, and gay people are not in any way organized but effectively repressed, governments have no moral responsibility to change heterosexually inspired marriage laws and institute the possibility of gay marriage. For there to be a gay marriage, gay people themselves must revolt and claim their social niche – only then will their freedom to marry be recognized. This policy emphasizes that according to Raz, governments do not lead society in any pro-active sense. On the contrary, governments must reflect and follow the course of societal developments. This attitude does not seem to meet the demands of personal autonomy.

Two points have emerged in evaluating Raz' account. First, due to its conservative implications, it is highly doubtful that Raz' conception of personal autonomy, although powerful, fully solves the troubles people face today in crafting their own existence. Second, the evaluation of Raz' meta-ethical foundation revealed that if we want to come up with a convincing account of liberalism, his valuable points about personal autonomy cannot replace traditional liberalism, but must instead be combined coherently with traditional liberalism's meta-ethical background. We will discuss these points in turn.

4.2 Inclusive pluralism

Does Raz' notion of respecting and supporting social forms present an answer to contemporary autonomy problems? To some extent it does. Raz emphasizes that people need an environment in which they can make meaningful choices, and assigns the government with a responsibility for creating such an environment. In the context of the economic crisis or the environmental crisis, this means that governments have to ensure that a certain social form does not dominate and suppress other

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[107]Van den Brink, Bert, 'The Tragedy of Liberalism, An Alternative Defense of a Political Tradition', State University of New York Press 2000, pp. 70-71.
[108]Raz 1986, pp. 420-425. See also Raz 1994, pp. 188-191.
[109]Idem.
[110]Raz 1986, pp. 390-394.

social forms. In other words, if there is a community of people who for some reason don't mind treating the natural environment unsustainably, and also a community which does value some sustainable interaction with nature, the first group may not suppress the latter. A government must ensure a society in which both kind of people can flourish, for both cultures present morally acceptable options to people.

However, things become more difficult when people aren't organized in minimally self-dependent groups. As discussed, governments have to await societal developments before they can determine which social forms exist and deserve support. This attitude is problematic for two reasons. First, people who value certain life-styles but are simply unable to stand against major social pressures are not protected. Raz accepts this kind of societal change too easily. When a government has the unique power to save a certain way of life, its commitment to personal autonomy should urge it to take action, not simply to observe the struggle of competing ideas. Second, the goal of an autonomy promoting government is not to simply to protect existing social forms. Raz himself admitted that personal autonomy is always a matter of degree.[111] If there are more and more refined morally acceptable options, people are simply better off. Why then not actively support people in constructing new ways of life? Why not add to the richness of one's society?

The ideal of autonomy holds that people should be born into a world in which they can truly find the social niche that best suits them. In other words, if in a group of a hundred people ninety people are perfectly content with their way of life, there is a moral obligation to support the ten who are still struggling. I call this ideal inclusive pluralism. The ideal society features a morally acceptable life style pluralism without end, which caters to all needs and interests. In this society, interacting meaningfully with others does not consist of seeking to place one's ideas above those of others, of beating them in acquiring social space and significance. Instead, it consists of jointly constructing a place where each can live in his own fashion.

Importantly, this utopia does not deny the existence of conflicts between morally acceptable life styles. Instead, where Raz accepts these conflicts as inherent to human society, inclusive pluralism provides a guide to resolving them actively. Whichever way of life allows the highest variety of options for morally acceptable autonomous lives, should be favored over options which are less inclusive. To take the environmental example, governments should support sustainable ways of life over unsustainable ways of life, because in the sustainable situation, people can choose between a caring relationship with nature and an uncaring one, while in the unsustainable situation, the option of sustainably relating to nature becomes more and more limited, even extinct. If people destroy a certain

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[111]Raz 1986, pp. 370-375.

landscape, they do much more damage to the range of life options than if they preserve it, even if this demands curtailing certain practices.[112]

Although Raz articulates the importance of social forms for living autonomously, he is too conservative and hesitant about the struggles between different ways of living. In his vision of a multicultural society, the weak are still left out. If one truly believes that each person is just as morally significant as the other, governments may not abide a situation where social interaction favors the strong, and the perspectives of true minorities are grim. Still, tragedies can never be avoided. Providing the necessary structures for very small groups of people might be too taxing for a society's citizens. Pluralism is only reached when different ways of life can truly co-exist. If such co-existence is impossible, certain acceptable paths of life remain impossible. However, the harsh reality of limited social space must not lead us to defend a view of government which is hesitant and only protects people's basic capacities and the dominant social forms – it must lead to instituting a government which always attempts to create as much cultural pluralism as possible.

4.3 A better idea of equal consideration

Applying Raz' insights to the modern autonomy predicament has led us to articulating the notion of inclusive pluralism, which seems ideally suited to phrase the government's responsibility for ensuring autonomous lives. The question that remains is how we can justify this interpretation of the value of personal autonomy, which takes us back to the earlier meta-ethical discussions. We found that while Raz' ideas about personal autonomy were convincing, his meta-ethical notions of success, well-being and the contingent development of human society were not. Indeed, traditional liberalism's foundational ideas were much more convincing in their attempt to justify the value of autonomy. The task ahead is then to see whether the notion of inclusive pluralism can be defended by these ideas.

Of course, I cannot argue here precisely which meta-ethical route prevalent in traditional liberalism is the most convincing – such a task would require much more extensive considerations. What can be argued is that, right or wrong, a certain combination of meta-ethical notions is capable of coherently grounding inclusive pluralism. The key to this justification lies in a different interpretation of the idea of equal consideration. Whether arguing according to moral intuitions about human dignity, trying to ascertain fair conditions of contract or constructing an account of rational agency, all approaches end up in endorsing the view that people can only be obligated to provide for each other the goods that all people need. Liberal morality is crucially based on what we have in common, not on the peculiarities each person features. This is why Rawls, Dworkin, Gewirth and others all construct

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[112]This is especially true in the debate about sustainable energy, where it is ultimately possible to rely on sustainable energy sources. See Stern 2006.

political systems which seek to ensure the common rights and goods. How can we interpret this common ground differently?

The answer is that we must interpret the common ground in an extremely general way, and resist the urge to state a conclusive list of politically relevant rights and claims. The core of liberalism holds that each person deserves the same consideration, and what that means exactly can only be ascertained in specific societal circumstances. That consideration does not stop at the edge of people's basic capacities, but extends to the social forms people need to successfully pursue some conception of life. Equally, political consideration does not rely on what people have in common, but tries to accommodate their peculiarities equally. Of course, this does not mean that each conception of the good life can be pursued equally – conceptions which endorse equal personal autonomy will be favored over conceptions which are hostile to that ideal. Social space must be governed in the most inclusive way, accommodating as many life styles and social forms as possible.

Traditional liberal meta-ethics can accommodate inclusive pluralism because it can justify the ideal of considering each person equally. That ideal, at least when one tries to realize it in the really existing limited world, gives rise to inclusive pluralism. Raz was right in refuting liberal neutrality, but he was not right about abandoning the meta-ethical groundwork of which liberal neutrality was thought to be a consequence. In fact, when accepting Raz' criticism, it turns out not to be a logical consequence of the meta-ethical framework. Governments must occupy themselves deeply with social power struggles, and must consciously divide the available social space in a fair manner. This task demands a principle, and that principle is inclusive pluralism.

4.4 Questions of inclusive pluralism

A lot of questions remain unanswered about the exact content of the principle of inclusive pluralism, and I can only provide some outlines in this thesis. A first question is what kind of way of lives must be guaranteed. It can't be true that the principle demands the highest *quantity* of life ideals. As Raz explained, some life options are far more pervasive and less trivial than others.[113] Possible life options must offer a certain quality and fulfillment – they must be seriously and deeply engaging. At the same time, the ideal of inclusive pluralism caters to the needs that arise among citizens. If there are people who desperately want to pursue seemingly trivial matters, they should be enabled to do so. As discussed, a concern for the peculiar and sometimes strange passions people exhibit lies at the heart of respecting personal autonomy.

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[113]Raz 1986, pp. 374-380.

A second question concerns Raz' thesis that autonomy is only valuable when aimed at the good. It seems clear that Raz makes a valid point when he argues that a person does not live autonomously when he merely chooses a certain life because it is not wrong.[114] There should be a lot of life options which are morally acceptable *and* suit a person's specific convictions. However, the plurality of morally acceptable options that inclusive pluralism advocates seems wider than the plurality Raz writes about. If there is a certain life which society's dominant communities find repugnant, but which does not violate the basic demands of personal autonomy, such a life is also valuable. Still, a liberal government should discourage life options which are less compatible with most other ways of living, and encourage life options which co-exists easier with moral pluralism.

Third, intolerant ways of life remain a difficult problem. Communities which strongly curtail the liberties of their members have a paradoxical relationship with personal autonomy.[115] On the one hand, when someone freely chooses to join such a community, he exercises his autonomy. The availability of those communities adds to the richness of society. On the other hand, in those communities attitudes are taught which conflict with the values of a pluralist society, and which can discourage or prohibit members in choosing their own lives voluntarily. At minimum, inclusive pluralism demands that governments guarantee a way out of these often strict communities, and strongly advocate the importance of personal autonomy. Clearly, this matter deserves deeper study.

Fourth, it is useful to state clearly how inclusive pluralism relates to the idea of the right and the good and the notion of perfectionism. Contrary to Raz' position, a principled valuation of personal autonomy leads to a kind of perfectionism which does embrace the difference between that which is morally necessary, and that which is merely morally acceptable. Morally necessary are those principles which are informed by personal autonomy, should guide governmental action and should govern morally acceptable pursuits of the good. Morally acceptable pursuits of the good are those ways of life which do not go against the basic demands of personal autonomy, such as respecting other persons' physical integrity or their freedom to lead their own kind of life. What's more, because the principles of personal autonomy lead governments to discourage some conceptions of the good, and enable others, the doctrine of inclusive pluralism can be termed perfectionist.

These comments by no means cover the complexities of realizing inclusive pluralism. Still, I do hope to have given a clear direction for further research.

5. Conclusion

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[114]Ibid., pp. 378-382.
[115]See for Raz' views on this subject Raz 1994, pp. 185-191.

In this thesis, I have argued that liberalism needs to be reinterpreted if it is to articulate a convincing understanding of and commitment to personal autonomy. Due to a mistaken interpretation of their meta-ethical foundation, traditional liberalists have always understood the duty to ensure personal autonomy as a duty to ensure those goods which are common to all persons – goods which are either rationally necessary, intuitively shared or mutually agreed to. Hence, traditional liberals swear by a distinction between principles of the right, which dictate governmental action, and conceptions of the good, which inform the lives of citizens. Governments are supposed to be neutral towards these conceptions, and solely rely on principles of the right.

In his work, Raz has shown the problematic nature of this interpretation of the value of autonomy. People cannot live autonomously on their own, but are incredibly dependent on existing social forms for their views about life and for the life options they have. After all, one can only be Jewish in a community of Jews. Indeed, rather than wholly inventing how they think about their own lives, people inherit ideas which humanity has slowly constructed. This dependency reveals that people's autonomy is highly affected by the social forms existing in a certain country, and that if governments take their responsibility to ensure autonomous lives seriously, they must also regulate these social forms. Social forms which enable autonomy must be supported, while social contexts which inhibit autonomy must be discouraged or even suppressed. Thus, as some social contexts must be favored over others, governments must give up their neutrality and admit their perfectionist commitment to personal autonomy.

Sadly, Raz takes his revolution of liberal thought both too far and not far enough. He wrongly denies the worth of the traditional liberal framework in justifying the value of autonomy, and as a consequence doesn't principally value personal autonomy. Arguing from notions of individual well-being and success, Raz is content with supporting existing and self-relying social forms, and does not seek to prevent the suppression of threatened social forms which do heighten the measure of people's personal autonomy. He is concerned with giving people chances to leading successful lives, instead of enabling autonomous lives. To give real meaning to personal autonomy, we must therefore return to the traditional liberal framework, and apply the useful insights Raz has brought forward.

As argued, the traditional liberal notion of equal consideration of each person turns out not to give rise to governmental neutrality, but to the principle of inclusive pluralism. This pluralism demands governments to turn society into a place where people have the highest possible amount of life options, and can truly lead their own lives. This task can only be completed by nurturing a mix of social forms which suits this diversity best. In ensuring this mix, a lot of considerations have to be paid attention to.

First, following Raz, governmental intervention may never impair a person's autonomy, in the sense of harming his physical or mental capacities for action or unreasonably limiting his life options.

The instruments used to ensure autonomy may never consist of sacrificing one person in order to help many. Second, social forms play a paradoxical role in ensuring autonomy. They always provide options for autonomy, but can also take options away – a man may choose Christianity, but at the same time forcibly raise his children as Christians. In supporting social forms, governments must pay heed to this paradox. Third, a part of living autonomously consists of facing the responsibilities of one's choices and conquering certain obstacles. Although this condition requires anything but a total absence of governmental regulation, it underlines the point that governments should provide for conditions in which their citizens can achieve something, instead of achieving those things themselves. The latter approach would make personal autonomy meaningless, and also risk setting up a dangerously powerful state apparatus. Pace Raz, if people can do something better themselves, governments need not pursue doing it for them.

Concrete state policies which suit this framework are familiar ones, such as providing for the physical and mental security and well-being of citizens, setting up all kinds of possibilities for education, supporting fragile minority groups, investing in a rich and varied cultural life and enabling a critical and open sphere for public debate, but also less familiar ones, such as consciously ensuring a plurality of ways of working, be it as an entrepreneur or part-time employee, and treating the environment in such a way that the highest variety of life options are available, from hunting animals to nursing them, and from enjoying a beautiful lake to engaging in water sports.

Let us return to the beginning of this thesis. Of itself, articulating a theory of inclusive pluralism does not solve the conflict between the capacities aspect and the environmental aspect of personal autonomy. However, it does attach equal value to both elements, and thus shows the way forward in tackling the modern problems of powerlessness and lack of life options. We should not abandon our commitment to ensuring people's basic capacities for action, but, contrary to Raz, we need not embrace societal change as an inevitable development. Autonomy-inspired morality will always demand governments to stand up for those who are threatened to be overwhelmed by powerful forces. People should always be enabled to live peculiarly, whether considering their work, their interaction with the environment or something else. Inclusive pluralism takes up this concern and is therefore a valuable reinterpretation of the essential liberal idea of considering each person equally.

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