

*Conceptualising Identity for Ourselves:  
Political and Feminist Theories of Autonomy*

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Doctor of Philosophy  
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**by**

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*To the memory of my mother*

## **Abstract**

*Conceptualising Identity for Ourselves: Political and Feminist*

*Theories of Autonomy*

*Ros Hague*

There has been much academic work on autonomy and on identity in both political theory and feminist theory. Although this work provides valuable insights, there is arguably less theory that considers both. In part, this is the result of the predominance of a particular liberal position on autonomy depicting an isolated individual. Both communitarians and feminists seek to correct this and argue for a different view of autonomy that takes into account the situated self, but there is little discussion of the identity of this self. Also, feminist theory on identity has mostly been concerned with exposing the extent to which identity is tainted by power and by patriarchy. Inevitably there is little discussion of autonomy. These theorists seek to show the lengths to which autonomy, as a means of liberation, is an illusion.

However, this thesis seeks to pursue a different approach. It combines some of the issues raised by feminist theory and contemporary political theory around questions of identity and autonomy with the application of the history of political thought to these questions.

The concept of autonomy and identity constructed here hopes to go some way to avoiding the imposition of rigid identities and instead suggests that identity is better understood as changing, multiple, but also something we need to take control of ourselves. In order to support this version of identity there needs to be a concept of autonomy which denotes self-direction to control our identity. As well as control this thesis puts forward a notion of autonomy as a process which means that we have degrees of autonomy, it uses the notion of recognition, it considers the impact of a 'masculine' approach to autonomy and it emphasises autonomy as dynamic.

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## **Introduction**

This thesis is about autonomy and identity. It attempts to discover what aspects of autonomy best accommodate the multiple and changing identities we all have in order to develop a concept of autonomy which can cope with this idea of multiple and changing identity. Autonomy is important to identity because it offers the prospect of taking control of identity and offering the means for self-definition. It is hoped that the concept of autonomy developed in this thesis will be able to enrich theorising on autonomy in both feminist and mainstream political theory. In order to develop such a concept this thesis looks at arguments both for individuality – as a means of developing independent identity – but also at community and the impact this has on our identity and autonomy. Our identities are inevitably influenced by our surroundings so we need to be sure our identities are authentic (an expression of who we want to be, not an imposition from our social surroundings). We can never be fully authentic but we can struggle towards authenticity. An important part of maintaining the struggle for authenticity is control. If we can control our identity, rather than have others control it then we have a better prospect for authentic identity. This thesis emphasises control as central to the concept of autonomy. We need to be in control of our own identity rather than having it controlled for us. We need to be in control of our identity but we are not isolated beings. The emphasis on control is in the context of our intersubjectivity.

There is a need for this concept of autonomy to strike a balance between independence and community if it is to be useful for identity. We want our identity to be recognised but recognition is reciprocal and we need to recognise others. Reciprocal recognition is important to my concept of autonomy because it offers the opportunity (through thinking about the agency we need for our own autonomy) of seeing how our identity is bound

to that of others. The following themes are integral to the concept of autonomy for which this thesis argues: First, autonomy is understood as a process and as something that could be both gained and lost (autonomy can progress and regress). Second, recognition which encompasses both inner recognition (self-recognition) and outer recognition (reciprocal recognition). Third, self-control which is important to autonomy but which is also suggested to be connected to the threat of social control. Fourth, there is an attempt to reclaim autonomy from masculinity – especially the assumption that the choice we have is a dichotomous one between being autonomous and heteronomous, rational and natural, there is a relational aspect to autonomy. Fifth, autonomy is understood as thriving, flourishing, dynamic not as stagnant, conformist, immanent and passive.

Autonomy should be both an interesting and valuable concept for feminism and for mainstream political thought as it offers the means for liberation on personal and collective levels. Much of this liberation involves taking control of our own lives and becoming able to be the people we want to be. My interest in autonomy was sparked by reading John Stuart Mill's (unusually) passionate claims for self-direction, independence and self-development. These claims must apply to feminism which I see as a movement that has fostered both individual and collective development by encouraging not just women but everyone whose lives were, and unfortunately still are, blighted by the domination of white, rich men. Although Kant is frequently associated with the liberal tradition, Mill's version of autonomy was more appealing than Kant's because for Kant, autonomy involves following universal laws. A concept of autonomy such as mine, which attempts to encourage individuality, diversity and is open to the prospect of change, would struggle with Kant's universal moral law. It would also be problematic as my concept of autonomy aims to be feminist, to give women space to develop their identity rather than conforming to social stereotypes. It argues against a universal position or identity for women. The danger of claiming a universal standpoint for women is that it obscures inequalities other than gender, so standpoint feminism, as developed by Nancy Hartsock for

example (Hartsock 1985), can know that women are oppressed by men and by patriarchy. However, they cannot recognise the force which is exercised in order to maintain a homogenous stance against women's oppression by white, middle-class heterosexual and able-bodied women. Because Mill focuses on individuality rather than universal applicability, his theory is more suitable for a feminist concept of autonomy than that of Kant.

Further research into other political theorists who deal with autonomy revealed a high level of abstraction with somewhat mechanistic descriptions of autonomy (Dworkin and Frankfurt for example) and also concepts of autonomy which derive from discussions surrounding contemporary issues of justice which appear to treat autonomy as a resource to be distributed in a just society. Neither approach appeared to respond to the question of identity and the seeming opposition between belonging and independence which was one which appeared to trouble feminist theory. Identity is dealt with by theorists such as Iris Marion Young who argue for recognition of women and of differences between groups but her argument is firmly within the realm of collective identity and is also based on some of the theories of justice as she argues for just and equal recognition of social groups (Young 1990). Therefore her arguments did not answer my questions about autonomy and identity because she was more concerned with justice than with the collective. A different feminist approach can be found in the work of Judith Butler (Butler 1999) which addresses the problem of patriarchal distortion of identity but does not conceive autonomy as a possibility because Butler believes that autonomy is so tainted by patriarchy that it adds to the distortion of women's identity and cannot be used to alter it.

My initial problem with approaching feminist theory was the way in which it has been split into categories by feminist theorists with the result that I found aspects of some of these theories useful in part, but no one theory existed which could address autonomy and identity, separateness and belonging. I also became concerned that my need to argue for autonomy

would place my arguments in a liberal feminist setting in which I did not feel they belonged. Some versions of liberalism appear to emphasise the individual to the exclusion of the collective. The many versions of feminist theory offer an impressive range of thought and potential for identity and should be celebrated but my need to construct a theory of autonomy led me away from feminist theory and towards political theory to discover a theory of autonomy that would accommodate a realistic concept of identity as shifting and multi-faceted identity.

I turned to Mary Wollstonecraft for an inclusive approach that would encompass both autonomy and women's identity but found some similar problems. Wollstonecraft detests idleness and appears to emphasise reason as a control on both emotion and nature, thus underlining a reason/nature dichotomy I find problematic for a concept of autonomy that seeks relationality. However, this is not always the case in Wollstonecraft's thought and I also discovered aspects of her thought which offered more hope for autonomy such as combining the imagination and reason as well as her emphasis on women as citizens. She also provided an insight into identity and recognition, which has become a key theme in my concept of autonomy.

The concept of recognition drew me towards G.W.F. Hegel because my concept of autonomy needed to be able to understand the individual in a context of other people where she needs her identity to be recognised and needs to recognise the identities of others. Hegel also presents a theory of recognition which built on that discovered in Wollstonecraft's work. The more I reflected on how I wanted autonomy to be understood for my purposes the more I was drawn to the work of Hegel. His work offers both a useful analogy for autonomy as a process (in his discussion of property) and also an example of the difficulties for women's autonomy. These two points have become very important. The notion of autonomy process has become a means of arguing that autonomy is something we enjoy in

varying degrees but also that theorising autonomy as a process helps develop the emphasis on a need for control over our identity, in order to have our identity recognised by others, we need to recognise ourselves and take control of our identity.

I returned to Mill in the hope of finding more positive emphasis on the aspects of autonomy I so admired in *On Liberty*. I found more support for the notion of autonomy I wanted to put forward, in terms of how autonomy can function in relation to the individual autonomy of all and arguments for the emancipation of women, as well as scope for further interpretation of autonomy as a process. However, I also found a theorist who appeared not only uneasy with the prospect of interaction between individuals that included all men and women rather than only those from the middle classes but who also appeared to have a fear of the masses. I pursued this fear and discovered that it extended to nature and also to the female body. Not only this, but Mill's fear of the female body and fear of nature as a form of stagnation fitted with his fierce guarding of individual liberty. The arguments for self-direction, independence and self-development appeared reserved for middle class men, only some middle class women and for no one else.

I initially read Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* knowing that I would find plenty on women's oppression but I also found mentions of sovereignty and liberation. However, it was upon discovering a less well-known work called *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that my view of de Beauvoir as important to my concept of autonomy was confirmed. In this work, and interpretations of it, I found further evidence for autonomy as a process as well as arguments that could back-up my claim that autonomy was attained by degrees. We are neither ever fully autonomous nor fully heteronomous, we both progress and regress. As with Wollstonecraft and also Hegel, recognition was a key theme.

I also found myself drawn to more contemporary liberal arguments around autonomy and responses to these arguments which emphasised the importance of others to our autonomy. Looking at these contemporary arguments allowed me to draw out the themes I had already begun to think of as aspects of the concept of autonomy I wished to develop. Aspects such as: individuality, self-development, the emphasis on autonomy by degrees, recognition, agency and authenticity. These contemporary arguments also allowed me to frame some of the problems with approaching the concepts of autonomy and identity. These were problems such as developing a theory of autonomy which could deal with the need to define ourselves when we feel oppressed by our community, our family, our ties to others without destroying the need we have for other people and for a sense of belonging.

The aim of this thesis is then to contribute to debates which take place in both mainstream political theory as well as feminist theory on autonomy. It does this by demonstrating the potential which lies in the dominant liberal tradition in order to develop a richer and fuller account of autonomy as a process. Thus the question this thesis poses is: how to construct a richer concept of autonomy which emphasises autonomy as a process with which we develop our identities? There is no clear-cut definition of autonomy and this is because I have argued for autonomy by degrees and autonomy as a process which means there is no universally applicable concept of autonomy.

### ***1. Structure of the thesis***

The first part of this thesis develops the key themes of the concepts of autonomy and identity for which I argue in the context of some of the issues and ideas of political thought: namely the liberal tradition, communitarianism and feminist critiques of these ideas. First, the control over identity, which we gain through emphasising autonomy as a process and that goes with individuality, is introduced in Chapter 1. Second, that

chapter emphasises the importance of autonomy as dynamic and changing. Creativity and self-direction to inspire our choice of identity are important and can be found in a reading of the liberal tradition that stresses its positive parts, especially individuality.

Chapter 2 explores recognition and argues for two forms of recognition: the self-recognition – inner recognition – we need in order to know that our identity is authentic and also agency, to assert ourselves as autonomous agents celebrating our individuality. This leads to the second form of recognition: recognition of others – outer recognition, which involves being recognised and doing our best to understand other people's identity through recognising their individuality. The importance of recognition of others is that it is reciprocal; we try to recognise others as we want to be recognised and we fight against misrecognition – be it in the deliberate misrecognition of an agent as a way of oppressing them, or misrecognition in the form of stereotyping which makes us see people in ways other than how they want to be defined. Recognition is not limited to liberal individuality but functions as a basis of solidarity. This emphasis on recognition suggests the agent as a social being and therefore calls upon autonomy to include how we relate to others. Therefore rather than emphasising a masculine understanding of autonomy as separation and dichotomy, this chapter argues for the importance of understanding autonomy as a relational concept.

The second part of this thesis develops my concept of autonomy by covering the works of Hegel, Wollstonecraft, Mill and de Beauvoir. These chapters demonstrate the importance of process, diversity and dynamism, control, recognition of others as well as recognition of ourselves and explore how autonomy is used. For Wollstonecraft, we are not individual selves but rational citizens and, as such, we have specific duties to perform. We understand our duty through reason and through God; which teaches us the contribution we make to society (which, in turn, makes us virtuous citizens). Self-control is important in Wollstonecraft's thought,



especially for women, as there are many distractions through frivolous pursuits and a cultural emphasis on beauty; according to Wollstonecraft this distracts women from their duty of being mother and wife. Women's identity is bound to these roles and to self-control which is an alternative to arbitrary power, enabling women to perform the tasks associated with these roles without distraction. Chapter 3 examines recognition in Wollstonecraft's thought and finds that recognition is not found in other people but is connected to recognising ourselves as fit to be held in God's image. Autonomy for women is tied to self-control, to recognition of ourselves as created for divine purpose and to performing specific duties.

The need for recognition is also discussed in Chapter 4 as a need for recognising the validity of the claims we make on our identity and the claims others make on the validity of theirs. This is a need for reciprocal recognition; we need to recognise the claims of others if we want our claims to be recognised. The chapter on Hegel demonstrates, through an analogy with the process of claiming property, the importance of process to my concept of autonomy. It also emphasises the importance of claiming an identity as 'ours', that is, an identity that is authentically ours.

Mill places similar emphasis on the importance of control. For him control is vital, as it separates us from nature. In Chapter 5, Mill's thought is interpreted as demonstrating two forms of freedom, freedom from nature and freedom from others. For autonomy this means the autonomous agent must be active in order to avoid the stagnation of nature but must also be protected from the influence of others. Yet, at the same time, Mill celebrates the diversity that can stem from allowing individuals to flourish, as this independence creates individuality that in turn facilitates human progress. When we recognise others in Mill's thought, we recognise them as independent individuals but also as a potential threat to our individuality. Our awareness of others is often through feeling threatened by others,

because others could encroach on our individuality but they could also drag us into the passive stagnation of nature.

Mill makes contradictory statements on women's identity. Women appear to have the same potential for individuality as men. As it is the result of the process of autonomy, individuality is vital to my concept. Yet, Mill also identifies women through their bodies and with nature. Although my emphasis on process in autonomy is not to escape nature, the two forms of autonomy that can be found in Mill's thought do suggest autonomy as a process. This, as well as his emphasis on individuality, makes Mill appealing for linking autonomy to individuality. However, Mill appears to place limits on women's identity through his association of women with nature and, in Mill's understanding of nature, this is a damaging association.

This limitation means that most women will struggle to enjoy the second form of freedom. For Mill, if women could control their bodily and natural identity then they could enjoy the individuality found in the second form of freedom. The emphasis on control in Mill's thought is not the control for which I argue in my concept of autonomy. For my concept, control is about managing our identity in order to try to escape stereotyping and having unwanted identities forced upon us. Mill's use of control, which limits the possibilities for women's identities, is not useful here. Therefore Mill's emphasis on diversity in the form of individuality and the interpretation of freedom as a process with the two forms of freedom, which are discussed in Chapter 5, are valuable to my concept of autonomy, but his use of control is not.

However, de Beauvoir's work is used to present a more useful approach. Freedom is again interpreted as having two levels. The first is similar to that of Mill, in that it involves separation from nature. However, in de Beauvoir's thought this separation can be achieved by most humans, not just men.

The argument in Chapter 6 that de Beauvoir does not associate women only with the body and therefore with nature is not in keeping with many of de Beauvoir's critics but, by drawing on *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Chapter 6 argues that we could consider women as candidates for both forms of freedom. This is because, as is argued, de Beauvoir sees women as troubled by but not as necessarily limited by their bodies and therefore as not restricted to nature and thus struggling with the first form of freedom. In de Beauvoir's work, realising our separation from nature comes as an agonising wrench. The second form of freedom also differs from Mill, as it does not ask the agent to be left alone but emphasises the need for others. In this interpretation we can see an attempt to balance the need for individuality and the need to be a part of the whole. In de Beauvoir's thought we cannot escape other people. For my concepts of autonomy and identity, this offers a useful understanding of our relationship as autonomous, authentic agents in control of our own identity, to other autonomous agents.

## **2. Methodology**

Quentin Skinner's approach to understanding historical texts presents two different methods – the first 'textualist', the second 'contextualist' (Boucher 1983: 112). The 'textualist' method: 'insists on the autonomy of the *text* itself as the sole necessary key to its own meaning, and so dismisses any attempt to reconstitute the "total context" as "gratuitous, and worse"' (Skinner 1969: 3). The contextual approach 'insists that it is the *context* "of religious, political, and economic factors" which determines the meaning of any given text, and so must provide "the ultimate framework" for any attempt to understand it' (1969: 3) (*italics in original*). My approach to the historical texts of political thought contains an amalgamation of these approaches with perhaps more emphasis on the autonomy of the text. However Skinner's is an approach which relies too much on binary

opposition in its construction of meaning so that we are left with the suggestion that we must adhere to one or the other of these approaches.

I agree with David Boucher's comment that 'Skinner's bifurcated division' is in fact 'an artificial abstraction' (Boucher 1983: 112). The danger in cleaving to one side of this approach is that epistemological opportunities are missed and that attempting to follow one methodological approach is limiting to a project such as mine which seeks to know why women were frequently ascribed the identities they were but also which seeks to understand how the political thinkers I consider offer valuable approaches to and interpretations of autonomy. In considering these approaches and interpretations I am looking specifically for both my key themes and also for the ways in which these theories of autonomy are masculine<sup>1</sup> which does manifest itself in dichotomous theorising – that we are either autonomous or heteronomous and either rational or natural. I do not approach these texts with a universal theory in view. Again, Boucher's description of a methodological approach to the history of political thought appears more useful: 'The lack of uniformity in method is something to be commended and not regretted' (1983: 120). This lack of uniformity contributes to a lack of universalising theories and avoiding 'commitment to a single method' which would be constraining (1983: 120), which is a position supported by this thesis. Boucher's position allows for both approaches ('textualism' and 'contextualism') and also for 'historical purism, a love of the past for the sake of the past; and historical impurism, the tendency to do something more than history' (1983: 120). This more flexible approach is a useful one as it permits both the use of historical political theorists to 'do something more than history' by providing the basis on which to develop aspects of my concept of autonomy but also, to a minimal degree, to consider the views of these theorists on women in context.

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<sup>1</sup> Genevieve Lloyd's classic work *The Man of Reason* argues that not only has reason been assumed to be male but that this assumption has resulted in the 'denigration' of the female (Lloyd 1993: 106-7). This problem is discussed in Chapter 1.

My approach to the history of political thought is one which would not meet with Skinnerian approval as I have looked to the past for specific concepts for a modern context. Skinner argues that 'the current historical study of ethical, political, religious, and other such ideas is contaminated by the unconscious application of paradigms whose familiarity to the historian disguises an essential inapplicability to the past' (Skinner 1969: 7). I apply the paradigms of understanding autonomy, identity and gender to my examination of the history of political thought. However, this is done not with the intention of contaminating history, not to make the theorists I study appear to hold values they did not, but to understand what their theories can tell us about autonomy and identity. I have also strayed from Skinner's methodology by combining the texts of historical political theory with contemporary texts, again an approach I feel necessary in order best to theorise autonomy and identity.

This thesis is no doubt guilty of a 'mythology of prolepsis' (1969:22) as I seek to understand these theorists' views on gender when, for some of them, gender was not part of political theory. When I interpret particular theorists' views on gender, that is a twenty-first century understanding of the issues surrounding gender, I am looking at these texts from my own viewpoint. This presents what Christine Di Stefano terms a 'formidable obstruction to the inclusion of feminist criticism within the historical camp' (Di Stefano 1991: 7). My approach here is that of a critic described by Di Stefano who, she argues, 'tends not to minimize her own presence and interest' (1991: 7). The study of gender raises important methodological issues. It may appear contradictory to use theorists, such as Hegel, whose views on women are clearly antithetical to feminist theory. However, in using Hegel and indeed using both historical and contemporary political thought which is the product of a predominantly patriarchal culture it becomes possible to make feminist claims on the basis of non-feminist theorising. As Di Stefano notes, 'feminism not only contributes to our understanding of past political thinkers, but itself participates in the

unfolding of political ideas towards the future' (1991: 132). This is what I attempt to do with the historical interpretations of autonomy. Thus canonical thinkers need not be dismissed as patriarchal but can be used to construct new approaches to understanding gender.

Diana Coole notes that in order to challenge 'crucial aspects of mainstream politics' (Coole 1986: 130) there needs to be recourse to 'a whole political vocabulary' which existed prior to feminist theory (1986: 130). Not all was prior but that which appears within the timescale of the evolution of feminist theory yet does not consider gender requires a similar approach. It is difficult to have a critique of theory without employing the very theory at which that critique is aimed. One example given by Coole is of de Beauvoir's use of Sartre (1986: 130), which is discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis. Di Stefano also argues that feminist 'critics across the disciplines share an avowed and politicized interest in the ways in which the conventions and categories of gender are involved in the production of canonical literatures' (Di Stefano 1991: 5-6). It is therefore the contention of this thesis that non-feminist theory can be used both to expose its own patriarchal foundations and also to construct a feminist alternative.

The process of writing this thesis, of finding autonomy and also of finding descriptions of women's identity in the history of political thought, the history of feminist political thought, contemporary political theory and contemporary feminist theory has admittedly been a process as much in contravention of traditional methodology as it has been an adherent of that tradition. Writing about autonomy and identity led me to contemporary sources for some aspects of autonomy such as agency and authenticity, whilst writing about other aspects such as individuality, control, self-direction and recognition allowed for a combination of canonical and contemporary thought. Because my concept is a comprehensive concept built on aspects of autonomy it is a concept that would inevitably need to draw on many theorists and diverse periods of feminist and political theory.

My thesis borrows from political theory from both past and present. When considering theorists from the history of political thought context cannot be argued to be irrelevant as it matters to a theorist's work. For example, Wollstonecraft directs her wrath at Rousseau, Mill reacts antithetically to Victorian society, de Beauvoir draws on Sartre whilst Hegel's epistemology means that it is inevitable his work should be a product of his historical context. This thesis tries to take this into account but at the same time it considers these theorists because their views are extant. These theorists and the contemporary feminist and political theories included were chosen because of their considerable relevance to autonomy.

Therefore this thesis breaks with Skinner's tradition by asking contemporary questions of historical texts and no doubt offends against some feminist approaches by using these canonical texts for a feminist theory of autonomy and offends again, this time against feminists such as Butler, by arguing for the relevance of autonomy at all because of its patriarchal associations. However, it is the view of this thesis that autonomy can be used for feminist purposes and I agree with Seyla Benhabib's point that autonomy should not be ignored before those who have never enjoyed its benefits have the opportunity to enjoy it.<sup>2</sup> It is an important method of self-definition – autonomy helps us to consider identity.

The concept of autonomy that is developed here is comprehensive in range as it covers a range of themes considered important to its development and before moving to the first chapter it is perhaps worth restating what these themes are: 1) Autonomy as a process and as contingent. 2) Recognition, both inner and outer. 3) Self-control and the threat of social control. 4) Reclaiming autonomy from masculinity, in particular from dichotomous

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<sup>2</sup> “social criticism of the kind required for women's struggles is not even possible without positing the legal, moral and political norms of autonomy, choice and self-determination” (Benhabib 1992: 6).

approaches to autonomy and reason and nature and emphasising a more relational approach. 5) Autonomy is understood as thriving, flourishing, and dynamic and is concerned with avoiding stagnation.



## **Chapter 1**

### **Constraining the Individual: Liberalism and Autonomy**

This chapter aims to introduce some important aspects of my concept of autonomy by looking briefly at the evolution of the liberal tradition towards the Millian version of liberalism, which forms a key part of this chapter and is integral to my concept of autonomy. This chapter also examines how the notion of constraints to autonomy develops with this evolution. Although I refer to 'liberalism' in parts of this chapter, the type which is of value to my concept of autonomy is the liberalism associated with John Stuart Mill.

#### ***Introduction***

Autonomy is a process but being autonomous gives human life value by allowing us to act on our own choices and motivations. The process of autonomy is not a value but the identity choices we make (even though we alter them) as a result of that process contain value because they are ours. We cannot make choices without motivations; motivations have to have a goal, even if never reached. Motivation to make choices implies the agent must have some end identity that she values, or thinks she would value. We place value on some identities more than others and also come to value certain identities that were once less important to us. Our conceptions of the good form the motivations from which we begin the process of autonomy.

Therefore there is a link between our motivation and our identity. If our motivations hold value for us then our identities reflect individuality. This gives us authenticity which will be discussed in the following chapter. The notion of identity as shifting and adaptable presented in this thesis is not arguing that identity should be so fluid that the agent is washed away from her situation (her community, her relationships with others and her historical

identity<sup>3</sup>) on a tide of free-flowing identity over which she has no control. Agents already have identities, and consideration of their identities and all aspects of their situation is part of the process of autonomy.

This chapter focuses on the liberal tradition in order to see both what it can offer my concept of autonomy but also the pitfalls that await autonomy in some strands of the liberal tradition. It argues that the liberal tradition can offer important contributions to autonomy through its emphasis on individuality, self-direction and creativity. However, the liberal tradition struggles when it applies dichotomous thought to autonomy. For example, the notion that autonomy is something we either have or do not have fails to grasp the complexities of autonomy. This chapter looks at two different constraints to autonomy in order to understand the value of the Millian version of liberalism that does not place severe restrictions on autonomy and that acknowledges the pervasive nature of constraints and then offers a theory of autonomy by degrees in order to combat these constraints. The first constraint is the case of objectification, the second coercion.

The first section of this chapter looks at individuality and autonomy and some of the liberal ideas that surround these two notions. I want to make a distinction between autonomy and individuality, and in order to avoid confusion I have chosen to refer to autonomy as a process. Two key aspects of my concept of autonomy are self-direction and creativity. These aspects allow the individual to reflect on her motivations and ask: what identities are really mine? Through emphasis on creativity and self-direction the agent is able to arrive at identities autonomously, knowing that they match her own conceptions of the good. Autonomy is a process by which people change and develop their identity. The value of individuality is associated with Millian liberalism and draws on Mill's *On Liberty*.

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<sup>3</sup> Historical identity will be discussed in Chapter 2.

The second section also draws on this work, it deals with harm, and in particular it focuses on Mill's notion of individuality and self-direction. Mill will be used to demonstrate the further evolution of the liberal tradition from the negative emphasis on fear and distrust to the prospect of individual flourishing (the idea of flourishing and of being dynamic is vital to my concept of autonomy). This point in the development of the liberal tradition produces the emphasis on individuality rather than individualism as described above. However, the positive emphasis on potential is accompanied by a need for protection from others. Distrust of others continues to haunt the liberal tradition in Mill's thought and the liberal individual remains a somewhat solitary figure, but Mill argues this is necessary in order to protect the individual from harm.

Following from Mill's arguments for individual space, the third section examines what could invade this space. There will always be constraints to autonomy but, because my concept of autonomy is one achieved by degrees, it is possible to be autonomous to some degree in situations that offer little hope. Autonomy is, as Richard Lindley notes, 'a matter of degree' (Lindley 1986: 69) and for this reason the emphasis on process is important; we can be more or less autonomous depending on how far we get along the process of becoming autonomous. This section looks at two possible constraints to autonomy: objectification and coercion. The pervasive nature of these constraints means that autonomy needs to be emphasised not only as a process but also as something gained (and lost), never completely but perpetually, by degrees.

### ***1. Individuality and other liberal values***

This chapter draws on Millian liberalism in order to emphasise the liberal values of individuality, creativity, self-direction, responsibility<sup>4</sup> and choice, all of which are associated with the liberal tradition but are also useful for

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<sup>4</sup> Responsibility is connected with having control over our autonomy and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

my concept of autonomy. Self-direction, creativity and choice foster individuality, and taking responsibility for our identity is an important aspect of autonomy because it forces the agent to reflect critically on her identity. It is hoped that the concept of autonomy that is put forward will be adaptable and not suffer the limitations of aspects of the liberal tradition also described below. Chapter 2 develops the concept of autonomy with a different approach by looking at the agent in society. Therefore, although the liberal tradition contributes much to my concept of autonomy, autonomy is not presented as a purely liberal value. To do so would restrict the concept by labelling it liberal, thus associating it with all that is liberal. This form of labelling is what we need to escape from rather than to utilise. This section considers the difficulties connected to some values of the liberal tradition as well as the benefit of others.

### *1:1 Liberal values*

Joseph Raz offers an interesting interpretation of autonomy. He considers whether autonomy is something we value in itself or if it should be valued not for what it is, but for what it does. Autonomy is described as enabling a person to act:

An autonomous agent or person is one who has the capacity to be or to become significantly autonomous at least to a minimal degree. Significant autonomy is a matter of degree. A person may be more or less autonomous. (Significantly) autonomous persons are those who can shape their life and determine its course. They are not merely rational agents who can choose between options after evaluating relevant information, but agents who can in addition adopt personal projects, develop relationships, and accept commitments to causes, through which their personal integrity and sense of dignity and self-respect are made concrete. (Raz 1986: 154)

The capacity to act makes a person autonomous, and Raz wants significant autonomy to be understood as something attained by degrees and as part of an ongoing process of 'personal projects', 'relationships' and 'commitments'. Significant autonomy appears dependent on being able to

exercise a capacity to act; when this capacity is thwarted by others autonomy is diminished.

However, he then appears to argue that autonomy is of intrinsic value:

If having an autonomous life is an ultimate value, then having a sufficient range of acceptable options is of intrinsic value, for it is constitutive of an autonomous life that it is lived in circumstances where acceptable alternatives are present. The alternatives must be acceptable if the life is to be autonomous. (Raz 1986: 205)

Raz explains the relationship between intrinsic and ultimate value as 'an explanatory or justificatory one. Ultimate values are referred to in explaining the value of non-ultimate goods' (Raz 1986: 200). The 'capacity' or 'conditions' for autonomy, the circumstances in which it is possible to be autonomous, is of value in a similar way to intrinsic value: 'The ideal of autonomy is that of the autonomous life. The capacity for autonomy is a secondary sense of "autonomy"' (Raz 1986: 372). For Raz, autonomy could be interpreted as both a substantive value as having an autonomous life is described as a value, but it could also be read as a capacity by which we realise our values. For my concept of autonomy the second interpretation appears more useful; autonomy is a process that leads us to experience the versatility of our identity and gives us individuality.

Millian liberalism has much to say on the aspects of autonomy that I include here as part of my concept, especially independence, being left alone and individuality. For Raz, independence is one of the key conditions for autonomy and requires independence from manipulation and coercion (Raz 1986: 379–80).<sup>5</sup> However, emphasis on independence is not always helpful for a feminist concept of autonomy. Wendy Brown notes that the liberal individual is independent as opposed to 'dependent on others' (Brown 1995: 156–57). She goes on to argue that, in contrast to rights, dependence is associated with need and encumbrance: 'Rights relations

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<sup>5</sup> Raz's theory of independence will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

presume autonomy and independence while relations of need presume intimacy and dependence' (Brown 1995: 159). Therefore liberal emphasis on independence can deny the ties that we may feel to others.

Independence when emphasised as being left alone is a form of Isaiah Berlin's negative liberty, which is concerned with limiting the intrusion of a government or society into an individual's life (and where positive liberty is concerned with questions of self-government). Berlin associates negative freedom with Locke, Mill, Constant and Tocqueville because negative freedom supposes 'that there ought to exist a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated' (Berlin 1969: 124). The right to negative liberty is restricted to those deemed rational. This notion of freedom requires that 'a frontier must be drawn between the area of private life and that of public authority' (Berlin 1969: 124). The drawing of barriers is problematic for my concept of autonomy which seeks to be flexible.

Positive liberty helps us understand what we are free to be or to do (Berlin 1969: 130), that we are able to 'lead a prescribed form of life' (Berlin 1969:131) and be self-directed. Berlin describes positive liberty as coming from 'the desire on the part of the individual to be his own master' (Berlin 1969: 131). By this he means that the individual should understand that her actions are the result of her own will or deliberation, consequently they are hers and do not stem from the will of others. The gendered language used by Berlin ('he' will be master) reflects not only a masculine language but also a patriarchal understanding of freedom as something we conquer and of which we take control. The version of independence I wish to stress for my concept of autonomy is one that allows for self-direction but does not entail the vision of a rational unencumbered agent described by Brown as 'Fiercely autonomous and diffident, he is unencumbered by anyone or anything, independent in both senses of the term (free of dependents and dependency in civil society)' (Brown 1995: 149).

Any discussion of autonomy in the liberal tradition is hampered by liberal reliance on dichotomy. Dichotomies are problematic because they privilege one side over the other. This results in a way of thinking 'in terms of presupposed but unthinkingly applied exclusionary dichotomies' (Prokhovnik 2002: 3). Kimberly Hutchings argues that feminist philosophy is engaged in a 'conceptual conundrum' in attempting to 'escape the conceptual binary oppositions.... which have associated women with the denigrated term and prescribed the exclusion of women from the practices of both philosophy and politics' (Hutchings 2003: 2). These binary oppositions are always hierarchical (Prokhovnik 2002: 4). The problems created by liberal dichotomy become apparent when addressing constraints as they pervade the binary of autonomous/heteronomous.

The liberal emphasis on reason and the assertion that autonomy is about rationality is also problematic for feminism because it relies on a dualism of reason and nature and this is underwritten by a gendered understanding of male/female and the public/private, which will be discussed in the section on harm. Through this dichotomy women are always aligned with the natural and therefore are denied autonomy. This is what Genevieve Lloyd terms 'the maleness of Reason' (Lloyd 1993: xix). This is a narrow sense of autonomy and it is problematic for feminism because it presents the identity of a rational man so, in order to be autonomous, women must assume that identity. Or, it raises the problem: if the rational is privileged over the natural then is the female, rational, autonomous subject disembodied? Autonomy is set up as disembodied subjectivity.

The primacy of reason results in the limited identity for the individual of liberal individualism. As such it argues that the only identities agents have are either that of rational utility-maximiser (as in David Gauthier) or of the rights-based, rational chooser (John Rawls).

Dependency and not privileging 'male' reason is seen as a weakness in the liberal tradition as it not only limits the capacity for self-direction but it also invites interference from a paternalistic state. Paternalism is something the liberal tradition argues we should guard against (for example Mill [1859]1989a: 89). Paternalism is perceived as threatening to liberals because it limits self-direction and treats rational individuals as if they were not rational. The state is also described as a 'night-watchman' by some liberals: Berlin (Berlin 2000: 33) speaks of 'the notion of the state as a traffic policeman and night-watchman preventing collisions and looking after property, which is at the back of much individuality and liberal thought'. Individuality requires the state to act as an arbiter but to remain in the background in order to foster individuality in its liberal citizens.

### *1:2 Freedom, autonomy and self-direction*

I draw on the liberal tradition here to describe autonomy but there are frequent attempts to distinguish autonomy from freedom and covering them in detail is beyond the scope of this chapter (Nancy Hirschmann (2003) is one example). I argue for autonomy rather than freedom. Robert Young comments: 'Freedom is only a necessary condition for autonomy. So autonomy involves more than just being free' (Young 1986: 8). John Christman argues that autonomy can be distinguished from freedom because 'autonomy is more properly seen as a property of preference or desire formation than a property of whole person's lives' (Christman 1989: 13). This means autonomy is concerned with aspects of our lives whereas freedom is concerned with the 'bigger picture'. This fits with my understanding of autonomy as something we gain or lose by degrees. Christman provides an example of a smoker who also enjoys watching baseball. The smoker exercises choice (preference formation) about whether to watch a baseball game but does not have the same autonomy over the habit of smoking. Christman argues that an individual's autonomy depends 'on the more basic characteristics of how each of her preferences



were formed ('or the degree of control she had over her choices') (Christman 1989: 13). Christman notes Robert Young's objection that autonomy can be applied to an overall view of an individual's life. According to Christman, Young: 'views autonomy as a property of a person insofar as her desires fit in with her overall life plan. But he then must view this "episodic" autonomy as partial autonomy' (Christman 1989: 13).

Both Christman's and Young's view of autonomy contain aspects useful to my concept. Christman's insistence on defining autonomy as applied to specific examples of an individual's life and the question of how much control the individual has is important to understanding how an individual can be autonomous in certain instances and not others. Christman's description of Young's autonomy as 'episodic' because it is partial also fits with my view of autonomy as attained by degrees. That an individual cannot be fully autonomous in every aspect of her life is not a failure of autonomy, rather it is an acknowledgement that individuals can have some autonomy in very constrained circumstances – Christman's smoker will be less autonomous when smoking but more autonomous when deciding on the baseball game. For my concept of autonomy this simply means the smoker is more autonomous in some situations than in others.

For Christman, the inability to act on preferences we have formed ourselves means we lack autonomy. Preference formation is a sign of autonomy and Christman contrasts this to freedom which 'is a property of human action' (Christman 1989: 13). Freedom has a wider application but, Christman argues, it must contain 'an account of autonomy' (Christman 1989: 13). For example, we are free to jump out of a window on the tenth floor of a building but we cannot consider this an autonomous act unless this is really what we want to do, that is, if we are in control of our autonomy and if this is an authentic expression of our desires. Autonomy is a more useful concept than freedom for my purposes because it can acknowledge contingency and 'episodic' moments when we are more autonomous than others.

Autonomy is also concerned with how we envisage our own identities, how we would like to change them and how we view the identity of others. This appears to fit better with the view of autonomy as partial than with Christman's view of freedom as concerned with 'human action' and a 'wider application' which would move us towards a discussion of universalism which, as was noted in the introduction, is not particularly helpful for autonomy in terms of self-definition.

### *1:3 Individuality and individualism*

What follows is a brief attempt to draw a distinction between individuality and individualism. This distinction rests on a tentative claim that individuality is a positive aspect of the liberal tradition, and useful for the concepts of autonomy and identity, whereas individualism contains the damaging image of the individual as a rational maximising egoist who inhabits a universe of dichotomy. We can see a development to the Millian type of liberalism which talks about the needs of a social individual from Hobbes to Locke. In particular, the Hobbesian individual reflects a territorial self and an emphasis on rationality that is problematic for a feminist concept of autonomy, although it is useful in terms of demonstrating the liberal tradition's evolution from Hobbes' isolated individual to John Locke's rational individual. This emphasises a shift in liberal thinking from an emphasis on force to an emphasis on relating to others through reason. Although by no means convivial, Locke's individual recognises the need for cooperation to avoid a state of war. The emphasis on others can be seen more clearly in Mill's liberalism. Although Mill is still concerned by the proximity of others his is a liberalism that attempts to deal with balancing individuality and society, that is, individual self-control and social control. Mill's work will be examined along with that of Dan Avnon and Avner de-Shalit in order to demonstrate the value of individuality that Mill's harm principle is intended to protect.

So far, the liberal individual has been presented as a flawed character. However, the liberal individual can be understood as a different type of character: a self-changing, self-renewing agent who is dynamic and actively pursues new identity. Thus the liberal individual can become a multi-faceted agent who can relate to others and shares similarities to others but who also is different to others. Individuality is far more valuable than the aspects of liberal individualism in working towards a fuller concept of autonomy, as will be discussed.

Individuality is an aspect of liberalism that is valuable to a feminist concept of autonomy, which aims to create diversity through enabling individuals to experience their own identity without prescription. It will be explored at greater length in the chapter on Mill, but for now some of the benefits of individuality for the concept of autonomy that I wish to advance will be explored.

## **2. Mill**

Avnon and de-Shalit and Mill will be used in this section to further emphasise the importance of individuality. As we have seen, Individualism reflects the unencumbered, independent, person described above, who has more in common with Hobbes' individual than the flourishing and creative individual of Avnon and de-Shalit and Mill.

### ***2:1 Mill and individuality***

Mill argues that individuality should be fostered and allowed to flourish. Mill wrote *On Liberty* with a view to protecting individuality from the crushing demands of conformity he thought Victorian society was imposing. This conformity was a threat to individuality because it encouraged sameness. Mill argued that the individual should be allowed to flourish and, like the tree to which he compares human nature, should be allowed 'to grow and

develope itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing' (Mill [1895]1989a: 60). The liberal individual portrayed here is driven by a desire to mutate and mould herself, to explore new identities. To continue Mill's analogy, individuality makes society diverse thus creating woodland filled with different trees. The individual is also sovereign over herself (Mill [1895]1989a: 13). She controls her own identity through choosing her identity and taking responsibility for it.

In order to encourage individuality Mill suggested that there should be 'experiments in living' (Mill [1859]1989a: 57). Individuality should be allowed to flourish, and this benefits not just the individual but also those around her, by presenting new ideas, sharing new experiences and generating new possibilities for ways of living. This emphasis on change and self-development encourages multi-faceted identity. We generate our own identities and these identities are unique. They are unique because they are combined in a unique way. Each individual has combined their identities in a different way and when individuals see how others have combined their identities then they witness alternatives to their own identities. This promotes awareness of other new identities and encourages diversity by emphasising that identity is not static, it changes and transforms.

Mill does not underestimate the importance of the influence of others on our identity. Although he tends to see the influence of others as a threat to individuality, this does not have to be the case. The individuality of others can have a positive effect by opening new possibilities as well as bringing out different identities in us. Avnon and de-Shalit recognise the multiple identities possible in a liberalism that values pluralism. They argue there are two types of pluralism: internal ('within the person') and external ('political realm') (Avnon and de-Shalit 1999: 3). Internal pluralism means that the liberal individual does not have a single identity; the individual can 'be autonomous and free to fulfil their desire to become creative

expressions of their complex selves'. This individual is 'complex' and is not 'the flat image' that is often supposed of the liberal individual (Avnon and de-Shalit 1999: 3). This flat image is one I associate with individualism rather than with individuality.

Millian liberalism fits with the realistic concept of the individual facing 'the paradoxical features of human realities'. The complexities of human individuality are reflected in a complex, plural state: 'There is a neat fit between life's ambiguities and the ambiguities of liberal discourse and practice' (Avnon and de-Shalit 1999: 4). Avner and de-Shalit argue that liberalism makes room for inconsistencies and changes in identity: 'liberalism's promise is to enable one to manifest the different facets of the self in relation to multiple circumstances, to feel good about it and not experience discomfort with apparent inconsistencies in the process' (Avnon and de-Shalit 1999: 4).

The individuality in the liberal tradition, discussed here as the liberalism of Mill and Avnon and de-Shalit, is very important to my concept of autonomy because it offers the prospect of creative individuals who can revise and alter their identity and who can be recognised as having more than one identity. Individuality can be about promoting varied identity by emphasising positive human characteristics of creativity, self-definition, self-direction, self-change, self-renewal, dynamism and activity in the pursuit of new identities. Individuality also places emphasis on flourishing and the acceptance that our relationship with others can have a positive effect, thus representing new possibilities and bringing out different identities in us.

The richer concept of autonomy I wish to construct needs to retain the description of individuality based on the work of Mill and Avnon and de-Shalit. It needs this in order to be strong enough to cope with the diversity of identity that can be found in mainstream feminist theory. Feminism argues for various female identities: career-based, sexuality-based and

those based around motherhood to name but a few. The concept of autonomy in this thesis needs to be able to equip the agent with the autonomy needed to experience and to control all her identities when and in the manner in which she chooses. For example, a woman who is a mother is not defined solely as a mother (even within the description of mother there are a variety of types of mother: she may be a caring mother or a distressed mother, for example). She may also have a professional identity such as a lawyer (again, this identity contains many different varieties as to how she behaves as a lawyer), and she will have many other identities as well. She may have a warm and compassionate character, which may be varied according to where she is. For example, she may not feel warmth and compassion towards her male colleagues if her work environment is sexist.

Identities vary from one agent to another but also in different situations. The changing nature of identity means that it is difficult to predict accurately what a person will do. There are times when, if we have sufficient information about a person or group, we can make a reasonable guess as to how they might act, based on our knowledge of their identity. For example, colleagues could make a reasonable prediction about how each other might react to going on strike. We can't always predict how people will react and we can't always predict how we will react but this does not mean that we wander directionless through life. We can have a plan, but we might deviate from it sometimes. However, we are all diverse in our identity and this involves having a multi-faceted character – the sides of which some people will only see at certain times. For example, Avnon and de-Shalit present a scenario in which Dan is talking about political theory to Avner, then his son comes in and then so does a car buyer (buying Dan's car). This makes Dan experience a plurality of identities in one person, identities that he alters according to the changes in his situation (Avnon and de-Shalit 1999: 8-9). Dan is expressing his multi-faceted identity by showing different aspects of his identity in different situations and with

different people. He does not display the same identity with his son as he does with the car buyer. He is a complex individual. As such he needs to be able to express his identity without constraint. This form of constraint is less obvious than force and Mill provides a description of this type of constraint in the form of harm.

## *2:2 Mill and harm*

Mill's notion of harm is more complicated than Hobbes' understanding of freedom as absence of impediments because it places the individual in a context that is far more social than the context in which the individual is described in *Leviathan*. Mill understands the individual as a social being, still in need of protection from others but also in need of the company of others. The harm principle argues for a sphere of human life in which the individual does not have to answer to society for his or her actions. The individual is only accountable if his or her actions cause harm to others. The nature of the harm caused varies and in response to this the way in which harm should be addressed also varies. Therefore actions that obviously harm others should be met with either legal or social penalties. The harm inflicted on another resulting in legal penalties is relatively easy to understand and is clearly subject to legal sanctions. Actions that are subject to social sanctions however, are less easy to define.

If actions are harder to define then so is the amount of censure with which these actions should be met. Mill wants to protect the individual from the opinions of the masses. This allows the individual to express unpopular opinions. To force the individual to conform to popular opinions would be coercion. The difficulties of applying the harm principle will be addressed further in the chapter on Mill, for now it is enough to note that the range of sanctions that could be imposed reflect the complex nature of constraints to autonomy. We are out of Hobbes' territorial war of all against all and into a much less clearly defined struggle for autonomy by degrees.

Regardless of the penalties faced by an individual who harms another (legal, moral/social), there is an element of the notion of harm that renders it a specific threat to autonomy. According to Mill, actions that could harm others are other-regarding actions, and these actions should be curtailed 'to prevent harm to others' (Mill [1859]1989a: 13). However, for the purposes of understanding how autonomy can be constrained, I want to argue that harm is not other-regarding, rather it is other-disregarding. It disregards others by rendering relationships impossible: one party of the relationship becomes treated as an object (Hoffman 1995: 89). This occurs when an individual no longer sees others as subjects but rather as Other to their subjectivity, in de Beauvoir's sense of otherness, or when an individual no longer sees others as ends in themselves but rather as a means to an end in the Kantian sense (Kant [1785]1998: 38). In both cases, harm functions to disregard the agency of individuals, and in so doing, harm objectifies individuals.

### **3. Constraints**

This section draws on the examples of objectification and coercion in order to demonstrate the flexibility required of a theory of autonomy. All constraints to autonomy vary in severity and it is difficult to imagine a situation in which we would never be constrained.

#### *3:1 Objectification as a constraint*

We need to be wary of the notion of objectification. For example, Catharine Mackinnon argues: 'Pornography makes women into objects' (Mackinnon 1987: 182), but this kind of argument renders agency impossible because it renders an individual a victim, thus creating objectification in the form of helplessness.



However, the description of someone as an object by another person or group can differ. For example, the notion of harm as objectification is used by Dworkin and Mackinnon in the Minneapolis ordinance of 1983. The wording of the ordinance is stark in its condemnation of the effects of pornography on women. Its definition of pornography includes four descriptions of ways that pornography presents women as 'sexual objects' (Bryson 1999: 182). In *Feminism Unmodified* Mackinnon says:

pornography institutionalizes the sexuality of male supremacy, which fuses the eroticization of dominance and submission with the social construction of male and female. Gender is sexual. Pornography constitutes the meaning of that sexuality. Men treat women as who they see women as being. Pornography constructs who that is. Men's power over women means that the way men see women defines who women can be. Pornography is that way. (Mackinnon 1987: 148)

On this reading women are constructed in men's minds by pornography and women are thus objects not subjects. Pornography is the (graphic) expression of male dominance and has created a hierarchical power relationship in which women appear to lack autonomy as a result of their objectification. Both the ordinance and Mackinnon's later claims about pornography present women as objects, but such is the extent of male domination, denying women autonomy, that there appears no way out. Dworkin and Mackinnon could have oversimplified the effects of pornography thus denying the subtleties of power relationships.

In order for pornography to have the potentially pervasive effect Dworkin and Mackinnon describe, the constraints faced by women must not simply be external. The construction of women as objects is a psychological effect of pornography. Men believe women to be objects and this devalues women both in men's eyes and also in women's eyes. If Mackinnon and Dworkin's claims were true then women would be so damaged by the effects of pornography that they would lack 'the inner resources for the development of consciousness or agency' (Brown 1995: 93). Women are not just internally constrained, they are paralysed. This leads to another

problem raised by Dworkin and Mackinnon's position: the depiction of women as objectified relies on a subject/object dualism and, although Dworkin and Mackinnon are not liberal thinkers, this is a liberal dualism. By describing an individual as an object we deny that they are a subject. As has already been argued, objects are denied agency but, in addition to this, another worrying aspect of objectification is its association with the identity of victim.

However, to claim to have been treated as an object could be the beginning of becoming more autonomous as it involves recognising a constraint and attempting to overcome it. A victim is thought not to be a subject or to have power; Julia O'Connell Davidson raises the problem of the identity of victim in a discussion of the portrayal of child sex workers as victims. She draws on a distinction made by John Hoffman between:

the notion of a 'victim', which refers to a person or group subject to violence, and 'victimhood', which refers to a pathology and ideology within which persons/groups see themselves, or are seen by others, as mere objects, without the capacity to defend their own interests or those of others (i.e. without power).  
(O'Connell Davidson 2005: 59)

The lack of agency means that while individuals or groups find the identity of victim a useful and valid description, the notion of victimhood denies the possibility of change, and denies that people who are objectified can ever become subjects. The recognition of the harm must not be equated with the notion of victimhood, thus compounding the harm. The less we are harmed the more we are autonomous but this is not easily achieved, hence the emphasis on autonomy by degree: the struggle of harm against autonomy is not a zero-sum struggle.

An individual is not simply either a subject or an object; O'Connell Davidson's work on child prostitution again provides an example of the limits faced by liberalism because of its reliance on dichotomy in understanding agency. She argues that children who work in prostitution

lack desirable alternatives but they do not lack agency. Children who use prostitution as an escape from even worse circumstances still have agency because running away 'even if that means using prostitution as a means of survival, can thus be experienced as an assertion of the self as a subject, not as being transformed into an object' (O'Connell Davidson 2005: 55). Yet liberalism does not allow for this subtle difference. This has strong implications for autonomy. Autonomy cannot be in the manner of the classical liberal man who freely chooses and consents to contract into a society because we cannot extract ourselves from our relationships. We need to be able to control our identity but at the same time we are social agents and live in a context of other people, we are influenced by our society. When this goes well it enables us to express our autonomy as part of a whole but when it goes badly we are unable to control our identity and find ourselves controlled by others or subject to social control. The struggle for self-control over social control will be returned to in chapters 3 to 6.

### *3:2 Coercion as a constraint*

The previous section discussed the way in which both being objectified and being labelled as objectified place constraints on autonomy. Neither versions of objectification can be discussed effectively by types of liberalism which draw on dichotomous thought. This is because objectification, as was demonstrated, is not something that we can easily say has or has not taken place. Objectification pervades neat dualisms and requires a concept of autonomy that is contingent in order to deal with situations such as objectification.

Another constraint which defies the simplistic labelling of liberalism based on the dichotomy of individualism is coercion. The effect of coercion is to leave a person or a group of persons in a certain situation: a situation of contingency, of immanence and of passivity. Coercion is perhaps an even more enveloping constraint than objectification because it occurs more

frequently and it is hard to imagine any area in which there can be said to be no coercion. This understanding of coercion as a pervasive entity means that complete freedom from others is impossible. Again, this strengthens the fuller account of autonomy because it involves understanding our connections to others. Even if they are not built in a freely chosen manner, we still need to see these connections. Our connections with others mean autonomy requires co-operation. This is because the nature of the relationships we have with others impacts on our ability to be self-directed, creative individuals and vice versa.

Although Mill's liberalism demonstrates an advance in combating constraints it also clings to the public/private dichotomy. In this dichotomy the private realm is to be left untouched. However our lives do not slot easily into two spheres, with one of a private domain, self-interest and the particular and the other being of the public world of other people, of the community and of the state. This is part of the narrow version of liberalism and my concept of autonomy needs to move away from the dichotomies of public/private and negative/positive. The public/private distinction has been especially problematic for feminism: women were associated with the private sphere which was in turn devalued; women were cut off from access to the state. Therefore, although we do require some private space this is not an argument for privacy, which cuts us off from others. The concept of autonomy I wish to put forward involves acknowledging that autonomy is always partial and limited and that autonomy is something to be attained by degrees. Unlike Hobbes, this is not an argument for the absolute autonomy of one individual over other individuals. Although a private sphere is useful when considering the process of autonomy and how it could be constrained, it is not helpful in emphasising our connection to others, which is part of our identity. Identities can be recognised by others and can be inspired by others but there also needs to be a space for the individual to contemplate her identity, and this notion of privacy is open to interpretation and easily altered. We need a private sphere in which to reflect and

consider our identity and this sphere needs be as unconstrained as possible.

For F.A. Hayek freedom is the absence of coercion (Hayek 1991: 80). This situation is not possible to realise fully, thus freedom must constitute the minimum of coercion possible. Hayek argues that freedom, if understood as a lack of coercion, demands 'that the individual has some assured private sphere, that there is some set of circumstances in his environment with which others cannot interfere' (Hayek 1991: 82). However, the individual's need for a private space does not mean that she should be cut off from others. An 'assured private sphere' is necessary in order for some of the aspects of my concept of autonomy to come to fruition, such as self-direction, reflection and creativity. However, these three attributes are not solely the domain of the private sphere because other individuals are integral to our autonomy. We better understand the direction our lives take in the context of others and it is only in this context that we can know if our self-direction is constrained.

Acknowledging the importance of others in our lives means seeing ourselves as part of a whole. We have relationships of different kinds: friends, family and community. Therefore we have relationships with both particular others with whom we share bonds of love and compassion but also different relationships with unspecified others, such as those who police the law of our society or even with those we might berate for increasing carbon emissions in their gas-guzzling cars. These relationships take place within social structures. We are involved in many ways with many different others. Others afford us a richer form of reflection. Self-reflection is valuable but we also need to see our identities reflected in our lives with others: we need recognition.<sup>6</sup> Although we may wish to create ourselves (through self-reflection and direction), in our private life we also need others.

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<sup>6</sup> Recognition will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Hayek's argument is also useful because he argues that coercion can exist on many levels, not just the political. Coercion can exist in all manner of human relationships: 'a morose husband, a nagging wife, or a hysterical mother may make life intolerable unless their every mood is obeyed. But here society can do little to protect the individual beyond making such associations with others truly voluntary' (Hayek 1991: 94). Presumably the morose husband can always divorce his nagging wife and move in with his hysterical mother, thus leaving him still morose. At least he has the economic power to end the first voluntary association and take up the second, which will ensure that he remains economically empowered, whilst, in Hayek's land of outrageous stereotypes, his mother – in between hysterical outbursts – performs all the domestic labour. The superior economic power of the husband might make him free to end this unhappy association but the wife, through lack of economic resources, could find this particular association less voluntary than Hayek assumes. Hayek's example demonstrates that voluntary associations are important to our identity, but so are the associations with others who come into our lives through coincidence or through being part of a community. In Hayek's example coercion does not make the people he describes necessarily heteronomous. However, Hayek's contention, that coercion pervades all social relationships, is a valid one and it further opens up the possibility of internal constraints.

Even the most constraining of relationships, such as that of the long-suffering nagging wife with her morose husband offer a way out because there is (limited) choice. It is possible for a person or persons living with coercion to experience some degree of freedom. However, the situation of coercion is a lack of self-direction and as such could be a situation of immanence or passivity. Immanence and passivity are problematic notions for a feminist concept of autonomy<sup>7</sup> as feminists have argued that (once

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<sup>7</sup> Immanence and passivity will be examined in Chapter 6.

again) there is a dichotomy of active and passive or immanent, and activity is associated with freedom, autonomy and men while passivity or immanence is the territory of women. This form of constraint is more subtle than harm. Chapter 4 explores the case of domestic violence, the way in which it turns individuals into objects and corrupts both the abuser and the person being harmed. The question of what counts as an obstacle remains a central issue in any discussion of autonomy but the obstacles are many and occur frequently, especially in the case of coercion.

Coercive relationships do not have to end autonomy but once we understand that we are not either a subject or an object we have to work harder to understand where our autonomy is at risk in our relationships with others and to take responsibility for our autonomy. However, we also need to see when relationships with others, rather than being a constraint, can enhance our autonomy, such as the people who inspire us or the people with whom we find some of our identity through shared interests and experiences, which help us to express our identities and to listen to others. Coercion, the most common constraint and the most pervasive, limits autonomy frequently and in diverse ways.

## ***Conclusion***

When the individual is understood to be either free or unfree, autonomy by degrees is lost and the concept is forced into the stark opposition of autonomous and heteronomous. If the narrow version of liberalism says there can either be a public or private individual, negative or positive liberty and inclusion or exclusion, then many people could find themselves on the wrong side of these binaries. However, if autonomy is taken to be a process of degrees by which an individual can develop then there can be no stark opposition of either autonomous or heteronomous; there are degrees of autonomy. Autonomy is not a concept alien to liberalism for it produces individuality. Individuality is the result of the process of autonomy

(aspects of which include creativity, self-direction, choice and responsibility) and is worth preserving and separating out from the stark individualism of the rational egoist who builds his fortress in fear of contamination from the company of others.

Going through the process of autonomy and gaining identities which are expressions of the multiple self, fosters individuality. The person who has individuality and who has control over her identity, who can claim to have gone through the process of autonomy and to experience her identities as varied (rather than rigid and imposed) will still face constraints to her autonomy because there will always be constraints but she will be much better equipped to face them than the self of the narrow version of liberalism. Individuality is also valuable for my concept of autonomy because it encourages the process of autonomy by emphasising the importance of self-direction: the self-directed individual has gone through the process of autonomy, thus allowing her to claim her identity as her own. Individuality is the result of self-determination. The process of autonomy and identity development that lead us to individuality can be thwarted to varying degrees. As long as there are social structures that oppress and exclude, autonomy can only be by degrees.

My richer and fuller concept of autonomy is better able to deal with constraints than liberal individualism because of its insistence on process, degrees of autonomy and the importance of going through the process in order to claim identities as ours. These make it much more alert to the subtleties of the constraints faced by autonomy. The constraints are better understood as degrees of limitation. Understanding how autonomy can be constrained by varying degrees allows for a concept of autonomy that is more sensitive to the needs of the socially situated individual and allows for a more adaptable concept of autonomy.



Although the concepts of autonomy and individuality presented in this chapter derive from a strand of liberalism, they can be fortified and enhanced by looking at some of the notions connected to these concepts that are expressed as criticisms of the liberal tradition. These criticisms come in many forms (not all of them dissimilar to those found within the liberal tradition) and although some may not take us far from the liberal tradition, they are all an attempt to go beyond certain aspects of the political theory of that tradition.

Constraints affect the process of autonomy to varying degrees; this is why there has been emphasis on autonomy by degrees. This can be a difficult process. However, recognising when we are constrained is vital because it is only then that we are able to change. We need to be able to recognise ourselves as who we want to be but also as who we are – our authenticity and we need to look at how we use agency to assert our authentic identity. We can also see autonomy as a process we always undertake in the company of others. Rather than conceptualising social relationships with a dichotomous approach we can better understand how our autonomy works in a context of other agents through a relational approach. We need to acknowledge our relationship with others in order to render recognition possible, we need our identities to be recognised and we need to be able to recognise others.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Social Character of the Autonomous Agent**

My richer and fuller concept of autonomy so far consists of a process of autonomy that includes creativity and self-direction and leads to multiple identities and therefore individuality. In order to strengthen this approach to autonomy this chapter discusses three notions that will deepen the sense of selfhood of the agent: authenticity, agency and recognition. This chapter develops more of the themes central to the concept of autonomy put forward in this thesis in particular, recognition, control and the question of approaching autonomy for feminist purposes.

#### ***Introduction***

Recognition is central to both autonomy and identity; without it the agent would be isolated from others and unable to exercise her autonomy. This chapter presents recognition as occurring in two forms, the first in the 'inner self' in the form of self-recognition and the second for the 'outer self' in the form of the recognition of others or reciprocal recognition. Autonomy is a growing awareness of self and of a self always negotiating her autonomy in a context of others. Autonomy can be helped by a concept of recognition that enables agents to see themselves as part of a whole and not to be constantly guarding against others. Jennifer Nedelsky argues that autonomy needs to be understood in the light of the tension between the individual and the community. This involves acknowledging that individuals are part of a collective and trying:

to move beyond a conception of human beings which sees them exclusively as separate individuals and focuses on the threat of community. The collective is not simply a potential threat to individuals, but is constitutive of them, and thus is a source of their autonomy as well as a danger to it. (Nedelsky 1989: 21)

The agent needs to find a way of asserting her autonomy as an individual but also of using her autonomy to help her belong to her surroundings. Recognition can go some way to achieving this. The first section of this chapter discusses the situated agent.

The inner self, where the first form of recognition occurs, concerns the relationship the agent has to herself and the way in which the process of autonomy is valuable because it helps her to discover herself, not in the sense that she has a self waiting to be discovered but in the sense of taking control of her identity. This chapter raises the spectre of control in the form of self-control over our identity which involves us taking responsibility for our identity. This responsibility is a part of the way in which we are able to claim that an identity is ours. It is not meant to infer that we are independent of others or that owe nothing to others in the form of reciprocity. The agent can use the process of autonomy to discover or rediscover identities with which she feels at home and that she feels belong to her. In other words, she can use the process of autonomy to approach identity, which will bring authenticity to her identity.

Authenticity is difficult to achieve and sustain. With so many stereotypes and so many unwanted, imposed identities the agent is engaged in a constant struggle to assert her authentic self. The struggle for authenticity is successful when the agent is able to recognise herself as an authentic being. This first form of recognition is the subject of the first section. However, authenticity is, like autonomy, never fully realised. We have no way of knowing if other people are expressing their authentic identity. The impact of social conditioning and stereotyping even pervades our ability for self-recognition and limits our ability to guarantee either that our identity is an expression of our authentic selves or that we could have enough agency to assume the identities we consider authentic.

The next section looks at agency, by which is meant the ability of the agent to assert her own identity. She engages with others as the authentic person she is, not the person she is told she should be nor the stereotype to which she feels compelled to conform. Agency is required to develop our identities for self-recognition and to gain recognition from others. Agency connects the inner to the outer. It offers the prospect of acceptance of the agent as her authentic self from others but it also contains the danger of rejection. The second section attempts to understand how the agent relates to others and explores the notion of relational autonomy. It also seeks to understand how the inner self projects her outer self into the community – how the inner self is related to the outer self.

Recognition and community are examined in the final section. Communities are vital to sustaining relational autonomy but these communities can threaten identity through misrecognition. Recognition of others is important for encouraging us to demonstrate our identity as authentic selves. The concept of recognition offers the prospect of being part of a whole that is larger than us. When recognition goes wrong, we suffer because we are unable to be an authentic self, we are unable to be agents, and our relationships with others suffer as a consequence.

Axel Honneth (2003) demonstrates the importance of recognition by presenting a theory of three spheres of reciprocal recognition, which will be discussed in the section on recognition. This chapter bears some similarity in structure to the development of the self through Honneth's three spheres by following the 'practical self-relation' that is developed on the journey through the spheres. The first sphere results in self-confidence, the second in self-respect and the third in self-esteem (Cooke 1995: 345). By finding the identities that are ours and are therefore authentic, we gain confidence in ourselves as authentic agents. Our sense of authenticity gives us confidence to move towards agency. Agency is where we develop our own identities and social and political roles; this gives us self-respect. We then

need the recognition of ourselves as unique selves who are 'irreplaceable' (Cooke 1995) in our group; this gives us self-esteem.

Self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem are formative processes that lead the individual towards authentic identity. To do this the agent needs to be autonomous but she also needs recognition. This chapter emphasises recognition as an overarching theme in the hope of alleviating some of the tensions described by Nedelsky between the individual and community.

The agent needs not only her own resources (self-determination and creativity) but also resources in her community or society. Joseph Raz illustrates these resources and his description of autonomy contains conceptual features useful for my concept of autonomy. Raz (1986: 154) says autonomy is 'a matter of degree'; as has already been argued this is a useful approach to autonomy because it understands the agent not in a binary mode of being autonomous or not but as enjoying degrees of autonomy. Autonomy as a matter of degree also fits with the concept of autonomy as a process, a process that can be repeated by the agent when she chooses. Raz's concept of autonomy is also similar to mine in its emphasis on creativity or as Raz puts it, 'self-creation' (Raz 1986: 370). The agent adapts to change and is open to new possibilities, making self-creation a constant and key element of autonomy. The autonomous agent is not 'the regimented, compulsive person who decides when young what life to have and spends the rest of it living it out according to plan' (Raz 1986: 370). It will however be argued that autonomy requires some, flexible, plan.

Raz argues that there are three conditions necessary for autonomy: 'appropriate mental abilities, an adequate range of options, and independence' (Raz 1986: 372). Appropriate mental abilities consist of a 'minimum rationality' and understanding, 'the ability to comprehend the means required to realize his goals' and the ability to plan how to achieve

these goals (Raz 1986: 373). An adequate range of options is necessary for autonomy: 'a person must have options which enable him to sustain throughout his life activities which, taken together, exercise all the capacities human beings have an innate drive to exercise, as well as to decline to develop any of them' (Raz 1986: 375). The final condition is independence, the opposite of which is coercion and manipulation: 'Coercion and manipulation subject the will of one person to that of another' (Raz 1986: 378). The second and third conditions are of particular importance here; Raz's second condition is perhaps difficult to guarantee. As long as there are options there is some choice, but Raz is demanding more of autonomy: he wants there to be not just choice but a certain amount of choice and the availability of adequate options depends on the community/society in which the agent lives. The final condition requires an understanding of the agent's authenticity. The agent must know her will in order to protect herself from coercion and manipulation.

The formation of the liberal self, apart from society, provides the possibility of agency in terms of free movement, but not autonomous agency. Michael Sandel describes the liberal subject as 'something 'back there', antecedent to any particular experience' (Sandel 1998: 8). The problem with the antecedent subject is its unity prior to its introduction to society; the self is a fully formed, rational individual already in society and bears no traits connected to community or society, the liberal self is 'unencumbered' (Sandel 1998: 179). Autonomy requires agents who know themselves and who know their surroundings to develop their identities. Depriving them of this information places severe limits on autonomy. The isolated, unencumbered individual is formed irrespective of society. Sandel describes this self as: 'the deontological self ... wholly without character .... incapable of self-knowledge in any morally serious sense' (Sandel 1998: 179). Although the notion of individuality discussed in the previous chapter may appear a somewhat wide conception of the good, it is a conception for agents to form in society and to negotiate with other agents. My concept of

the autonomous agent leaves room for self-knowledge through recognition of self and self-realisation.

The communitarian criticism of the dislocated, distanced and disembodied self leads to a strong emphasis on the self as situated and constituted by her community. Without any particular conception of the good, she would be morally indifferent. Sandel notes that the self in question is so distanced from her community and devoid of any kind of particularity that when it comes to questions of self reflection there is nothing with which to reflect (Sandel 1998:179). Thus there is no place from which to stand and reflect because the liberal individual is universal, everywhere and nowhere. This lack of focal point begs the question: 'Who is this self?' The self has no identity, it has 'no given continuities, save those of the body which is its bearer and of the memory which to the best of its ability gathers in its past', and therefore no 'identity and continuity' (MacIntyre 1985: 33).

The lack of self and also the lack of embodiment of the liberal individual is a criticism that communitarians share with some feminist theorists (Frazer and Lacey 1994: 266). Feminists argue that women and men need to be seen as not only embodied selves but also as selves who are affected by their embodiment. Autonomy needs to be able to offer the means to achieving this self-recognition.

### ***1. The inner self***

The following discussion of authenticity is framed around key features of the authentic self. These are: the notion of the inner self; the way in which the agent uses imagination and self-reflection to bring out her authentic self; the formation of the historical self; and finally her connecting the inner self to the outer.

### *1:1 The inner self and self-recognition*

This section considers how we come to recognise ourselves. The argument here is not for a core self, a self that never changes and that can be discovered within ourselves. The inner self, like the outer self, is always changing. The notion of authenticity put forward in this thesis is not one which claims we have a true or core self but one that argues for the ability to define ourselves, as who we wish to be and this means struggling with internal constraints by psychological factors such as denial or indoctrination. Understanding the subtleties of internal as well as external constraints is vital for my concept of autonomy if it is to be valuable to feminist theory because internal constraints can threaten the ability of the individual to control her identity.

As Jean Grimshaw notes, feminism has been aware of the variety of internal constraints women face: 'The female self, under male domination, is riddled through and through with false or conditioned desires' (Grimshaw 1988: 92). The challenge of overcoming these internal constraints rests on the capacity an individual has for self-determination, but this capacity can be overwhelmed by internal constraints to the extent where the individual is unable to determine herself, unable to experience her own identity. This challenge is one my concept of autonomy hopes to go some way to meeting by arguing that internal constraints can be overcome through understanding the nature of constraints. This cannot be done through the liberal tradition alone because it requires an understanding of the individual's context as well as the power relations of which she is a part within her context.

A feminist conception of autonomy needs to answer Grimshaw's challenge to feminist theory to reflect 'a female self that would be authentic, that would transcend or shatter this conditioning'.<sup>8</sup> Although authenticity alone will not enable transcendence of social conditioning, it offers the prospect of

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<sup>8</sup> In the end Grimshaw rejects the possibility of an 'authentic or unified 'original' self which can simply be recovered or discovered as the source of 'autonomous' actions' (Grimshaw 1988: 106).



self-recognition which enables the agent to see how she is constrained. Like Avnon and de-Shalit's internal and external pluralism discussed in the previous chapter, the agent requires the internal ability to deal with constraints but also external circumstances as with Raz's adequate range of options. We need there to be 'a reasonable number of options' (Bellamy 2000: 42) available. This involves struggling within the social structures that surround us and understanding more about our relationship to others. This chapter is concerned with recognition, but this is not to deny the importance of economic and social structures and the influence these have on agency and recognition and therefore on autonomy.

In *Sources of the Self* Charles Taylor provides a method of understanding our relationship to others. He argues that the self inevitably has a framework within which it lives. Within this framework we set our horizons or our orientation:

My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.  
(Taylor 1989: 27)

Taylor's self always exists within its context, the self is always defined in relation to others (Taylor 1989: 35). Taylor sees the self as embedded in a framework. The self is influenced by her society, there is an emphasis on the good, and there is a narrative but Taylor also emphasises choice. In acknowledging our framework we are becoming aware of how its structure orients us towards the good:

in order to make minimal sense of our lives, in order to have an identity, we need an orientation to the good, which means some sense of qualitative discrimination, of the incomparably higher. Now we see that the sense of the good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story... In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going. (Taylor 1989: 47)

We see how we have come to where we are (our lived experience) and how within our framework we make qualitative distinctions about the good, thus providing us with an orientation. This is a part of our autonomy although, as Raz notes, we cannot expect to plan our lives with accuracy but we can have a plan in the sense that we have a conception of the good that motivates us to gravitate towards certain identities. These are identities we feel are part of ourselves as authentic agents and give our lives value in that we are individual.

If, as Taylor claims, our lives are part of an unfolding story then it is vital that we understand that our story develops with other agents, that we are part of a whole. Morwenna Griffiths uses the metaphor of a web in which new threads are spun 'partly under guidance from the self, though not under its control' (Griffiths 1995: 93) and we can see our life story as a web made up of threads of our identity that have become part of the web at various times. The web is like an unfolding story, never finished and always changing. The notion of understanding our lives as a narrative is not the result of an agent's overwhelming self-obsession as Galen Strawson argues (Strawson 2004), but of understanding our own story and how it connects to the narrative of others. It also gives us a sense of authorship; we are the authors of our own narrative. As Robert Young (Young 1986: 109) notes: 'To author one's world is to shape and direct one's life'. Authorship also involves understanding how we all develop our orientation to the good. The orientation to the good does not make us autonomous but it fuels our autonomy by providing motivation for change. We choose our conceptions of the good but for my concept we also need to take responsibility for our choices as authentic selves and explain the plan behind our narrative. Taylor explains that we need to make qualitative choices, which 'means we experience some of our desires and goals as intrinsically more significant than others' (Taylor 1991b: 152). We choose on which desires we wish to act by doing this we are exercising control over ourselves.

Understanding how the agent arrived at her current situation can help her to plan her future direction. In making future plans the agent draws on her experience but also on her own preferences as a distinct individual. Taylor argues that our 'inner nature' is of great importance:

There is a certain way of being human that is *my* way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's. But this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for *me*. (Taylor 1991a: 28–9)

By 'realizing a potentiality' (Taylor 1991a: 29) of herself the individual is being authentic. Taylor argues that 'individualism as a moral principle or ideal must offer some view of how the individual should live with others' (Taylor 1991a: 45). The individual is wrapped up in a social life and a part of the ethic of social life is having a morality that recognises the existence of others and tries to understand them. Taylor wants authenticity to be something we understand as 'being true to ourselves' but at the same time something that we do in connection 'to a wider whole' (Taylor 1991a: 91). This connection is sustained by the recognition of others of us as authentic beings.

However, being part of a wider whole can disrupt our feeling of authenticity. Griffiths describes how a sense of inauthenticity can result from feeling that we have to hide parts of ourselves in order to be accepted: 'The pretending and the hiding lead to a feeling of being inauthentic' (Griffiths 1995: 117) and 'feelings can be hidden – to the point of self-deception' (Griffiths 1995: 118). In the case of such feelings of inauthenticity, self-recognition and recognition have failed.

Inauthenticity and self-deception suggest a core self to be deceived, yet notions of a core self are problematic, especially in the context of identity. In order to allow for diverse and changing identity there cannot be a core self with a specific identity but there does have to be something in each agent

that allows her to describe an identity as belonging to her and allows her to create a place for certain identities that make her feel at home. What belongs to us could change, so the part of us that is home to identities adapts to new identities that replace others as belonging to us:

Decisions can be made about which parts of the self need transforming and how far it is possible to do that. It is essential to acknowledge that there exists no unity of the self, no unchanging core of a being. Such a belief is a fancy, and will mislead the self into seeking to establish it. Being true to oneself does not mean seeking after such a core. It means undertaking the difficult business of assessment and transformation within a changing context of self. Authenticity requires re-assessing the changing self, not preserving the sameness. (Griffiths 1995: 185)

Because we are subject to social control we need to be wary of our identity. The notion of authenticity put forward here aims to guard against the internalisation of stereotypes and instead to argue for self-control in order to maintain authenticity. Our identities alter and so do our social circumstances. We do not have a core self but we do have a notion of what is authentic to us and this helps us begin to imagine how we would like to be.

### *1:2 The imagination and self-reflection*

In 'Imagining Oneself Otherwise' Catriona Mackenzie argues the imagination plays a significant role in autonomy through aiding self-reflection (Mackenzie 2000: 124–5). An affective approach can be as much a part of planning our lives as cognition:

The imagination can be, and often is, delusional. But because of its affective force and cognitive power, imaginative mental activity is crucial to the various processes by means of which we try to sort out what we want; what matters to us; and what ideals, goals, and commitments shape our lives. (Mackenzie 2000: 125)

Imagination and self-reflection can be limited by 'dominant cultural metaphors' such as 'normative stereotypes of gender relations' (Mackenzie 2000: 125). According to Mackenzie, our autonomy can be severely

constrained by 'the cultural imagination' (Mackenzie 2000: 144) because it can limit 'the process of formation of our beliefs, desires, patterns of emotional interaction, and self-conceptions' (Mackenzie 2000: 144), it can limit agents' autonomy by limiting their ability 'to imagine themselves otherwise' (Mackenzie 2000: 144). Yet if we can reclaim our imagination we may be able to gain some options for our lives in order to satisfy Raz's second condition for autonomy. We can use our imagination at the beginning of thinking about defining ourselves. If we are able to imagine a different life for ourselves then the time will come for us to challenge normative stereotypes as Mackenzie suggests. Although we are social selves, self-definition begins with solitude and reflection.

Drucilla Cornell recommends reflection as an important part of freedom in self-definition:

Given my understanding of the person as involving an endless process of working through, each one of us must have the chance to take on this struggle in his or her own unique way. It is under my definition a project that demands the space for the renewal of the imagination and the concomitant re-imagining of who one is and who one seeks to become. Hence, my insistence on the imaginary domain as crucial to the very possibility of freedom. The equal protection of minimum conditions of individuation can only insure that none of us is cut off from that chance of freedom. Freedom to transform oneself cannot be given, let alone guaranteed and certainly not by law. (Cornell 1995: 5).

Cornell argues that the imaginary domain is a place in which the possibility of renewal and transformation is possible. This is valuable to my concept of autonomy as it enables the first stages of the process of autonomy (creativity and self-direction). It is, to use Mackenzie's term, about imagining ourselves otherwise. If we can free our imaginations from the imposition of cultural norms then we are not subject to them as constraints. The imaginary domain offers us a chance to live, in our imaginations, the possibility of unimpeded movement and opportunities. Even if an agent is in a constraining situation there is hope if she is able to imagine or desire 'new forms of identity' (Griffiths 1995: 191). However, agents have

not only imaginations but also memories. The past plays a role in defining who we are at any moment.

### *1:3 History and the self's past*

MacIntyre places emphasis on a self who is autonomous in the sense that she has an individual life story. He emphasises the importance of the past of a community to its present and its influence on the agent:

I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships. The possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide. (MacIntyre 1985: 221)

Individual identity can be understood as both situated and constructed by the past. A historical perspective allows the agent greater self-understanding. John Christman argues that autonomy can be seen from a historical perspective; we look at a person's desires and values and then assess how they were achieved. Christman wants to argue for an emphasis on a historical perspective of autonomy and the conditions of preference formation (Christman 1989: 20). If the person can be seen to have formed desires and values independently then that is an autonomous person (Christman 1989: 9).

The historical self can be used to explain what has happened. Tracing a sense of how our values and desires have been formed is important because it gives us a sense of our situation, of how we arrived, autonomously or not, at our current location and a sense of why it is that we have certain values and desires. However, beyond describing how we got here, a historical understanding of autonomy must facilitate our future direction. If we can trace how our desires and values are formed then we will be able to plan how to be more autonomous in the future. Although the

past can place limitations on individuality it is nevertheless important to be able to trace a path from the past to the present.

To have identity that is versatile we need to recognise the way in which individuals change throughout their lives. A child is not going to be defined as a child when she is in her fifties and the notion of changing identity can help us to recognise this process of change on a more complex level.

Griffiths regards the self as fragmented. She says that we belong to different groups at different times: a child is a label, a group membership in which she is recognised as a member by other members. As Griffiths notes, 'most people will not identify 100 per cent with any group in which they find themselves. We are all hybrids' (Griffiths 1995: 182). It represents a certain period of time in a life, a fragment that was once relevant to her identity but is no longer so. Nevertheless, her experiences under that identity will be linked to her adult identity.

Chantal Mouffe discusses the way in which 'hybridity' allows for identity difference. Mouffe's take on identity equates difference with exclusion. If identity is based on difference then it is also based on exclusion and this creates an 'us/them' relationship (Mouffe 1994: 108). This relationship is antagonistic and therefore is, according to Mouffe, political 'which describes the dimension of antagonism and hostility between humans' (Mouffe 1994: 108). She argues this antagonism can be diffused by politics (she contrasts the political to politics): 'which seeks to establish a certain order and to organize human co-existence in conditions that are permanently conflictual because they are affected by 'the political'' (Mouffe 1994: 108). Politics 'concerns public activity and the formation of collective identities' (Mouffe 1994: 108). Identity is formed not alone but through contact with others. This is 'a constituting process.... that.... must be seen as one of permanent hybridization and nomadization' (Mouffe 1994: 110). If we learn to accept 'otherness' then difference is not a threat and we are able to use politics to accept difference: 'by accepting that only hybridity creates us as separate

entities, it affirms and upholds the nomadic character of every identity' (Mouffe 1994: 111). Hybridity and nomadic identity are useful in conceptualising identity that is varied. Hybridity emphasises the importance of others in an agent's formation of identity and the nomadic emphasis expresses the need for agency in order to move between identities.

My concept of autonomy needs Mouffe's definition of politics as a way of organising identities so that difference does not result in exclusion. Exclusion would render recognition impossible. Griffiths' and Mouffe's emphasis on hybrid identities links back to the discussion of conceptions of the good and individuality. The conception of the good for my concept of identity entails understanding what identities we want to express as part of our authentic selves. Doing so gives us value in that we are individuals: we arrive at our identities ourselves in our own way, combining them and altering them rather than having them imposed.

## ***2. From self-recognition to the recognition of others***

Combating domination involves changing our own view of the world, this involves the realisation that we are sometimes subject to domination but also that we can try to change our situation. This involves using the imagination in a slightly different way to that already discussed. For example, Genevieve Lloyd argues that the self can be viewed differently: 'If we think of agency, letting our imagination run from the collectivity to the individual rather than in the other direction, the self takes on something of the complexity and multiplicity of a collectivity' (Lloyd 2000: 121). This re-conceptualisation of agency would take on board the complexity and pluralism described by Avnon and de-Shalit, allowing for the realisation of a multiple self but also for a self developed in relation to an agent's community.



## *2:1 Relational autonomy*

Taylor shows the way in which our frameworks define our identity but in a context of others. Whenever we ask 'Who am I?' we are, according to Taylor, asking about the nature of the context in which we are situated. We all exist within a 'frame or horizon': if this were not the case then we would be 'a person in the grip of an appalling identity crisis' (Taylor 1989: 31). Without contact with those in the frame or horizon the individual is lost and has no sense of identity because there is no identification with others: we can neither recognise nor be recognised by others. Taylor notes, 'our identity requires recognition by others' and 'our identities are formed in dialogue with others' (Taylor 1991a: 45). This could take place 'in agreement or struggle' (Taylor 1991a: 45–6). This underscores Nedelsky's point about the collective as both a source and danger for autonomy. Recognition from others is important if we are to enjoy increasing degrees of autonomy but our autonomy will only progress if we can gain recognition of our authentic selves. Relational autonomy develops our ability to define ourselves in a context of others.

Diana Tietjens Meyers notes, we all have 'intersectional identity' (Meyers 2000: 153), which means that we are members of different social groups at different times. Understanding our relation to others in this way makes room for greater intersubjectivity. To understand our current location we need to take responsibility for our identities as part of recognising ourselves as intersubjective agents. Autonomy should be connected to responsibility in the form of making claims for ourselves. This is so even though we do not choose to be autonomous:

Possessing autonomy as a human being implies being responsible. Exercising autonomy involves taking responsibility. The former is inescapable. The latter is not only escapable but is more readily escaped than performed. (Parry 1995: 100)

Only by accepting responsibility for our autonomy and for the identities that result from our process of autonomy can we be authentic agents. Autonomy

can be thwarted when agents find themselves constrained by their surroundings. Yet the agent moves more freely in an environment in which she cooperates with others and in which there is an emphasis on relatedness.

Frazer and Lacey present a relational view of the subject influenced by the community in which she is situated but in which she is also separate enough to be able to reflect on herself:

in recognising itself through its relation to others, it embraces both connection and separation, and retains the potential for a reflective and critical stance towards itself and the world it encounters.  
(Frazer and Lacey 1993: 198)

The relational self retains her individuality, embraces her community without becoming engulfed by it, and offers a possibility of agency through critical reflection in contexts where the subject may experience oppression.

A critically reflective agent is one who recognises 'itself through its relation to others, it embraces both connection and separation, and retains the potential for a reflective and critical stance towards itself and the world it encounters' (Frazer and Lacey 1993: 198). My concept of autonomy finds the agent socially situated and is relational in that it emphasises both self-recognition and recognition of others.

Although some aspects of my concept are not relational it borrows many elements from this notion. Mackenzie and Stoljar provide a broad definition of relational autonomy:

The term "relational autonomy", as we understand it, does not refer to a single unified conception of autonomy but is rather an umbrella term, designating a range of related perspectives. These perspectives are premised on a shared conviction, the conviction that persons are socially embedded and that agents' identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race class, gender and ethnicity. (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000: 4)

The 'umbrella term' used here is useful for a conception of autonomy such as mine, which aims to be wide-ranging in scope. However, the above definition presents the challenge of the individual embedded in society and the possibility of hierarchical power relationships that can be inherent in some communities, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Marilyn Friedman emphasises the need for 'a context of other selves' (Friedman 2000b: 217) and notes the possibility of using relational autonomy, which, amongst some of the features she lists, includes emphasis on the possibility of being autonomous and also dependent on others: 'caring for them intensely, taking ample account of the needs and desires of loved ones, cooperating with others in collective endeavours' (Friedman 2000b: 218). Cooperation and dependence do not have to be seen as a threat to independence and individuality.

### *2:2 Connecting the inner to the outer*

It is important to be aware of the limits to freedom faced by the agent in her community. Taylor notes the individual needs to be able to make judgements for herself about what it means to her to be free and this requires her 'exercising self-understanding' (Taylor 1991b: 162). In order to exercise self-understanding the individual needs to know what the impediments to her freedom are, what it is that prevents her from pursuing the values that are important to her. Taylor provides an example of such an impediment when he discusses the exclusion of women from particular careers they thought would be 'deeply fulfilling'. He describes the exclusion as an external barrier 'which had nothing to do with their own authentic desires and attitudes' (Taylor 1989: 46). The agent needs to understand what it is that she values and, if she is prevented from realising these values, she needs to understand how this happens. The process of realising her values and realising the identity she chooses is an integral part of my concept of autonomy. This process will not be easy. Challenges to

autonomy from gender inequality, as with many forms of inequality, will not stem from misrecognition alone but also from structural factors.<sup>9</sup>

Maeve Cooke focuses on self-realisation and places the self within the context of her ethical surroundings. Cooke sets out three components of '(postconventional) ethical selfhood on the grounds that it is possible to identify three distinct aspects from the point of view of which an ethical validity claim can be contested' (Cooke 1995: 340). These are: autonomy as 'rational accountability' (Cooke 1995: 341); ethical rightness, which is Cooke's assertion that the individual can be judged by 'the rightness of her actions and judgements through reference to the specific strong evaluations that inform these actions and judgements' (Cooke 1995: 341); and the notion of irreplaceability which Cooke uses to maintain that the individual can also be criticised with reference to 'her claim that her actions and judgements are an authentic expression of her distinctive, irreplaceable "inner self"' (Cooke 1995: 341).

The idea of rational accountability fulfils Raz's first condition for autonomy by ensuring that the agent has appropriate mental abilities, but it also does more than this. Rational accountability for Cooke means the individual must account for her actions and beliefs to others; this emphasises the importance of responsibility for my concept of autonomy. In order to be an accountable agent the individual must possess 'the ability and willingness to enter into critical and open discussion with regard to the validity of claims raised within a given utterance' (Cooke 1995: 341). This emphasis on rational accountability means that the autonomous agent needs to be able to understand how to decide goals and conceptions of the good, and doing so prevents the agent from merely copying the conceptions of the good of her society, family or friends. This goes some way to ensuring that the agent's chosen identities are the expressions of her authentic self. Raz's minimum rationality allows the agent to consider her goals and to choose

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<sup>9</sup> For example, Nancy Fraser argues that social disadvantage of all types, including gender inequality, can only be addressed by looking at both recognition and distribution (Fraser 2003).

her conceptions of the good, and Cooke's rational accountability allows the agent to claim her choices are 'hers', she can take responsibility for her choices.

The second and third of Cooke's components are linked:

In the case of ethical validity it is, I suggest, tied to the individual human subject's claim that her actions and judgements are right for her as a unique being, irreplaceable by others, within the context of her particular life-history. (Cooke 1995: 341)

The authentic agent has identities which are the expression of her authentic self and these identities are formed in the unique experience of the individual's life, her conceptions of the good, her experiences and her experience of relationships with others. Autonomy as rational accountability asks individuals not only to choose their paths but also to be able to account for these choices within their landscape. This places emphasis on the individual as a situated being who makes choices within her given context and who is able to account for those choices through engagement with others and reference to her surroundings.

To return to authenticity and the inner self Cooke, again borrowing from Taylor, claims that the notion of the 'inner self' 'is the element that underpins the modern idea of authenticity, the idea that my actions and judgements are an authentic expression of my "inner nature"' (Cooke 1995: 342 – 3). Cooke uses the 'inner self' to claim that every individual is unique and therefore irreplaceable. Irreplaceability is linked especially to "ethical rightness" because it requires recognition. The agent gets recognition from others that her actions and choices pertain to the standards and norms of her society and thus claims ethical rightness. In seeking recognition for her irreplaceability the agent 'seeks recognition that these actions and judgements express an "inner nature" in a way that is unique to her, distinct from any other' (Cooke 1995: 343). In a crude analogy, 'ethical rightness' makes the individual seek inclusion by demonstrating that she belongs to

her surroundings and is part of the jigsaw of her situation. Irreplaceability makes the individual seek inclusion by her difference; she is a piece of the jigsaw puzzle but no other piece is quite shaped in exactly the same way. Thus she contributes to the puzzle by virtue of her uniqueness or the expressions of her multiple self, which creates diverse and changing identity and fosters individuality. She needs recognition of her 'uniqueness' (the third component) but also inclusion (the second component). Cooke argues this can be achieved:

The recognition sought by the ethical self can be expressed in terms of a conception of solidarity that combines both of these elements. Solidarity in this sense refers to bonds that link the members of groups that share an orientation towards shared normative demands that emanate from beyond the self, whereby the irreplaceability of each member of the group is recognized. (Cooke 1995: 344–5)

All members have the orientation towards a shared concept of the good in common yet they retain their uniqueness as irreplaceable individuals.

Individuality means being 'irreplaceable', but 'irreplaceability' can only occur in a context of close relations with others. Otherwise, without cooperation and dependence, there would be no irreplaceability: who would miss the agent who was not part of a collective or who wasn't both depended on and dependent?

Cooperation and dependence work with Cooke's notion of irreplaceability through recognition. The relational self needs to see and to be seen and even when she wants to put some boundaries between herself and others, recognition still has a role to play in recognising her right to do so as an irreplaceable individual.

### **3. Recognition and Community**

This section looks at the outer self; the agent needs to be recognised and needs to be recognised by others. However, recognition is fraught with danger. The first part of this section looks at communities in which the agent is not recognised the way she wants to be, as her authentic self. In what is here termed 'problem communities' the agent finds herself misrecognised. The second part of this section looks at the ways in which recognition can help integrate the agent into her society by emphasising Cooke's work on irreplaceability and solidarity as well as the work of Honneth. It argues that agents within a given community will never be identical (this would be antithetical to my concept of autonomy) but each forms a significant part of the whole.

#### **3:1 Problem communities**

There can be a problem of 'too much community' in which authenticity and agency become lost. This can cause particular problems in attempts to alter communities.

Communitarianism can be seen as conservative, especially from a feminist analysis. Frazer and Lacey argue that one of the main 'models' for communitarianism is the family (Frazer and Lacey 1993: 139). Elizabeth Frazer says the family is 'invoked as an inspiration or model for community' (Frazer 1999: 175). She notes that some 'communities conceive .... of the family as the basis, the fundamental building block, of community' (Frazer 1999: 176). As such it demonstrates the workings of a community open to 'external influences' (Frazer 1999: 185) and consisting of 'clusters of relationships' (Frazer 1999: 185). She also says: 'Communitarian parents understand that their moral responsibility to bring their children up well is a responsibility to the community' (Frazer 1999: 176). Family is closely linked to community but Frazer notes that when it comes to explaining what community is, 'communitarians have produced very little in the way of

systematic analysis of this concept' (Frazer 1999: 44–5). However, a common thread appears in her discussion of the limited definitions of community in the work of MacIntyre, Sandel and Etzioni and that thread is that all these writers compare community to the family (Frazer 1999: 45). Frazer also notes communitarian reference to the family as 'an example of the kind of association in which the relation of community can be enjoyed' (Frazer 1998: 118).

Problematically, Held notes that many of women's relationships formed in traditional communities and through parents' traditional values leave women attempting self-definition within 'stifling expectations of others' (Held 1993: 62). Held argues that breaking out of these oppressive relationships involves 'quests for self .... for a new and more satisfying relational self, not for the self-sufficient individual of liberal theory' (Held 1993: 62). This quest undertaken in relation to others is a quest for a new context, away from traditional communities and values.

The traditional family is also described by Frazer and Lacey as demonstrating:

the salient features of women's oppression – the reproduction and reinforcement of a coercive heterosexist culture, the sexual division of labour, the objectification of women as property, sexual harassment of women by men (Frazer and Lacey 1993: 139–40).

Frazer and Lacey wonder how such features can be altered without the possibility of 'not only internal but also external critique – that generated by debate across traditions and on the basis of values external to prevailing cultures' (Frazer and Lacey 1993: 144). This is a problem for communitarianism in particular as critique only takes place within communities or traditions and not, as Frazer and Lacey suggest it should, across communities or traditions. This means that values held within one community, tradition or practice are internally generated and not open for outside scrutiny. This leaves the only avenue of criticism inside the



community and it is harder to question the values that have been held for a long time within the confines of a community without recourse to external alternative ways of understanding certain practices. Frazer and Lacey provide an example:

the woman who lives in a sexist and patriarchal culture is peculiarly powerless. For she cannot find any jumping-off point for a critique of the dominant conception of value: her position as a socially constructed being seems to render her a helpless victim of her situation.... Within a communitarian framework, who is to say that a community with gender segregation and hierarchy in its labour market is not preferable to one without such a hierarchy, and how are they going to get to the stage of saying it? (Frazer and Lacey 1993: 151)

The lack of a jumping-off point represents the difficulties faced by groups seeking to end oppression. Although it is difficult to find a jumping-off point where all would converge this should not rule out the possibility of smaller jumping-off points that are not static. As Frazer and Lacey note, the notion of a community depends very much on inclusion and membership.

However, this 'entails non-membership and exclusion .... This raises a fundamental question hardly addressed by communitarians. "Who, in the relevant context are we?" (Frazer and Lacey 1993: 146). There is not a problem if the community really does meet the needs of its residents; it is however very problematic for communities that foster values that other communities would find abhorrent. There is still no jumping-off point for those who find themselves regarded as deviant within the community and no guarantee of membership for those who want to join. It appears the nagging wife of the previous chapter is then a member of a tragic community that communitarians brush aside.

Friedman is concerned by the degree to which community can become exclusionary 'especially to outsiders defined by ethnicity and sexual orientation' (Friedman 1989: 281). She argues that there is a need to see community not as a monolithic entity of which we are a part whether we like it or not, but to envisage the concept of community as being more than one

community: 'The problem is not simply to appreciate community per se but, rather, to reconcile the conflicting claims, demands and identity-defining influences of the varieties of communities of which one is a part' (Friedman 1989: 282). She therefore emphasises 'communities of choice', to which adults can become members but can equally cease to be members. Some examples of Friedman's 'communities of choice' are location – adults chose to move to certain areas and sometimes to particular neighbourhoods as well as 'labor unions, philanthropic associations, political coalitions' (Friedman 1989: 284).

However, these communities of choice must inevitably exclude some people as well because, to take the example of location, moving to an area of choice and then into a community of choice requires the necessary economic means. Thus location excludes everyone who cannot afford to move to their community of choice. Similarly, political coalitions and unions tend to deliberately target some people and not others: how many of these communities (and this can include the philanthropic associations as well) welcome the nagging wife, the child prostitutes or the poor?

However, Friedman's assertion that community is neither singular nor static is a valid one and raises the spectre of Cooke's horizons of evaluation in which we are members of different communities that are part of our identity. Friedman argues that the communities into which we are born 'do not necessarily constitute us as selves who agree or comply with the norms which unify those communities' (Friedman 1989: 289) because we can be 'deviants' within our community (Friedman 1989: 290). According to Friedman we need to have 'a critically reflective stance' to our community by considering our identity in that community and by so doing we will have 'embarked on the path of personal redefinition' (Friedman 1989: 290). If this is possible then both agency and authenticity can thrive in communities where agents recognise others and are themselves recognised. Much work has been done by feminist theorists on finding a critically reflective stance

in the form of either a relational self or relational autonomy. However, it is perhaps not quite as easy as Friedman suggests to move between 'communities of choice' as we take our identity, our sense of who we are with us and also we find ourselves more welcome in some communities than in others.

### *3:2 Recognising the inner self in the outer self*

When we find ourselves in communities not of our choosing we may want to identify ourselves by our very difference to the community but also we could suggest this difference should not exclude us but make us a part of a changing, dynamic community. Cooke's notion of irreplaceability is meant to be applied not only to individuals but also to horizons of evaluation. A key aspect of this is the recognition of not only the individual as irreplaceable but also the horizon from which she derives her meaning. An individual's self-esteem requires more than recognition of irreplaceability, she 'also requires recognition of the irreplaceability of the very horizon of strong evaluation' (Cooke 1995: 351). Cooke acknowledges that this is problematic in a pluralist society in which there are no universal conceptions of the good life (Cooke 1995: 351).

Authenticity can easily become lost in a plural society of competing values and we need to be able to reflect on ourselves both apart from others but also with others. Authenticity requires understanding what our conceptions of the good are and this can be done through self-reflection and recognising ourselves, but also through dialogue with others. Dialogue with others involves recognition from and of others. In order to enter into dialogue with others and express ourselves as authentic beings we need to understand both the difficulties and the possibilities of agency.

Cooke's concept of irreplaceability of both agents and horizons of evaluation works for as long as both receive recognition; this functions as a validation of irreplaceability. When recognition goes wrong it becomes misrecognition.

Misrecognition occurs when identity is not recognised as the agent wants it to be, when she is not understood how she needs and wants to be understood. It can occur accidentally by others not understanding certain identities but there can also be deliberate misrecognition such as the use of stereotypes to describe and communicate. Taylor describes misrecognition as both harmful and oppressive (Taylor 1994: 25). Misrecognition damages an agent externally by exclusion and internally by not providing the validation of her identity:

The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort or oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized. Not only contemporary feminism but also race relations and discussions of multiculturalism are undergirded by the premise that the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression. (Taylor 1994: 36)

Recognition functions to promote an agent's sense of self-worth (Mackenzie 2000: 140). Recognition is a vital stage for the autonomous process. Autonomy requires the agent to be creative and to have self-direction; it requires the agent to make choices about her identity and also to take responsibility for these choices, because she is in control of them. She needs to be able to account for each and every aspect of her multiple identities because by doing so she is asserting her individuality, her authenticity and her agency. However, she needs her identity to be recognised in the way she wants it to be understood rather than through misrecognition, which thwarts agency.

As was noted in the introduction, Honneth's theory of reciprocal recognition contains three spheres, all 'necessary for the successful development of personal identity' (Cooke 1995: 345). Honneth's theory of recognition

develops out of the historical development of these spheres of recognition that coincide with 'the social-moral development of capitalist society' (Honneth 2003: 142). The three spheres develop through constant change according to normative principles of the time. Rather than constraining the individual the normative principles alter and are flexible because each sphere is 'distinguished by internal normative principles that establish different forms of mutual recognition' (Honneth 2003: 143). The spheres of recognition are defined by the actions of those within rather than imposed by social structures. The normative principles that govern each sphere work only if they command respect and 'an attitude of mutual recognition' (Honneth 2003: 143). They also enhance individuality:

with the institutional differentiation of spheres of recognition, the opportunity for greater individuality also rises – understood as the possibility of increasingly assuring the singularity of one's own personality in a context of social approval: with each newly emerging sphere of mutual recognition, another aspect of subjectivity is revealed which individuals can now positively ascribe to themselves intersubjectively. (Honneth 2003: 143)

As was also pointed out in the introduction, all three of Honneth's spheres of reciprocal recognition result in a 'practical self-relation' (Honneth 2003: 143): the first sphere results in self-confidence, the second in self-respect and the third in self-esteem (Cooke 1995: 345). The first sphere involves the recognition of emotional needs, it encompasses 'primary relationships of love and friendship' (Cooke 1995: 345). Honneth describes this sphere as the domain of 'the singular needy subject (love)' (Honneth 2003: 161). The second sphere is concerned with 'the equality principle (the norm of legal relations)' (Honneth 2003: 143), and Honneth describes the subject in this sphere as 'the autonomous legal person (law)' (Honneth 2003: 161). Cooke describes the third sphere as being concerned with 'recognition of the self's particular qualities and capacities' and she argues that it is achieved through what she terms 'solidaric social relationships, that is, through membership in groups or communities' (Cooke 1995: 345). This is where the individual's irreplaceability becomes significant because it is in

this sphere that 'the distinctive, irreplaceable contribution of each individual is recognised' (Cooke 1995: 345). Honneth describes the subject in this sphere as 'the cooperative member of society (esteem)' (Honneth 2003: 161). The emphasis on membership is similar to Friedman's communities of choice discussed in the previous section. However, Honneth and Cooke appear to be concerned with individuals who develop in their community rather than those who move from one community to another.

For the way in which I have borrowed Honneth's three spheres to describe authenticity, agency and recognition, the third sphere is also the culmination of the agent's authenticity and agency. Only when the agent is sure of her identity (her authenticity) and when she is able freely to express her identity (her agency) will she be able to think about the recognition of others. Honneth notes the three spheres function in a very similar way to Hegel's three spheres of 'the family, civil society and the state' in *The Philosophy of Right* (Honneth 2003: 143). He argues that Hegel 'shrank from seeing a transcending struggle structurally built into each of his spheres of recognition' (Honneth 2003: 145) because he envisaged each sphere as a kind of hermetically sealed unit. For Honneth the spheres are much more connected with the individual developing through intersubjectivity, but rather than transcending each sphere the individual finds aspects of her identity to develop in certain spheres, so the strength of her intimate connection to particular others will increase in the first sphere and, having developed her identity in relation to others, she contributes to her community (the collective) in a way that no other individual could (here we return to Cooke's phrase: her 'irreplaceability'). The interconnection of these spheres can also be applied to authenticity, agency and recognition. When we reach out for the recognition of others we are asking for recognition of our authentic selves and we are using our agency as a mode of attaining recognition of our authentic selves.

The second way in which Honneth sees his version of reciprocal recognition as differing from Hegel's is that Hegel's spheres were deeply institutionalised; each sphere was meant to deal with a specific area of human life and there was not meant to be a crossover. Honneth sees this approach as problematic as 'Hegel is no longer free to systematically bring other institutional embodiments of the recognition principles into his analysis' (Honneth 2003: 146). Honneth prefers to see 'institutional complexes' as representing an 'intermeshing' of recognition principles rather than allowing each sphere to be equated with a particular institution such as love and marriage (Honneth 2003: 146). Honneth notes in an example of this 'intermeshing' that his version of spheres of recognition allows for the convergence of the spheres of law and love:

The introduction of the legal principle of recognition – an external constraint of legal respect among family members – typically has the function of guarding against the dangers that can result from the "pure" practice of only the principle of love and concern (Honneth 2003: 146–7).

Where Hegel's sphere would leave the family unregulated by law, Honneth's version allows for the introduction of law (as an outside principle so only when required) into the realm of love and family, in cases such as rape, for example. This offers protection for agents regardless of what sphere they are in.

Because there is an 'intermeshing' there is a mixture of the cognitive and affective, which Held refers to. Honneth's recognition 'is a form of reciprocal recognition that has a strong affective dimension and that is closely bound up with interpretations of the "good life"' (Cooke 1995: 340). Recognition is not then based on the liberal vision of selves as rational egoistic choosers but on the emotional impact of our encounters with others and how this affects our view of the good life. Although Cooke expresses doubts about how Honneth's reciprocal recognition based on both affectivity 'of friendship and love' and cognition based on 'respect for persons' could be 'co-extensive with society as a whole' (Cooke 1995: 346), she says that his

reciprocal recognition means 'solidarity conceived this way is not confined to the intimate sphere but is possible between strangers' (Cooke 1995: 346). However, this can only take place in communities that are not 'problem communities'.

Cooke, using Habermas, comments that there are problems with arguments for solidarity. The two problems she addresses can be applied not just to the notion of solidarity but also to the problems described above in communitarianism. The two problems are the problems of evil and of exclusion. Evil is problematic if we acknowledge:

that not all strongly evaluative interpretations that inform recognition of the self's irreplaceability are morally permissible .... it seems clear that the various horizons of significance that inform the life of the ethical self may not offend against moral norms and principles. In Ricoeur's graceful formulation: the ethical aim must pass through the sieve of the norm. (Cooke 1995: 349)

This means that all ethical decisions for a community must accord with the morality of every individual within that community. If the community is controlled by the decisions of a particular group who then impose their values then the members of the community are subject to these values. This suggests a lack of control over an agent's autonomy and raises the spectre of social control in which an agent's views are the product of her environment and not expressions of her authentic identity. There are problems for those oppressed: if they fail, through their difference, to pass through the sieve then they are excluded and forced to live on the margins of the community. Cooke expands on the problem of exclusion. She argues that there are two types of exclusion (Cooke 1995: 349). The first occurs:

when not all horizons of strong evaluation are accorded equal recognition in a given society, or when some are denied recognition altogether. Here one might think, for example, of those who belong to certain ethnic or religious groups, or associations based on race, class, gender or sexual orientation. (Cooke 1995: 349-50)



This kind of exclusion threatens Cooke's notion of the irreplaceability of horizons if some horizons are not recognised by others and this leads to the second form of exclusion, which occurs when conceptions of the good life clash or:

when the validity of ethical interpretations (the notions of the "good life") that inform certain horizons of value depend (in part or as a whole) on the rejection of the ethical interpretations that inform other horizons of value. Here one might think, for example, of certain fundamentalist religious groups, or certain kinds of nationalist ideologies. (Cooke 1995: 350)

This is a problem faced by communitarians who place much emphasis on the community to the point that the individual is perhaps constrained by the ethical values of that community and finds them to be in contradiction with her moral values. In this case the individual finds herself suffering from misrecognition and from a sense of not belonging. Honneth also argues that social morality is normative and fits the society or situation in which it is formed (Honneth 2003: 181), so one community's morality cannot simply be used to measure the morality of another. This gives members of that community a sense of solidarity through belonging to the same group organised by rules the members consider an expression of their values. It also creates a community that recognises its members as belonging. Solidarity within a group depends on recognition to maintain unity. If consensus fails then members will start to notice not what they have in common but the things on which they disagree.

Cooke can offer no firm solution to this dilemma of clashing values other than to suggest that:

Esteem-based solidarity must be complemented by respect-based solidarity: the self's commitment to certain strongly evaluative interpretations must be complemented by a commitment to the principles of respect for all persons, which can in turn be interpreted in terms of a commitment to discourse in the legal, political and moral spheres of human interaction. (Cooke 1995: 350)

Cooke wants to attribute 'moral significance' to the 'differences between human beings' through the idea that each individual is unique and 'unrepeatable' (Cooke 1995: 342); difference is not standing out from the norm but is about constructing a conception of ethics drawn from individuals which becomes the norm. For Honneth too the aim of recognition is to alter the nature of the responses of recognition of an agent from a negative to a positive experience. Thus he argues that groups formed out of combined experiences of social exclusion unite and form a positive identity: 'the necessity of exclusion is made into the virtue of constructing an independent identity' (Honneth 2003: 162). One example is the gay pride marches, although there are countless others. There is more hope here for those excluded: if they have an authentic identity (which they feel belongs to them) then there is hope that they will join with others to effect the change Honneth describes. This functions in a similar way to the nomadic identities described above. We will belong to more than one group that Honneth describes and moving between them we are using our nomadic identity. As we connect with others, recognise common facets of our identity or recognise people whose identities challenge our conceptions of ourselves, we experience hybridity. However, as Taylor says, misrecognition causes internal damage by not providing the agent with validation so authenticity could still be damaged by exclusion. Exclusion, like constraints in the previous chapter, causes internal as well as external damage. The recognition attained through belonging to a group can be destroyed by rejection.

### ***Conclusion***

Recognition of others is an important part of the process of autonomy. Creativity and self-direction lead the agent to choose identities and to take responsibility for them by being in control of them. Because she has done this, her identities are unique and therefore reflect the individuality and authenticity of the agent; this is self-recognition. Repetition of this part of

the process with each facet of her identity gives the agent multiple and diverse identity and all her identities as well as her uniqueness or individuality will require recognition from others.

The process of autonomy is a means to achieving control over our identity and therefore is not a value in itself. We have different conceptions of the good and there is little justification for favouring some over others, although no value should be placed on conceptions of the good that cause the oppression and/or the exclusion of others. We have different conceptions of the good but we all value individuality. The version of recognition developed in this chapter reflects the value of individuality in both forms of recognition (self-recognition and other-recognition). Authenticity and agency allow the individual to try to find identities that express her individuality in the first form of recognition and recognition from others develops the individuality of the agent in the second form.

Individuality and autonomy mean following a plan of our own but, in order to accommodate the changes in our lives and the influences of our family, friends, and community, we need to be flexible in our plan and not be afraid to make changes. We can be more flexible in our plan if we allow ourselves to let down our boundaries and relate more to others but also if we allow ourselves to enter our imagination at times.

The autonomous process of approaching identity should ensure the authenticity of the identity for the agent. The agent needs to recognise her identities as belonging to her as an authentic agent. She also requires agency to achieve this. Agency allows her the opportunity to seek out the identities she wants (those that fit with her conception of the good, this too is part of the process of self-recognition). Agency is also involved in gaining recognition of the authentic autonomous agent's identity by others.

No part of this process is easy and examples of where it might fail have been provided in this chapter, such as a failure of the agent to understand her authentic self or her being unaware of limits to her agency through oppression and/or exclusion. Recognition can be deliberately withheld or agents can feel excluded by communities with narrow ranges of identities. These are threats to both self-recognition and the recognition of the agent by others. We need to be wary of misrecognition but we also need to be able to relate to others. Relating to others is important to my concept of autonomy because it stresses the non-masculine approach which, in its rejection of dualistic thinking, does not see others as entirely separate from us. Recognition and our relationship to others are further discussed in the following chapter on Mary Wollstonecraft. This contains a description of the way in which domination and arbitrary power can distort our ability to relate to others as authentic agents. It also examines how the use of control can shift from self control to social control.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Mary Wollstonecraft and the Politics of Self-Control**

Mary Wollstonecraft seeks to extend the rights and privileges of citizenship to women, whom she believes will become virtuous citizens. This can be achieved by a reform in education, which will educate women to be rational, and a 'revolution in female manners', a social/cultural change, which will end the association of women with sensibility, weakness and passivity. Although this chapter draws on other aspects of Wollstonecraft's work, its main source is *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

#### ***Introduction***

Wollstonecraft's understanding of knowledge offers us the prospect of both rational self-control and an emphasis on our relatedness to others. However, Wollstonecraft prescribes roles for women related to nurturing. Wollstonecraft maps out a path for women thus providing women with a plan as the 'regimented, compulsive person' described by Raz, there is little flexibility for women's identity in Wollstonecraft's thought. Wollstonecraft's emphasis on self-control reflects a concern that women fulfil their specific duties, and her focus on relatedness to others shows women to relate from the family sphere and men from the civic/political sphere.

This chapter begins with an examination of women's nature in Wollstonecraft's thought and then addresses her understanding of what it means to be human. Here Wollstonecraft can be seen to express both rationalist and romantic understandings, and even to display quite radical possibilities through her understanding of the human imagination. However, it will be argued that, ultimately, Wollstonecraft sees the imagination as needing control by reason. Control is linked to duty and to social improvement; these are important features in Wollstonecraft's thinking. The next section describes the nature of the relationship we have with others.

Following on from the previous section, Wollstonecraft again appears not to be an advocate of isolated rationalism but understands the importance of human interaction as a source for the development of self-sovereignty, being in control of oneself without seeking to control others. However, this is not always smooth and she provides examples of when this goes badly, when humans cease to relate to others as equals and instead resort to arbitrary power. This power corrupts both the holder and the subject and demonstrates a lack of self-control on the part of the holder. The exercise of arbitrary power is a failure of reason. It should not be exercised over rational humans but can be exercised over nature, or non-rational humans. This leads to the final section, which addresses our relationship with nature. The examination of Wollstonecraft's attitude to nature explores both Wollstonecraft's tendency to see women as 'natural' and her view of nature as something over which we should exercise control. This chapter offers a reading of Wollstonecraft's thought in which order, control and duty dominate. In addition to this it argues that Wollstonecraft's identification of women with the natural suggests the need for control either by, or failing that, over, women. Wollstonecraft emphasises the need for control which is an important aspect of my concept of autonomy. Wollstonecraft's thought reflects arguments for self-control and taking responsibility for ourselves which are key parts of my concept of autonomy. However, Wollstonecraft also demonstrates the way in which self-control can be replaced by social control. In order to prevent individuals from relinquishing control to nature there needs to be the threat of social control for Wollstonecraft.

### ***1. Women's identity***

Wollstonecraft believes that women need to become better wives and mothers. The role of mother and wife is valued because it is a duty and therefore carries with it the recognition of citizenship. Yet it is a role that places woman firmly in the family and therefore carries a very specific set of identity options. Wollstonecraft envisioned the ideal family to which the

man returned home in the evening and in which the woman tended to the needs of the children as well as those of her husband; her role was to be a comfort to him and to satisfy his needs. Together they should form a perfect whole. She should be nurturing yet educated enough to understand his cares and worries in the public sphere and her existence should complement his. The role of mother was integral to Wollstonecraft's description of women:

But, to render her really virtuous and useful, she must not, if she discharge her civil duties, want, individually, the protection of civil laws; she must not be dependent on her husband's bounty for her subsistence during his life, or support after his death – for how can a being be generous who has nothing of its own? or, virtuous, who is not free? The wife, in the present state of things, who is faithful to her husband, and neither suckles nor educates her children, scarcely deserves the name of a wife, and has no right to that of a citizen. But take away natural rights, and duties become null. (Wollstonecraft [1792]1995b: 166)

There are no duties without natural rights because without natural rights we are not free, if we are not free then we cannot be generous, we cannot be virtuous. The female citizen suckles and educates her children. The role of women is to 'govern a family with judgement' and to 'take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world' (Wollstonecraft [1792]1995b: 13). Wollstonecraft is clear that it is a wife's duty both to educate and to breast feed her children (Wollstonecraft [1792]1995b: 166) and she criticises men who 'refuse to let their wives suckle their children' because they see this as a transfer of the wife's attention from them to the children (Wollstonecraft [1792]1995b: 83). This criticism of women who sought wet nurses for their children was levelled against the wealthy who found breast feeding an inconvenience (Green 1995: 96). Wollstonecraft objected to this practice of wet nursing because breast feeding was a woman's duty, part of her role as a rational mother. Here, nature and reason coincide in that duty stems from bodily practice. However, breast feeding, with the increase in the practice of wet nursing in the eighteenth century (Green 1995: 96), was an option for wealthy women rather than a necessity, meaning wealthy women did not necessarily perform their duty.

That woman be sufficiently rational, in order to ensure not just her own sense of duty but that of the next generation, whom she nurtured and in who she instilled a sense of duty, was essential to Wollstonecraft's notion of citizenship. The mother provided the earliest example of how to be dutiful, virtuous and of how to submit to reason, and this was her aim: 'She lives to see the virtues which she endeavoured to plant on principles, fixed into habits, to see her children attain a strength of character sufficient to enable them to endure adversity without forgetting their mother's example' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 57). Watching her children develop this character should be a source of great satisfaction for a mother. However, Wollstonecraft maintains that some women, privileged and wealthy women, were a danger to the project of child-rearing. These women failed to cultivate their own faculty of reason because their lives consisted of 'the pursuit of pleasure' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 58). Without sufficient reason and living a life in which they had 'every extrinsic advantage' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 51), they knew little of reason and had been 'educated for dependence' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 54) and also lacked bodily strength, exhibiting 'lovely weakness' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 43). This made them dependent on men for themselves and rendered them incapable of educating their children sufficiently (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 55). These women were also accustomed to having their every whim catered for and exercised 'arbitrary authority' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 178). This did not fulfil the criteria for citizenship. Wollstonecraft argued that women must learn to limit their desires and embrace motherhood as a duty of citizenship because, she argued, this 'gives women a place in the world' (Brace 2004: 450). Motherhood, if carried out with respect to duty, virtue and reason, made women fully fledged citizens and moved the emphasis of the eighteenth-century image of passive and delicate woman towards a far more rational and robust character.



Wollstonecraft was attempting to move the eighteenth-century understanding of what a woman should be from passive to active:

masculinity and femininity was conveyed in alluring images of natural complementarity in which strength and the capacity for reason and freedom stood in perfect harmony with the attributes of physical weakness, empathy and gentle submissiveness. (Vogel 2000: 190)

Wollstonecraft wanted to change this and to argue that women have a specifically domestic role to play but this role is not a passive one. The family itself is not a passive sphere that is acted on by the state but an active realm of growth and creativity. However, if, as will be suggested, Wollstonecraft held reason in greater value than the more 'natural' aspects of human nature, then ultimately the other aspects must submit to reason. If man represents reason and woman support and nurturing, then she too must ultimately submit to the control of rational man. Thus Wollstonecraft may limit women's autonomy for my concept of autonomy by limiting the identity options available to them. As Moira Gatens notes, 'Wollstonecraft's tendency to treat the role of wife/mother/domestic worker as one which follows directly from women's biology raises further problems for a feminist analysis of women's social and political status' (Gatens 1991 :114). Men held the world to be a place of opportunity and possibility but women should stay in the known and prescribed limits of the home.

Barbara Taylor comments on the identity Wollstonecraft portrays women as having in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and notes that she failed to get to grips with the socio-economic reality of her time. The women she wrote about with such contempt were the rich few not the poor many. Yet Taylor's comment also displays an example of Wollstonecraft's view of the aristocracy – rich women were complicit but the poor, rendered poor and powerless by men, were not, as in the later work *Maria* (Taylor 2003: 13):

In Wollstonecraft's writings, as in most eighteenth-century works on feminine manners, modern Woman is a figure of sensational unreality. A preening narcissist, obsessed with appearance and fashion; a

voluptuous hedonist; wallowing in sybaritic excess; an enervated emotionalist, strung out on frail nerves and overwrought sensibilities: the pages of the *Rights of Woman* are so crammed with caricatures like these that the reader, looking up from them, finds it hard to recall the more mundane reality, that in 1792 the vast majority of British women were not rich dilettantes but poor women who spent their days labouring in the field or home, tending their children, worrying about bread prices, rents, unwanted pregnancies. Wollstonecraft knew this too, yet it was to be some years before the shadow cast by emblematic Woman over her writings began to fade. (Taylor 2003: 174)

The women in *A Vindication* were emblematic to Wollstonecraft because they were characteristic of the kind of women she most detested: the aristocratic women. These were the women who had the time to obsess over fashion and who had the leisure to concern themselves with sensibilities, these women were passive rather than active, they did not venture outdoors to breathe fresh air and go for long walks to strengthen their constitution. Their embracing of emotion and sensibility rendered them incapable of self-control and therefore in need of guidance from others: their husbands or fathers.

These women needed to be shaken from their self-obsession and sensibility and become rational citizens capable of self-direction rather than relying on their husbands/fathers. This facet of Wollstonecraft's argument adds to my concept of autonomy by emphasising why self-direction is so important. However, her argument is also troubling for the notion of changing and diverse identity this thesis argues for. The association of women with nature and roles connecting with mothering raises problems by which feminist theory continues to be troubled. For example, Wollstonecraft's linking of rights to maternal duties raises the question of

whether it is possible for women to be citizens, and therefore possess rights, without enacting maternal duties which, for the twentieth- and perhaps also eighteenth-century woman, come dangerously close to a new form of enslavement. (Moore 1994: 35)

Wollstonecraft admires reason and argues for the rational credentials of women, yet she also associates women's nature with the natural world and with nurturing.

Wollstonecraft demands active citizenship for women yet continues to assign women specific roles as to the terms of this citizenship. This is both a radical and a limiting move by Wollstonecraft. It is radical as it is the beginning of the recognition that women's lives in the private sphere influence the public. Justice should pervade the private as it does the public but Wollstonecraft recognised that women's experiences of life in the private sphere varied dramatically in the eighteenth century, yet in some way they were united by their gender, or how their gender was perceived by men. Wollstonecraft's citizenship is limiting because it forces women into a rigid identity. Multiple and changing identity is not easy here as the possibilities of self-definition and relocation are limited; they are already prescribed by Wollstonecraft.

## ***2. Rationalism and romanticism***

This section argues that Wollstonecraft's thought offers more than her confinement to the label of rationalist or of liberal feminist thought today would allow. Her arguments span a range of features of contemporary feminist argument and also reflect contemporary dilemmas over women's identity. Wollstonecraft offers some routes to liberation for feminism yet also reflects some of the problems that have developed. One of her strengths appears to be that she demonstrates the importance of what were considered women's traditional roles to the very maintenance of the state, thus making politics not simply the arena influenced by men, but by women also.

As an eighteenth-century thinker, Wollstonecraft will have been influenced by the rationalist and romanticist debates that were taking place at the time.

Ursula Vogel's analysis reveals how the debate influenced arguments for women's liberation in the eighteenth century. Rational arguments focus on claims for rational citizenship and place heavy emphasis on the political sphere. The Romantic argument however is less concerned with the political than with other aspects of human life; it emphasises the importance of the particular and refutes the rationalist emphasis on the universal. It emphasises the interconnectedness between individuals: 'Not 'rational fellowship' among citizens, but romantic love freed from the conventional sexual roles points towards the utopia of a regenerated world' (Vogel 1986: 20).

Vogel believes that Wollstonecraft falls into the description of a rationalist feminist. She notes that Wollstonecraft assumes that reason in men and women is 'of the *same kind*' (Vogel 1986: 27) (*italics in original*). Rationalist feminism is complex because, like romanticism, it argues that sexual difference should not be a significant differentiation between people (Hutchings 2003: 12), therefore challenging gender stereotyping but also promoting unity and not differentiation. However, the emphasis on lack of embodiment means that rationalist feminism misses out on the transformative 'positive potential of sex and gender as conditions of possibility for thought and the transformation of social and political relations for both men and women' (Hutchings 2003: 14). Thus, by emphasising women's capacity for reason as the basis of unity, rationalist feminism can foreclose the possibility that women could bring something new to thinking about the world.

Yet the rationalist position is more complicated than its association with modern liberal feminism allows. This is a rationalism that seeks not merely formal equality but uses education to promote genuine equalities (Vogel 1986: 30). It seeks to change society by ending exclusion (Vogel 1986: 33). What is important about an emphasis on rationalism as a strategy for women's liberation is its understanding of the need for reform through

education designed to 'bring about a fundamental re-education of attitudes, a rooting out of the most deeply entrenched prejudices of modern society' (Vogel 1986: 30), a view also shared by Wendy Gunther-Canada, who claims that the 'revolutionary power of Wollstonecraft's feminist analysis was that it theorized the relationship between gender, education, and citizenship' (Gunther-Canada 2001: 113).

The potential for education in Wollstonecraft's thought is that it mediates the relation of the citizen to the state (Gunther-Canada 2001: 113). Therefore, if Wollstonecraft wanted women to become rational mothers and citizens with a duty then they had to be educated for these purposes. The link between education and citizenship is essential to women's liberation for Wollstonecraft, because her argument in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is that there needs to be representation of women as well as men on a subject as important as political rights (Gunther-Canada 2001: 114-116). Vogel argues that Wollstonecraft sees the family as 'a constitutive element of citizenship' (Vogel 1986: 32), thus making the family a place of duty and virtue for women that should be included in the universal concept of the 'rights of man'. According to Vogel, rationalist arguments contain utopian hopes. In fact, she claims there can be found "two utopian expectations": the claim of one underprivileged group shares the claim for equality with all other underprivileged groups and 'equality of right will eventually change the very basis and quality of all human relationships within society' (Vogel 1986: 32-33). So rationalist arguments, although limited by the claims to universalism, offer the hope of change and improvement. Parts of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* suggest that human improvement and progress are a theme in Wollstonecraft's thought. Women's oppression has formed a social 'gangrene' that 'pervades society at large' and equality is a benefit not just to women but to the entire moral improvement of society (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 204). Wollstonecraft claims: 'Liberty is the mother of virtue' ([1792] 1995b: 42). She later says that good politics (good government and good civil society) promote liberty

and to promote liberty is to effect an improvement in human wisdom and virtue (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 42). The rationalist position holds genuine potential and although this chapter does not seek to define Wollstonecraft as either a rationalist or a Romantic thinker, it appears that the parts of Romantic thinking Wollstonecraft displayed were ultimately traits to be controlled by reason.

The Romantic view says that emancipation should be achieved not with an emphasis on universal rights as what links us together, but on love as a unifying emotion, which generates a natural concern for others. Against a sense of rational order, Romanticism emphasises creativity (Vogel 1986: 34). It argues that women should be emancipated in order to develop society, with 'the diversity of male and female dispositions as a stimulus and a source of energy' (Vogel 1986: 35), yet the emphasis appears to be on women as having a definable set of characteristics.

However, as this passage in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* demonstrates, Wollstonecraft would not have defined herself as a Romantic thinker:

From observing several cold romantic characters I have been led to confine the term romantic to one definition – false, or rather artificial, feelings. Works of genius are read with a prepossession in their favour, and sentiments imitated, because they were fashionable and pretty, and not because they were forcibly felt. (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995a: 29)

This kind of Romantic thinking represents a lack of authenticity, a fake feeling. Wollstonecraft despised the affectation of sentiment, which she associated with the aristocracy. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she argued that reason should 'tame' the passions (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 155). Reason should be used to discover genuine emotions – those experienced through feeling not imitation and this gives us independence yet 'the nature of reason must be the same in all' (Wollstonecraft [1792]

1995b: 60). This is because reason links us to God. Children depend on adults for advice as their rationality is only at the stage of being built-up, after that point is attained then Wollstonecraft says 'you ought to *think*, and only rely on God' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 23). She seems to want to express the need for an individual to think for herself. This is a point made clearer a page later when she asserts that we become virtuous by the exercise of our own reason and that 'it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason. This was Rousseau's opinion respecting men: I extend it to women' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 24–5). This reflects Wollstonecraft's emphasis on the family and it re-emphasises the importance of self-direction.

Women become corrupted from their duty as mother and wife, especially women of the aristocracy, thus rendering them less virtuous. The less virtuous women are subject to vices of all kinds including the passions that their lack of reason renders them unable to control. The passions are not dangerous if measured by reason: 'Women as well as men ought to have the common appetites and passions of their nature, they are only brutal when unchecked by reason' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 147). Reason gives us pre-eminence over other animals, virtue distinguishes us from other humans and through experience of struggling with our passions we gain knowledge (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b:14). Reason appears to be required in order to prevent destructive tendencies. This results in a need for order, stability and control and this chapter interprets Wollstonecraft as placing much emphasis on the need for control. This is a view that can also be seen in parts of Vogel's work.

Part of the reason for Vogel's description of Wollstonecraft as a rationalist is Wollstonecraft's dismissal of love. Love should not be the foundation of marriage and Wollstonecraft 'fears in love a destructive power extending well beyond the boundaries of the merely private sphere' (Vogel 1986: 40). For Wollstonecraft, love threatens the order of society (Vogel 1986: 44).

Stability is valued, Wollstonecraft gives priority to friendship over love, and love threatens stability as it comes from the passions and serves to 'distract individuals' (Vogel 1986: 41). Stability is a priority, as it is for both Mill and Hegel. So when it comes to marriage, partners should be chosen for companionship rather than love, stability rather than passion. Ruth Abbey also asserts that 'Wollstonecraft's model of marriage as friendship is valuable because it allows us to imagine how liberal values might be furthered without increasing the domination of the social contract model of human relations' (Abbey 1999: 90). In this model marriage is between equals and does not entail obedience (Abbey 1999: 85). So friendship is a more ordered relationship in marriage than having love as its foundation. Friendship is void of passion and the irregularities and turmoil that passion bring to family life: in Wollstonecraft a man who prefers to have his senses stirred by nature is also the libertine who prefers

the sensual tumult of love a little refined by sentiment, to the calm pleasures of affectionate friendship, in whose sober satisfactions, reason, mixing her tranquillizing convictions, whispers, that content, not happiness, is the reward of virtue in this world.  
(Wollstonecraft [1797] 1989: 175)

Friendship offers the prospect of equality whereas Wollstonecraft sees sexual relations as uneven, as they treat women as objects (Green 1995: 99). Wollstonecraft preferred to emphasise the calm aspect of friendship over the potential chaos of passion and emotion because it promoted her ordered view of women's identity as nurturing, caring and stable, all vital to maintain the family. Love, however, does not seem to feature in Wollstonecraft's description of the family. Perhaps this is due to Wollstonecraft's desire to see the family as regulated by justice rather than left to what she would see as the contingencies of love.

Women's role of mother and wife is ensured by the marriage contract and this contains the conditions of women's relationship to the state. Gunther-Canada comments on Pateman's analysis:



As Carole Pateman has argued, women did not contract into the societies created by Hobbes, Locke, or Rousseau. According to Pateman's reading of the fathers of the canon, the social contract was based upon a preceding sexual contract that inscribed the political subjection of women to men. Thus, when the canonized forefathers spoke of women they were speaking of wives; women's relationship to the state was mediated by man. (Gunther-Canada 2001: 129)

If men mediate women's ties to the state then this also affects how women behave in the home. The two spheres are connected and behaviour in the family can have a disastrous affect on life in the state. This is something Wollstonecraft recognised. Abbey notes that Wollstonecraft sees powerless women as tyrants. This means that they will dominate those they can (children and servants): 'Women who are forced to resort to arbitrary power are dangerous models for their children, for future citizens grow up in households witnessing the very power that liberals seek to expel from the public realm' (Abbey 1999: 86). So, Wollstonecraft sees a link between the power of men over women in the state and the power of women over children in the home, and this comes full-circle in that it creates the kind of state available for the future generation. It also emphasises the negative impact of domination. Philip Pettit also notes that domination lies in the capacity to exercise arbitrary power (Pettit 1997: 63). This stresses the sheer unpredictability of domination. The emphasis on the arbitrary nature of the exercise of power-over means that an agent's autonomy is subject to the arbitrary exercise of the power of another; the agent no longer has control over herself and this is damaging to autonomy. For Wollstonecraft it also means that the family fails to provide the model of justice and reason that it should. This is the effect of domination and arbitrary power. Reason is presented by Wollstonecraft as incompatible with domination. However, this chapter argues that reason is only one facet of Wollstonecraft's thought.

Taylor also emphasises the rational characteristic of Wollstonecraft's thought but she claims as well that this is mixed with strong arguments over the imagination; a trait associated perhaps more with the Romantic than

with the rationalist tradition. This emphasises the rich tapestry of Wollstonecraft's thought. Hers is a theory of emancipation that combines the views of liberal and radical feminism, for in arguing as a rationalist Wollstonecraft also touches on the possibilities of combining reason in women with arguing for both the difference of women's contribution to society from that of men but also the similarities. This makes her harder to categorise in contemporary terms than her usual association with liberal feminism would suggest. What follows does not suggest that Wollstonecraft did not place much emphasis on reason but that reason was one facet in her thought. We gain knowledge by experience and through emotions, but also through rational reflection on these (Green 1995: 101). The imagination plays an important role in Wollstonecraft's thought for it unlocks the mind and gives rise to social and ethical development (Green 1995: 103).

### **3. *The imagination***

In her argument that Wollstonecraft has created a feminist imagination, Barbara Taylor comments that Wollstonecraft has been 'a pioneer of romantic individualism' (Taylor 2003: 140). For Taylor, 'imagination' has deep ambiguities. It has:

dual reference to conscious reasoned creativity – the sort of mental inventiveness that, in the political arena, gives rise to revisionary theories, reformist strategies, utopian projections – and to the implicit, often unconscious fantasies and wishes that underlie intellectual innovation. (Taylor 2003: 4)

Taylor sees Wollstonecraft's 'unconscious imaginings' to be linked to her utopian aspirations: 'the imagination was a sacred faculty, linking the fantasising mind to its maker' (Taylor 2003: 21). It is the 'impassioned imagination' for Wollstonecraft that makes us active in pursuit of happiness; it gives humanity an 'incessant striving', without which 'there would be only stasis, death-in-life, the one truly impermissible state' (Taylor 2003: 204). The imagination is a powerful force, it drives us forward. The motivation for

this comes from religious belief. Taylor notes that Wollstonecraft rooted her work in God because she wanted 'revolutionised ethical subjectivity' for women:

The male erotic imagination transforms biological sexual difference into a rigid division between male sexual possessor and female possessed, and then concocts a female image to fit the scenario. Women, economically dependent and intellectually degraded, immerse themselves in mythic Woman to the point where their subjectivity disappears into the image. A female self is created so saturated by masculine fantasy that it appears to lack any independent moral personality – or even a soul. (Taylor 2003: 129)

Without a self, without autonomy, there can be no soul because the female self is an image, not a rational subject. So when men limit women's freedom they deny women not simply a moral sense of self but also the possibility of divinity. Women must be rational in this life in order that they can pursue their freedom and become virtuous and only then can they have a soul to be 'stamped with the heavenly image'.

Taylor claims 'the erotic imagination is implanted in us by God to lead us toward Him' (Taylor 2003: 113). She says Wollstonecraft celebrated the erotic imagination 'as the dynamic core of human subjectivity', however it had 'its true source in the fantasising mind, not in the body, and its ultimate direction must be heavenward'. It is 'the realm where profane passion transmutes into sacred rapture' (Taylor 2003: 112). So women should stop acting as the objects of the male gaze, as objects of (earthly) desires, and see themselves as seen by the Creator, so that they no longer want to adorn themselves for men, they move from being the objects of the male gaze to objects of the divine gaze. As Taylor observes: 'for Wollstonecraft, the truly creative spirit, like the soul of a truly emancipated women, remained one bound by the love of God' (Taylor 2003: 140). This is the recognition of something non-bodily – the object of the gaze. However, Taylor notes that the linking of imagination to God as a solution to women's

troubles was not seen as a solution by the end of Wollstonecraft's writing career. Taylor argues that in linking the imagination to God by love: 'an epistemic impulse toward Him is essentially imaginative and erotic in character' (Taylor 2003: 108). Wollstonecraft discovered a perfect love. Love 'is not only who we have but who we are' (Taylor 2003: 131); if love is projected towards the perfect – the divine – then the 'painful issues of personal identity' love brings are avoided (Taylor 2003: 131). For much of her life Wollstonecraft channelled her love to God but, Taylor argues, becoming a mother and meeting Godwin altered this (Taylor 2003: 131). Her faith in the imagination as a source of liberation connected to God might have dwindled but her understanding that women's as well as men's imaginations can be directed toward 'amorous idealisations' had not (Taylor 2003: 131).

The erotic imagination remains a useful tool for analysing Wollstonecraft's thought, especially in reference to her view that the imagination must be controlled and there is danger for it becomes misdirected towards bodies, and that this is where it goes wrong. The mind is distracted by the imagination when it strays into the body and nature. Women's imagination is criticised by Wollstonecraft as being misguided by novels, romance and social notions of what a woman should be – all these give a voice to the lie that the object of the imagination should be physical. This holds no value for Wollstonecraft and is a distraction from the true focus of the imagination: spiritual objects. Wollstonecraft provides an example of this when she argues that 'wealth leads women to spurn' the 'natural way of cementing the matrimonial tie' of breast feeding their child in favour of wearing 'the flowery crown of the day' (Wollstonecraft [1792]1995b 162).

The imagination is our capacity to fantasise, to construct a utopia, it is the fuel for social progress and the psychic space that allows the individual freedom to develop from within. However, these capacities and the possibilities they represent for both the individual and social change also

render the imagination a threat to social cohesion, social order and social unity. This can mean that the imagination must be controlled and it can mean that its scope must be delimited. The following section looks at other interpretations of the imagination in order to understand better the combination of the concepts of imagination and reason in Wollstonecraft's thought.

### *3:1 Policing the imagination*

The imagination is a dangerous thing. The imagination is the source of our fantasies – as in Taylor's description of the erotic fantasy that leads to God, Uday Singh Metha notes also that we fantasise through our imaginations and our fantasies affect 'the particular content of our freedom' (Metha 1992: 118). So our definition of what will render us as free individuals depends on what we fantasise our freedom to be. The content of our freedom is determined by our imaginations yet the content of our freedom is also mediated by the outside, by what constitutes acceptable fantasies of freedom and what freedoms we would actively pursue as a result of our fantasies. A link is established between what individuals are told is acceptable, even as a result of the exercise of parental authority, and what individuals tell themselves is acceptable. Thus authority, judgement and self-restraint can become what Metha describes as 'a tripartite relationship': it is necessary to experience submission to others before one can learn to submit to oneself (Metha 1992: 138). This contradicts the way in which I use recognition for my concept of autonomy because it involves consideration of the recognition of others (the outer self) before self-recognition and also posits an element of social control prior to self-control. The self regulates from within and finds itself 'husbanding, enclosing and moulding the imagination' (Brace 1997: 144), but the regulation is socially conditioned.

There must be control of the passions. Metha's description of the passions explains the wider fear of the non-rational. The passions have three features. These include an absence of self-control. Unlike interests, they are mysterious they 'designate a person as being under the governance of an inscrutable motive'. Finally, passions are identified as 'misguided excess' the activity is insensitive to boundaries and without direction: 'some presumed limit is transgressed and .... the destination of the activity is either unknown, insatiable, or wilfully denied'. Passions are then in control of the self within, they are unrecognised or perhaps unacknowledged forces that propel us through the boundaries of acceptability towards the infinite (Metha 1992: 8). We, as individuals, must then regulate ourselves and construct 'internal boundaries' (Brace 1997: 139).

Reason then, polices the imagination to maintain the outer order of society. However, Drucilla Cornell also argues for the policing of the imagination, or the creation of the 'imaginary domain', a psychic space needed for the creation and expression of imaginaries (Cornell 1995: 104). She wants to free the imaginary zone of women from the imposition of 'masculine sexual fantasies', a confinement imposed by 'men's reaction to us' (Cornell 1995: 171). For Cornell, the imagination is a vital part of our individuality and of our freedom. She makes personhood dependent on free scope of the imagination:

The project of becoming a person is dependent on the psychic space of the imagination, particularly when it comes to the living out and the contesting of sexual personae. Thus I have defended the imaginary domain as itself a minimum condition of individuation. The demand is that we all have, as sexuate beings, the imaginary domain granted to us as part of the equivalent evaluation of the worth of our personhood. To demand equality in this manner is to demand sexual freedom as long as one accepts that sexual freedom is intimately related to the release of the constraints on the imaginary imposed by gender hierarchy and normalized heterosexuality. By demanding an imaginary domain, we are insisting that we will not be confined in our life's opportunities because of the imposition of physical, cultural and legal definitions of ourselves as unworthy of personhood. (Cornell 1995: 232)

Personhood (as opposed to citizenship) can only be achieved through giving freedom to the imaginary domain; to become a person is to work towards a future, it is 'a project, a struggle and an endless process' (Brace 1997: 152). As was shown in Chapter 2, the imagination holds the possibility of thinking about ourselves in better situations and can help with self-recognition.

These are three different interpretations of what the imagination's function is. For Taylor's interpretation of Wollstonecraft it is a vital component of freedom as it directs individuals to the creator, it can serve to bind people together in this project of divine salvation. However, it can lead individuals astray if it is focused on the desire for others, specifically on the physical and bodily desire. This corrupts the individual as it diverts the imagination from its true focus. This is brought about by a deficit of rationality: reason should control the imagination. This is true also of Metha's description of the imagination; it must not run wild. The imagination holds the content of our freedom in that it directs us as to what kind of individuals we want to be. However, it must be controlled as it has associations with disorder and lack of control, and must be policed. As with Barbara Taylor, we get a sense that it is better for the imagination to be policed by the individual. We are brought up to do just that through lessons in submission. If this fails though, there will be ways of controlling our imagination's scope. A failure to limit the imagination is interpreted as madness (Metha 1992: 111). The question of who it is that polices and sets limits to the imagination is raised by Cornell. Her protection of the imaginary domain is necessitated by the imposition of the imaginary domains of others. However, this use of the imagination does allow for difference, experimentation and a sense of individual freedom worthy of celebration. In Cornell there is no fear of a breakdown in order and no fear of the imagination swamping reason. Wollstonecraft's use of reason and the imagination offers an innovative approach to both concepts.

The imagination offers the potential for invention, for an alternative to concrete and constraining reality and also for love. Yet there is also a sense that even our imagination must be limited by our reason. To some extent we police our own imagination, setting limits on what we dream of as an alternative to our reality. The imagination offers the potential to extend creativity, which is important to my concept of autonomy. Yet Wollstonecraft wants to tame creativity with reason. In Wollstonecraft's thought it appears that self-direction, in the form of reason, limits creativity. This is a problem for my concept of autonomy and there is no clear solution as to when self-direction and reason should limit creativity, and if it should at all.

The possibility of thinking of women other than as polite society and novelists portray them, and the possibility of imagining a society regulated by justice, is the value of the imagination for Wollstonecraft. Yet in tapping into the imagination Wollstonecraft also reveals a sense of fear, a fear of losing control, and this can also be seen in her attitudes to nature. Without the imagination to construct utopia we would be in stasis.

Although the final section describes Wollstonecraft's desire for control over nature it should also be remembered that there are some aspects of nature that she valued. These were the parts of nature that enlivened the spirits. She valued that there was beauty to be found in nature and that nature also 'demands respect' (Wollstonecraft [1792]1995b: 157), and is linked to God (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 34).

#### ***4. Individuals and relationships with others***

Before embarking on an examination of Wollstonecraft's attitude to nature in the form of our relationship both with and against nature, this section discusses our relationship to others. In places, Wollstonecraft appears to follow the classical liberal assertion of the isolated individual. In an attack



on social attitudes of 'ladies' in eighteenth-century, she points out the need for self-direction:

Besides, by living more with each other, and being seldom absolutely alone, they are more under the influence of sentiments than passions. Solitude and reflection are necessary to give to wishes the force of passions, and to enable the imagination to enlarge the object, and make it the most desirable. (Wollstonecraft [1792]1995b: 66)

Reason should be used to 'tame' our passions but from this statement it appears that reasoning should be done in solitude. This shows a similar attitude to autonomy as Mill as was demonstrated in Chapter 1. There is also a similar insistence on the value of individual experience. Men are more able (as a result of social attitudes) to pursue their passions and yet not to be overtaken by them. Men

give a freer scope to the grand passions, and by more frequently going astray enlarge their minds. If then by the exercise of their own reason they fix on some stable principle, they have probably to thank the force of their passions, nourished by *false* views of life, and permitted to overleap the boundary that secures content. (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 123–4) (*italics in original*)

It is only through our passions that we have the opportunity to exercise reason (Wollstonecraft [1792]1995b: 123-124). It is only by experience, being driven by our passions and making mistakes (something denied to women), that we can use reason to understand our passions.

Wollstonecraft argues for a form of relational autonomy. She argues that individuals develop through their relation to others. This is the basis of her argument in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: human flourishing depends on the active participation of all society's members. This connects to self-sovereignty in that individuals negotiate their lives in the context of others rather than to the exclusion of others. However, in terms of identity, self-sovereignty must also give the individual control over her own process of identity claim: the individual must want/desire the identity she has and if she does not then she must be able to alter this identity. Wollstonecraft did

not set out to discover if women wanted the identities of mother and wife, she assumed these were the roles women should have because she saw these roles as women's duty. Women do not have control over their identity in terms of initially claiming their identity for themselves in Wollstonecraft; women have a duty to carry out in the form of their gender-based roles and this is also an expression of their freedom: 'how can woman be expected to cooperate unless she know why she ought to be virtuous? Unless freedom strengthen her reason until till she comprehend her duty' (Wollstonecraft [1792]1995b: 4). The emphasis on duty is part of Wollstonecraft's emphasis of reason over the possibility of women imagining themselves other than wives and mothers.

This thesis argues that the concepts of autonomy and identity are linked as autonomy is conceptualised as a process by which people alter and develop their identity. However, the reading of Wollstonecraft's thought in this chapter suggests the process of self-development is not open-ended. Autonomy or freedom appear to be linked to identity for women in that Wollstonecraft's rational woman is free when she performs her duty – when she is a good wife and mother – but the opportunity to develop identity beyond these two roles is not available.

However, Wollstonecraft's emphasis on self-sovereignty and active participation in the context of other people is a positive development for my concept of autonomy because it suggests some possibility of a relational approach. Wollstonecraft does not suggest that individuals relate to each other as possessive individuals, excluding others and defining themselves against others, yet she sets individuals apart in their pursuit of virtue which limits the possibilities for a fully relational approach. Brace notes the 'triumvirate of reason, virtue and knowledge at once binds people together by distinguishing their humanity from the rest of the world, and holds them apart from each other in their individual virtue' (Brace 2000: 442). We then use our virtue to distinguish ourselves from others. Wollstonecraft argues

that women are included in this narrative but fails to see that because she underpins reason with the conquest of nature and because she equates nature with gendered difference, she still excludes women. She still associates women with nature through her insistence on mothering and family yet also still insists on the importance of reason to control nature.

Women seek their autonomy in relation to men, they seek recognition from men that they are autonomous. This takes the form of 'an innate desire for love and respect, a craving for recognition from others that ideally affirms the individual's absolute autonomy' (Poovey 1984: 60). This poses a problem with recognition which will be revisited in the following chapter on Hegel. The problem is that in seeking recognition of our autonomy in others we need others in order to be autonomous. Recognition is potentially a co-dependent system, and if this is so men still have the opportunity, if women seek their autonomy through them, to mediate the terms of women's freedom. Recognition risks becoming misrecognition when, as was discussed earlier, we seek recognition from others; recognition should be sought from God. Wollstonecraft sees the emancipation of women and eternal salvation as inextricable:

If the human soul were not immortal – if our brief existence invariably terminated at death – then female oppression, however censurable in itself, would be only one more of those infinite woes which make up our lot in this vale of tears. Social injustice throws into relief the injustice of women's subordinate status and offers opportunities for change; but it is the prospect of life beyond all such mortal contrivances which makes women's suffering as a sex wholly reprehensible – for in enslaving women on earth men have also been denying them heaven (Taylor 2003: 106).

Recognition of the immortal souls in women as well as men is therefore essential to their freedom. In a similar way, Taylor reads Wollstonecraft's demand that wives should have affection for their husbands as being conditional on husbands 'inspiring wifely respect', they should be united by a 'shared love of the Good' (Taylor 2003: 108). Recognition plays a pivotal role in emancipation – it is not just understanding of God but also

understanding of shared advancement toward that state, the mutual inspiring of virtue, that leads the path to freedom. The message is that our freedom is bound with others and not fulfilled against others.

Wollstonecraft's sense of virtue through performing duty to God means that she insists on specific roles for women. Although equally endowed with reason, Wollstonecraft's citizen is still defined as either a male citizen or as a female citizen. It is in the best interests of the state for women to fulfil their duties as wives and mothers and this takes the form of civic obligation in that to fail to perform an obligation not only renders the citizen a non-citizen, outside civic life, but it also threatens the security of the state. In relation to the state, Wollstonecraft's woman does not have empire but nor does she have equality; her 'nature' makes her unequal in the patriarchal empire- 'an empire of difference' (Brace 2000: 453–4). Her attempt to treat women as different from men yet at the same time equal highlights the problems of treating women as a group equal to men or as a group different to men that continues to influence feminist theory. This raises the issue of not just equality and difference, but also of what constitutes a group. For Wollstonecraft, the emblematic aristocratic women form a specific group. Our relationship with others threatens to be a distraction from performing our duty to God and the state. Yet if we successfully join together for the purpose of performing our obligation then we better realise our true freedom (through devotion to God) in the company of others.

#### *4:1 Slavery*

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft argues that women have to be understood as having the status of slaves. However, her notion of slavery both in terms of how constrictive it is to the individual and in terms of the identity of the oppressor or slaveholder varies. She understands the nature of power relationships underlying slavery but her shifting of the description of slavery varies from men, sensibility, women,

women's bodies, opinion and slavery itself to the dependence of others on us that gives us a sense of obligation (Poovey 1984: 54). Thus the dangers of enslavement for women exist in many forms. She appears to use the notion of slavery consistently to denote powerlessness but women are enslaved by men in different forms, rich women also dominate poor women and women can be slaves to their bodies as they 'plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch' (Wollstonecraft [1792]1995b: 63). These women have attained 'power by unjust means .... and become either abject slaves or capricious tyrants' (Wollstonecraft [1792]1995b: 51).

Equality, for Wollstonecraft, is linked to equal distribution of power. It is, in a sense, a positive notion of power: together equal citizens (equal because they are all rational) create a polis in which each is as free as the other and in which each performs the task to which they are best suited (for women this is nurturing a family), thus creating a state that is effective, secure and based on equality rather than arbitrary power. 'It is not empire, but equality', Laura Brace notes, 'Women should not be aiming for negative power over others, a mere inversion of patriarchy, but for power over themselves' (Brace 2000: 453). To undermine equality of rational beings is to undermine a rational state and a rational citizenship; it is counterintuitive and it damages the state by replacing relations of equality with relations of domination and subordination.

Wollstonecraft is clear in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* that domination damages both the person who holds the power and the person who has power held over her:

virtue can only flourish amongst equals, and the man who submits to a fellow-creature, because it promotes his worldly interest, and he who relieves only because it is his duty to lay up a treasure in heaven, are much on a par, for both are radically degraded by the habits of their life. (Wollstonecraft [1790]1995a: 61)

Power, when used over others, degrades both parties. Her argument is that the harm done by slavery is a moral one in that it prevents the possibility of virtue. A virtuous person cannot be either slave or master. Arbitrary power affects both family relations and translates into the state for, as Abbey notes, the affect of arbitrary rule within the family is to 'form personalities unaccustomed to the possibility of free, rational and equal exchange among individuals' (Abbey 1999: 86). Domestic animals, 'brutes' and all non-human life can be dominated (even here it must be respected as it comes from God and all humans must respect God's creations), but rational beings are free because freedom, as was pointed out earlier, 'strengthens reason' so that we know our duty. To carry out our duty makes us virtuous. To enslave another person is to act contrary to reason and is to assume power over a person. The source of this power cannot be rational agreement because it is not rational to agree to enslave yourself. John Hoffman argues that force leaves the individual with no will, and without will there is no choice (Hoffman 2001: 12). Where force is used there is no freedom. Hoffman also says there is no distinction between force and violence (Hoffman 2001: 173) and violence 'is never legitimate. It undermines freedom, brutalizes both perpetrator and victim, and can easily become counter-productive' (Hoffman 2001: 175). Force dehumanises those involved. The use of force against a person leads to a situation in which 'the individual becomes the mere property of another' (Hoffman 1995: 89). Even hierarchical relationships maintain their social legitimacy because they are based on coercion not force, but force/violence means we can no longer talk of a relationship (Hoffman 1995: 89). A relationship is defined as when 'each sees the other as a subject' (Hoffman 1995: 89); when the other is seen as an object there is no relationship because relationships require at least two subjects.

Wollstonecraft questions the validity of a particular hierarchical relationship: authority, unless it is divine authority, is not a reason to submit to another according to Wollstonecraft. She criticises Burke for arguing for

dependence on authority (Wollstonecraft [1790]1995a: 64). We are not autonomous if we submit to authority because we lack self-direction.

Wollstonecraft's perception of our relationship to others is more complicated than the charges against liberal feminism's abstract individualism suggest. She recognises how our relationship with others is complicated by a power differential that gives men more power to define women's identity and prescribe their social role than women have over themselves. This definition of women implies that women have an enhanced sensibility and are weak. This has a corrupting impact on women, rendering them non-rational holders of arbitrary power. The result of this is that Wollstonecraft sees these women as being as dangerous and as threatening to rational society as the upper classes:

Wicked women, and their invidious effects, are men's handiwork. The argument moves back and forth, mobilising the radical critique of absolute power to expose women's debasement at the hands of men, and then returning to 'artificial distinctions' of rank and power to depict them in gendered terms, with women equated not to the lower orders, as in late twentieth-century feminist polemic, but to the corrupted upper ranks, the 'great'. (Taylor 2003: 16)

These women are the holders of false power and as such threaten society when they are 'the corrupted upper ranks' and are subject to false power when 'at the hands of men'. Again, aristocratic women hold arbitrary power, they demand the fulfilment of their passions and Wollstonecraft compares them to 'uncivilized beings who have not yet extended the dominion of mind' and she says they are incapable of thinking for themselves and so 'blindly obey authority' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 215).

Another form of slavery appears in Wollstonecraft's critique, of women being 'slaves to their bodies' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 49), as they are constantly confined by illness due to inactivity and, as a result of their lifestyle of leisure, are unable to cope with illness. Later she describes women as being 'slaves to their persons, and must render them alluring

that man may lend them his reason to guide their tottering steps aright' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 165). Their enslavement to their bodies, their vanity, renders women dependent on men and here we see the complicity of women, in particular aristocratic women, in their oppression. This dependence on men represents a want of reason created by immersion in bodily beauty and, for Wollstonecraft, this is not a source of virtue, it renders women 'spaniel-like' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 38).

Gunther-Canada notes that Wollstonecraft is critical of Rousseau's work in that 'he used the novel to romance female readers into embracing the marriage plot and accepting their inferior status within the social contract' (Gunther-Canada 2001: 29). Part of the romance of these novels, especially, according to Wollstonecraft, the novels of Rousseau, was that they offered the possibility of unity. Woman's destiny lies in marriage where she becomes part of a whole but this served only to make woman 'be reconciled by romance to her chains – the bonds of matrimony' (Gunther-Canada 2001: 30). This inferior status is evident when Gunther-Canada describes Julie's 'predicament' in *La Nouvelle Heloise*, where Julie describes herself as having surrendered her esteem to Saint Preux (Gunther-Canada 2001: 28).

However, Wollstonecraft's own vision of the family set out in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* does present a vision of unity. Wollstonecraft would see this as a rational unity, with each individual performing the role to which they were best suited; as women discover their roles through reason they are not the victims of novels, of romance. Wollstonecraft describes her vision of complementarity in the family: 'I have seen her prepare herself and children, with only the luxury of cleanliness, to receive her husband, who returning weary home in the evening found smiling babes and a clean hearth' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 162). Yet this does, as remarked earlier, present a notion of unity or complementarity that



relies on essential notions of 'woman'. Unity is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Maira Ferguson argues that, in one way or another, all men enslave women. She notes that this assertion gives women 'a group identity, a political position from which they can start organizing and agitating' (Ferguson 1992: 88). The effect of this group identity is that it must encompass all those included in Wollstonecraft's comparison of women's oppression, which would put aristocratic women in the same group as poor women. So when women's lot is compared to that of brutes and brute is 'a synonym in contemporary vocabulary for slaves. Thus, white women, slaves and oxen become part of a metonymic chain of the tyrannized' (Ferguson 1992: 92). The substitution of one label for another reminds us of the fear Wollstonecraft has of the effects of slavery: to render the oppressed non-rational holders of inauthentic power. The danger of this is that the attempts to assert this inauthentic power can have devastating affects. One example of this would be the control of women's sexuality by men. For Wollstonecraft, sexuality would be an inauthentic source of power for women because not only does it not stem from rationality but it also prevents rational and equal relations. This is 'because sexuality for Wollstonecraft (dictated at large by men) imperils any chances of female autonomy' (Ferguson 1992: 95). It prevents self-sovereignty, and self-direction. Two examples of this lack of autonomy can be found in examples of what Taylor would see as the misdirection of erotic power: the meretricious slave and the prostitute.

#### *4:2 Meretricious slave*

Corruption and lack of control lead citizens to ignore their duty.

Wollstonecraft sees women as corrupted by having false power over men and as in need of obeying their civic duty as well as their duty to God. Just as the imagination becomes misdirected towards bodies, so too does

recognition. Rather than recognising the soul in an individual, men focus on women's bodies and this makes women holders of a false power over men. Barbara Taylor notes Wollstonecraft's failure to comment on Rousseau's theory of women's power: '[N]owhere in her quarrel with Rousseau does Wollstonecraft contest this overblown, paranoid account of female power; indeed: her own ruminations on the theme tend to be even darker than his' (Taylor 2003: 92). This renders women holders of (erotic) power over men and this notion of power was, Taylor notes, commonplace in eighteenth-century thought and would have been the target of feminist criticism, especially when 'such behaviour was as grossly idealised as it was in the case of Rousseau's Sophie' (Taylor 2003: 92).

A source of inauthentic power for women, according to Wollstonecraft, is the attainment of 'power that comes from powerlessness':

Women have been taught to be cunning, soft, outwardly obedient and to pay attention to propriety in order to ensure that they are protected by men. This is the classic sexual contract, trading obedience in return for protection, but she complicates the power relationships involved by arguing that women develop a winning softness 'that governs by obeying'. (Brace 2000: 438)

It is the need for protection and the rewards women can offer in return that inspires chivalry in men, which can be compared to Mill's description of chivalry in the chapter on Mill in this thesis. On Wollstonecraft's reading the rewards are not as 'high' as in Mill, the reward is obedience and the 'gentleman' (the recipient in Mill's depiction of chivalry) lacks both sincerity and humanity (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 149). Brace points out that Wollstonecraft saw this as an 'inauthentic' source of power because it comes from powerlessness. Women, under it, are still slaves. This slavery damages both master and slave again, because it degrades both. Wollstonecraft calls this a 'meretricious slave' (Brace 2000: 438) and it is a mode of patriarchal domination that has been the subject of feminist attention – women who use their perceived weakness as a means of

control over men but do not see how their weakness makes them weak, how it is a false identity.

Wollstonecraft is critical of the woman who seeks to 'govern by obeying' because she should not be submissive but also because she should not seek to govern another. It is 'not empire, but equality' and not control over others but control over herself – autonomy that a woman should have. 'Educated women would not need to resort to the deceptive practices that subservient females had historically used to sway tyrannical husbands and despotic fathers' (Gunther-Canada 2001: 119-120). The meretricious slave seeks to control others because she cannot control herself and therefore she becomes a threat to the order of society. Wollstonecraft's solution is education, this would give women real power over themselves rather than false power over others. Education, or a lack of education, is also the basis of Wollstonecraft's understanding of the cause of prostitution.

#### *4:3 Prostitution*

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft talks of the 'shameless behaviour of prostitutes' who lacked the virtue of modesty (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 138). As a virtue, modesty would only come from knowledge and education, something denied to these 'poor ignorant wretches' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 138). Yet as well as the women who worked as prostitutes, the act of prostitution was seen by Wollstonecraft to be something many women had to do. Julia O'Connell Davidson notes that prostitutes 'are seen as people who live outside the 'respectable community' of wives, sisters, mothers, aunts etc' (Hoffman 2001: 195). Yet, for Wollstonecraft, women were outside this community – particularly the women of *Maria*. Barbara Taylor argues that Wollstonecraft believes 'In a man's world, all women are prostituted' (Taylor 2003: 242). All women experience powerlessness. If this is so, then Wollstonecraft's view of women's identity in the eighteenth century (as always dominated and

powerless) is reflected in this, because there will be women who prostitute 'themselves', women who enjoy their status and women who attempt to escape. Taylor also notes how Jemima in *Maria* is neither a 'pitable whore' nor a woman 'of virtue' (Taylor 2003: 242) because Wollstonecraft doesn't want to make this distinction. Taylor compares the characters of Maria, the 'respectable' character, and Jemima, the former prostitute, and finds that 'like Jemima, Maria too has been married, defiled, and bartered for money' (Taylor 2003: 242). Women all trade their bodies, or at least some form of access to their bodies, in return for financial support. For Wollstonecraft some women were prostitutes, some women were dominated physically by men, some women traded access to their bodies in return for financial security and some women thought they could use their bodies to control men. Wollstonecraft objects to this use of women's bodies, believing the soul to be more important. Yet she also derives women's role and identity from their bodies.

Given the class distinctions Wollstonecraft describes between women, it seems unlikely that she would identify women as a group. Women are compared to slaves in different ways, as was described above, ranging from the woman who has very little power as a result of domination by men and also as a result of poverty to the aristocratic woman who is a slave to her passions.

If Wollstonecraft uses prostitution to describe all women this does not mean she sees all women as prostitutes in the same manner. Again, this has much to do with class, with aristocratic women being prostituted by the erotic imagination of men and poorer women who lack economic power resorting to prostitution. Therefore neither 'slave' nor 'prostitute' can define all women for Wollstonecraft. Wollstonecraft recognises that women do not all experience oppression in the same way. Yet women can see oppression at work, as Wollstonecraft does. This is a similar argument to that put forward by bell hooks who argues that there is a need for feminism to look

at 'the politics of domination on all fronts' (hooks 1989: 50) and to combat 'interlocking systems of domination' (hooks 1989: 22).

However, the struggles might be linked together but should also be observed to be different – Hoffman uses Elizabeth Spelman's argument to show that oppression can be at once similar and different: 'Spelman makes a convincing case for seeing the interlocking character of oppressions so that, for example, the sexism experienced by black women is quite different to the sexism experienced by white women' (Hoffman 2001: 197). The experience of sexism isn't universally the same but acknowledging this does not mean that there cannot be solidarity between women.

Wollstonecraft's description of the different ways in which women are 'prostituted' suggests her thought goes some way to understanding women's oppression as experienced in different ways and especially the way in which poor women suffered through sexism and poverty.

Wollstonecraft does envisage a common duty for women based on an assumption that women are always concerned with the family and that the family is the source of private affection that translates into public virtue.

Wollstonecraft appeals to duty when she considers autonomy, in that our autonomy exists in our doing the right thing according to God. For women this path is always motherhood so women's autonomy is automatically conflated with children and family and duty. All is a duty to God. Autonomy is about self-definition, but this self-definition is to choose motherhood; it is also about self-control and not giving in to the emotions or behaving as if a non-human animal, behaving, that is, as if without reason.

## **5. Nature**

The prospect of non-rational humans, who would not be considered citizens, arises out of Wollstonecraft's view that reason separates us from nature and our bodies link us to nature. This section provides a reading of

nature in Wollstonecraft's work. She quotes from Francis Bacon: 'man is of kin to the beasts by his body; and if he be not of kin to God by his spirit, he is a base and ignoble creature!' (Wollstonecraft [1792]1995b: 23) She is using this passage to protest at women's treatment as 'domestic brutes' because women, if in possession of the same rationality as men, must have the same link to God. This link provides a human nature in which humans are rational and virtuous and carry out the duties of citizenship. Yet she ascribes specific natures to men and women when it comes to defining their roles in civic life and these roles are 'based on a sexual division of labour as dictated by nature' (Brace 2000: 435). There is also a link to nature itself, as her quotation from Bacon shows: this is the nature that links humans to non-human animals. Yet this link has different interpretations. It is good for women to be in accordance with nature when, for example, breast feeding. Yet to follow nature is also abhorrent in that it gives rise to uncontrolled appetite and leads to the vices she so despises in the aristocracy. Humans are different from nature. What separates us from animals (in this sense of nature) is our reason, but what links us to animals is our bodies. Animals lack reason and therefore their domination by humans can be justified. However, although they can be used to human ends they cannot be treated with cruelty, and Wollstonecraft argues that justice should regulate our relationship with animals, otherwise justice will not prevail elsewhere. She argues that if boys are allowed to tyrannise over animals then they will grow up to be men who tyrannise over women, children and servants (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 197). So, to some extent, how we behave towards nature defines how we have to each other. This point is reiterated in an analogy already referred to from Wollstonecraft's description of women as caged birds. Wollstonecraft describes women as 'the feathered race' who 'plume themselves' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 63). Interestingly they are described as being in cages because in cages women are not quite nature. Wollstonecraft is not locating women in the realm of simply the natural: she is not saying that women are nature but that women are nature controlled by men. Women

have been dragged out of nature but then controlled and put in cages in order to preserve the aspects of nature men find appealing whilst being aware that nature is dangerous for men and must be controlled.

We behave differently than animals because, endowed with reason, knowledge and virtue, we are active, we move with a sense of purpose and we are directed by our reason, we progress. We achieve this by being active – ‘Individuality is created through activity. It is defined in opposition to being sedentary, delicate and soft, insulated from the world’ (Brace 2000: 442). Wollstonecraft’s ideal of freedom is about being active and individual. It is a very masculine concept of autonomy based on a fear of passivity in a similar way to Mill. Poovey comments on Wollstonecraft’s opinion that women need to escape their bodies – ‘a body that in giving birth originates death’ (Poovey 1984: 76). Women need to escape their bodies in order to escape the sense of passivity and decay. In a similar vein it is argued that when the body overflows its prescribed boundaries what is a danger is ‘not just disruption of the unmarked, universalised body, but disqualification from full personhood’ (Shildrick and Price 1998: 5). The body cannot or, at least, should not be transcended, overcome or moved beyond. As Spelman observes the way in which ‘a philosopher conceives of the distinction and the relation between soul (or mind) and body has essential ties to how that philosopher talks about the nature of knowledge, the accessibility of reality, the possibility of freedom’ (Spelman 1999: 33). However, if a theory of freedom requires that the imagination be focused away from the body then we must ask why this is so. This is the case for both Mill and Wollstonecraft: both set freedom in rational grounds and both invite some use of the imagination but demand its control and would see the imagination as threatening to engulf reason rather than reason being the threat to the possibilities of, not just the imagination, but also the possibility of an imagination given free expression (including nature, the body and senses).

This also gives rise to a link between rationality and intended action. The active person intends her actions, they are 'the product of consciousness, reflection, choice and so then issues in intended action' (Prokhovnik 2002: 72). If a woman follows life, not through the path of intended action but through 'natural bodily rhythms', then her life is not the result of intended action but results from the dictates of her body thus revealing a 'dependence of the definition of reason on body and on social roles', which equates intended action with men (Prokhovnik 2002: 73). If our minds separate us from non-human animals and the natural world then women's autonomy depends more on mind than on body, more on active rationality than on immersion in bodily rhythms. Yet Wollstonecraft's definition of woman's role as mother and wife limits women's autonomy by linking them constantly to their bodies.

Wollstonecraft cautions that nature should be observed and understood as valuable: 'Nature in every thing demands respect, and those who violate her laws seldom violate them with impunity' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b:157. She presents a description of 'weak' women and 'libertines' who produce 'a half formed being that inherits both its father's and mother's weakness' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 158). Here Wollstonecraft appears to assign nature a role in human fate – if men have children with women who are weak and women with men who are also weak then they will suffer a morally weak child. The two guilty partners have been led by their nature/tendencies and the result is that nature takes over and produces a child that would not make a suitable citizen – this is what happens when people give in to their natural instincts and become closer to the natural than to the rational (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 157-158). Here nature is a force for good in that we should observe 'her' rules. In a wider sense, nature represents the opportunity of being active, which will be discussed in the chapter on Mill.



There is also the nature found in the state of nature; for Wollstonecraft, the life based not on justice but arbitrary rules. For Wollstonecraft our rights come to us via our reason, which is given from God. Wollstonecraft's fear is of a lack of order and control. Before we become rational in what Virginia Sapiro describes as 'the human mental state of nature', we do not have control over ourselves and we are 'buffeted about by outside forces'. Sapiro thinks this is what Wollstonecraft 'meant by a dependent mind' (Sapiro 1992: 62). In other words, without reason or before reason, we are only able to follow and not to think. Our rationality offers us the prospect of freedom, but it is freedom in the form of control. If we demonstrate our command over nature then we have rationality, if we can be rational then we can be free. If, however, we are to be free alongside others, then we must demonstrate self-control. Self-control for Wollstonecraft means not becoming weak in the face of nature. We should enjoy the outdoors, not because we are a part of the natural world but because it makes us stronger.

That women are as potentially capable of this as men is something Wollstonecraft asserts. However, underwriting her belief in equality (at the expense of nature and any qualities to be found there) is a belief in difference. The rights she wants for women must be earned by women in the form of duties. These duties are to the (patriarchal) state. The state needs men to perform certain duties and women others, as was discussed earlier. Wollstonecraft presents an argument for citizenship that runs along deeply gender-constructed divides. She talks about 'natural' rights, again demonstrating gendered roles.

Wollstonecraft says that men have encouraged women to be beautiful rather than virtuous resulting in women being corrupted. She makes her point by comparing women to plants:

like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity. (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 9)

She describes this as 'barren blooming', in part to be attributed to 'a false system of education' (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 9). This barren blooming reflects Wollstonecraft's dislike of women who only seek to please men, a role Hegel would attribute to women, and a role which we will see Mill also suggests for women. The ostentation and desire to please also suggests the 'meretricious slave'. The meretricious slave could be seen as the one who tempts men back into the grasp of nature; in seeking to govern by obeying the slave drags the master down into nature with her.

Wollstonecraft expresses a link between mind and body, for example, as Sapiro notes, when she talks of controlling appetite and instinct in order to develop the mind (Sapiro 1992: 68). Also, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* Wollstonecraft notes that 'self-preservation is, literally speaking, the first law of nature; and that the care necessary to support and guard the body is the first step to unfold the mind' (Wollstonecraft [1790] 1995a: 15). So the mind and body are linked but with the mind as in control over the body ideally. This control is the beginning of human progress. Progress of the individual is inextricably linked to the progress of society (Gatens 1991: 120). This is why slavery is so damaging: it impedes self-improvement. A society that sets limits on self-improvement is damaging because 'human life is not worth living, is not truly a human life, unless there is opportunity for growth and self-improvement' (Gatens 1991: 117). Therefore the improvement of women is the improvement of all humans. If women are allowed to be rational and free citizens then they will make good wives and good mothers (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1995b: 204). Yet, for Wollstonecraft, this improvement should not just be on the part of middle-class women but all women. Later, Taylor notes that Wollstonecraft demonstrates a clearer awareness of the limits to self-improvement posed by class as well as by

attitudes to gender, especially in *Maria* (Taylor 2003: 238). This appears to be so, as if her optimism for women's liberation had been dampened, the female characters in *Maria* are both poor and abused by men.

### **Conclusion**

In Wollstonecraft's understanding of what it means to be a woman, women's duty is to perform the role of mother and wife, and this is a civic duty. The family and state are not easily separated in Wollstonecraft's thought. These roles are rational, but Wollstonecraft's emphasis on reason suggests a need for social control and self-control. Her understanding of women's oppression was sophisticated in that that some women were complicit in their oppression; some women were more clearly oppressed by men; and some, in fact many, women suffered also through poverty. As the section on prostitution shows, all these women, even the aristocratic women, were having to trade with aspects of their bodies in return for survival. However, the powerlessness they experienced depended on their class. Wollstonecraft did not treat women as a homogenous group.

Some of the five themes which were described in the introduction to this thesis as important to the concept of autonomy put forward in this work have been developed in this chapter. Wollstonecraft's thought demonstrates the importance of both the idea of inner and of outer recognition that was put forward in Chapter 2. We seek recognition of ourselves as God's creations but Wollstonecraft also demonstrates the importance of considering how individuals relate to others. The emphasis on relatedness leads to the development of another theme: a relational emphasis of autonomy. In Wollstonecraft's thought autonomy is not a project we explore alone, individuals are not merely isolated beings but rather they belong to a shared project of doing their duty. Duty to the state and to God makes us free. These two themes (recognition and the

importance of a more relational understanding of autonomy) can be seen to combine.

Recognition of each other as citizens means that we do not seek power over others, instead we relate to others as autonomous agents. So part of being autonomous ourselves involves seeing others as autonomous. How we relate to others affects how we are seen by them but also how we see ourselves – arbitrary power is a failure to recognise ourselves as autonomous because directing others is not the same as being self-directed. Recognition, as it has been described in this chapter on Wollstonecraft, makes us mindful not only of our own autonomy but also of the autonomy of others. Our autonomy has to be exercised without impeding the autonomy of others for to do so would be akin to exercising power over others and therefore inauthentic. We best exercise our autonomy by relating to others but not by being directed by them.

Another theme, that of control, is advanced through the reading of Wollstonecraft's work in this chapter. Order and control play important parts in Wollstonecraft's understanding of what it means to be human. For example, marriage should be based on friendship rather than be subject to the arbitrary character of love. Passion and emotion serve to disrupt the order that should prevail in the family. Autonomy lies in self-direction and self-control; self-control requires neither exercising nor being dominated by arbitrary power. However, self-direction and self-control in Wollstonecraft are not about a process for claiming any identity; rather they are about pursuing specific identity options, for women the roles of wife and mother. Wollstonecraft's autonomy involves maintaining an independence from others and keeping a respectful distance from nature; it does not offer the possibility of multi-faceted identity as it has prescribed roles for women. Nature features in Wollstonecraft's framework as both something from which we can learn, as her division of domestic labour based on nature suggests, and it is also something over which we must exercise control and

use our reason. Too much nature renders our actions unintended, unplanned and potentially chaotic. This is the beginning of a fear of nature, which can be seen to a greater extent in the work of Mill. Wollstonecraft's framework is influenced by both romanticism and rationalism. Autonomy is exercised through self-control yet also through an understanding of human emotion and the natural world. Wollstonecraft's view of autonomy for women takes the form of belonging to the rational family.

Rational motherhood shows a link in Wollstonecraft between autonomy and identity. A woman should be rational, able to think for herself, but this is in order to fulfil the duty of a woman, that is to be a good mother.

Wollstonecraft's woman uses her narrowly defined autonomy in order to follow the path of a virtuous and rational mother; this is the identity Wollstonecraft gives to woman. Identity is limited to prescribed roles and thus limits the potential for women to be autonomous in terms of being truly in control of their identity. This means that autonomy for Wollstonecraft is not an open-ended process as it is for my concept of autonomy which needs to make room for self-definition.

Wollstonecraft promoted the use of reason through education; she argued that an increase in reason in both men and women would alter social relations. Her emphasis on rationalism is vital to her understanding of the world. For Wollstonecraft, reason is linked to divine knowledge via the imagination. Her thought produces a virtuous citizen: rational and dutiful. It produces two types of citizen, the male and the female. The male citizen is similar to Hegel's masculine subject, capable of pursuing freedom and thus contributing to human improvement outside the family. The female citizen remains in the family and makes her contribution to human progress by maintaining that unit. Her autonomy and her identity are bound and limited to these roles. The family is regulated by justice from within rather than subject to the justice of the state and, unlike Hegel as the following chapter will demonstrate, Wollstonecraft distinguishes women's role from nature.

Women can learn from nature in Wollstonecraft's thought. Women are more a part of the civic community and the family represents a rational duty of citizenship.

This chapter has argued that the imagination is 'policed', and this can be applied to Wollstonecraft's use of the imagination. Therefore the liberating potential offered by Taylor's interpretation of Wollstonecraft's use of the imagination has its limits and tells us something else about Wollstonecraft; it tells us that an interpretation of autonomy in her thought has much to do with control and with directing the content of our imagination to a particular goal. We need to control our imagination and to limit its scope. This in turn limits the possibilities for creativity and for change. Wollstonecraft's thought reflects a tension between two of the themes I highlighted in the introduction. Autonomy as dynamic and flourishing is seen in arguments about the imagination giving rise to creativity and autonomy as control is seen in the way in which the imagination is inevitably to be controlled in Wollstonecraft's thought.

My concept of autonomy needs dynamism in order to open up the possibilities that exploring new identities can bring and needs to maintain control over those identities in order to go some way to realising our identity as authentic and avoiding stereotyping. The imagination is a useful part of this process. We need diverse identities but we need to be able to choose them ourselves and to take responsibility for them. In Wollstonecraft's thought the emphasis appears to be more about control than about exploring identity. Her work reflects the need for control, both state control through making the family Just and self-control through emphasising the need to do our duty.

It is hoped that this chapter has offered a different interpretation of Wollstonecraft by focusing on aspects of her theory not usually discussed. Aspects such as: control, her attitude to nature and the importance of other

people as well as the dangers of exercising power over others. For Wollstonecraft, knowledge of the world and understanding of what it means to be human appears to come from reason and self-control. Women have specific roles and women's autonomy is a combination of her belief in reason and self-control and the roles she gives to women. Women's autonomy is in the realm of the family, men's in the realm of the civic. Women can be autonomous like men in that they have the capacity to think for themselves and rely only on God but they do not follow the Hegelian process for claiming identity as will be shown in the following chapter. They are given the identities of wife and mother, and from there become autonomous. They are autonomous because they control their own lives and are independent of others but also because they value this role. If they do not then this is an imposed identity, and this is something with which Wollstonecraft's theory cannot cope.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Leaving the Nether World: Women, Autonomy and Recognition in Hegel's Thought**

This chapter draws on the work of G.W.F. Hegel, in particular *Philosophy of Right* and *Phenomenology of Spirit* in order to discuss the possibility of controlling identity by building up an account of autonomy that is based on a process of approaching and claiming identity. It also emphasises the problems involved in the recognition of identity.

#### ***Introduction***

The first part of this chapter will look at women's identity in Hegel. Although Hegel was by no means a feminist, as demonstrated by his association of women with the nether world, his epistemological insistence on universality will be used in order to make feminist claims for women's identity. That is, feminist claims for identity which is constructed on the basis of inclusion as opposed to dichotomous thinking. His epistemology will also be used to put forward an argument for a feminist theory of knowledge and understanding of identity. It will be argued that Hegel's theory of property helps to advance a concept of autonomy that involves a procedure for claiming identity which benefits feminist theory. Recognition of others has a valuable role to play in terms of autonomous identity. The tale of the lord and bondsman in *Phenomenology of Spirit* is valuable as it demonstrates the important role of other people for an individual's identity.

Although Hegel can offer a procedural approach to identity, his work can also provide an example of the difficulties of claiming and recognising identities in a world in which everyone needs claim and recognition – as already noted, we need others but others can also be a threat to us. Therefore this chapter ends with an analysis of this problem, with the



example of domestic violence and the problems of identity claim and recognition that can be found there. It does this by analysing the identities of both the abuser and the victim and shows how they have not gone through the Hegelian process to acquire those identities.

### ***1. Women's identity in Hegel***

In Wollstonecraft's thought men must be able to retreat to the family in order to understand the origin of civic virtue and women must provide that point of contact for them. However, Hegel's view of women is that they have a vital role as nurturer but this effectively confines them to the lowest, most private sphere. Laura Brace compares the fate of women in Wollstonecraft's work to that described by Hegel – women must dwell in the family/private as this is the substantive destiny of women:

She cannot experience herself as an active, respectable, masculine, human character with ennobling talents and durable virtues that can make a difference to the world – even as a mother. Her 'nature' means that she remains suspended by destiny. (Brace 2000: 452–3)

The role of women in Hegel's work is to maintain the lower human order. Unlike Wollstonecraft, Hegel does not confer the status of citizen upon women. Women are vital to the social order in their function of maintaining the family in order to facilitate male progress.

If women only have a place in the nether world then they have a single identity: nurturer. Women's relegation to 'the nether world' has been the focus of attention for critics such as Genevieve Lloyd. This chapter will begin therefore with a brief analysis of this critique. Having established why Hegel's view of women is problematic it will then be argued that Hegel's own theory demonstrates that his view of women need not necessarily be binding today. For Hegel, no belief or knowledge is eternally valid.

In *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel explains the difference between the position of man and woman in ethical life. Woman runs the family and the household, which is ruled by divine law, while man 'passes from the divine law .... over to human law' (Hegel 1977: 275). The union of man and woman therefore denotes the joining of divine and human law and from here man proceeds, much like an unencumbered self, into existence in the state with the risk of death and woman upholds the law of the nether world. Men need to leave the family to pursue a life in civil society, which serves as 'a mechanism for advancing their welfare and satisfying their needs' (Brace 2002: 331). Men leave the family to enter the realm of the ethical and leave the particularity of the family behind them (Lloyd 1993: 82).

Lloyd sees Hegel as drawing a public–private distinction with a set of dualisms that she lists as: the public and private pursuit of power and wealth, 'less and more advanced stages of consciousness', the natural and the universal, and the outer and the inner. In all these Lloyd says Hegel 'explicitly aligns the feminine with the private side of this enriched public–private distinction' (Lloyd 1993: 80). This is damaging to women's autonomy because it prevents the possibility of the inner self gaining recognition as an outer self. In Hegel's thought women do not gain recognition of their authentic selves and are instead labelled as 'nurturers'.

Men have the opportunity of pursuing their destiny outside the family but woman's destiny lies in maintaining the shadow world of support for her men. The family is the place where 'children learn, and adults are continually reminded of, what it means to be a member of a small association based on love and trust' (Pateman 1988: 176). Women are merely consciousness, able to support others by their role in ethical life, but men are self-consciousness, able to explore the outer world beginning with the struggle of self-consciousnesses in the master–slave dialectic. Women's support of the family is vital, without them family – the base of

society – would not come into being. Yet it is the very necessity of their role in the family that means women are confined to the nether world. Men, Lloyd points out, have particular relationships within the family, they are father and husband to distinct people, whereas women have a universal role, they are mothers and wives with universal concerns of mothering and being good wives (Lloyd 1993: 82). Brace argues that women are denied individuality in Hegel and that femininity is described in essentialist terms as motherhood (Brace 2002: 343). As motherhood is perceived as 'natural', it does 'not qualify a woman for subjectivity' (Brace 2002: 344). Women are given the role of nurturer. For men, women and the family are part of their progress through ethical life into the community, therefore the 'stage of consciousness associated with the Family and women, like other immature stages of consciousness, exists precisely through being transcended' (Lloyd 1993: 82). Men must leave behind the particularity of the family to embrace the universal – in other words they, if they remained within their family, would be held back by their association with women and children. Women therefore must be held in the realm of the family where they serve as a shadow for men, a past men have transcended but can revisit as adults. The shadow is for men vital as a sign of their (male) humanity.

Hegel's view of the role of women is expressed in his discussion of Antigone in both *Philosophy of Right* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The Hegelian subject journeys from nature to spirit (Hegel's truth claim), with nature being the realm of feeling and spirit being that of reflection (Hutchings 2003: 45). Women, Kimberly Hutchings says, 'only appear at a point of mediation or transition between natural and spiritual existence' (Hutchings 2003: 45). She notes that in the story of Antigone, women have a duty to the family while men have a duty to 'political ties of citizenship' (Hutchings 2003: 47). This creates the division between politics and family, men and women, which we see repeated through Wollstonecraft, Mill and, in places, de Beauvoir. Women need to remain in the realm of the family or risk tearing the system apart; women need to be kept in place. Women are

identified in Hegel's theory as being much closer to nature than are men and there is a sense that freedom is defined in opposition to or in overcoming nature. This sense of overcoming or controlling nature can be seen also in Wollstonecraft, Mill and de Beauvoir.

Hegel tells the story of Antigone in order to represent the difference and indeed the potential clash between the family and the community. According to Hegel, the difference between the family and the community is the difference between the particular and the universal. The family is natural and needs to be subdued, it is sensuous, it 'is only an unreal impotent shadow' (Hegel [1807]1977: 270). The family produces brothers and sisters who 'overcome their [merely] natural being and appear in their ethical significance'. She becomes the head of the household and he 'passes over to human law' (Hegel [1807]1977: 275). In the realm of human law there is the potential of power and subjectivity. Hegel attaches the privilege of autonomy to a specifically male identity. The father/husband sheds the familial identity in order to pursue life in civil society. The act of leaving and transcending the family ensures the opportunity for developing autonomy. Autonomy is developed by men initially by this act of leaving the family. Women cannot enjoy this autonomy because Hegel identifies them with nurturing, which he does not associate with autonomy.

Judith Butler notes that, for Hegel, 'Antigone represents the law of the household gods' and Creon 'the law of the state', and the laws of the state supersede the laws of kinship (Butler 2000: 5). Antigone cannot act in the state as she does not belong in the state, she cannot be a citizen 'because she is not capable of offering or receiving recognition within the ethical order' (Butler 2000: 13). Hegel uses Antigone to represent all womankind (Butler 2000: 35 and Hutchings 2003: 95). Women are firmly rooted in the family, which has its own laws, and men are citizens in the state, which also has its laws; these laws complement each other and tragedy occurs when

this ceases to be so (Hutchings 2003: 83). This is why the story of Antigone is a tragedy: one of the two laws will be broken.

Hutchings notes that feminist criticism of Hegel concentrates on the gap between these laws and the association of women with the family. Women are 'close to the elements of earth and water, defined by blood and death rather than conscious action or choice' (Hutchings 2003: 95). As men dwell in the state, the family allows men to maintain 'their connection to nature and to feeling' (Brace 2002: 330). Women are passive. Hutchings notes that women 'do not act but are acted upon by the external world of civil society and the state – a world which is mediated for them by the male head of household' (Hutchings 2003: 150).

For Hegel there is an element of essentialism: women are nurturing and passive and have their destiny in the nether world while men go and actively pursue their destiny outside the family. This essentialism forms a binary opposition in which the male is privileged over the female, the active over the passive. Although Hegel here does appear to rely on what Hutchings has described as 'one-sided thinking' (Hutchings 2003: 39), his understanding of the way in which knowledge is produced and the changing nature of the self-understanding of the 'self-changing, self-interpreting being' (Hutchings 2003: 109) makes it possible to escape essentialism and to leave the nether world. Again, to do this we need to remember Hegel's own framework of thought involves accepting that our way of thinking could change. If this is so, then there is the possibility that women could leave the nether world. Hutchings comments that even Hegel's account was partial. Hegel's own claim about women is less valid now because 'his partial grasp of the position of women has become less and less sustained by spirit and the forms of its self-understanding in science and philosophy' (Hutchings 2003: 109).

## **2. Hegel's framework of thought**

Hutchings argues that both Hegel and feminist theory are engaged in what she describes as the 'conceptual conundrum' of escaping binary oppositions. They address the problem of attempting to think outside of these binaries and to avoid the need to take one side of them (Hutchings 2003: 2). Hutchings explains the roles of truth and knowledge as working to form the match between the concept of the object and the object. From Kant onwards she says the 'conditions of possibility of knowledge' have privileged reason over emotion (Hutchings 2003: 17); the route to knowledge has been via reason not emotion and this separation has removed the importance of the identity of the one seeking knowledge. Yet Hegel, as Hutchings contends, offers an alternative to 'one-sided-thinking'. Hutchings reads Hegel as engaged 'with the same conceptual conundrum which is constitutive of feminist philosophy within the western tradition. This is the conundrum of how to escape binary oppositions' (Hutchings 2003: 2).

Hegel argues for the need to use phenomenology – 'the immanent exploration of how things are experienced' (Hutchings 2003: 35). This is the journey from consciousness to spirit in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hutchings 2003: 36). On this journey the knower fails in his attempt to reach the object of his knowledge and so fails, returns and repeats the process. The subject is able to learn from this failure so although the subject is returned to the beginning there is more to be learned. Hegel 'sees consciousness as both returning to the same failure and also learning' (Hutchings 2003: 36). This creates the self-consciousness that goes on a journey of understanding its relation to the world through stoicism, scepticism and the unhappy consciousness (Hutchings 2003: 37). All of these processes fail because they reduce thinking about the world to a set of binaries, keeping the individual away from truth. Hegel moves from this to the history of Western thought in order to demonstrate the benefits of modernist thinking within a particular history. However, even this carries the risk of a reduction to

thinking in terms of binary oppositions and 'one-sided thinking'. The subject's relation to knowledge is not abstract, the relation is there in 'its social and historical context' (Hutchings 2003: 39). All that we know is supplanted by new knowledge. Hegel says:

The bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter; similarly, when the fruit appears, the blossom is shown up in its turn as a false manifestation of the plant, and the fruit now emerges as the truth of it instead. These forms are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole (Hegel [1807]1977: 2)

Knowledge is supplanted by new knowledge and this can be done as a part of organic unity. Hegel's phenomenology offers both the epistemological prospect of change and renewal and the same prospect for autonomy. Phenomenology could ask the agent to develop her autonomy within her situation, her community or her social practice.

Hegel's theory of the autonomous self was of a self that does not exist in abstraction from its environment and from its history: 'self-determination is the truth of a complex, mediated and self-reflective whole rather than of an individuated rational agency' (Hutchings 2003: 40). Gary Browning argues that Hegel's concept of the 'self is inherently universal and expresses its capacities by developing ties with other selves' (Browning 1999: 46). He argues that for Hegel the self develops and progresses but must be understood as having connections with 'a wider world of meaning' (Browning 1999: 46). Browning holds Hegel's self up in opposition to that of Hobbes, for whom the self is very much within itself rather than in the wider world. He observes that for Hegel universal thought constitutes human identity – self-recognition can only be achieved as 'a universal being' (Browning 1999: 52). From this understanding of the self, individuals develop a social perspective and 'can recognise and express their generic identity as inherently universal creatures' (Browning 1999: 57). This is a

version of the self that can know others in order to know itself. If we can accept that Hegel's description of women as tied to the family was a product of his own 'one-sided-thinking' then there is the possibility that women could be included in the universal community of the state. So the self could be a woman. The question of how a self relates to others will be discussed later in this chapter.

However, in Hegel knowledge of the self is similar to knowledge of the truth in that it is contingent on its place in history, a universal perspective is never complete and any knowledge and any identity is not ultimately fixed but changes with time. Truth is contingent on being, how we live, how we perceive ourselves and how this self-perception changes. Truth is produced in response to our self-perception; this also changes, it is never 'fixed nor arbitrary' (Hutchings 2003: 109). For Hegel a claim to truth 'is a matter of the recognition of a truth by others' (Hutchings 2003: 109); just as our existence is contingent on the recognition of others, as will be seen in the section on the lord and bondsman, so too is the truth. However, before examining the lord and bondsman this chapter turns to Hegel's theory of property. The next section of this chapter puts forward an analogy with Hegel's theory of property in order to demonstrate the concept of autonomy as a process for the construction of identity.

### ***3. Hegel's property process***

Hegel's process of claiming property provides a useful analogy for how we might approach and claim identity, as well as how we might recognise the identity of others. However, it is important to be clear about for what we are claiming ownership. The analogy should be understood to suggest ownership of identity and not of the self; the concepts of possessive individualism and self-ownership are both regarded as problematic. Therefore this section begins with a brief discussion of the two concepts and seeks to find a better alternative in the form of self-sovereignty.



The concepts of possessive individualism, which has already been discussed, and self-ownership are both unhelpful to the idea of a self who is connected to other selves claiming identity. According to Macpherson the individual 'is free inasmuch as he is proprietor of his person and capacities' (Macpherson 1964: 3). The individual on this understanding answers to no one, is obligated to no one and is suspicious of everyone. This location of property in the person leads to the unanswerable question of who it is who can at once own his self and be his self. Who stands behind the ownership? Can an individual, if he owns his self in a society of market relations, sell his self? It also ignores any ties the individual may have to others, for in locating freedom in ownership of the self, freedom becomes defined as being a very negative sense of 'freedom from others' (Brace 1998: 150). Having cut himself off from others in order to own his self, the self-owning individual would be in a similar position to the first man in Rousseau's state of nature 'who, having enclosed a piece of land, thought of saying 'This is mine'' (Rousseau [1754]1984: 109), in that the individual would be constantly guarding his territory from others. This creates the image of the Hobbesian self who surrounds himself with walls in order to keep others out which will be discussed later in this chapter.

This version of self-ownership is about the freedom of the individual from others, or what Laura Underkuffler calls 'absolute individual autonomy' (Underkuffler 1990: 127). G.A. Cohen also has a similar description of self-ownership in the libertarian understanding of the term as 'each person enjoys, over herself and her powers, full and exclusive rights of control and use, and therefore owes no service or product to anyone else that she has not contracted to supply' (Cohen 1995: 12). This is a very isolated view of the individual. Underkuffler argues that there is an alternative to this view of self-ownership in the form of a 'comprehensive approach'. The comprehensive approach takes into consideration not just the freedom of the individual but also how that freedom develops and is expressed 'in the

context of relatedness to others' (Underkuffler 1990: 128), in a similar way to Wollstonecraft's apparent argument for relational autonomy. So rather than the image of Hobbes and Locke of one individual competing against another for security and property respectively, this is a vision of a community acting to promote the common good of its members and offers a recognition of how others help in the development of the freedom of the self.

However, this concept of comprehensive ownership demonstrates the importance of connection with others and of relational autonomy, which will also be seen in arguments made by Hegel concerning recognition. Comprehensive ownership incorporates useful notions of autonomy.

Another important aspect of autonomy is self-sovereignty: where self-ownership (with the exception of Underkuffler's comprehensive approach) suggests the exclusion of others, self-sovereignty does not. If an individual can claim they own their identity then this means they are able to alter or discard this identity. However, if an individual claims she owns her self then this possibility is extinguished as she can neither radically alter, nor remove, her self. Owning the self does not help with a concept of identity because it is an abstract concept. However, if an individual claims to be sovereign over her self then identity can alter. Self-sovereignty simply means that the individual is in charge of her process of claiming identity. So the difference is between ownership of an abstract notion of the self and sovereignty over the *process* of claiming identity. Self-sovereignty has the possibility of relating to others as sovereign selves, that is, as others who are in charge of their own identities. Self-ownership means that when people come into contact with others they become territorial. Self-sovereignty will help in a process of approaching and claiming identity as well as in helping us to recognise the identity of others. It offers the possibility of transformation.

If we conceptualise autonomy as a process for claiming identity then we have a more ordered notion of identity. A more ordered notion of our identity then allows us to maintain a sense of who we are when we interact with others. Hegel's analysis of property in *Philosophy of Right* provides a valuable approach in thinking about a procedure for attaining identities autonomously, and in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he demonstrates both the importance of others and the impact they have on our identities. Hegel's property owner needs to be able to choose the property she desires and to claim it, in a similar way we need to choose our own identity (rather than be stifled by unwanted identities) and we need to go through a process so we can achieve this. What follows is an attempt to construct an analogy of claiming identity from Hegel's process for claiming property. That we are social beings is something Hegel acknowledges and in *Philosophy of Right* he addresses some of the issues connected with this – his analysis of property shows how we take 'things' for ourselves and how others recognise us as owners of these things. This provides a useful analogy for autonomous agents approaching identity. We all want particular identities and our ability to claim these is the equivalent of our ability to define ourselves.

Both claim and recognition are themes in the work of Hegel. In Hegel's analysis of property, a person is able to claim property as theirs by putting their will into it. There are three ways in which property belongs to an individual. They are taking possession, use, and alienation. Before a person owns property they put their will into it by focussing their desire on it and then by moving into it. A person must in some sense occupy property in order for them to claim it for themselves.

People recognise one another through things and relate to one another in terms of these things. This section suggests that a tentative comparison can be made between Hegel's approach to property and our approach to identity in that we could benefit from being able to choose and claim our

identities as if they were property. A particular identity is claimed by a person who wills it for themselves; by locating and then focussing their will/desire on an identity the person is able to occupy it. Because identities are infinite, the notion of identity as property in the sense that there is competition for each particular identity does not apply. However, Hegel's link between property and recognition is also applicable to identity as a sort of property. A closer analysis of the three ways in which we modify property to make it ours according to Hegel will reveal the similarities between taking possession of 'a thing', using it and then alienating it; and moving towards and claiming an identity.

### *3:1 Taking possession*

The first way of making something into our property is to take possession of it. There are three ways of taking possession of a thing. We can physically grasp it, we can form it and we can mark it as ours. Hegel says that the first method, physically grasping an object, is both the most 'complete' method of taking possession and also the most restricted in scope. It is the most complete because it is the most obvious way of saying of an object 'this is mine' yet it is restricted to our physical ability to grasp the thing. Therefore other forms of property already in our possession may be needed to take possession of the object we desire. Hegel says:

Mechanical forces, weapons, tools, extend the range of my power. Connexions between my property and something else may be regarded as making it more easily possible for me than for another owner, or sometimes possible for me alone, to take possession of something. (Hegel [1821]1967: 46-47)

In a similar way, moving towards a new or different identity is the most obvious method an agent can have of claiming that identity for herself. However, the 'tools' used by the agent will be those available according to

the identities the agent already has. When we consciously alter our identities, we draw on the resources of our past experience and therefore of our past identities. These may be identities we had discarded or could be identities that are currently part of us. They could also be unwanted identities or imposed identities such as being the victim of domestic violence which will be discussed later. If we recall Hayek's example of the 'morose husband' we can see an example of drawing on other identities as a resource. As before, it is the 'nagging wife' that is considered, contrary to Hayek. It was noted in Chapter 1 that the 'morose husband' would have the economic means to leave his wife. Given that women, although this is not always the case, tend to earn less than men, and that it is possible that Hayek imagined the wife to be a domestic labourer, it is quite likely that she would find herself struggling to leave the 'morose husband'. He has presented her identity as a stereotype of 'nagging wife' which is loaded with implications for gender. Hayek labels the wife as 'nagging' but we should perhaps not simply accept this description. The stereotype of the 'nagging wife' is pervasive and works against women. For example, a woman who is simply requesting that her husband not take her domestic labour contribution for granted and asking that the husband could share the burden is described as 'nagging wife', if this request for equality of workload were suggested at a union meeting or raised in a board meeting, it would more likely be described as being assertive rather than 'nagging'. Therefore Hayek's 'nagging' wife is a stereotype and she needs to recognise that this stereotype is constraining. She therefore has an unhappy facet to her identity but self-reflection might enable her to remember other, more vibrant identities she has now or has had. She can draw on these to try and improve her situation. She could try to alter her relationship with her husband, leave him, or simply ignore him! Whatever she chooses is not important to the point being made, which is that she can take control of her identity and of her situation. If she exercises control over her situation she should be able to draw on and develop better/happier identities.

The second method of making a thing property is to impose a form on it. Hegel suggests that this is done by putting ourselves, or our will, into the object and then by being able to move away and see the object function in the way we want it to. He says we 'impose a form' on the thing:

When I impose a form on something, the thing's determinate character as mine acquires an independent externality and ceases to be restricted to my presence here and now and to the direct presence of my awareness and will. (Hegel [1821]1967: 47)

Hegel cites the cultivation of plants as an example of this (Hegel [1821]1967: 47). When we own something we are able to impose our will on it. So, when we own a plant we can cultivate it in whatever way we wish and in its cultivation we can recognise our ownership. When we approach a facet of identity we may feel it is an identity we desire but we may wish to cultivate it in our own method in order to make it authentic to us. Because we need to cope with more than one identity at a time we need to be able to approach new identities as agents already with identities, as who we are. We need to adapt that identity to exist alongside the others. For example, lawyer is a very general identity but when an agent approaches the identity of lawyer she needs to be able to absorb it without having to reject another identity. She may already be a very organised person and/or a very compassionate person so she will mould the lawyer identity around these facets of her identity. Whatever kinds of identities she has already will shape the kind of lawyer she will be. Even if she is different as a lawyer (organised) than she is when she is with her friends (compassionate), compassionate and organised are both her identity, which she uses depending on her situation. Multiple and diverse identity can be achieved if there is the possibility of taking an identity (plant) and cultivating it to our own will (imposing a form on it). This gives a new identity authenticity because we make it ours.

Using an identity like this is a way of adding to the unique character of the agent. No two people will be entirely alike, partly because they will approach the same identity such as that of lawyer with different identities already inside them. The description of someone as lawyer does not tell us anything about the person who is a lawyer, just as an uncultivated plant tells us nothing about its owner; in fact it suggests it has no particular owner.

The third method of making a thing property is to mark it. Unlike the first two methods this is not a physical way of gaining property but is representative (Hegel [1821] 1967: 49). We leave a mark on a thing to say 'this is mine' and Hegel says, 'the meaning of the mark is to say that I have put my will into the thing' (Hegel [1821]1967: 49). Marking something as ours is a way of saying to others that we own it. Saying that we own or are in control of our identity is important for us to do for ourselves, and it is important to have this claim recognised by others. Again, as will be shown later in the example of domestic violence, not going through this process properly makes claims to identity false.

For autonomous agents approaching and contemplating identity this is a two-stage process. The first stage is that by putting a mark on something we are saying that we are in control of it; by doing this 'man just shows his mastery over things' (Hegel [1821]1967: 39). Although in terms of identity the act of marking an identity does not preclude others from marking it for themselves it does demonstrate our control over our identity. Marking our identity is an expression of our individuality. Controlling our identity for ourselves is important in order to guard against having unwanted identities forced upon us as in stereotyping. We are able to find an identity and say 'this is mine'.

This leads to the second stage. Hegel sees a need to mark property for others to see that this is mine and for that to be recognised by others. If others recognise that we are in control of our identity then we are able to be identified in the way we wish rather than having imposed identities. This will be examined in more detail later in this chapter.

This leads us from taking possession of the thing to the next stage of relation to the thing we will to be our property: use. Inevitably we will use property and when we use it we get the recognition of others of this thing as ours.

### *3:2 Use of the thing*

Hegel argues that although using property is a clear signal of ownership, this should not mean that property not in use is without an owner because the primary basis of holding property is the owner's will that it is theirs, therefore use of the property is a further modification of property (Hegel [1821]1967: 49). Use of the thing is a further modification of property because it changes the character of the property, for example the cultivated plant in being cultivated embodies the character of the cultivator and is no longer simply a plant, it has had its identity modified. Because the person using the thing has a will and the thing does not, the thing cannot resist being used and so using it negates its existence as a thing and makes it my thing. The thing loses its 'qualitative character' as a thing (Hegel [1821]1967: 239).

Identity is infinite but it only takes on specific meaning when used like Hayek's 'nagging wife' reflecting on her identity. We cannot simply destroy identities that are forced upon us but we can struggle against them. The freedom and ability to destroy the property can be compared to the



freedom and ability to destroy rigid identities. Rigid identities do not take account of other identities and make some identities unattainable to certain people, so destroying unwanted identities and replacing them with the individual's interpretation of identity (coexisting with other identities in the identified agent) is desirable. We can claim an identity, we can use it to our own ends and finally we need to be able to reject that identity if it is no longer wanted. This is the final stage of Hegel's modification of property: alienation.

### *3:3 Alienation of the thing*

We can alienate property because 'it is mine only in so far as I put my will into it' (Hegel [1821]1967: 52). Hegel regards alienation as an expression of ownership because we can only alienate something that is ours; we can only relinquish something that is ours in the first place. Hegel's description of property is limited to that which we can alienate: 'those goods, or rather substantive characteristics, which constitute my own private personality and the universal essence of my self-consciousness are inalienable' (Hegel [1821]1967: 52–3). So a property owner can alienate his property but cannot alienate his ability to own property – his freedom of will. In a similar way an agent can only alienate identities she has absorbed and cannot alienate her original freedom to approach identity. She will always be an autonomous agent (or will always have the potential to be) but she can attempt to alienate the particular identity through, for example, resistance to stereotyping.

Hegel's emphasis on the fact that we can only alienate property that is ours, property that we have put our will into, underlines Morwenna Griffiths' idea of a web of identity. The web is constructed through our experiences, so as we move from one identity onto others we leave a trail behind us. The web

will be made up of identities we have rejected and some we have retained but it will not include those we have not experienced.

#### **4. *Property: the locus of personality***

Our taking possession of the thing, our use and alienation of it, all depend upon recognition. Just as we only put our will into something we want, we only enter an identity we want to be. We have been able to look at the possibilities (property or identity) and to choose a location for our will. In terms of identity, recognition has two functions: it gives us an opportunity to recognise ourselves and it allows others to recognise us. Peter Stillman notes that for Hegel, property is a locus for personality:

Property is directly tied to personality and its development because the property right – the will in the thing – is the basis for the rights of the person to life and liberty. The person claims himself as he claims a property, through his will to own, to occupy, and to modify and transform himself. (Stillman 1980: 140)

Similarly, in a process of self-definition there is a will to own, modify and transform. To own an identity is to claim it, to become an identified autonomous agent; to modify is to take different identities and combine them to create new ones thus creating individuality and to leave a path of identity formation; and to transform is to be free to reinvent, to redefine. Transformation is achieved through alienation.

For Hegel there are some things that cannot be alienated. We cannot alienate our personality (a thing not external by nature) from ourselves – our rationality, which provides us with our will, or our intelligence, which directs our will, unless through ‘slavery, serfdom, disqualification from holding property, encumbrances on property’ (Hegel [1821]1967: 53). In a similar way, as autonomous agents we cannot alienate our autonomy. To alienate, to surrender our autonomy, would turn us into objects. We can lose autonomy by degrees but we cannot lose autonomy completely; we

cannot will ourselves to become an object and not at all self-directed (as the willing of this requires agency and self-direction).

Will can become other-directed, identity becomes imposed. In this sense we are described or misrecognised as identities we do not wish to have, or our will to alter our identity is frustrated by our current identity or by the fact that we live in a 'problem community' as described in Chapter 2. At this point identity must be experienced as limiting. Will, and consequently self-direction, can be taken from us by violence, both to body and mind; alternatively it can be taken almost imperceptibly, leaving us sensing that we must remain trapped in our identity – even perhaps persuading us that this is our will.

### **5. Recognition**

Recognition by others is an important aspect of identity. As J.M. Bernstein argues, it is others who make us who we are. Without others to recognise my self-consciousness 'my sense of myself as a self-conscious agent would be nothing more than an unjustified assertion' (Bernstein 1984: 15). Without others being willing to recognise us as whom we want to be seen, identity remains an internal concept, a state of being trapped in a world of being other-defined.

Recognition can function to maintain slavery of the will. If others project an unwanted identity onto us then our ability to define ourselves becomes diminished. If others can impose an identity onto us then we are forced to be portrayed as this identity, but do not desire it, we are allocated an identity but we have not put our will into it. This imposition of otherness can be likened to Simone de Beauvoir's writing on otherness. In *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir offers us the existentialist-based vision of reciprocity between self and Other. Rather than regarding man as self and woman as Other de Beauvoir puts forward an argument in which humans are selves but are also, in the eyes of other humans, the Other. She says:

To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her; let her have her independent existence and she will continue none the less to exist for him *also*: mutually recognising each other as subject, each will remain for the other an *other*. The reciprocity of their relations will not do away with the miracles – desire, possession, love, dream, adventure – worked by the division of human beings into two separate categories; and the words that move us – giving, conquering, uniting – will not lose their meaning. (de Beauvoir [1949] 1997: 740–1) (italics in original)

In my body and in my self, I am subject, self, sovereign. My outlook on the world is unique – no one sees the world as I do – no one shares exactly my experiences and the different identities I have combined in my self, therefore every other person must, by definition be Other to myself. This cannot be avoided. As will be shown in the Chapter 6, people being other to myself does not mean that they are not also vital to freedom, our freedom is bound up with that of others.

The vision of a self that is at the same time subject and object indicates how our relations with others are structured. To us all others are objects of our gaze: I recognise them as being separate from me, as being set apart from my sphere. This is a useful approach in discussing the boundaries of the self. It combats the threat of engulfment for the subject as self is aware where she ends and the Other begins. Boundaries are necessary for an autonomous self. However, an autonomous self still needs other people and the above does not tell us how this self relates to Other selves – do we respect the Others as sovereign selves?

There is a difference between recognising that people are Other to my self, and taking this to mean that others are objects of my self. If the Other is merely an object then its sphere has no boundaries, it can be entered and taken over. Another agent may be Other to us but our view of them as an object is different, it leads us to encroach on their domain and to encroach

on their possibilities of freedom: to themselves they are not Other, they are the subject, but they are misrecognised.

The resulting encroachment of seeing another as an object suggests a territorial self or a Hobbesian self who sees herself as surrounded by boundaries to and from others. Brace notes that the relationship of the Hobbesian individual to the state 'is an indirect expression of the boundary metaphor' (Brace 1997: 143). A territorial self tries to control the wall of her fortress; she decides who to let in and when to shore up the defences. This individual will 'value the capacity of individuals to dissociate as well as associate' (Brace 2004: 94). This is because notions of boundaries inevitably conjure images of property and ownership, which in turn lead to the vision of a 'possessive individual' (Macpherson 1964). This fortified individual is the product of negative power relations. Any notion of autonomy will inevitably contain some sense of boundary to the self in order to differentiate (but not necessarily to dissociate) the individual from others. However, the boundary does not have to be that of a fortress; it can be traversed and it need not be permanent. It will be shown that the bounded self can let down her defences and allow others in but this requires a more delicate understanding of the boundaries that exist between self and others.

Hobbes frames individual liberty, such as it is, in terms of individual rights and these are rights we hold against others. This is the individual of the territorial self. For Hobbes, coercion and fear are the natural state of mankind. The individual in the state of nature is faced with constant impediment in the form of other individuals. The Hobbesian individual is purely self-interested and as individual interests come into conflict, so do individuals. Conflict is inevitable and agreement impossible: 'one person's absolute autonomy will come to rely on extinguishing the autonomy of another individual. Power becomes a zero-sum game' (Brace 2004: 4). Hobbes' notion of freedom involves having power over others and resisting them, it also involves using force for survival. In a Hobbesian version of

liberty one individual's freedom is gained as a result of the lack of liberty of another. This pits individuals against each other, creating individuals who are at best protective of themselves and at worse aggressive, with a view to pre-empting an attack on themselves. This attitude of the individual towards others 'is the basis for an emphasis on mastery and dominion over others and over the world' (Brace 1997: 139). The individual seeks power over others and this endless desire for power 'ceaseth only in Death (Hobbes [1651]1994: 70).

Hobbes' individual is aware only of himself and any awareness of others is as a threat to his safety and as a danger. The Hobbesian individual struggles with the fear of being consumed by the dominion of others, but also fears death as a result of one individual extending his dominion over others and this is a very real threat. These are external constraints and Hobbes' individual could conceivably not have the time or scope of imagination to worry about internal impediments given his constant watchfulness over predatory persons who occupy the earth in dangerously close quarters to him.

Without boundaries we would risk losing our sense of self and we would not be certain where one being ends and another starts. However, this image need not necessarily be a negative one. Boundaries do not simply serve to demarcate the sphere of the agent, they can also define our relations with others in a more positive way. We can, if we choose, let others in. This is not the metaphor of the self as castle letting down the drawbridge only to pull it up at the first sight of a stranger. It is rather a view of an agent who recognises the need to relate to others but also to withdraw at certain times.

Jennifer Nedelsky explores, and ultimately rejects, the use of boundaries to provide a metaphor in American law for a concept of autonomy based on property (Nedelsky 1990: 167). Instead she uses an alternative metaphor of

boundaries of the self as skin. The qualities of skin invoked as an image of a boundary of the self are that it is permeable, elastic and changeable, it is 'constantly changing while keeping its basic contours, and a source of sensitive connection to the rest of the world' (Nedelsky 1990: 176).

Nedelsky promotes this idea to the extent that it expresses a relationship between the self and others. Although Nedelsky rejects boundaries as having any role in structuring relationships with others, it will be argued here that some sense of boundary is necessary. The skin-as-boundary metaphor is useful in talking about the self in its relation to others but also skin is a very appropriate metaphor for the boundary of the agent.

An analogy can be drawn between our genetic make-up and our identity make-up. Just as no two humans have the same genetic make-up, neither do they share the exact same path of experience – the identities they have experienced, retained or rejected, and the other agents they have chosen to gravitate towards and away from make each unique. Our skin – the outward container of our unique genetic make-up, demonstrates a unique pattern – because no two people are identical – no two finger prints are identical either. Thus we can see the difference between the metaphor of a castle and that of the skin. The walls of a castle are identical to those of any other castle; they tell us nothing about the castle dweller. The skin tells us where the person has been, how they were formed.

The metaphor of the skin and its permeability represents how we relate to others and how others relate to us. Travel across the membrane is two-way. Nedelsky emphasises the permeability of the skin in presenting an alternative to walled boundaries. We can get into other people's skins; in other words, we can relate to them. This metaphor, however, can present a problem when it comes to keeping what is inside our skin just for us. The advantage of the metaphor has been that it allows us contact with others but the fear of engulfment (Brace 1997: 153) by others is a serious problem. Permeable boundaries are good for as long as we want to relate

to others; but for our own reflection, for the preservation of a sense of who we are and to ensure that who we are is different to who another is, it is vital that we do not let people permeate our skin to the point of inhabiting it. Our skin is a point of contact but a point of contact of our choosing. We need control over our boundaries in order to protect us from encroachment by others. In order to control our boundaries and to control our autonomy we need draw on the notion of relational autonomy discussed in Chapter 2 and the notion of self-sovereignty discussed here because this allows us to relate to others as agents and not as territorial selves.

The territorial self and the problem of misrecognition appear to leave us both always defending ourselves as essential and always invading the Other because they are objects to us. This would be the result of an emphasis on self-ownership rather than on self-sovereignty. The concept of self-ownership appears to require us to exclude all others in order to be ourselves. Selfhood in this vision is the constant battle against invasion from others. To conceptualise the self in this way also allows for a kind of psychological invasion against which the individual must struggle in order to define herself. In addition, it raises the problem of what Elizabeth Spelman refers to as 'boomerang perception'. This comes about when we look at a person of whom we already have preconceptions; we will see what we want to see and not necessarily what the person wants us to see. Spelman draws on her experience of being a white child in the United States. She explains that she and other white children 'were told by well-meaning white adults that Black people were just like us – never, however, that we were just like Blacks' (Spelman 1990: 12). The identity being projected onto a black person is that of white person but it is not an identity willed by the black person. So although we can alienate our identity, others can also alienate it for us. 'Boomerang perception' is difficult to avoid. However, if it affects our definition of other people then it must also structure our relationship with other people. The nature of de Beauvoir's notion of subjectivity will be further discussed in Chapter 6.



If each self remains for others the Other then this is significant for the way we define other people's identity. We perceive them not as equal subjects but as objects of our gaze and our gaze defines them in our words, so they are not defined by themselves but by us. This complicates an analogy with Hegel's property theory as he attempts to make property and its distribution fair by contract: this is not possible when confronted with the possibility that identities can be imposed. Yet at the same time we are not atoms, we need contact with others.

Donna Dickenson notes Kathy Ferguson's observation in *The Man Question* of the need for others in order to gain self-knowledge and to become 'full subjects':

The Hegelian subject always has to go outside itself to know what is inside; by seeing itself reflected in the world it discovers relations constitutive of itself. The sole route to *individual* autonomy and self-sufficiency is through the recognition of *others* who also possess self-consciousness. (Dickenson 1997: 97) (italics in original)

Dickenson emphasises the way in which people are created through their relations to others and that individuality is 'conventional, not natural' (Dickenson 1997: 97). Hegel's emphasis on the need of the individual for society is similar to the idea of a relational self. The individual needs others to help define herself, she needs recognition but recognition of her willed self, not of an imposed identity. The individual needs others and therefore needs some form of mutuality. Robert R. Williams refers to Hegel's criticism of the Roman empire, where the empire itself represented public life and all citizens were reduced to 'mere atoms' with no sense of mutual recognition other than through property ownership, the result being that 'human beings relate to themselves as abstract owners' (Williams 1997: 136). This is a similar relation to that of individuals to one another found in the theory of self-ownership and in Hegel's description of civil society.

Williams comments that this abstract person is one who has abstracted 'itself from the contingencies of birth, race, gender, and religion' (1997: 136), which appears similar to the communitarian critique of liberalism. He argues that although Hegel does use the idea of abstract right in the *Philosophy of Right* it is still based in his theory of the idea of mutual recognition. Abstract right can only become real when it is actualised and Williams says:

[r]ight is not actual until it is both exercised and recognized. Right is always exercised and asserted by individuals. But it is not fully actual unless it is recognized by others. Both facets are crucial; neither by itself is adequate to the notion of right. (Williams 1997: 140)

#### 5:1 *The lord and bondsman*

The relationship with others becomes more complicated in the 'Lordship and Bondage' section of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It examines the difficulties of power and oppression and also how we as selves are dependent on our bodies. This raises important issues for identity in feminism, in particular in discussions on oppression in the form of domestic violence. Hegel describes the emergence of the person as a process of self-awareness. As the conscious self becomes self-conscious it also becomes aware of other self-consciousnesses; in fact it is only awareness of other consciousnesses that creates self-consciousness because, as Lloyd puts it, 'isolated consciousness cannot sustain self-consciousness' (Lloyd 1993: 88). However, with this awareness comes a perception of threat from others, thus consciousnesses become pitted against others in a life-and-death struggle. Each consciousness desires things external to itself but those desires conflict with the desires of other consciousnesses. Self-consciousnesses must recognise each other but, as they perceive each other as a threat, the process of recognition is 'conflict-ridden' (Lloyd 1993: 89). Lloyd explains:

If self-consciousness is to be sustained, it must be, as it were, confronted by itself in another; there can be no self-consciousness without consciousness of the other. But this mutual need of the other's recognition – demanding, as it does, that each engage in its own negation in order to sustain the other's self-certainty – means that the two consciousnesses must 'prove themselves and each other through a life and death struggle'. This struggle may end in the death of one of the antagonists. However, the more interesting outcome, which makes possible a transition to richer forms of consciousness, is that wherein both survive, but one in a state of subjection to the other.... They survive as different forms of self-consciousness: master and slave. (Lloyd 1993: 89-90)

The slave has accepted "spiritual" death, the reduction to thinghood, over natural death' (Bernstein 1984: 18). Orlando Patterson describes slavery in a similar way. Referring to slavery when it was an alternative to the death penalty and the slave was left to live a half-life: 'Although the slave might be socially dead, he remained nonetheless an element of society' (Patterson 1982: 45) and Patterson describes this state as 'liminal' (Patterson 1982: 46). The slave dwells on the edge of society and is an outcast who is barely acknowledged as human. This, Patterson says, is 'one of the most extreme forms of the relation of domination approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master, and of total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave' (Patterson 1982: 1).

In Hegel's master-slave dialectic the relationship is described as being borne out of insecurity and the slave has the consolation of being alive, the slave became a slave in order to avoid death and as the relationship develops the slave has some power over the master. However, the Hegelian master-slave relationship would be inauthentic from the outset for Wollstonecraft because Hegel uses force as the rationale for slavery.

Although Hegel's slave has lost the 'battle' he has not lost his life and has thus moved from being a natural being to a spiritual being. Natural beings 'regard natural life and death as their constituting parameters' whereas for the spiritual being spiritual life and death is a step beyond this, yet neither slave nor master can go beyond their embodiment – spiritual life is

dependent on 'bodily existence' (Bernstein 1984: 18). The confrontation with another has led both master and slave to risk their lives and in so doing both have 'proved themselves over the animal' (Willett 1998: 154) in order to gain recognition. This is the first step towards freedom and it is about conquering the natural animal self – freedom is tied to a conquest over nature and indeed in terms of slavery both to the body and to nature, not just for Hegel, but for Wollstonecraft, Mill and de Beauvoir as well.

Eventually, the slave will become better off than the master through a process of the slave's self-awareness manifested in the cultivation of the slave's talents. The slave realises that it is possible to create the external world whilst the master remains dependent on the slave. Thus the slave is more free than the master. However, as the bondsman becomes aware of his ability to create things in his own image, so too does he experience these things being taken away from him by the master. The master can do this because he has power over the bondsman. As a result of this the things produced by the bondsman belong to the master and if the things the bondsman has produced reflect his own image then that reflection also belongs to the master and can be changed by him. This is the experience of negation and a return to the prospect of death – through the process of negation.

Death was the outcome of domination (physically violent) of the Other but now domination is experienced by the consciousness as being trapped in itself and of being defined by the lord. If the bondsman succeeds in escaping the lord, then he will experience this fear of death again. This time it is the fear that the body, that is the container of self-consciousness, will die. The self-consciousness must take control of its container – it must become the master of its body.

Inevitably this creates a mind-and-body dualism with the mind having lordship over the enslaved body. However there is also an element of contradiction in that mind is self-control and self-direction, yet mind is

housed in body, a place that experiences decay and is unable to alter the inevitability of that fact. Lloyd says the result of this is that 'the unhappy consciousness berates itself constantly, setting up one part of itself as a pure judge aloof from contradiction and disparaging its changeable part as inessential, although ineluctably tied to it' (Lloyd 1993: 46). Self-consciousness must have a container yet the slow decaying of the container will frustrate self-consciousness. Self-consciousness disdains the body that houses it because it is inevitable that it will be let down by it. It is Other to mind but mind cannot project onto it an accurate picture of its will (negation of death), the Other will die and will render the self-consciousness 'Other-less'.

Williams notes that the attempt to link mind and body is not an attempt to create a dualism but rather to link the two together. Mind is housed in the body, consequently harm to the body or even death is harm to mind, the mind becomes susceptible to the same kind of injury from others as does the body, and this 'constitutes vulnerability' (Williams 1997: 145). If hurt and injury is caused to the mind the body may not be affected, it is simply a container. Yet if hurt or injury is caused to the body – the container, what is inside – mind, is affected. Williams comments on Hegel's use of slavery to make his point. He quotes Hegel's *Vorlesungen uber Rechtsphilosophie* Vol. 4:

I can withdraw from my outward existence into myself, and can make my situation external to me; I can separate myself from my feelings, and can be free even if in chains. But all of this is due to *my will*. For others, *I am in my body*. I am free for the other only insofar as I am free in my existence [*Dasien*]. But violence done to my body by others is violence done to me. (Williams quoting Hegel, 1997: 146) (italics in original)

This understanding of the link between mind and body and the denial of dualism is helpful to feminist theory, which has struggled with this dualism in terms of privileging one side over the other. The linking of mind and body

of human consciousness and its container is of relevance to feminist analysis of oppression in the form of domestic violence.

### *5:2 Domestic violence and identity*

Nancy Hirschmann asserts that violence is 'a function of patriarchy'. For her this function can work against some men – the victims of domestic violence who experience sexism as creating 'a stigma for male victims as much as it does for female victims, even if the specific features of that stigma differ by gender' (Hirschmann 2003: 106). So in what follows there are no attempts to assign any particular gender to either the abuser or victim; although the initial discussion refers to women as victims it is because this is following one example provided by Hirschmann in which she does refer to women as the victims.

Hirschmann provides comments on the 'intrapsychic' damage of domestic violence put forward by her as explanations of why women 'women stay with abusive mates' These reasons include women who either experienced abuse as children or witnessed their mothers being abused by their fathers – these women 'may internalise a belief that violence is a "normal" expression of love'. Hirschmann also explains that love leads 'women to believe an abuser's promises of reform and his displays of remorse and affection. Depression, feelings of low self-worth and guilt, all stemming from her beliefs that she deserved or even provoked the violence', these are also reasons why women stay. To this list Hirschmann adds that the impact of tradition and 'the stigma of divorce' (Hirschmann 1997: 197). These are all internal reasons (rather than physical reasons) why women are 'reluctant to come forward at all, or even to admit to themselves that they are battered women' (Hirschmann 1997: 198). Hirschmann also notes elsewhere that there are two barriers to leaving an abusive relationship: the victim feels lack of choice both 'objectively (she

has few alternatives) and subjectively (she feels she has no alternatives at all)' (Hirschmann 2003: 113).

The 'intrapsychic' damage of domestic violence makes seeking an alternative a two-stage problem. Not only is a practical solution required but also the desire to seek that solution – the idea that it is not a 'normal' situation. The quote from Hirschmann suggests that there are two types of people affected by domestic violence – those who recognise themselves as such and those who do not. A woman who recognises that she is abused and seeks a solution could use the identity of 'victim' in an attempt to locate and relocate herself. This identity is not one she values and it is imposed on her by others. The process of leaving an abusive partner is also a process of redefinition. She was never just a person affected by domestic violence, she had other identities as well. However, ridding herself of that identity will allow others to become more prominent – she may also wish to absorb new identities. What is important is that she has gone through a process of redefinition.

This is harder for the woman who finds it difficult to admit that she is being abused. The ability to reflect on her situation is vital. Friedman argues that there is a way out for people trapped in abusive relationships: 'she may begin to withdraw from the relationships. In so doing she displays .... relational disconnection that can stem from a person's autonomous reflections' (Friedman 2000a: 42). Friedman maintains that reflection is vital for a woman in any relationship: 'A woman who does not reflect on her relationships, communities, norms, or values is incapable of recognizing for herself where they go wrong or of aiming on her own to improve them' (Friedman 2000a: 46). However, the problem is that internalised beliefs such as a lack of self-worth are not easy to externalise for critical reflection. There is a difference between a woman who believes she is worthless and a woman who knows she suffers from low self-esteem. There is more hope for transformation in the case of the latter.

If domestic violence is conceptualised as a power relationship (both physically and psychologically) between two people then similarities can be drawn from Hegel's master–slave dialectic. The similarity is that the master seeks domination and without the power to do this the master becomes the slave. To avoid this the master seeks the 'intrapsychic' control that Hirschmann refers to. For as long as the victim fails to realise the possibilities of the external world (a consequence of internalised damage of domestic violence) then there is no possibility of deflecting the image of victim onto the abuser. The deflection would be in order to make domestic violence clearly not the victim's fault but the fault of the abuser. To recall the dialectic, when the slave becomes aware of the ability to produce things a step is taken towards liberation from the master. This is due to a sense of self-respect (something missing in the Hirschmann example of intrapsychic damage). Either the victim becomes aware of other possibilities – thus the possibility of leaving the abuser arises – or, the identity of victim is reflected back towards the abusive partner. The bondsman is aware that something is being taken away from him but also that the lord is associating himself with what he has taken away from the bondsman. In the case of domestic violence what is being taken away is self-esteem and the analogy shows how self-esteem needs to be regained. Assuming both partners had (some) self-esteem to begin with, the abusive partner has slowly taken that away from the victim and the power gained is power over the victim. Therefore the abusive partner experiences an increase in self-esteem while the victim experiences it slipping away. If the victim is able to see that this is what has happened then they move from being in the intrapsychically damaged category to the self-aware category. Although this is not a solution it does highlight the same possibilities for the victim as Hegel's bondsman.

However there are problems with bringing women into the master–slave dialectic. First of all it is debatable whether they would qualify for slave status because the master and the slave are men (Pateman 1988: 178).



The slave only became a slave due to a clash between self-consciousnesses who were fighting for recognition; Hegel's women do not engage with the outside world and they do not struggle for recognition. They do not claim property, they are recognised and claimed. To return to the beginning of this chapter, the nether world is the private, inner world, it is the world of Others. The nether world is an imposed identity.

Hegel did not want women to leave the nether world and describing them as a lower stage of consciousness guaranteed this. A less advanced consciousness would not want property, therefore they would not claim property and seek recognition from others as property owners in the external world. Recognition for women in the nether world does not involve them stepping outside themselves, it requires them to stay in themselves and to be defined by men.

However, women are not a lower stage of consciousness. They can take part in the process of identifying themselves, they can claim identity and they can try to have the identity they claim recognised by others. If women take part in the process then they might engage with the outside world and become embroiled in a struggle for recognition – if this is the case then de Beauvoir's and Williams' emphasis on reciprocal recognition should be remembered. We are all selves but we are also all Others to other selves. If we do not recognise others as sovereign selves then we misrecognise them and this is a failure for the process of autonomy. To return to the domestic violence partners, it is not just the victim who has failed to achieve self-definition but the abuser has too. The abuser must see herself as essential yet, as the lord needs the bondsman to sustain 'lord' identity, so too does the abuser need an object to sustain power and self-esteem. What follows is a brief analysis of how both partners have not gone through the process of self-identification.

The abuser, instead of approaching an identity, approaches another person. She approaches this person as if she were a 'thing'. So the initial 'taking possession' stage is not actually taking possession of a thing or of an identity, but of a person. To return to the distinction between self-ownership and self-sovereignty, a self cannot be owned. The abuser has replaced the victim's control over her process of claiming identity so the victim is not truly sovereign, but the abuser does not own the victim. This stage of the process can be seen to be characteristic of domestic violence: it is physical, it involves changing the thing (in this case a person) from what it is to how its owner wants it to be and it is marked, the thing belongs to no one else other than its owner. If the thing is a person then the boundaries of her self have been forced open (when she was grasped), invaded (when she was formed) and marked (when she becomes defined by her partner rather than herself). The process of marking can especially be seen to signify to the outside world that the abuser possesses the victim. Following this, the abuser needs to modify her property, she needs to use it or cultivate it – as victim. This involves a further loss of self-esteem and is perhaps where the intrapsychic effects of domestic violence occur. The victim no longer cultivates her own identity – she no longer chooses other identity, instead identities are forced upon her.

If the abuser wanted to alienate her property then she could. She could do this because the property (the victim) is the object of her will. The problem for the abuser (if it is a problem) is that her property is a person. Alienating a person (or discarding them) is not impossible but is difficult to achieve. If the abuser relinquished her victim then there would be loss of power for the abuser. The victim, however, cannot alienate her identity of victim as she did not claim it. This is where alienation becomes of relevance in the Marxist feminist sense: objectification by the abuser has prevented the victim from controlling her identity, instead it is imposed. The victim has not gone through the process of claim and recognition. For Marxist feminists, alienation is experienced by women when they feel removed from what

they have produced or when what women are is controlled by men, be this their sexuality, child-rearing or intellectual capacity (Jaggar 1983: 307–17). In this sense of alienation, the individual cannot claim to have gone through the Hegelian process of claiming identity as the connection has been removed between the individual and her identity. This sense of alienation is experienced by both the abuser and the victim in the domestic violence example; neither have gone through the process properly.

To return to the abuser, recognition is what comes next in the process. The abuser has claimed her property but now does she want this property to be recognised by others? Yes, in the sense that this property is a source of self-esteem (she has power over her 'thing') and also her property needs to be protected from invasion by others. No, in the nature of the property and the way it has been acquired. The self-esteem was gained by violence and the property is not a thing, it is a person. Even if the abuser wants others to recognise that she 'owns' her partner, does she want them to recognise that she had to use force to 'acquire' her? Hirschmann notes that it is possible for the abuser to not understand that there is something wrong with domestic violence; they may not understand 'that what they are doing is seeking power and control'(Hirschmann 2003: 129), this is Wollstonecraft's sense of inauthentic power because rather than controlling her own autonomy, the abuser tries to control her partner. They may not know what it is they are seeking, they may be so removed from their motives as to 'display a gross discontinuity of selfhood and intentionality' (Hirschmann 2003: 129). The abuser has failed to go through the procedure of autonomous identification. The identity she has, of violent partner, was a chosen one but, because it involved treating a person as an object, it is not an identity that would receive recognition as valid. How can the abuser go outside herself to know others when going outside herself has resulted in her trying to possess others?

Hegel's property can be taken by force and this is what the abusive partner does. Although the shadow people in the nether world (women) perhaps provide a good metaphor for victims of domestic violence – as men enter the light of civil society women are the shadow they cast and someone's shadow is part of the whole of that someone, is formed by them and subordinate to them – it should be pointed out that domestic violence would damage the family. The family is where man feels his 'own unity', it is 'characterised by love' (Hegel [1821]1967: 110). Unity is threatened through the destruction reaped by domestic violence. The violent partner does not have the love and unity at the base of their civil existence, they have destroyed it and so have lost a tier of their make-up. If unity is threatened then so too is family – the base of civil society. If the family is threatened then the abuser cannot always leave the family because they must maintain (violent) order – they have to use violence in order to maintain unity.

However, even if women do not initially belong in the nether world, we can see how domestic violence could relegate the victim to the nether world. The nether world smothers its inhabitants and leaves them in the shadows. The laws there are different to those of civil society. Analogously our civil law says that acts of abuse and violence against other citizens are illegal. 'Citizen' is an identity we all have potentially, but citizenship is denied implicitly to the person who does not have access to the law. The victim of domestic violence is a citizen if she can get help from the state but if her partner prevents her from doing this, if she is afraid to do this, or if she lacks the self-esteem to do this, then she is not experiencing the identity of citizen. The rules of civil society are, for her, different to the rules that govern her home. At this point the state is experienced by the victim as a separate, public sphere and this public world has no link to the private sphere in which she is forced to dwell.

We also need to consider the capacity of force and to remember Hoffman's point that force leaves the victim with no will. Therefore the victim is denied

the means by which to recognise herself as the object of force. This leaves the victim with two impediments: the internal one of denial by which she is coerced into accepting her situation as normal and the external one of force/violence. In this situation the abused person is coerced by the threat of force and her denial means that she becomes socially dead, living on the margins of life in the eyes of the abuser, and rendered immanent by waiting for (and fearing) the action(s) of others. She is unable to determine herself fully and has become severely restricted. She could have been a citizen with access to the law before her relationship began, she could have had multiple identities. She, as a consequence of domestic violence, has become misrecognised and other-defined, and this has damaged all her identities. Grasped, formed and marked by someone else, her agency has suffered and therefore her ability to define herself. Agency requires motivation and motivation needs self-esteem. The violent partner has removed, or at least reduced, her partner's self-esteem and altered her identity. Identity is imposed rather than chosen; she is marked by others and does not mark herself. The mark she has is predominantly that of victim.

'Victim' is a contentious identity. It is an identity but not necessarily a self-chosen identity. She might not know, due to low self-esteem, that her self-direction, her will, has been taken from her, perhaps by degrees or perhaps suddenly. If she is able to go outside the oppressive sphere and say 'I am a victim' then she is beginning the process of self-definition, she is claiming that identity for herself (she is also becoming a citizen). She is asking for recognition. If however, she either does not believe she is a victim or she does not want to believe she is a victim, she still might experience that identity. Victim is also an imposed identity. Assuming she did not choose to be in this situation she already has an imposed identity but now the outside world, the world where she could be a pro-active victim, labels her instead a passive victim. John Hoffman's term 'victimhood' is applicable here if she is

regarded as an object by the abuser (although she is not turned into an object by the abuser).

The identity of victim does not have to be negative. It is negative if it connotes hopelessness and a further loss in self-esteem because it does not offer an alternative. It is less negative if it can be perceived as a transitory identity. If the victim needs to pull the identity of 'victim' towards her in order to relocate her self, then it is positive. It is positive because it returns her to the beginning of the Hegelian process of leaving the nether world. She is conscious of her self and is attempting agency and self-definition.

This kind of self-consciousness is something Williams notes in Hegel's theory. He quotes from Hegel on slavery:

I cannot make myself a slave, for this possession that I grant to another ceases as soon as I so will. Even if I am born a slave and am fed and brought up by my master, and even if my parents and ancestors were all slaves. I am free the moment I so will it, the moment I come to the consciousness of my freedom. (Williams 1997: 148)

If alternatives are available then the slave is less likely to continue to will or desire to be a slave. The problem for the victim of domestic violence lies in being able to realise alternatives.

The lord and bondsman locate their freedom in a struggle between the two, this autonomy is connected with having power over a person. The property analogy shows that it is possible to go through a different process of claiming identity, resulting in a different and better range of identity options. This process is followed neither by master nor slave and these identities are assumed by struggle and force; they are therefore false. It is vital that we can lay claim to our identity in order to know that it is chosen by us and not for us.

## ***Conclusion***

This chapter has demonstrated the way in which autonomy and identity can be combined by developing the idea of a link between the two concepts. That link is the process of autonomy by which identities are developed and altered. This chapter has also demonstrated the complexities of approaching identity thus highlighting the need for a staged process in approaching identity. In order to do this the chapter has provided a reading of both Hegel's master-slave dialectic and his theory of property which is not based in traditional readings of Hegel's work in these areas. Instead of this an analysis of Hegel's work has been put forward which develops the argument for autonomy and identity in this thesis. In so doing it has covered some of the themes integral to the concept of autonomy this thesis puts forward: autonomy as a process, control, recognition and a more relational approach to autonomy.

Hegel's analysis of property shows that there is a sense of a process in acquiring property, claiming it for ourselves and recognising the property of others, and this sense of a process is also of value as a guide to how we can approach, claim and recognise identity. If we can go through this process then we can be identified the way we want to be and not be susceptible to definition by others. If we have claimed our identity ourselves then this helps us in thinking of future identities. If we know that we chose to become who we are then we are better able to chose our future selves' identity. Hegel's writing can offer the notion of frameworks of knowledge of how identity relates to an understanding of the human condition for feminist theory. Not only this, but it can also offer some ideas as to how these identities might be claimed by the individual through an autonomous process, and of how the individual needs to negotiate her process of self-definition in a world of other individuals who also make such claims.

Hegel's process gives us a line to both retrace our identity but also to forge new identities. It would, however, be unrealistic to claim that we can always do this. The example of domestic violence highlights this for victims of domestic violence are forced into the nether world and require a process of redefinition in order to leave it. Whether or not they are successful depends partly on the degree to which they are engulfed by the identity of victim and whether they are able to use this as a transitory identity and become a 'survivor'.

The analogy of claiming identity with claiming property also allows for a positive emphasis on the importance of control. When we claim identities and use them we are taking control of them for ourselves and this means that we are taking responsibility for them. This is important to my concept of autonomy because control here allows for self-direction over the process of changing and altering our identity. If we can go through the process properly then we can claim to be in control of our identities.

Hegel's work also highlights the importance of our relationships to others. There is a need to recognise others in Hegel's thought which suggests we cannot see the self as 'unencumbered' and therefore autonomy has to be a project undertaken in the company of others, although this can be fraught with difficulty. In the tale of the Lord and Bondsman, Hegel's arguments about recognition also lead to the re-assertion of the problem of misrecognition, of not being recognised as who we want to be. This is a problem for recognition because of the power of others or society to misrecognise us.

The tale of the Lord and Bondsman shows how identities can be imposed and how oppression and violence change identity. The domestic violence example shows the dangers of not going through the process of autonomy properly. The process is meant to enable an individual to claim identity not to take over other people's identities and indeed to take physical control of



them. To do this would result in a lack of autonomy on the part of both abuser and victim as neither is in control of their identity, neither has defined themselves. The themes of control and recognition come together here. Autonomy involves controlling ourselves and not other people and recognising other people as being in control of their own identity as well. When the process of autonomy breaks down in the case of the Lord and Bondsman and domestic violence, not only is the process of autonomy halted but other key parts of my concept of autonomy are limited: recognition becomes misrecognition, self-control and taking responsibility for our identity is taken away, autonomy becomes a somewhat more 'masculine' idea based on the mastery of the abuser over the victim, this is not relational but is about excluding others.

The need to relate to others without encroaching on their domain leads this chapter to argue for the idea of self-sovereignty which allows the autonomous individual to claim her identity as hers. She can claim to be sovereign over her identity because she has control over the process of claiming her identity but her boundaries are permeable. The discussion of self-ownership and self-sovereignty also leads to consideration of a more relational approach to autonomy, self-ownership presents the agent as isolated from others, self-sovereignty does not. The sovereign self is able to be in control of her identity and is also able to recognise others as sovereign selves. This vision of the sovereign self combines the themes of recognition, control and a relational/non-masculine approach to identity. It does this by emphasising the importance of having control over our own process of autonomy whilst acknowledging the control of others over their own process which leads us to recognise others as sovereign selves. Self-sovereignty emphasises control over the process of managing our own identities but not that of others.

Oppressive identities can engulf the individual to the point of making the autonomy process impossible to embark upon. Yet prospects arise in the

form of other people who have different experiences – and who demonstrate the existence of other identities. In order to access new identities for feminist theory, rigid frameworks of knowledge and identity need to be transformed and renewed and linked to each other. However, Hegel's own framework of knowledge is both good and bad for feminist theory. It offers liberation through its exposure of the contingent nature of any framework of knowledge, yet Hegel's understanding of what it is to be human is within a framework in which women are not counted as fully human or as citizens.

The following chapter on Mill returns to the prospect of greater social and political inclusion for women found in Wollstonecraft. Mill's political theory can be used to develop the notion of autonomy as a process. Both he and de Beauvoir, who will be discussed in Chapter 6, suggest two forms of freedom which require autonomy to be dynamic and active in order to avoid stagnation and passivity.

## **Chapter 5**

### **John Stuart Mill and the Limits on Individuality**

Chapter 1 demonstrated the importance of John Stuart Mill's emphasis on individuality for the concepts of autonomy and identity put forward in this thesis. This chapter looks more closely at Mill's work in order to establish the difficulties of making a link between autonomy and identity. The chapter argues that Mill's thought, although it has similarities with that of Wollstonecraft, contains a stronger emphasis on control. This emphasis on control places limits on the scope of autonomy and individuality. The chapter interprets freedom as being in two forms in Mill's thought: the individual human against nature, and the individual against other individuals. Four of Mill's works are analysed: *The Subjection of Women*, 'On Marriage', *On Liberty* and 'Nature'.

#### ***Introduction***

This chapter argues that a theory of freedom can be drawn from Mill's work that suggests that Mill's love of liberty was tempered by a deep-rooted desire for control. It will be argued that the theory of freedom taken from Mill's texts is a theory of freedom in two forms. The first form of freedom is demonstrated in Mill's essay 'Nature'. In this essay Mill sees nature as having a mesmerising lure that threatens to engulf humans in the natural world, a world that he takes to represent passivity and stagnation. Individuals slip into the natural realm via their bodies: that is, the bodies that connect us with nature. Inevitably the body, like all things natural, decays. In order to assume the first form of freedom we must assert our humanity, our rationality and our individuality over the natural. We must be active and we must be able to control ourselves and to control our bodies and reason must be used for this control. A very basic definition of this form of freedom, is then, freedom from nature.

The second form of freedom also has negative connotations although its links to human progress make it less negative. It is freedom from other people. The freedom described in *On Liberty* is freedom for self-development and it benefits not only the individual but society as a whole. In order to enjoy the second form of freedom, that is, in order to be self-directed and individual, creative, authentic and to be an agent, Mill's individual must be able to display self-control. If an individual can do this then he (occasionally 'she', as will be explained) will not encroach on the freedom of others. This is where Mill's harm principle is important because where an individual threatens the autonomy of another, the threatening individual displays no self-control and therefore this individual must be subject to social control.

The two forms of freedom suggested in this chapter correspond to self-control and social control. Social control is needed to control those who cannot control themselves because these are dangerous individuals who remind the social world of the natural world, which lurks, at times, in too much proximity.

In *On Liberty* Mill sets out an argument for human freedom in which the individual is free to pursue her own interests, on the proviso of the 'very simple principle' that her actions do not harm others. Mill's *On Liberty* offers us then a vision of a rational individual who is capable of limiting her actions after careful deliberation. Mill's rational individual must seek to define herself, both in relation to others (an awareness of the effects of her life on the lives of others), and, ultimately, against others, as they are a threat. Her right to choose her own path must constantly be defended by physical and mental activity as she faces the possibility of being engulfed by others. Mill's theory could present us with numerous options both for pursuing identity options and for retaining control of our own identity. As there is in Mary Wollstonecraft's work, there is a strong emphasis on control but Mill's

fear of a breakdown in individual self-control appears to be greater, and he therefore puts great stress on the need for control in the form of social order.

We gain a deeper insight into what Mill valued about human freedom by looking at his essay 'Nature'. Whilst *On Liberty* deals with freedom in society, 'Nature' examines freedom in nature. What is interesting about the approach taken in both texts is that Mill seeks to define freedom against something else. We need to be free from society and we need to be free from nature. Although the emphasis on giving freedom an antithesis is much stronger in 'Nature', where there is a clear dichotomy, it becomes clear in both texts that freedom is about being active. As humans, in nature and in society, we face a stark choice: if we do not actively pursue our own lives, within our own definition of whatever meaning our life has, we will stagnate. Mill would emphasise the importance of activity and self-assertion rather than passivity. We have a duty to pursue our freedom, not just to enjoy a meaningful existence but also to contribute to society, especially to posterity. We, by living our own lives with vigour and curiosity, facilitate human progress. This dichotomy, progress and stagnation, can be found in *The Subjection of Women*, 'On Marriage', *On Liberty* and 'Nature'. Ultimately, Mill was motivated by an overriding concern with human progress and this progress was required in order to prevent Mill's biggest fear for humanity, his 'dread of cultural stagnation' (Zerilli 1994:118).

Although Mill's writing on women advocated a much better way of life for some Victorian women than they did experience, and although Mill does demonstrate some understanding and, at times, horror at the plight of the Victorian woman, women, ultimately, are held in a private sphere in his theory. He does not state categorically that women belong only in the private sphere in his theory, and nor is it helpful to map the notion of public and private directly onto his harm principle. However, Mill appears to demonstrate a belief that men needed wives and children. If Mill wanted

educated women it was not, as with Wollstonecraft, to make them better mothers, but to make them better wives. He does ascribe the role of mothering to women but appears more concerned with their role as wives. In particular, 'On Marriage' demonstrates a deep sense of horror at ill-matched marriages. For Mill, as will be discussed, marriage should be between intellectual equals. If this does not happen then the intellectual inferior will drag down the other and we are returned to Mill's nightmare of stagnation. Mill demonstrates a tendency (although not a consistent one) to view men and women as different but potentially complementary. This may not be essentialism on his part. Mill says that men and women are socialised into gender roles, however there is a tension between Mill's horror of socialisation and his view that somehow there is a difference between the sexes, and that women belong with the role of nurturer and men that of provider. This is the importance of marriage. The private woman's role is to ensure children are nurtured, and that her husband is stimulated, while the man must go out and actively pursue life.

The first form of freedom is available to men and women, but Mill thinks women are more prone to slip into nature's lure of passivity and ultimately stagnate because he equates women with embodiment more than he does men. The second is available to rational men and women. The women here are few: the unmarried who must pursue their own lives, or the wealthy, who will have been better educated and whose influence on society is to be applauded. Thus the range of identity options available for women is more restricted than it is for men because their options generally (if they can be considered options) are located in the first form of freedom. What prevents every woman from enjoying the chance of the second form of freedom is that, in Mill's view, women are more engulfed by nature than men are. Women, in general, can grapple with the first form of freedom but because they dwell in the family, they cannot pursue the second. This is not to say that Mill did not think them capable, with the correct education and background some of them could be, but Mill needed women to be primarily

man's companion. This could be justified by his theory of progress: human society flourishes when men and women complement one another in unity and do what each does best. As Mill argues in *The Subjection of Women*, women should be given the opportunity to develop their individuality as this is in the interest of society. Both risk failure. Men can be corrupted by society and lose their individuality, and women risk slipping into stagnation in part as the result of their bodies, the bodies that are necessary to produce the future but whose very act of creating life risks death. There is a tension in Mill's argument that women's characteristics complement men's, thus creating a perfect whole, and his other assertion that women are no different from men and therefore pursue a life beyond their relationship with husband and children. Therefore, Mill's view of women's identity appears confused. Women can be rational, they can be the opposite of men thus creating a perfect union in marriage or they can be bodies that could slip into stagnation and could drag others down with them.

The first section looks at Mill's arguments for social progress in order to establish how Mill balances individuality with social progress. The second section looks at Mill's theory of autonomy and the role that other people play. In Mill's theory we are in a social context but he argues for the need to preserve a space for individual creativity. The third section uses Mill's views on marriage to suggest that his views on women were, at times, perhaps contradictory. He appears to argue both that marriage should be based on equality because women are the same as men (rational individuals capable of self-development), yet at the same time he argues that marriage represents a perfect union between two poles (and here Mill's description of women assigns specific gender-based characteristics to them). The final section explores this assignment of gender roles to women on the basis of them having a very specific identity based on embodiment. In this section Mill appears to equate women with nature and to portray nature as a threat to civilisation.

### **1. Human progress**

Mill's thought was a mixture of Romantic thought and rationalism (Ryan 1987: 41). The contrast between Mill's rationalist and Romantic thought can be seen in his comparison of Bentham and Coleridge: 'By Bentham, beyond all others, men have been led to ask themselves, in regard to any ancient or received opinion, Is it true? and by Coleridge, What is the meaning of it?' (Mill [1840] 1987: 177). Mill comments in his essay on Bentham that Bentham was an empiricist, this was part of his rationalism, yet Mill saw him as an empiricist 'who has had little experience' (Mill [1838] 1987: 149). The value of experience is rationalist, yet the emphasis on depth of experience, 'what was worthwhile in human character', which Mill found in Coleridge (Ryan 1987: 39), promotes a more Romantic emphasis on diversity. For Mill, Romanticism offered 'insistence on variety, individuality and freedom' (Ryan 1987: 37). As part of his own rationalist credentials, Mill places great value on the roles of education, as did Wollstonecraft; education offered the prospect of rebuilding society (Di Stefano 1991: 162), although the utopian vision offered by the unfolding of the imagination in Wollstonecraft is not found in Mill. With Mill, as with Wollstonecraft, ultimately the appeal to reason appears to override anything else. This gives rise, again as with Wollstonecraft, to the need for self-control, and also social control.

Mill's rationalism is informed by his utilitarianism. Utilitarianism allows genius to flourish thus facilitating the progress of the human race. Order must be maintained to ensure progress takes place. Chaos threatens human progress by allowing the masses to stifle the individual, by allowing the natural to swamp the scientific and by allowing the mediocre to smother genius. Mill is not setting up the individual as an atomistic being, unaffected or unmoved by others. The promotion of the good of the few against the many is for the benefit of the whole society. So although utilitarianism may appear to be atomistic in its assertion that each individual counts as one



and no more, it should be balanced against Mill's assertion that independent human flourishing is vital for progress of a society.

The flourishing of genius can improve human progress but equally, Mill found, the mediocrity of the masses would impede progress. The subjection of women is thwarting the progress of human beings. For Mill, progress is a permanent and ongoing feature of history and is, with the emancipation of women, about to enter a new phase. History shows the constant movement of society through a process of change and development resulting in human progress. One example Mill provides of this is slavery: with the passing of time, slave relations of domination and subordination have been worn away. However, the continued subordination of women to men in a similar kind of slavery is 'now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement' (Mill [1869] 1989b: 119). Mill's theory of progress stems from his utilitarianism 'grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being' (Mill [1859] 1989a: 14). As members of a society we all desire the same thing, the highest amount of happiness possible for the greatest number of people. Mill does not believe that we are isolated from others but that we share a common interest, which is our general welfare. We are altruistic and not selfish, we are members of a society and must look to the good of society as a whole because this is the only way we are capable of maximising the greatest happiness possible, the general welfare of our society. This is, for Mill, the higher good, taking precedence over any personal desires we may have.

Because all rational agents are capable of progress and improvement, both morally and intellectually, Mill believes that all rational agents desire the higher good of mankind. Women are rational agents: consequently Mill believes that their contribution to social affairs would result in an improvement of the greatest happiness of the greatest number through both a greater diversity of opinion and a greater amount of competition, which would in turn result in a greater choice being made available. Ignoring the

happiness of women does not result in the greatest happiness of the greatest number. However, women also have specific roles to perform: they must be good wives. Mill believes that women want to be good wives and this is the greatest happiness a woman, or most women at least, could achieve. Again, rationality makes women the same as men, whilst the specific character traits Mill believes women have render them different from men. If women fulfil these roles and display rationality, the social order prevails.

In *On Liberty* Mill is concerned with safeguarding individuality from stagnation. Individuality is under threat from a society that adheres to majority opinion without reflection, from a society that relies on custom for its morals and therefore offers no rational rule of conduct. Individuality should be allowed to grow and develop, but the effect of society on the individual is to prevent this and to allow individuality to stagnate. The individual who would think for herself, act in accordance with her own wishes, or who would simply be as the majority does not think she should be, is stifled by society. *On Liberty* can be seen to offer both a description of why individual identity is easily threatened by other people and of how autonomy needs to be used to regulate our relations with others. However, individuality must also be controlled.

## ***2. Autonomy and relationships with others***

For Mill, the greater the number of experiments in living the greater the number of choices will be available for others to choose from. New ideas develop from allowing individuality to flourish. This argument can be applied to identity. However, Mill believed individuality to be under threat from the imposition of society and social attitudes.

### *2:1 Threat from society*

According to Mill, society can be a 'tyrant'. It issues its own 'mandates', sometimes they can be wrong and sometimes whether wrong or right they should not be issued as they interfere 'in things with which it ought not to meddle'. The effect of this is that it 'leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself' (Mill [1859] 1989a: 8). The individual is portrayed as a sphere, apart from society but encroached upon by society (Mill [1859] 1989a: 9). This can also explain how individual identity is encroached upon by the identity of others. If we consider the way social attitudes affect and tend to define identities in very rigid terms than we can understand how the identity of the individual is encroached upon by society. This occurs in all areas of identity, for example: professional, sexual and parental.

In order to arrive at an opinion that is independent the individual must consider all aspects of that identity in a similar way to the way in which Mill's individual should arrive at an opinion. Judgement on an opinion is only valid if the judge has 'shut out no light which can be thrown upon the subject from any quarter' (Mill [1859] 1989a: 24).

Mill stresses the importance of individuality and experiments in living:

As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so it is that there should be different experiments in living; that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others; and that the worth of different modes of life should be proved practically, when any one thinks fit to try them. It is desirable, in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself. Where, not the person's own character, but the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress. (Mill [1859] 1989a: 57)

Knowledge of society is imperfect and therefore society should not place limits on diversity: traditions, customs and rules are all normative and thwart individuality. This argument is similar to that put forward by Hegel:

knowledge is contingent, truth partial, and we do not know enough of the world to make binding choices. There is also a sense that Mill would accept some of Hegel's claim on the contingent nature of knowledge, as his emphasis on progress suggests that there is new knowledge to be discovered. Again, independence from the dictates of society frees the individual to experiment with their own identity and by so doing renders more identities, more opinions, available for others, thus providing others with more choice. For Mill, making a choice is a mental and moral exercise and to forgo this practice is to resign an element of human character:

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties". (Mill [1859] 1989a: 59).

This highlights the role of the autonomous agent in taking responsibility for her own identity, to choose her own identity and to mould it herself rather than to move into a sphere that is pre-defined. Many identities already exist but, as in Hegel's steps in modifying property, an agent moulds that identity by combining it with other identities that she has, thus making it her own identity and not that of another.

### *2:2 Threat from others*

However, as Susan Mendus suggests, Mill does talk about social position in marriage and suitable intellectual matches are important to him (Mendus 1989: 185). This apparent contradiction, that an individual should have free range of individuality unconstrained by attitudes of social positioning, yet that when marrying partners should be aware of social positioning and not marry someone whom Mill would describe as an intellectual inferior, arouses the suspicion that Mill might only want certain individuals to flourish, even at the expense of others. The next section will look further into Mill's views on marriage. The value of individuality and individual flourishing to social progress is that it allows genius to develop. This is an

important aspect of *On Liberty*: 'Genius can only breathe freely in an atmosphere of freedom' (Mill [1859] 1989a: 65). He points out that: 'mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest' (Mill [1859] 1989a: 16). If society does not create the space for genius to flourish then society is in danger of being in stasis or even stagnation, and the whole will stagnate. This does imply that Mill would perhaps place limits on the autonomy of certain people and raises questions about his desire to tend to the welfare of society as a whole: can there be genius and unity?

Mill defines what freedom should be: liberty of conscience, thought, feeling, opinion, sentiment, expression, tastes and pursuits, framing our own plan of life and freedom to live with others (Mill [1859] 1989a: 15-16). If an agent does not have this freedom then pursuit of her own identity is threatened. However, Mill recognised the problem faced by the individual – others. The response to this problem is a degree of responsibility to others and an ability to fight against tradition, society and culture when they threaten to encroach on individuality.

In *On Liberty*, Mill's notion of autonomy appears also to be based on a foundation of self-awareness or self-consciousness. In a similar way to Hegel's self-consciousness, consciousness is worth nothing without other consciousnesses. We need others to render us self-conscious – like Hegel and, as will be discussed in the following chapter, de Beauvoir. Mill's autonomy is not meant for the isolated being, it is a struggle concerned with the situated self. As such Mill's individual would begin the process of identity formation, in a similar way to the analogy of Hegel's property process suggested in Chapter 4. The individual will claim identity in an environment of other individuals doing the same and, as with Hegel, the relationship with others becomes complicated by others imposing their will, directing the individual towards identities they would not choose. Mill attempts to delineate the relationship of the individual to others in order to

allow independence and free choice, which would prove valuable to the process of identity formation. Mill uses his harm principle to determine where society ends and the individual begins:

the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others... The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign. (Mill [1859] 1989a: 13).

However, this is not very precise because of the individual being in society. One useful interpretation of the harm principle is that it serves as an entreaty for us to be responsible for our actions, to think for ourselves and to 'frame our plan of life'. The fact that all our actions can harm, affect, or affect the interests of others, is not perhaps deliberately left ambiguous, but perhaps something Mill felt we should answer for ourselves, rather than following rigid rules. Just as our actions affect others in many ways, so too are we affected differently by the actions of others.

For example, if three people live in a row with adjacent gardens the decision by the person in the middle, neighbour B, to trim the hedges that border on both sides of her garden does not harm neighbour A. Neighbour A hates gardening and is grateful not to have to do the work herself. Neighbour C however, wanted the hedge to remain at the height it was because he enjoys being in his garden and feels he has lost his privacy by the hedge level becoming lower. He has been harmed. That we could be either neighbour A or C means that we have to decide for ourselves if we have been harmed. If we are to choose our own way of life we cannot ask Mill to provide us with a set of moral guides to decide when we are harmed. Neighbour B should also have the awareness of when she is harming others. Again, the answer does not lie with Mill but with entering into a dialogue with the other neighbours and ultimately, taking responsibility for herself. In a similar way we need to take responsibility both for our own identity and for the effect it has on others.

Other people can help us but can also be a threat to us. Other people have wisdom from which we can benefit, but other people's knowledge and experience should be used by the individual 'arrived at the maturity of his faculties' not as others have but 'in his own way'. (Mill [1859] 1989a: 58). At the same time we need to distance ourselves from others:

each should be bound to observe a certain line of conduct towards the rest. This conduct consists first, in not injuring the interests of another; or rather certain interests of one another; or rather certain interests, which, either by express legal provision or by tacit understanding, ought to be considered as rights... As soon as any part of a person's conduct affects prejudicially the interests of others, society has jurisdiction over it, and the question of whether the general welfare will or will not be promoted by interfering with it, becomes open to discussion. But there is no room for entertaining any such question when a person's conduct affects the interests of no persons besides himself. (Mill [1859] 1989a: 75-76)

Mill is not advocating atomistic individualism, he acknowledges that people live together and their lives interconnect with one another. This is demonstrated in Mill's assertion that others can be affected by an individual's actions. The question is where to draw the line and decide which actions affecting others are legitimate and which are not. Mill's answer is the harm principle, which has received a variety of interpretations. J.C. Rees argues that some interpretations of Mill's harm principle have assumed that he is making a clear division between self- and other-regarding actions and have consequently ignored Mill's careful division between harming others and harming the interests of others (Rees 1991: 174).

Interests are not merely legal but depend on social recognition and prevailing standards of generally acceptable behaviour (Rees 1991: 175). Interests, Rees argues, are more concrete than feelings. We can easily, and frequently do, affect others' feelings, but this is not the same as affecting their interests. Rees says Mill links interests to rights, not because they are the same, but because having an interest gives an agent a right.

This right is 'not necessarily a right to the unqualified protection of his interests; perhaps only a right to have his interests taken into account' (Rees 1991: 179–80).

An action always affects others but it must be answered for when it affects the legal rights or rightfully (socially recognised) interests of another. This does not categorically answer the question of what constitutes an interest but it prevents the charge of atomism against Mill. He was aware that many actions fell into a group that affected the feelings of others. He did not see the individual as isolated and unconnected. This interpretation also separates feelings from the social/political sphere. Hurt feelings are not a good enough reason to impose sanctions. It would be difficult to construct a harm principle that could deal with feeling and it would not offer the prospect of order and control.

However, the harm principle also covers people's opinions. Here a problem arises, for when can the expression of an individual's opinion not be understood as affecting others? Mill's answer is that if an individual expresses opinions that are unpopular or perhaps unpleasant then they should only be faced with condemnation. Mill refers to both 'moral disapprobation' (Mill ([1859] 1989a: 81) and 'natural penalties' (Mill [1859] 1989a: 78). Mill's harm principle is flexible to cope with a range of infringements from the relatively minor to those that border on force. However, the harm principle also reflects Mill's concern with control through his worry that other people's interests will restrict our autonomy. Mill demonstrates a fear of the non-rational. The non-rational threatens a lack of control and, as was the case in Metha's description, non-rational motivations are not like interests. These motivations are hard to make out and they are excessive: they break boundaries (Metha 1992: 8).

Mill says that individuality is essential to progress: 'A people, it appears, may be progressive for a certain length of time, and then stop: when does it



stop? When it ceases to possess individuality' (Mill [1859] 1989a: 71).

When we cease to generate new ideas and new possibilities, we encounter stagnation. In this case it is social or cultural stagnation. This is the dichotomy of *On Liberty* – the individual against society, against the mass. To avoid this stagnation the individual must be a situated subject, they must be in society. They must be a public figure, to draw on Mill's emphasis on freedom of expression. We can formulate our thoughts in isolation but there is no value in this unless we can speak, and speaking is something we do with others. This is where individuality benefits others.

It is only when we are in contact with others that we can use the harm principle. Therefore the harm principle functions in the second form of freedom, whereas the first involves struggling against nature. Although these two forms of freedom do not correspond exactly to notions of the public and the private, Mill's emphasis on the primacy of reason for individuality and for making contributions to human progress require him to create a sphere where those who cannot use reason should go, out of the public and into the private. Yet this private realm, on this view, is not the place of solitude and reflection, the realm of self-regarding, and the two concepts are not the same. The private sphere is the realm of children, the non-rational but also of many women. Women may enter the public sphere but in order to do so they must remove themselves from their association with what Mill assumes to be the non-rational elements of reproduction and their general embodiment. In this sphere humans struggle with the first form of freedom: freedom over nature. If successful with this struggle they are able to move to the second form of freedom, which takes place in the public sphere. The second form of freedom involves negotiating freedom with others and this is where the harm principle is relevant. Mill would see women (those women who suggested to him embodiment and therefore nature) and the poor as always affecting the rights and interests of others, as is argued in the following section. Where we stand in society, our race, our social class and our gender, affect our ability to enjoy the freedom

discussed in *On Liberty*. It is clear that social class was something of which Mill was aware; his fear of the masses is expressed as his fear of the excited mob outside the corn dealer's house (Mill [1859] 1989a: 56). That women are less free than men is something Mill acknowledges, yet his solution both fails to offer more freedom and reveals, because of his underlying assumption of the value of the public/private split, that Mill thinks women have very particular social roles to play in society. Ultimately they, like the poor, cannot enjoy the true freedom of *On Liberty*.

### **3. Women's identity and marriage**

Mill wants women to be good wives; this offers both companionship and stability for male society. An examination of *The Subjection of Women* and 'On Marriage' shows us both Mill's perception of women in Victorian society and his views on how best to achieve emancipation. This is through a combination of education, female suffrage and a change in attitudes to marriage. Mill presents women as victims of their time, culture and society. Frequently women suffered at the hands of despotic husbands who exercised arbitrary power over them. They were generally poorly educated, and for many the marriage contract was experienced more as bondage. As Mill perceived it, women's situation was detrimental to both themselves and to men.

This section examines the arguments Mill makes about women's identity, and these can be divided into two general statements: that women are the same as men and that women are different from men. These two views are considered with reference to Mill's view of the role of women in marriage.

Julia Annas argues that Mill's proposition in *The Subjection of Women* was a confusion of reformist and radical approaches, the former arguing that social institutions should be altered in order to include women and the latter that that would require a drastic alteration in society's structure and in the

relations of men and women (Annas 1977: 181). She uses this approach to show that Mill, under the radical approach, argues that under contemporary conditions of subordination the true nature of women cannot be known and that attempts to describe women in such a way are distortions of the truth (Annas 1977: 183). Yet later on, Mill argues that women do have special traits: for example, women have intuition and this 'is a valuable corrective to man's tendency to abstract reasoning' (Annas 1977: 184). This appears to foreshadow the more second-wave debates between equality and difference. Where Mill argues that there is no character difference between men and women he appears to pave the way for a straightforward liberal or rationalist argument and yet the strategy that women have something important and unique to offer society takes the form of a more radical or sex-difference argument. Mill, however, appears unclear as to which approach he is advocating (Annas 1977: 192). These two strategies will be discussed. However, this section begins with a brief discussion on what Mill believed to be at the root of the subjection of women based on a reading of Mill's *The Subjection of Women*.

### *3:1 Women's oppression*

Mill thought that women lacked choices and the opportunity for autonomy for three reasons: men, society or, more specifically, education, and women themselves. Men, or some men, want to hold women back. He believes that some men fear equality because it would make women unwilling to marry. He argues that marriage based on the power of the husband over the wife makes marriage 'a law of despotism' and contrary to the progress that has been made in women's education, for if marriage is to be regulated by despotism:

all that has been done in the modern world to relax the chain on the minds of women, has been a mistake. They should never have been allowed to receive a literary education. (Mill [1869] 1989b:145)

For Mill, marriage represents a form of slavery, in fact it is, he says, that marriage 'is the only actual bondage known to our law. There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house' (Mill [1869] 1989b: 196). Mill claims that marriage contract laws are a remnant of slavery. Slavery he argues:

became regularised and a matter of compact among the masters, who, binding themselves to one another for common protection, guaranteed by their collective strength the private possessions of each, including his slaves. (Mill [1869] 1989b: 123)

Mill varies in his description of the relationship between men and women, master and slave. The law of marriage protects the master/slave relationship. It is a relationship of arbitrary power rather than of equality, reciprocity or, in his more romantic mode, love (Mill [1869] 1989b: 160).

Mill, like Wollstonecraft, views the master/slave relationship as having detrimental effects on the power holder's relationships in society:

Even the commonest men reserve the violent, the sulky, the undisguisedly selfish side of their character for those who have no power to withstand it. The relation of superiors to dependents is the nursery of these vices of character, which, wherever else they exist, are an overflowing from that source. A man who is morose or violent to his equals, is sure to be one who has lived among inferiors, whom he could frighten or worry into submission. (Mill [1869] 1989b: 153)

This is similar to Hegel's master who, in order to maintain his image, must subjugate another. The difference is this is not a battle of two self-consciousnesses for Mill or Wollstonecraft; it is an unfair battle between those who have strength (for women are protected as slaves by laws that are made by their masters), both legal strength and physical strength, and those who do not. For Mill, neither men nor women can be happy with this situation. The 'master' as a result of his arbitrary power suffers from a form of vanity:

an intense feeling of the dignity and importance of his own personality; making him disdain a yoke for himself, of which he has no abhorrence whatever in the abstract, but what he is abundantly ready to impose on others for his own interest or glorification. (Mill [1869] 1989b: 161)

Like Hegel's master, this feeling of dignity is false in that this sense of self is formed by dependence on another. If the slave is the source of man's esteem, the source of these feelings of dignity and so on, then the master is more dependent on the slave than the slave on the master. This reduces the autonomy of the master for the master is not free from the slave, rather he is bound to the slave as the source of his identity. Again, as it does in Wollstonecraft's thought, this power of the master spills over from the family realm to society. The relations in a marriage are then unequal and, similarly to Wollstonecraft, the man is left to venture out into the public realm with a false notion of his power and authority and the woman is left either powerless or with a false sense of power, the power of bestowing the 'gifts' of their 'favour' on men.

The source of this power of men over women is physical (Mill [1869] 1989b: 122 – 3), and this means that the domination takes a natural form. As will be seen in the following section, Mill believes that there is a source of human freedom to be found in domination over the physical but this is the result of a relationship between inferiors; man over nature. This is the first form of freedom. Yet, here at least, Mill sees relations between men and women as having the potential of being between equals, and he criticises institutions for allowing the idea that might equals right to continue (Mill [1869] 1989b: 124), therefore animal power of strength does not have a place.

Mill reflects on how education is also a source of women's oppression. For those men who do not want, or even are worried by, women's equality, education must be denied to women. Education has conditioned men and women into attitudes towards each other, and here the argument is similar to that of Simone de Beauvoir:

Such people are little aware, when a boy is differently brought up, how early the notion of his inherent superiority to a girl arises in his mind; how it grows with his growth and strengthens with his strength; how it is inoculated by one schoolboy upon another; how early the youth thinks himself superior to his mother, owing her perhaps forbearance, but no real respect; and how sublime and sultan-like a sense of superiority he feels, above all, over the woman whom he honours by admitting her to a partnership of his life. (Mill [1869] 1989b: 197)

Men are educated to regard women as their inferior and this attitude to women should be changed through education. However, Mill does find that women are also culpable in their oppression and they must take some responsibility for how they behave when they are denied liberty:

An active and energetic mind, if denied liberty, will seek for power: refused the command of itself, it will assert its personality by attempting to control others. To allow to any human beings no existence of their own but what depends on others, is giving far too high a premium on bending others to their purposes. Where liberty cannot be hoped for, and power can, power becomes the grand object of human desire; those to whom others will not leave the undisturbed management of their own affairs, will compensate themselves, if they can, by meddling for their own purposes with the affairs of others. Hence also women's passion for personal beauty, and dress and display; and all the evils that flow from it, in the way of mischievous luxury and social immorality. The love of power and the love of liberty are in eternal antagonism... The desire for power over others can only cease to be a depraving agency among mankind, when each of them individually is able to do without it: which can only be where respect for liberty in the personal concerns of each is an established principle. (Mill [1859] 1989b: 214)

This was the danger of men having physical power over women and the danger Mill sees in some women as having a manipulative power. Here a desire for beauty is corrupting on the part of women in a similar way that it was for Wollstonecraft. This is also similar to Wollstonecraft, in that she has a similar fear of arbitrary power. It is only in relations of equality that people will not seek to have power over one another.

This is not the state of marriage, Mill believed, at his time of writing. Instead the lack of liberty results in a scramble for power, usually won by the man and following this, the enslavement of the woman. Ruth Abbey notes that

the assertion that marriage should be concerned with higher friendship can be found first in Wollstonecraft and later in Mill (Abbey 1999: 85). Both seek to replace arbitrary power with equality in marriage, and this demonstrates the higher value both thinkers place on friendship as a rational relationship rather than love as a more Romantic idea of what the foundation of marriage should be. Both thinkers, as well as Hegel, see the family as a unity, a place where the subject, citizen or individual experiences unity. For Mill this unity is negotiated by contract, yet it is a contract heavily influenced by the social norms of the nineteenth-century, which in the end 'rejected the cultural paradigm because it undermined the imperative of a life-long union, made the public interest in marriage prey of the arbitrary will of individuals and destabilised the necessary authority of the husband and father' (Vogel 2000: 196), thus maintaining order. However, unity can take a different form: that of complementarity.

### *3:2 Marriage: a perfect union*

Mendus argues that Mill's work demonstrates a complementarity thesis:

the distinction between intellect and emotion, rationality and intuition, thought and poetry, is not a simple male/female one in his philosophy.... The mistake in Annas' interpretation of Mill lies in her failure to see that the complementarity thesis pervades his thought. (Mendus 1989: 187)

The complementarity thesis argues that Mill, as a result of his reaction against Bentham and his desire to incorporate Coleridge into his thought, attempts to weave rationalist and Romantic arguments into his work. Mendus uses complementarity to argue that Mill saw marriage as the opportunity for the perfect union of these opposites, to create the perfect whole. This goes some way to explaining why marriage is important to Mill, because it created unity.

Marriage in *The Subjection of Women* is about intellectual companionship and is as such a route to moral perfection. As Mendus says, 'Mill's opinion

of marriage is that it should be a marriage of true minds' (Mendus: 1989). Complementarity can, according to Mendus, be traced through Mill's work. It is the recognition that diversity can bring about balance, the very balance Mill sought in 'the importance of something other than analysis and intellect' (Mendus 1989: 186).

In 'On Marriage', Mill states that marriage is perfection for two high natures and it should be a free and voluntary choice (Mill [1832–3]1984: 39). However, those who are capable of the greater happiness suffer because of the numbers of people in society who are not capable of being the same as they are. Stringent laws on marriage are made for those who lack the high-mindedness Mill admires:

the law of marriage as it now exists, has been made *by* sensualists, and *for* sensualists, and *to bind* sensualists. The aim and purpose of that law is either to tie up the sense, in the hope by so doing, of tying up the soul also, or else to tie up the sense because the soul is not cared about at all. Such purposes never could have entered into the minds of any to whom nature had given souls capable of the higher degrees of happiness: nor could such a law ever have existed but among persons to whose natures it was in some degrees congenial, and therefore more suitable than at first sight may be supposed by those whose natures are widely different. (Mill [1832–3] 1984: 40) (*italics in original*)

Mill dichotomises sexuality and intellect. Mendus thinks that, for Mill, 'marriage laws were objected to primarily because they made women sexual slaves' (Mendus 1989: 189). She does acknowledge that there is a hint of high-mindedness in Mill's opinion:

Mill's dream of a world of individuals and eccentrics is really a dream only that the world will contain Coleridge as well as Bentham... not a dream that the world will contain Barry Manilow or Samantha Fox or any of the darker, lower, and less acceptable examples of individuality. (Mendus 1989: 185)

He is concerned with rescuing marriage from the 'sensualists', who needed to be bound, for the high-minded individuals who, he believes, are able to form a perfect and free union. Mendus is arguing that there is a limit to Mill's desire to embrace all kinds of diversity (Mendus 1989: 185). Mill



would want sensualists to be bound. His objection to marriage laws is that they do not allow the higher mind who may have made a mistake to be able to contract out. If, in a state of equality, people marry, then there should be the option to dissolve the marriage. If those married are equals then, if the happiness of one is fulfilled by the dissolution of the marriage, this must be consistent with the happiness of both (Mill [1832–3] 1984: 45). When young, people are likely to make mistakes in marriage and to not always make the correct union first time around:

The chances therefore are many to one against the supposition that a person who requires, or is capable of, great happiness, will find that happiness in a first choice: and in a very large proportion of cases the first choice is such that if it cannot be recalled, it only embitters existence. The reasons, then, are most potent for allowing a subsequent change. (Mill [1832–3] 1984: 46)

This means that Mill allows for the possibility of retracting from the contract but it does not mean that Mill did not want first marriages to work, wherever it is possible. If there are children then it is more difficult. Mill thinks that people should not have children until they are surer of their union. If they divorce they should recognise the common interest they have in their children (Mill [1832–3] 1984: 47). As a defence against this happening Mill is clear that people should not marry to advance social position (Mill [1832–3] 1984: 40). Women need to have equal opportunities in order to form a good match. Marriage here appears to be about unity. Here marriage is an ideal for a certain kind of woman, the rational woman. However, Mill's description of women in 'On Marriage' and *The Subjection of Women* suggests that he did not always view women in this way.

### *3:3 Women as different to men*

This section looks at Mill's use of the notion of chivalry, which suggests he associates particular identities and character traits with women. The nature of these character traits is revealed through close examination of 'On Marriage'. Chivalry is the result of the moral influence women have on men.

Women have a moral influence in two ways. First, they have a 'softening influence' – as a result of their experiences of violence against them and also of not having been taught to fight. The second influence is that they stimulate the qualities of courage and 'the military virtues' in men – their protectors. Together these moral influences foster chivalry:

From the combination of the two kinds of moral influence thus exercised by women, arose the spirit of chivalry: the peculiarity of which is, to aim at combining the highest standard of the warlike qualities with the cultivation of a totally different class of virtues – those of gentleness, generosity, and self-abnegation, towards the non-military and defenceless classes generally, and a special submission and worship directed towards women; who were distinguished from the other defenceless classes by the high rewards which they had it in their power voluntarily to bestow on those who endeavoured to earn their favour, instead of extorting their subjection. Though the practice of chivalry fell even more sadly short of its theoretic standard than practice generally falls below theory, it remains one of the most precious monuments of the moral history of our race. (Mill [1869] 1989b: 201)

If women have the power to inspire chivalry in men then they have a very gendered, and essentialist, form of autonomy, reminiscent of the meretricious slave who is able to locate power in her softness and to govern by obeying. For Wollstonecraft this is an inauthentic power given to women by men and not actively exercised by women – inauthentic because it does not originate in reason, for a woman should not seek domination over a man, she should rather seek equality, and it is difficult to see how chivalry could promote equality. This must be read as being part of an appeal to women's difference from men. Yet it is not a difference that would give women autonomy. For in this case power only comes by having a man to offer high rewards to, and it comes from a position of powerlessness, and also from a non-rational source: it cannot be autonomy. It also implies that women have a specific nature and suggests feminist arguments for difference rather than equality. Yet it is difference based on values that Mill, as will be shown, tends to rank below the more rational traits. The chivalrous man and the woman in this example have very different natures.

The reference to self-abnegation suggests the element of self-control is a necessary criterion for autonomy and a quality that this chapter argues is associated more with men than with women. It also implies that not only would it be a man who is more able to exercise self-control, but also it would be a man of a certain class: a gentleman. The high rewards that the woman bestows suggests that Mill understands this woman to be a 'lady' and the chivalrous man to be a 'gentleman' and this suggests the kind of people for whom Mill sought freedom: the upper and middle classes rather than the working class, who he associated more with passivity, decay and non-human animals. For the high rewards on offer must be the same rewards as Mill appears to fear in the form of 'the perpetual renewal of animal life', as will be shown later.

Mill argues women should be dependent on men but in a specific and reciprocal way. Dependence through affection, and voluntarily created is acceptable 'the more exclusively each owes everything to the other's affection and to nothing else, - the greater is the happiness' (Mill [1832-3] 1984: 43). This reflects the earlier discussion of marriage as based on complementarity.

However, if dependence is not out of affection then the woman is described as 'low-minded' and her dependence on men resembles the exchange of prostitution:

if that resource were not too often the only one her education has given her, and if her education had not also taught her not to consider as a degradation, that which is the essence of all prostitution, the act of delivering up her person for bread. (Mill [1832-3] 1984: 43)

If a woman uses her body to attract men she is presented as 'low-minded'.

Mill appears to be making the claim that was also made by Wollstonecraft, that dependence on men is not a satisfactory way of life. However, Mill appears to want women to be capable of supporting themselves, but not to

actually do this. Women's main occupation should be 'to beautify life' (Mill [1832–3] 1984: 44), her beauty is for the benefit of those around her:

The great occupation of woman should be to *beautify* life: to cultivate, for her own sake and that of those who surround her, all her faculties of mind, soul, and body; all her powers of enjoyment, and powers of giving enjoyment; and to diffuse beauty, and elegance, and grace, everywhere. If in addition to this the activity of her nature demands more energetic and definite employment, there is never any lack of it in the world. If she loves, her natural impulse will be to associate her existence with him she loves, and to share *his* occupations; in which if he loves her (with that affection of *equality* which alone deserves to be called love) she will naturally take as strong an interest, and be as thoroughly conversant, as the most perfect confidence on his side can make her. (Mill [1832–3] 1984: 44) (*italics in original*)

Women are criticised for using their bodies in the earlier passage yet here Mill encourages women to cultivate their bodies to make them pleasing to men. Unlike the passage on chivalry Mill is here suggesting that women have other faculties – mind and soul.

Reason is part of the description of the perfect wife. Women need to have the power of supporting themselves but women in marriage, like in Wollstonecraft, have specific roles:

gaining their own livelihood: until, therefore, every girl's parents have either provided her with independent means of subsistence, or given her an education qualifying her to provide those means for herself. The only difference between the employments of women and those of men will be, that those which partake most of the beautiful, or which require delicacy and taste rather than muscular exertion, will naturally fall to the share of women: all branches of the fine arts in particular. (Mill [1832–3] 1984: 44–45)

Mill appears to offer a diverse number of interpretations of women's identity. Women are compared to slaves in marriage, education has oppressed women by socialising them into gender roles – here beauty is a symbol of patriarchal society at work on women. Women also appear able to match men in the form of complementarity. Mill emphasises marriage as the marriage of equal minds, so presumably women do not have a group

identity here. Rather, class distinguishes women when only women of a 'high-minded' nature appear able to find the perfect union in marriage.

However, the passage on chivalry reveals a different identity for women. Chivalry has the suggestion of dependence. The discussion of chivalry also demonstrates a form of unity but not one based on equality. In this case women are presented as in need of the protection of men and in return they 'beautify life'. The most damaging identity that comes out of the above discussion is of women as prostitutes. However, again Mill is not suggesting a group identity for women but this is perhaps another example of Mill's class bias. A 'gentlewoman' who depended on men brought out the best in them but the equally dependent woman who was 'low-minded' was debased. Mill's class prejudices appear to limit his calls for women's liberation to only a minority of women from the middle classes.

Some of these identities are worrying for women's autonomy: Mill bases his autonomy on rationality, which he does not connect to beauty or dependence, on individuality, which women cannot have if their role is to beautify life, and on self-development, which is difficult for the dependent woman, if not impossible. It is therefore harder for women to pursue the freedom Mill advocates in *On Liberty*. Furthermore, Di Stefano and Zerilli's claims, which will be discussed in the following section that Mill equates women with nature via their bodies mean that women have to struggle far more with the first form of freedom than the seemingly disembodied men.

#### **4. Nature**

This section offers a reading of Mill's 'Nature' in which he draws a stark contrast between the natural world and the human world. He wants us to consider the dual meaning of the word 'natural'. Mill declares the purpose of the essay to be to distinguish laws of motion from laws of human nature:

It is proposed to inquire into the truth of the doctrines which make nature a test of right and wrong, good and evil... No word is more commonly associated with the word nature than law; and this last word has distinctly two meanings, in one of which it denotes some definite portion of what is, in the other, of what ought to be. We speak of the law of gravitation, the three laws of motion, the laws of definite proportions in chemical combination, the vital laws of organized beings. All these are portions of what is. We also speak of the criminal law, the civil law, the law of honor, the law of veracity, the law of justice – all of which are portions of what ought to be. (Mill [1874] 1965: 373)

The distinction lies between observable laws of motion termed 'nature' and laws of human 'nature'. Not only are the two different but the latter is superior to the former. This is because Mill equates being human with a conquest over nature; the natural is the enemy. Military language is used to make the point that we should not obey nature; we should conquer it: 'her powers are often toward man in the position of enemies, from whom he must wrest, by force and ingenuity, what little he can for his own use' (Mill [1874] 1965: 377).

This creates a dichotomy between nature and civilisation, with civilisation being valued over nature: 'All praise of civilization, or art, or contrivance is so much dispraise of nature' (Mill [1874] 1965: 377). This hierarchical dichotomy suggests that to be human is to be in conflict with nature but to succeed in being human there must be conquest over nature. This becomes clear in a passage on Bacon:

According to Bacon's maxim, we can obey nature in such a manner as to command it ... If, therefore, the useless precept to follow nature were changed into a precept to study nature – to know and take heed of the properties of the things we have to deal with, so far as these properties are capable of forwarding or obstructing any given purpose – we should have arrived at the first principle of all intelligent action, or rather at the definition of intelligent action itself. (Mill [1874] 1965: 375)

Christine Di Stefano notes this, and says that the essay is a stand against Romantic thinking, and this provides a further example of how rationalism, in the end, is given priority over Romantic thinking:

In that essay, Mill establishes his firm stand against the romantic notion that human beings ought to emulate nature. For Mill, such a doctrine is irrational and immoral; it is, in fact, immoral precisely because it is irrational. To the extent that we are already natural creatures, says Mill, such a notion is tautological. But to the extent that the "natural" denotes an arena of pre- or nonhuman intervention, it avoids facing the fact that all worthy human action involves an altering of nature for the better. (Di Stefano 1991: 152–3)

The distinction between humans and other animals grows clearer through reading Mill's discussion of human nature in 'Nature'. This shows that there is human nature and human character, human nature being natural man and character the arena of social man:

only after a long course of artificial education did good sentiments become so habitual, and so predominant over bad, as to arise unprompted when occasion called for them. In the times when mankind were nearer to their natural state, cultivated observers regarded the natural man as a sort of wild animal, distinguished chiefly by being craftier than the other beasts of the field; and all worth of character was deemed the result of a sort of taming, a phrase often applied by the ancient philosophers to the appropriate discipline of human beings. The truth is that there is hardly a single point of excellence belonging to human character which is not decidedly repugnant to the untutored feelings of human nature. (Mill [1874] 1965: 390–1)

Not only should we study and control nature but we should, also, exercise self-control. Self-control is something humans learn by experience, it is:

sacrificing a present desire to a distinct object or a general purpose which is indispensable for making the actions of the individual accord with his own notions of his individual good – even this is most unnatural to the undisciplined human being, as may be seen by the long apprenticeship which children serve to it. (Mill [1874] 1965: 393)

Self-control is something we learn by experience, and the more able we are to exercise self-control, the more civilised we have become. Those who are unable to exercise self-control – children, savages, soldiers, sailors and the poor, are similar to those to whom Mill would not apply his doctrine of liberty, 'meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties' (Mill [1859] 1989a: 13). The necessity of self-control is a key to

autonomy. If we cannot control ourselves, either we depend on others or we become slaves to nature.

Nature and virtue are also set against each other. Not only is conquering nature what makes us human, it also is what makes us virtuous:

The acquisition of virtue has in all ages been accounted a work of labor and difficulty ... it assuredly requires in most persons a greater conquest over a greater number of natural inclinations to become eminently virtuous than transcendently vicious. (Mill [1874] 1965: 399)

Yet earlier, in the example of chivalry, virtue could be encouraged in men by their behaviour to women. Perhaps Mill is implying that women and nature share the same characteristics in order to encourage virtue in men. Conquest over nature offers humans the prospect of virtue, self-control and consequently autonomy, but the struggle against nature can be tortuous:

In the clumsy provision which she has made for that perpetual renewal of animal life, rendered necessary by the prompt termination she puts to it in every individual instance, no human being ever comes into the world but another being is literally stretched on the rack for hours or days, not unfrequently issuing in death. (Mill [1874] 1965: 382)

Di Stefano comments, 'So much for nature's claim to the successive reproduction and replenishment of life' (Di Stefano 1991: 156). Now human reproduction has lost its 'high rewards' of Mill's description of chivalry. Mill appears unable to combine the Romantic notion of love he expresses in his discussion of chivalry with this view of human reproduction; love is civilised and marriage is companionship but the child-bearing wife will be dragged into this animal state.

Di Stefano uses Mill's essay 'Nature' and *Considerations on Representative Government* to highlight Mill's attitude to gender: '[w]hat we glean from these writings highlights the contours of an emotional sub-structure in which gender, cognitive orientation, and political preoccupation are intimately



linked' (Di Stefano 1991: 150). She points out that in *Considerations on Representative Government* Mill wants to note that order and progress are not opposites, they have 'similar qualities' that only separate when it comes 'to the question of preserving or advancing the social good'. Mill then takes these to contrast with what Di Stefano calls 'their genuine antonym, the deadly spectre of decay' (Di Stefano 1991: 150–1). Order and progress are activities but decay is the result of inaction: 'Immorality is equated with passivity, passivity with decay.... Life is a constant struggle against the quicksand of regression as the insistent forces of decay beckon from the sinister periphery of civilization' (Di Stefano 1991: 152).

Di Stefano adds that Mill also divides humans into the categories of passive and active. She quotes from Mill: 'the active or the passive type: that which struggles against evils or that which endures them; that which bends to circumstances or that which endeavours to make circumstances bend to itself' (Di Stefano 1991: 152). The active citizen, she says, is intelligent and takes part in the democratic political process, and the uneducated should be educated so they can do the same (Di Stefano 1991: 152). Di Stefano highlights Mill's insistence that the active person is the one who struggles against nature, not the one who follows nature, and this leads her to analyse Mill's essay 'On Nature'. The association of nature in Mill with the opposite of self-control and civilisation, made at the beginning of this section, is supported by Di Stefano. She points out Mill's gendered personification of nature: "'She' must be commanded' (Di Stefano 1991: 153) and

"She" stands in sharp and threatening contrast to the morality and rationality of the civilized world. And it is in large part precisely because of this dichotomous contrast that she lurks as such a threat. (Di Stefano 1991: 154)

Mill contrasts the violence of nature with cleanliness. Di Stefano argues that Mill's claim that "natural" should contain no *positive* presumptions is

backed up by the alternative claim that the “natural” contains a good many antivalues’ (Di Stefano 1991: 154):

Nature emerges as an evil, malevolent, and destructive force, a far cry from a category having no preemptive value or claim on human aspirations. (Di Stefano 1991: 154)

Di Stefano thinks that this essay and *Considerations of Representative Government* mirror each other in their claims on culture to control and command nature. Discipline and self-control are what is needed for civilised life (Di Stefano 1991: 155). If Mill equates nature with death then, Di Stefano argues, this cannot be separated from his ideas on ‘liberty and autonomy’. She picks out Mill’s tortuous description of labour, mentioned earlier, and equates this with a ‘primal terror of maternal re-engulfment which signals the “death” of the masculine child’ (Di Stefano 1991: 156). She says that Mill’s use of nature reflects a process of masculine identity formation with ‘the themes of a feminized nature and a masculinized objective cognitive stance’ (Di Stefano 1991: 157). The child-bearing, body-burdened woman represents nature, and nature must be overcome in order for autonomy to be realised. Autonomy is thus equated with masculinity. Di Stefano argues that Mill’s subject is not abstract but has modern masculine traits. The subject ‘is capable of maintaining a discrete sense of identity vis-à-vis fellow human beings’, the individual is threatened by ‘the undifferentiated mob’ and *On Liberty*:

is preoccupied with the liberty of a well-differentiated modern masculine subject who requires a protected zone of thought, expression, and action for his survival and well-being. Within this zone, the liberal masculine subject is constituted as a self-sufficient and sovereign entity. It is from this zone that he ventures into the social world. (Di Stefano 1991: 171–2)

This is similar to the family in Hegel’s thought: the man ventures from his protected zone, the family, and pursues his particular destiny. He returns

from this pursuit to be replenished and nurtured in the protection of the family where he feels part of a unit.

The description of the individual as a sovereign subject also links back to the chapter on Hegel. Mill's individual has self-sovereignty in that he is able to be in control of the process of identity formation. He is able to control the identities he has and able to reject other identities. In seeking control over this process the sovereign individual will relate to others also as sovereign selves, as was demonstrated in the section on our relationship with others. However, the masculine nature of Mill's autonomy means that women who are mothers, involved in nurturing or resembling nature in any way through their bodies, are unable to maintain this discrete identity as they are identified with reproduction and their bodies.

Di Stefano argues that Mill can only incorporate women for as long as they can be masculinised, and when they are in 'embodied and gendered capacities as wives and mothers' his liberalism fails them' (Di Stefano 1991: 175). Mill's harm principle and his division of life into public and private 'presume a division within the individual himself in terms of private identity on the one hand and social identity on the other' (Di Stefano 1991: 170). This in turn represents the masculine subject, who is more able to assume a non-embodied identity. Not only is Mill's fear of nature directed at women but also the poor, as Zerilli notes:

Mill's symbolic figuration of nature is articulated through a discourse not only of gender but also of class. For nature exerts her destructive power first and foremost through the working-class body that remains on the nether side of the clean and proper, at once savage and menacing. (Zerilli 1994: 102)

Nature is set in dichotomy with the attributes that make humans rational, virtuous and autonomous but the rational being who is more likely to slip to the nether side is the body-burdened and child-bearing woman. This description of woman as embodied and natural is reminiscent of Hegel's description.

She, in particular the mother, must be a threat to male self-control. Di Stefano suggests this is true of James and J.S. Mill. They, she says, saw J.S. Mill's mother as 'a constant source of mortification to her husband and eldest son, a pregnant reminder of her husband's all-too-human desires' (Di Stefano 1991: 183). These desires should be quelled by self-control: 'representing the harnessing of nature at the level of the individual'. A lack of self-control threatens not just the individual, but also the progress of civilisation (Di Stefano 1991: 155). So it now appears that the second form of freedom and all the possibilities of individuality, autonomy and difference are bound to a prior gendered division made by Mill. Women are identified by their bodies and thus limited to nature, with the exception of the few women who are not from the working classes and do not remind Mill of the female body, while men pursue individuality, difference and progress. A woman's capacity for self-control is limited by her links with nature and the risk of her sliding into nature; therefore Mill sees women as a threat and so they must be controlled.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter offers some familiar and some less familiar interpretations of Mill. The combination of texts is perhaps an unusual one but such a combination offers an insight into how Mill perceived women's identity, of how his view of freedom can be interpreted as having two forms and of how control appears to influence Mill's thought more than is perhaps often thought.

Di Stefano notes that Mill treated women as either exceptional individuals or masculine individuals (1991: 175), and it was only the latter which would qualify for the second form of freedom. Frequently seen to be on the edge of classical and at the start of new liberalism, Mill also reflects the dilemmas picked up by the second wave of feminism from the first: should women's emancipation lie in equality or difference? In the end, for Mill, women's autonomy had to be the same as for men, he was unable to distance his theory of autonomy from his gendered view of freedom. Freedom was to be found away from the natural and women's nature made them closer to the natural world, whereas men were able to exercise self-control and use order to fight the chaos of nature, as their human (male) nature allowed them to. Wives can grapple against nature, against the threat of stagnation but when wives are also mothers they cannot, and men can test themselves against both levels of freedom.

Mill makes strong links between women's identity and their capacity for autonomy. His thought, as that of Wollstonecraft, linked autonomy with reason and self-control: this is what separates humans from the non-human world. However, the possibility of self-control for women is seldom realised by Mill because he also has a gendered view of identity. As in Wollstonecraft, women are nurturers and carers; they, with men, can form part of a perfect whole. However, unlike Wollstonecraft, these roles are not associated with rationality; he did not consider love and nurturing to be compatible with reason and individuality. Also, unlike Wollstonecraft, he appears to fear those he refers to as the 'masses', suggesting a class bias. Both the masses and nature and woman's body needed to be escaped from. Therefore individualism, and indeed autonomy, comes from a separation from all the traits he assigns women but also from a distancing from others: this is the second form of freedom – individuality is only possible through an autonomy that works against others and perceives others as a threat.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, Mill offers a theory of individuality which can take us away from the isolated notion of the liberal individual who lives apart from others. However, this chapter reveals limits to Mill's claims to individuality and these limits stem from the emphasis on control. Here two of the themes key to the concept of autonomy put forward in this thesis can be seen to come into conflict. They are the idea of autonomy as dynamic and the importance of control. Individuality is key to social progress but it appears that the individuality of the genius above anyone else is what must be preserved. But against this possibility of progress lies the threat of stagnation. This is both the threat of a stagnant society which stands still or worse festers until it decays and also the risk of stagnation Mill found in nature. The risk for Mill was that if humans did not separate themselves from nature they would be engulfed in the passive and rotting world with which Mill associates nature. In order to prevent this there must be control; this takes two forms: control over ourselves to avoid slipping into nature and social control. Social control is to prevent people risking social stagnation, that is, to control those who cannot control themselves.

Mill appears to favour control as much as liberty in the end and this highlights the importance of finding a balance between having enough control over our identity in order to be able to say that it is ours and being able to allow our autonomy to promote identity that is dynamic and that can flourish. My concept of autonomy needs to allow for the element of control that gives us the ability to manage identity for ourselves but this management has to be of ourselves not of others and also not by others. Individuality in Mill's thought, for all the possibilities of diversity and individual flourishing it brought us in Chapter 1, becomes controlled. The diversity Mill wishes to promote appears to become divisive through Mill's wish to maintain order and control and to direct the promotion of difference towards the male middle classes rather than looking to the poor and to women. In part this comes about because Mill's desire for control dominates his thought and masks what he says about our relationships with

others. Thus the harm principle helps the individual negotiate her autonomy and presents the image of an individual in the company of others but it also becomes a somewhat 'masculine' version of the individual who has to be separate from nature and separate from others in the two forms of freedom discussed in this chapter.

This separation is not useful for my concept of autonomy which seeks to promote relatedness to others, yet the spirit of Mill's insistence on diversity is useful: we all gain from allowing genius to flourish. Similarly we all gain from allowing others to pursue their identity because a society of freely-chosen diverse identity means there are more options available. The idea that autonomy is gained by freeing ourselves from nature and from other people denies the possibility of relational autonomy, my concept of autonomy requires that we be free without having to define this freedom against something.

However, to some extent, the two levels of freedom do present a positive aspect of autonomy for my concept because they emphasise the importance of process albeit a negative one based on defining ourselves against nature or against other people. The idea of autonomy as a process for identity claim and development put forward in this thesis is a developmental process; it is concerned with identities which are evolving so any suggestion of a process is useful. However, Mill's process of two forms of freedom would ultimately thwart autonomy by bringing the process to a halt with the imposition of social control and with limits on the possibilities for women's identity.

As was noted, identity and autonomy are linked in Mill's framework. Identity, or rather, women's identity, limits the possibilities for autonomy. Autonomy cannot be found without reaching the second stage of freedom and Mill suggests that most women, because of the identity he sees them as having, will perpetually struggle with the first. The most sinister implication

of this framework is that those left struggling with the first form of freedom will require control by those who have reached the second. Social order must prevail and this is possible by one of two strategies: self-control, or, failing that, social control.

Mill's rigid assertion of women's identity is in part responsible for the strong division between the two forms of freedom. The next chapter argues that Simone de Beauvoir does present a less rigid divide between the two types of freedom and also offers the possibility of freedom with others, as does Wollstonecraft.



## Chapter 6

### ***Freedom and Other People: From Matter to Mind, to Other People Matter in de Beauvoir's Thought.***

This chapter draws on one very well-known text written by Simone de Beauvoir; *The Second Sex*; and one that is less well known, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. These texts are drawn on in order to argue that together they present arguments about freedom and gender identity as a social construct that are useful for my concept of autonomy.

#### ***Introduction***

The parts of this chapter that focus on *The Second Sex* do not attempt to enter the myriad debates surrounding this text but instead consider the criticism of Genevieve Lloyd. Lloyd's criticism is used because it voices some of the common criticism of de Beauvoir's work in a very succinct and engaging manner. I argue, contrary to Lloyd, that de Beauvoir's theory of freedom is not a male theory that is problematic for women because it emphasises disembodiment over embodiment and opposes subject to object, with women always being in the latter category.

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* de Beauvoir demonstrates that the dichotomy of subject and object is a false one to apply to human beings and that many philosophers, as Nancy Bauer notes, 'have incorrectly identified the ambiguity of the human condition as some sort of radical *split*: as between body and soul, or phenomenon and noumenon, or interiority and exteriority' (Bauer 2001: 161) (*italics in original*). De Beauvoir argues this rather than trying to 'cleave either to one side or another of the split' (Bauer 2001: 161). The central oppositions the book tackles are those of our human origin in nature and of our awareness of self, or individuality, and our need for others.

This chapter argues that if de Beauvoir's work in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is used as a conceptual backdrop for *The Second Sex* then we can see that women can struggle for freedom in the same way as men but in order to do so we all need to acknowledge our ambiguity, the seeming contradictions of freedom with others, and seeing others as a threat to our freedom, and of actually being consciousness and also wanting to be part of nature.

The first section in this chapter looks at criticism of de Beauvoir and argues that her view of women's identity is based on a description of how patriarchy socially constructs women, rather than a linking of women to all that is to do with the body and to do with nature. The second section looks at sovereignty and freedom in de Beauvoir's thought and argues that her theory of freedom is not based on the dichotomy of an agent being either a subject or an object, and also that her theory rejects domination as a legitimate form of freedom. The final section looks at de Beauvoir's theory of freedom as a theory which, like that of John Stuart Mill, takes two forms and also demonstrates a progression from the lower or basic form of freedom to the more complex and intersubjective kind.

### **1. *The body-burdened life of woman***

This section deals with the de Beauvoir's view of women. She appears to describe women as immanent in the face of men's transcendence. However, this section argues that de Beauvoir's view does not do this; rather she describes the condition of woman based on the experience of being immanent as the result of social construction rather than biology. Lloyd is concerned that de Beauvoir criticises the female body more than she does social attitudes to this female body. This leads her to conclude that, following Jean Paul Sartre, who is following Hegel, transcendence of the body-bound state is in fact transcendence of bodily life: 'Man transcends species life and he 'creates values''(Lloyd 1993: 100). Men transcend but women's bodies confine them to immanence. However, this

chapter argues that de Beauvoir does not view women as only immanent, rather, she is concerned with the social conditioning of women that tells them that they are body more than mind, and immanent and not transcendent.

### *1:1 Lloyd's criticism of de Beauvoir*

Lloyd criticises de Beauvoir's appropriation of the master–slave dialectic from Hegel and from Sartre as making de Beauvoir more concerned with women as embodied than the social construction of 'woman'. According to Lloyd in Sartre's version there can only be one 'looker' and one 'looked-at' (Lloyd 1993: 96). However, when de Beauvoir conceptualises transcendence: 'one sex is .... permanently in the privileged role of looker, the other is always looked at' (Lloyd 1993: 96). Lloyd is critical of the way in which de Beauvoir takes the female predicament in Hegel's nether world as 'nothing but a zone of bad faith' (Lloyd 1993: 99) because, according to Lloyd, it:

has some more negative consequences for de Beauvoir's account of the condition of being female. They come out especially in some of her remarks about female biology, where she presents the female predicament as a conflict between being an inalienable free subject, reaching out to transcendence, and being a body which drags this subject back to a merely natural existence. It is as if the female body is an intrinsic obstacle to transcendence. (Lloyd 1993: 99)

Therefore, Lloyd says de Beauvoir's use of Hegel causes her to 'slip into those disconcerting passages' and transcendence becomes, Lloyd comments, 'a transcendence of the feminine' (Lloyd 1993: 101). If transcendence is to be of the female body then, according to Lloyd, this must imply that transcendence is inherently male.

Lloyd's comments imply that de Beauvoir's understanding of freedom is based on a dichotomy of a free transcendent male and an unfree, immanent female. This fails to recognise the importance de Beauvoir attached to our relationship to others; we are neither completely immanent nor completely transcendent. De Beauvoir's theory of freedom is more complex than this, as will be explained in the second section.

For Lloyd, de Beauvoir's use of Hegel is problematic because male transcendence is different from female transcendence, and impossible for women because it tears away the nether world:

Male transcendence, as Hegel partly saw, is different from what female transcendence would have to be. It is breaking away from a zone which, for the male, remains intact – from what is for him the realm of particularity and merely natural feelings. For the female, in contrast, there is no such realm which she can both leave and leave intact. (Lloyd 1993: 102)

In Hegel the nether world and family must remain intact, but de Beauvoir is not borrowing from all of Hegel. Also, if female transcendence would tear away the nether world then this implies the break achieved through transcendence is permanent. The third section shows, through a reading of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, that it is not: the difference between being free and unfree is not a straightforward dichotomy because there are degrees of freedom. Woman can transcend, and as she moves away, the nether world does not have to remain intact, her individual action could affect others in a different way. The nether world is a male construct and the women who can transcend it help to alter its reality. As was suggested in Chapter 4, Hegel's views of women were a product of his time and no philosophy more than his is open to the possibility that the beliefs held at a particular time could become challenged later. Therefore the claim that if women were to leave the nether world the family would collapse does not correspond to the views, starting to form around the time of publication of *The Second Sex* but much stronger now, that the family is not the sole domain of women.

Women can leave the family and inhabit other spheres just as men can inhabit the family and leave the state. So woman can leave the family. However, women can only leave their immanent sphere if they want to, if they come to recognise their personal aims, become authentic agents and express their individuality.

### *1:2 De Beauvoir's criticism of social structures*

Steven Lukes examines how domination can affect the way in which we regard ourselves. He argues that if domination is understood as power over others then it matters to what degree the power of others impacts on the life of the dominated (Lukes 2004: 114). Domination can result in the ability of one group to define another. Lukes, using Spinoza, asks: how does domination constrain our ability to act according to our nature (Lukes 2004: 117)? One possibility he suggests is an interpretation of nature is to explore identity (Lukes 2004: 118) – do we construct our identities according to our nature or are our identities constructed by our society, thus imposing a nature on us? Lukes notes this also raises the spectre of recognition and what it means to have 'ethnic or cultural or religious or geographical identities' misrecognised, or to be 'irredeemably defined by a fixed and unalterable inferior and dependent status and set of roles from which there is no exit' (Lukes 2004: 119). Lukes adds that domination through identity takes:

more complex forms still where the dominant group or nation, in control of the means of interpretation and communication, project their own experience and culture as the norm, rendering invisible the perspective of those they dominate, while simultaneously stereotyping them and marking them out as 'other'. (Lukes 2004: 120)

However, Lukes also notes that the domination will never be complete: 'the dominated will never fully internalize ways of interpreting the world that devalue them' (Lukes 2004: 120). From Lukes' reading of domination we can see how patriarchy, as a dominant culture, has been able to define

women's identity with stereotypes suggesting that women are 'other' to men. It appears to be this form of cultural and social, as well as political, domination against which de Beauvoir argues.

Judith Butler also argues that patriarchy's grip on women's identity is such that it makes it impossible to think about women's identity other than how it is defined by male domination. She refers to the gendered body as performative. This means that the female body is only what can be seen and no more, 'it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality' (Butler 1999: 173). Gender does not describe who we are according to Butler, 'it is something that one *does*' (Lloyd 2005: 25) (*italics in original*).

The sex/gender distinction has been an object of contention in feminist theory. However, Butler draws on Simone de Beauvoir to argue that the two are very different (Butler 1986: 35). She notes 'Simone de Beauvoir's account of 'becoming' a gender reconciles the internal ambiguity of gender as both 'project' and 'construct'.... Beauvoir formulates gender as a corporeal locus of cultural possibilities both received and innovated' (Butler 1986: 37). 'Becoming' gender is similar to Butler's argument here that gender is always 'acting out'; this leads Butler to develop a concept of gender parody. This does not assume an original gender identity and is in effect 'an imitation without origin' (Butler 1999: 175).

Gender parody disrupts hegemony, it is 'a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization' (Butler 1999: 175). Butler concedes that these identities will have been formed in the 'hegemonic, misogynist culture' but there is movement and change of place, their 'parodic recontextualization' defies the hegemonic culture (Butler 1999: 176). Even if identities are formed in oppressive situations, there is still the chance of re-conceiving these identities. The act of parody disrupts hegemony. The notions of gender as a project and as socially

constructed reflect Wollstonecraft's point that we do not know what it means to be a woman because gender is constructed by men, so women need to be able to discover what gender means.

*The Second Sex* is a long and on occasions, seemingly contradictory book. As Butler notes: 'Although Simone de Beauvoir occasionally ascribes ontological meanings to anatomical sexual differentiation, her comments just as often suggest that anatomy alone has no inherent significance' (Butler 1986: 45). It is therefore left, to some extent, open to interpretation as to what exactly she did mean. However, it is the view of this chapter that de Beauvoir did not equate women with bodily immanence and that she viewed gender as a social construct. This is the view of de Beauvoir that Butler takes: 'In 'The Data of Biology' she distinguishes between natural facts and their significance, and argues that natural facts gain significance only through their subjection to non-natural systems of interpretation' (Butler 1986: 45). In a passage cited by Lloyd (Lloyd 1993: 100), de Beauvoir argues that the nether world is created by men; it is not natural: 'Men have presumed to create a feminine domain – the kingdom of life, of immanence – only to lock up women therein' (de Beauvoir [1949] 1997: 96–7). If de Beauvoir describes women in a way that links women to their bodies it is because this is what patriarchy does. If, therefore, de Beauvoir talks about transcendence in *The Second Sex*, she means transcendence of women's situation, transcendence of patriarchy, transcendence of oppression.

De Beauvoir is concerned by the use of anatomical difference to construct women; she is clear that biological facts do not map out destiny for women:

I deny that they establish for her a fixed and inevitable destiny. They are insufficient for setting up a hierarchy of the sexes; they fail to explain why woman is the Other; they do not condemn her to remain in this subordinate role for ever. (de Beauvoir [1949] 1997: 65).

In the first quotation taken from Lloyd in this chapter she says that transcendence is the transcendence of 'species life'. This is true for de Beauvoir but 'species life' could be interpreted not as equated with the female body in particular but with the natural world in general. This is a different proposition because it says that freedom is to be found through rising above and, as transcendence is connected to the master–slave dialectic, through gaining 'mastery' over the natural world. Freedom in de Beauvoir then becomes like Mill's first form of freedom in seeking control of nature.

## **2. Sovereignty and freedom**

This section looks at de Beauvoir's theory of transcendence in more detail and begins with a discussion of sovereignty in order to establish that her theory of transcendence is neither based on the master–slave dichotomy nor on the somewhat patriarchal notion of domination.

### **2:1 Women as sovereigns**

Woman is capable of being essential but her cultural context, her upbringing, lets her believe that she is inessential. She is not born the passive, inessential Other but a restricted upbringing in which she is taught to accept a male hierarchy leaves her defined by society rather than being able to define herself. Woman needs to transcend her oppressive context.

John Hoffman thinks that when de Beauvoir:

talks about the sovereignty of the oppressed, she equates sovereignty with autonomy and independence rather than with domination and repression. But the power which is exercised by people who are sovereign (that is to say, those who are autonomous and respectful of others) is not simply positive in character. It has both a negative as well as a positive dimension. (Hoffman 2001:11)



Negative and positive power work in a similar way to negative and positive freedom: negative power connotes 'the notion of force or the threat of force' (Hoffman 2001: 148). Positive power is 'power to' although as Hoffman notes, if we understand 'power to' as capacity then positive power becomes 'power over' (Hoffman 2001: 148), that is, 'power as domination' (Hoffman 2001: 148). So in very general terms negative power is connected to power as force and positive power to power as capacity. Hoffman argues that negative and positive power cannot be successfully separated and one contains elements of the other (Hoffman 2001: 150). When emphasis is placed on power-over then it contains negative aspects of force through domination. This is the kind of power Wollstonecraft argues is so destructive and that damages not only the oppressed but also the oppressor. As will be shown, sovereignty in de Beauvoir's thought appears to be far more concerned with controlling ourselves rather than dominating others. However, de Beauvoir is similar to Wollstonecraft in that she also sees an attempt to limit another's freedom as damaging to all involved. She is mindful of the way in which our freedom connects with the freedom with others and this suggests a theory of autonomy which requires individuals to understand the way in which their autonomy affects the autonomy of others.

As was shown in Chapter 4, in *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir sees all humans as having the potential for sovereignty. Yet it is still possible for women to become the Other:

Now, what peculiarly signalises the situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego (conscience) which is essential and sovereign. The drama of woman lies in this conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego) – who always regards the self as the essential – and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential. How can a human being in a woman's situation attain fulfilment? (de Beauvoir [1949] 1997: 29)

Women are capable of transcendence but the patriarchal oppression of women means women often experience their situation as immanent. In the quotation above, the transcending self is described as 'sovereign'. This sense of sovereignty reflects the nature of how the self became sovereign. The self in the above description treats woman as an object which, returning to the discussion of recognition in Chapters 2 and 3, is an illegitimate source of power. The self has used illegitimate means to his transcendence and the very foundations for his transcendence are the social structures that allow him to oppress. Also, misrecognition is involved. The self in de Beauvoir's description does not recognise the Other but misrecognises her. Recognition of others involves us seeing people as other (different) to us and this is an argument for true and authentic sovereignty that allows us to recognise others as sovereign selves. It is not the subject/object dualism we associate with theories of self-ownership in which 'others' take on a different meaning as others are a threat to our autonomy. However, de Beauvoir's emphasis is on self-sovereignty as self-definition and self-control. Hoffman says of de Beauvoir's theory for autonomy for women:

women can obtain autonomy without having to invert patriarchal domination, so that .... the sovereignty of (emancipated) women is qualitatively different from the sovereignty of (patriarchal) men. Women who assert their sovereignty, are slaves liberating themselves, not masters acting at the expense of others. (Hoffman 2001: 159)

Again referring to *The Second Sex*, Hoffman says: 'But sovereignty here again implies, it seems to me, not domination, but the right to control one's own life' (Hoffman 2001: 159). This is the control over herself, the sovereignty that woman seeks. This offers a positive interpretation of sovereignty, which strengthens my concept of autonomy through emphasis on control, self-definition and the need for recognition as well as the dangers of misrecognition for autonomy.

De Beauvoir is aware that autonomy and freedom can result in the oppression of others, as will be shown in the third section. She also shows an understanding of autonomy as a process. Thus autonomy can be available to the oppressed, in limited degree, yet autonomy used by oppressors cannot lead them to true freedom because they fail to recognise the importance of others to their own freedom.

## *2:2 De Beauvoir's theory of transcendence*

The first section suggested that transcendence means transcendence of the natural world for de Beauvoir. In similar ways to Mill she describes immanence as stagnation and as not being active:

In particular those who are condemned to stagnation are often pronounced happy on the pretext that happiness consists in being at rest. This notion we reject, for our perspective is that of existentialist ethics. Every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence; he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out towards other liberties. There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the '*en-soi*' – the brutish life of subjection to given conditions – and of liberty into constraint and contingency... Every individual concerned to justify his existence feels that his existence involves an undefined need to transcend himself, to engage in freely chosen projects. (de Beauvoir [1949] 1997: 28–9)

Immanence is equated with stagnation and the threat of a 'brutish life' and contingency as it is in Mill. De Beauvoir's phenomenological background means she argues that our bodies provide us with existence in the world (Hutchings 2003: 66) but cultural attitudes surrounding the female body also place limits in our situation. De Beauvoir does not reduce women to biology (Hutchings 2003: 67).

De Beauvoir believed that women were largely immanent due to their cultural experience. Women have been taught, and on occasion become complicit with the notion, that they not only cannot transcend their situation

but do not desire to do so (de Beauvoir [1949] 1997: 315,352–3, 358). It is a desire to pursue ‘concrete projects’ (de Beauvoir [1949] 1997: 308) that creates the possibility of transcendence. This desire has, according to de Beauvoir, been fostered in men but not in women. Man and woman are aware of their current situation, but it is only man who is capable of desiring more, of moving forwards. De Beauvoir argues that this desire is culturally fostered in men but that this is not so for women. Her solution involves the belief that cultural history itself can be transcended. In order to pursue meaningful lives, to aim towards ‘concrete projects’, women appear to need to confront and alter the cultural history that has trapped women in immanence. Also, each woman needs to transcend her own situation. It is not entirely clear in *The Second Sex* exactly how this is to be achieved. One possibility de Beauvoir raises is that an awareness of her immanence is enough to drive women to desire transcendence:

All oppression creates a state of war. And this is no exception. The existent who is regarded as inessential cannot fail to demand the re-establishment of her sovereignty.

Today the combat takes a different shape; instead of wishing to put men in a prison, woman endeavours to escape from one, she no longer seeks to drag him into the realms of immanence but to emerge, herself, into the light of transcendence. Now the attitude of the males creates a new conflict: it is with bad grace that man lets her go. He is very well pleased to remain the sovereign subject, the absolute superior, the essential being; he refuses to accept his companion as an equal in any concrete way. She replies to his lack of confidence in her by assuming an aggressive attitude. It is no longer a question of a war between individuals each shut up in his or her sphere: a caste claiming its rights attacks and is resisted by the privileged caste. Here two transcendences are face to face; instead of displaying mutual recognition, each free being wishes to dominate the other. (de Beauvoir [1949] 1997: 726–7)

De Beauvoir’s theory of freedom is not a dichotomy because women do not seek to drag men into immanence in order to be transcendent, as was discussed in the previous section. De Beauvoir is presenting a version of autonomy where the passive being becomes aware of her context and, as a part of a process of awareness, she desires change. De Beauvoir describes the desire for change: ‘the free spirit with all its riches must

project itself towards an empty heaven that it is to populate' (de Beauvoir [1949] 1997: 721); this is a description of an agent, or at least of the becoming of an agent. Power appears to play a significant role in structuring and changing relations. The woman who has transcended is left in a state of conflict with men who want her to be immanent. This raises issues connected with the domestic violence example of Chapter 4. The relationship is antagonistic, the abuser wants to own and possess the victim and the victim cannot assume the necessary agency to remove herself from this context without recognising her immanence in this situation: her victim status. However, as with the domestic violence example, the power held over her is not legitimate and is not the result of an autonomous process. The transcendent man has tried to appropriate woman as a 'thing' but she is not a 'thing' so he has attempted to appropriate a person and, as was demonstrated in Chapter 4, this is not possible.

This self is context-bound yet it is not context limited. It is a self loaded with cultural origin and is therefore not an unencumbered self. Created by an awareness of her history and an acknowledgement of her context, she is able to transcend that context. The self's awareness of her context gives rise to a desire for change and it is this desire for change that enables de Beauvoir's passive woman to transcend her otherness. De Beauvoir acknowledges that the reality of oppressive situations means freedom has to be understood as limited according to the situation: 'this at last suggests the possibility of qualitative distinctions between different sorts of freedom, something which is difficult to square with the Sartrean ontology of *Being and Nothingness*' (Hutchings 2003: 59). Some women will find it harder to transcend their context and develop their autonomy and their identity (by transcending oppression women are claiming identity). However, again, it must be noted she is transcending a patriarchal context and not a specific person.

Transcendence is not absolute; it is of any given situation. Immanence is a state that can be altered but this alteration is gradual. De Beauvoir's theory of freedom relies on a constant awareness of situation and a constant struggle for transcendence: freedom in a given situation does not guarantee freedom in all situations.

It is hoped the discussion below of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* will demonstrate that although de Beauvoir possibly believes women suffer more as a result of biology, the sphere of immanence is not one determined by biology: it is one determined by other people. Therefore the task is to overcome indoctrination and prejudice – this is a result of patriarchal oppression. However, the road from immanence to transcendence is neither fast nor clear, it must be taken in stages and in the company of others who might slow us down but on whose cooperation we are dependent. Freedom with others is addressed in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. De Beauvoir is concerned with the many ways we use to avoid being free and the ways in which others do this. Our duty to recognise the freedom of others is not opposed to but is part of our process of transcendence; we can only transcend what we know is real and we can only strive to goals we have set ourselves.

### **3. De Beauvoir's theory of freedom**

This section looks at what de Beauvoir says about freedom in order to understand how this might contribute to my concept of autonomy. Two emphases stand out in de Beauvoir's analysis, which appear to distance her position from Sartre's: first, de Beauvoir is insistent that freedom be seen as not only concretely situated but also affected or limited by situation (de Beauvoir [1947]1976: 38) in a way that has implications for freedom, as has already been discussed. De Beauvoir's theory implies that autonomy is negotiated within social structures through her emphasis on humans as 'material beings' (Arp 2001: 54). The second emphasis is described by

Hutchings as de Beauvoir's insistence 'that the freedom of any individual is dependent on the freedom of others (1997: 73)' (Hutchings 2003: 59).

Her thought on freedom is therefore modified from Sartre's to allow her to theorise female autonomy for women as both limited by social context but also as enabled by cooperation with others. For de Beauvoir there is some sense of solidarity in advancing our freedom in that it is a project better achieved with others than alone.

The emphasis on transcendence is modified not only by the implications of situatedness, but also by arguments for intersubjectivity. The important claim being made here is that our freedom (male and female) is bound up with that of others. This could go one of two ways. If transcendence depends on others then it will also depend on the gender bias inherent in the social situation of self and other. Alternatively, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* could indicate a situation in which transcendence is not in itself a gendered concept. It offers potential autonomy yet is realistic enough to be conscious of the effects of gender and power that may make autonomy more difficult for women more often than for men. If transcendence can become non-gendered then free movement and the possibility of multi-faceted identity can be realised. The context-bound self needs to be able to move away from restrictive identities. If de Beauvoir's theory of freedom based on her notion of transcendence is realisable within any context (not necessarily attainable but can at least be imagined) then the emphasis de Beauvoir places, particularly in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, on the instrumentality of others in *our* freedom and the role of recognition, is vital.

De Beauvoir's work in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* takes account of two types of ambiguity, which correspond to two forms of freedom. First, we are 'natural' beings, we are a species of animal but our freedom depends on our ability to separate ourselves from nature. The second ambiguity is that we are individuals but our freedom depends on our realising we are

dependent on others for our freedom. We are not individual, hermetically sealed spheres, we are a part of a whole and we are more free through cooperation rather than combat with others.

The two levels of freedom de Beauvoir emphasises are similar to the two forms of freedom in Mill (Chapter 5). However, although they display some similarities in relation to their attitudes of the first form towards nature, which involves negotiating freedom from nature, they differ in that de Beauvoir does not see the boundaries between the two levels as being as absolute as does Mill. In de Beauvoir's thought there are steps towards human or moral freedom, away from natural or ontological freedom. These steps blur the boundaries between the two and make moral freedom a more gradual process. This sense of progression from one form of freedom to another is demonstrated in the final part of this section, which focuses on a discussion in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* of five characters de Beauvoir describes who fail to be free in varying degrees.

### *3:1 Ontological freedom*

Our ambiguity is something de Beauvoir says we cannot flee, instead we should 'try to assume our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our life that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting' (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 9). Kristanna Arp also suggests that there are two forms of freedom to be found. She refers to the first form of freedom as 'ontological freedom' because: 'There is no freedom in nature' (Arp 2001: 55). To fail to be free is to attempt to revert to natural existence but this is not satisfying as any individual so doing is still burdened by their freedom – to be ontologically free is still to suffer the anguish of not being able to be part of being-in-itself, the human mind cannot be resolved into matter. We cannot dissolve into nature, be part of the water or the earth, we are burdened. Because women are consciousnesses, they cannot be only for immanence (ontologically free



rather than morally free). Arp notes that you cannot will yourself not to be free – you are free but you can fail to respond to the fact of your freedom:

Since one is always free, one can, and indeed one must, freely choose what attitude to take to one's own freedom. One can persist in the vain desire to be and not will oneself free. Or one can will oneself free by accepting one's freedom and actively making oneself a lack of being. If a person chooses the latter option then he or she achieves moral freedom. (Arp 2001: 55)

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* de Beauvoir says humans are ambiguous:

'Rooted as they are in the earth, humans can transcend their material origin in thought, but they can never escape it' (Arp 2001: 48). We cannot escape this ambiguity, we are both mind and matter: 'the existence of consciousness is dependant on the human body and its continuing functioning. For this reason death, Beauvoir stresses, is inevitable and indeed possible at any moment' (Arp 2001: 49). If we recognise ourselves as natural beings then we might be better reconciled to death: 'without consciousness there can be no revelation of enduring truths. But consciousness depends on the body, which exists in time, not in an atemporal realm' (Arp 2001: 49). We are thinking beings but we cannot exist only in our minds. We are free, whether we like it or not. We cannot be part of nature so we cannot relieve ourselves of our freedom. We need to 'completely realize our freedom by accepting its burdens rather than running from them' (Arp 2001: 50).

According to Arp, Sartre's ontology in *Being and Nothingness* is without ambiguity, there is 'the for-itself – consciousness – and the in-itself – non-conscious reality' (Arp 2001: 52), so to make myself a 'lack of being' my consciousness needs to reject the non-conscious world – I need to stand apart from the natural world in order to recognise that I am a part of it. Arp notes that in the philosophy of both Sartre and de Beauvoir 'humans make themselves a lack of being in order that there might be being' (Arp 2001: 51). However Arp notes, that de Beauvoir argues, again as Sartre, that there are two forms of being: mind and matter, the conscious and the non-

conscious, but unlike Sartre de Beauvoir argues that the two are connected: 'Beauvoir stresses the dark, submerged links between the non-conscious and the conscious more than he does' (Arp 2001: 52).

The attraction of the material or the non-conscious is that it offers respite from the responsibility and the 'burden' as it is for Sartre (Arp 2001: 54) of freedom. Arp quotes de Beauvoir:

"I should like to be the landscape which I am contemplating, I should like this sky, this quiet water to think themselves within me, that it might be I whom they express in flesh and bone" (EA 12). Beauvoir refers to this desire to become one with nature in other works.... In *The Second Sex* she gives a psychological explanation of it origins, tracing it back to the anguish caused when the infant is "separated more or less brutally from the nourishing body" of the mother at around six months of age (Arp 2001: 53)

We cannot make ourselves 'at one' with nature, we are at a distance from it, but, although this might create a sense of anguish, it is good to 'remain at a distance from nature. Due to this distance the sky and the water exist before us' (Arp 2001: 54). This emphasises the importance of self-direction and self-control (in terms of not relinquishing control) as an aspect of autonomy as it is argued for in this thesis. De Beauvoir is arguing for a sense of control over nature in order to avoid engulfment. We are able to stand apart from the sky and the water and therefore to have a sense of control over it, we can avoid being blown by the wind or drifting with the current and because we are human we are not part of the sky and the water and we are not engulfed by them. In a similar way, women can avoid being engulfed by their bodies. De Beauvoir notes that women frequently fail to be in command of their bodies (de Beauvoir [1949] 1997: 65) and this bodily engulfment is to be resisted. So women need to be able to be in control of their bodies, not in order to be like men, but to avoid the engulfment that threatens ontological freedom. This threat is what is meant by making oneself 'a lack of being'. We cannot actually succeed in this project and to attempt to is futile and a waste of our potential for freedom. We can be free in the first sense but how we respond to this is a measure

of moral freedom. In a similar way to Mill and Wollstonecraft, we experience our freedom as a separation from nature.

De Beauvoir is frustrated by the confusion of freedom with attributes that imply matter not minds: 'in France the free woman and the light woman are obstinately confused, the term *light* implying an absence of resistance and control, a lack, the very negation of liberty' (de Beauvoir [1949] 1997: 699). As with Wollstonecraft and Mill, self-control is again linked to freedom. However, this does not lead de Beauvoir to go down Mill's route of social control. Self-control is needed for the process of self-realisation and self-definition but control over others is contrary to moral freedom in de Beauvoir's framework. De Beauvoir wants to move from having established the link between self and others and to portray this as a positive aspect of morality. It is a positive aspect of morality because it involves respect for the freedom of others, which she posits as the alternative to oppression of others.

### *3:2 Towards moral freedom*

It is in the search for the 'truth of our existence we need others' according to de Beauvoir (de Beauvoir [1947]1976: 72). This leads her to the conclusion that: 'The me–others relationship is as indissoluble as the subject–object relationship' (de Beauvoir [1947]1976: 72). The moral freedom of de Beauvoir differs from the second form of freedom in Mill. For Mill this second form involves individuals demarcating their freedom against others, bringing up boundaries between themselves and others and equating human freedom with a withdrawal from contact with others. However for de Beauvoir, the moral form of freedom can only be achieved along with others, there is no cutting off from others, there is an acceptance of social embeddedness. In her conclusion de Beauvoir re-makes her assertion that she wants her ethics to be concerned with the individual in context:

Is this kind of ethics individualistic or not? Yes, if one means by that that it accords to the individual an absolute value and that it recognizes in him alone the power of laying the foundations of his own existence. It is individualism in the sense in which the wisdom of the ancients, the Christian ethics of salvation, and the Kantian ideal of virtue also merit this name; it is opposed to the totalitarian doctrines which raise up beyond man the mirage of Mankind. But it is not solipsistic, since the individual is defined only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals; he exists only by transcending himself, and his freedom can be achieved only through the freedom of others. He justifies his existence by a movement which, like freedom, springs from his heart but which leads outside of him. (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 156)

Freedom is the freedom of others and not the oppression of others. De Beauvoir wants to emphasise the positive aspect of linking freedom to others:

A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied. And it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom: to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom. (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 91)

De Beauvoir's ethics involves acknowledging that we are at once sovereign selves and a part of a community of sovereign selves. This is the core of her argument set out in the first section of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. The ambiguity of our condition lies in our recognition of our own sovereignty along with our acknowledgement that we live in a world of other humans who are also sovereign selves:

This privilege, which he alone possesses, of being a sovereign and unique subject amidst a universe of objects, is what he shares with all his fellow-men. In turn an object for others, he is nothing more than an individual in the collectivity on which he depends.

As long as there have been men and they have lived, they have all felt this tragic ambiguity of their condition (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 7)

Instead of taking this ambiguity for what it is, we have had philosophers who have 'striven to reduce mind to matter, or reabsorb matter into mind, or

to merge them within a single substance' (de Beauvoir [1947]1976: 7). As a consequence of this, philosophers have espoused ethics to eliminate the ambiguity 'by making oneself pure inwardness or pure externality' (de Beauvoir [1947]1976: 8). This dualism is not, says de Beauvoir, necessary, and this is interesting because de Beauvoir is criticised precisely for relying on Hegel's system and equating women with the 'Other' side of the dualism (Hutchings 2003: 58).

When de Beauvoir interprets the master–slave dialectic, she is taking the status of two consciousnesses, albeit perhaps in more or less advanced stages of consciousness but nevertheless consciousness. It is more with Hegel's emphasis on recognition than on exchanging the master–slave relationship for that of subject/object that de Beauvoir is concerned, rather than connecting women to the slave and men to the master. De Beauvoir refers to the master–slave dialectic but the fact is that her transcendence and immanence are not identical to it. As Bauer argues: 'Beauvoir does not simply map the master-slave dialectic onto the situation of men and women' (Bauer 2001: 176). On de Beauvoir she says:

For her, appreciating the fact that mastery – our very subjectivity – is achieved only through an acceptance of our bondage to and with one another, through, that is, our willingness to *subject* ourselves as ambiguous beings to something she calls "objectivity", is the key to achieving the fullest flowering of human self-consciousness. (Bauer 2001: 103)

We are all part of a community in which we can flourish: 'the individual is dependent on the human community for its birth and sustenance' (Arp 2001: 49), our freedom is bound to the freedom of others. As with Mill, autonomy is not meant for an isolated being, autonomy is negotiated from the context of the situated self. As with Wollstonecraft and Hegel, individuals seek recognition, and there are similarities between where this goes wrong in Wollstonecraft and the potential for misrecognition in de Beauvoir. The issue of freedom and others is a theme in Mill and can be found in Wollstonecraft too.

This section has highlighted two important strands in de Beauvoir's thought: immanence and biological determination are not the same – de Beauvoir tackles the former and not the latter and there is a progression from ontological freedom to moral freedom. The following section describes the progression from failing to acknowledge freedom at all, towards moral freedom in de Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*.

### 3:3 Freedom as a process

Freedom moves from our status as being to existence 'in a movement which is constantly surpassed' (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 79), and this is progress. Progress is not the attainment of the absolute but should be 'the free engagement of thought in the given' (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 79) and the reaching for and movement towards new possibilities.

So de Beauvoir's theory of freedom means men and women must struggle with their ontological freedom in order to attain moral freedom. *The Ethics of Ambiguity* shows how moral freedom can be achieved. In Chapter 2, 'Personal Freedom and Others' de Beauvoir discusses five ways in which we can fail to will ourselves free. These are: the sub-man, the serious man, the nihilist, the adventurer and the passionate man. Below is an examination of these five characters who fail to be free in varying degrees. The sub-man fails the most, thus he is the one who tries (and inevitably fails) to make himself a 'lack of being' and we progress towards the passionate man who is the closest to attaining moral freedom but still fails to do so. There is a sense of progression from the sub-man to the passionate man, Arp compares it to a ladder (Arp 2001: 56). Although de Beauvoir's characters are all men, the ways in which they fail to be free are relevant for women as well as we have established that women can aim for freedom as well as men.

The sub-man fails to realise that he should make himself a being and not a lack of being. He fails to attempt to stand apart from the water and the sky. Consequently, he does not consider himself to be a human with potential to be free. De Beauvoir describes how the sub-man attempts to achieve this aim. The subman is apathetic and rejects the reality of his existence (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 42). The sub-man is described as a bad painter who is satisfied with his work and demands nothing more from it (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 43). Other people recognise him as a bad painter and as someone who has *chosen* to be a bad painter. He is human and consequently responsible for his existence yet he denies this responsibility. However, de Beauvoir argues that his very attempt to reject his existence demonstrates that he does indeed exist: 'He would like to forget himself, to be ignorant of himself, but the nothingness which is at the heart of man is also the consciousness that he has of himself' (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 43–4).

He cannot ignore himself because he is himself – he is incessantly plagued by the fact that he is mind and not therefore matter, Arp notes: 'As Beauvoir stresses in her discussion of ambiguity, a human is a material being, but never wholly a material being' (Arp 2001: 56).

The sub-man identifies himself with nothing; inadvertently 'nothing' becomes his identity. Arp compares him to Meursault, in Albert Camus' *The Stranger* who commits murder. Meursault's act is presented as an unintended action – he did not intend to act so did not intend to do wrong, therefore his act of murder could be perceived as not being morally wrong (Arp 2001: 56–7). Arp then explains how the sub-man has failed, in existentialist terms, by not addressing his ontological freedom. The sub-man fails, rather miserably, to achieve moral freedom because he tries to blank out the way that his ontological freedom constantly implicates him in events and the lives of others. But he cannot, he remains responsible for

his existence, although he attempts to avoid taking any responsibility for his actions (Arp 2001: 56–7).

The serious man must also negate his freedom: he tries, sets himself goals, or has values but these are not important to him. What

matters to the serious man is not so much the nature of the object which he prefers to himself, but rather the fact of being able to lose himself in it .... to will for will's sake is, detaching transcendence from its end, to realize one's freedom in its empty and absurd form of freedom of indifference. (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 47)

The serious man will produce things to which he can dedicate his action. He is similar to the sub-man in that goals, values or occupation replace pursuit of freedom.

The serious man becomes the nihilist when he realises that he is unable to become anything separate from his ends and 'decides to be nothing'. De Beauvoir describes the nihilist as 'disappointed seriousness which has turned back upon itself' (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 52). The nihilist does experience the ambiguity of his existence but mistakenly experiences existence as 'a lack at the heart of existence':

The nihilist is right in thinking that the world possesses no justification and that he himself is nothing. But he forgets that it is up to him to justify the world and to make himself exist validly... there is life, and the nihilist knows that he is alive. That's where his failure lies. He rejects existence without managing to eliminate it...

The fundamental fault of the nihilist is that, challenging all given values, he does not find, beyond their ruin, the importance of that universal, absolute end which freedom itself is. ([1947] 1976: 57-58)

When the sub-man aims for nothing he remains a person aiming for nothing, like a bad painter, but when the nihilist aims for nothing he does not just reject his goals, he also rejects himself. He would not even label himself as a bad painter. It is up to us to justify the world for ourselves, we



make our own existence valid but the nihilist denies this. The nihilist rejects the world but the irony is similar to that of the sub-man: he requires the world to exist in order that he be able to reject it.

The adventurer, like the nihilist, also ignores universal ends but in almost the opposite way to the nihilist. The adventurer craves action and believes that 'freedom is realized as an independence in regard to the serious world and that, on the other hand, the ambiguity of existence is felt not as a lack but in its positive aspect' (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 58). The adventurer recognises the existence of others but fails to understand or care about the human relatedness of his action and respect for the freedom of others:

The man we call an adventurer ... is one who remains indifferent to the content, that is, to the human meaning of his action, who thinks he can assert his own existence without taking into account the existence of others (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 61)

The adventurer, unlike those lower than him, believes that action is important. However, in failing to recognise the relation of other people to his action he fails moral freedom. The serious man treats others as a means to his ends, which are without merit. The adventurer has more definite goals than the serious man but still fails to see the significance of others to himself and his projects.

The goal of the passionate man is far from detached, unlike that of the nihilist, but his goal is always, to some extent, unattainable. The passionate man has aims but 'remains at a distance; he is never fulfilled' (de Beauvoir [1947] 1976: 65). Not only is the goal of the passionate man unattainable, it also sets him apart from others. His goal has nothing, he thinks, to do with others; others are instrumental to the attainment of his goal but he sets himself apart from them by seeing them as instrumental, and becomes an oppressor.

As with the others, the passionate man will never be satisfied because the goals he sets himself will always be beyond his reach, and because he does not recognise the clash between his reaching out for goals and others doing the same thing. He fails to be free in the second sense. Even at the top of the ladder, the passionate man fails to recognise his dependence on others for freedom, he does not think of himself as intersubjective. A political and social sense is essential for moral freedom. Although this is not noted in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, it is important to note that on the reading of her two texts in this chapter it must follow that the men de Beauvoir refers to here cannot have attained moral freedom if they deny it to women. The five characters are not without links. For example, when the serious man realises he cannot pursue the goals he has chosen, in order to avoid pursuing his freedom his disappointment can turn him into the nihilist, who is self-destructive as a result of rejection of goals to pursue.

The five failures show that freedom is a process. We are always free but if we assume the status of the sub-man then we are trying to reject our freedom. We begin to explore our ontological freedom when we become the serious man and again ontological freedom is experienced by the nihilist even though the experience is a negative one. The nihilist also represents the beginning of moral freedom; others are bound to our freedom as we are to theirs. De Beauvoir does not present freedom as something we either have or do not have, rather freedom is something we either respond to or we do not. We must, it would appear, first respond to our own freedom in the ontological form, in order that we may respond to the freedom of others. If we take de Beauvoir's expressions of freedom in *The Second Sex* – transcendence and immanence, we can see that they too are not a dichotomy but two poles of human freedom. The fact that moral freedom requires the agent to be concerned for others also suggests that de Beauvoir's theory of freedom cannot be, as was pointed out earlier, the reversal of subject and object of master and slave, because that would be domination rather than freedom.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter hopes to have approached de Beauvoir's work from a slightly different angle by using *The Ethics of Ambiguity* as a backdrop to *The Second Sex* in order to demonstrate her understanding of women's identity and her understanding of freedom both of which advance my concept of autonomy. Unlike many critics I am arguing that de Beauvoir does not confine women to biology.

Women are not either immanent in the sphere of biology or transcending free agents: they go (as do men) through a process of attaining freedom. There is no clear gap between immanence and transcendence, we are all able to scale the 'ladder' but also to deny that there is any reason to do so. It has been argued that de Beauvoir did not see women as permanently trapped in the family because women are not just nature and women are not matter controlled by male mind-masters. This must complicate an analogy between men and women, and Hegel's master and slave dialectic.

Despite Lloyd's criticism, this chapter has argued that de Beauvoir did not see women as having a limited scope of identity and as permanently burdened by their bodies. Her theory of freedom provides insights into autonomy as a process, as does the notion of there being two forms of freedom. The first form demonstrates the need for autonomy to be dynamic and active but it also presents the natural world in a similar way to Mill, as something to be escaped. The second form of freedom is much more positive than that of Mill: its emphasis on the need for others builds on the concept of autonomy put forward in this thesis, which seeks to understand autonomy as a shared project that requires cooperation and support from other autonomous agents.

My argument is that de Beauvoir's theory of freedom is not an inevitably male theory of transcendence. Although she does see men as more likely to inhabit the realm of freedom or reason or, as it is expressed in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, mind, than the immanent realm of biology or (the opposite of mind) matter, she does not necessarily confine women to biology. Women can be free, but in accordance with the difficulties of gendered society loaded against biology, this freedom is attained by degrees. This helps my argument that autonomy is a process, it is contingent and it can be gained and lost. It also encourages the non-dichotomous approach to identity by emphasising a middle ground. We are not either the master or the slave, free people or biologically determined; most of us inhabit the middle ground in between these polarities. This middle ground is explored by de Beauvoir in her discussion of the five ways in which we fail to achieve moral freedom. De Beauvoir's distinction in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is between being free and willing ourselves to be free.

This middle ground helps to further develop the themes of recognition and a more relational approach to autonomy in order to reclaim it from a 'masculine' understanding of autonomy. The idea of recognition in de Beauvoir is simply that we recognise our own sovereignty in part by recognising the sovereignty of others. My concept of autonomy involves a theory of recognition put forward in Chapter 2 that has two stages: self-recognition and recognition of others. De Beauvoir's theory demonstrates the imperative importance of the latter. It is also possible, through contemplating the process of self-realisation that develops in the first form of freedom and as we follow the 'failing freedom' characters towards moral freedom, to see the importance of self-recognition too.

The individual in de Beauvoir's work is a relational self who recognises the importance of others, this is important for my concept of autonomy because it demonstrates the potential for autonomy as a shared project. In the company of others we successfully challenge limits to autonomy that we can

only overcome together. De Beauvoir also emphasises the need for sovereignty in order to advance freedom. My concept of autonomy argues for control, but control over our identities and not control over others. De Beauvoir's writing on sovereignty emphasises the need for autonomy to be concerned with self-direction and not domination. Domination is neither an expression of autonomy nor is it conducive to autonomy as a process to be undertaken with others. Of all four thinkers considered in this thesis, de Beauvoir offers the clearest and most emphatic demonstration of how autonomy must be considered in a realistic social context with an awareness of other people.

De Beauvoir helps us to see how autonomy can be negotiated within social structures that are not necessarily perfect for autonomy, by emphasising that autonomy is a process there can be the beginnings of a way out of such oppressive circumstances where autonomy is constrained as was discussed in Chapter 1. De Beauvoir's emphasis on freedom as negotiated with others, as well as negotiating a path for ourselves within oppressive social structures means that there could be room for autonomy for an individual who is part of a community and already has relationships with others as was discussed in Chapter 2.

## **Conclusion**

In the introduction it was stated that the question this thesis poses is: how to construct a richer concept of autonomy which emphasises autonomy as a process with which we develop our identities? It was also noted in the introduction that such a concept would need to be able to cope with the socially situated individual, that is the individual who may be part of a community but may, at the same time, feel that her identity and thus her autonomy is stifled by that community. The idea was then to construct a concept of autonomy which deals with the individual agent's identity in the hope of developing a concept of autonomy which would be of use for liberating individual identity from oppressive circumstances. In undertaking this, this thesis has developed readings of the four thinkers in chapters 3–6 which relate to autonomy and identity thus looking at some aspects of the texts not usually explored and also combining arguments of theorists not usually combined (such as G.W.F. Hegel and Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill and Simone de Beauvoir). My concept of autonomy is intended to be a contribution to mainstream political theory but also to feminist theory in that it seeks to enable women to overcome the particular difficulties they face in claiming their own identity. Some aspects of this thesis pertain to current debates in feminist theory. The notion of autonomy, especially what has been described as relational autonomy, has enjoyed prominence in recent years (see for example Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000) and Hegel has enjoyed resurgence in feminist theory (see for example Hutchings 2003). Identity is also a topical issue for feminist theory (see for example Butler 1999 and Lloyd 2005).

The first two chapters of this thesis presented a number of concepts and ideas as well as five themes connected to the notion of autonomy this thesis wishes to present; the subsequent chapters explored the usefulness of the four thinkers for developing this concept. Therefore this conclusion

aims to do three things: to draw attention to the link between autonomy and identity as has been suggested throughout this thesis, to bring together the themes and ideas presented throughout the thesis and to summarise the arguments for a richer and fuller concept of autonomy as a process for claiming and changing our identity.

### ***1. Link between autonomy and identity***

Much of the problem surrounding autonomy and identity for women comes from patriarchal stereotypes but it can also be found in the form of race and class prejudice or in a combination of these. The aspects of my concept of autonomy that stress the importance of our relationships with others call on us to recognise that there are, as Mary Wollstonecraft demonstrates, different forms of oppression. This requires self-recognition and the honesty to say when we think we are in the privileged group as well as when we are not. This forces us to consider not only our own autonomy and identity but also how we affect and possibly sometimes limit the autonomy and agency of others. We do this when we fail to recognise ourselves as oppressors and therefore fail to recognise those we oppress: By doing this we misrecognise them and limit their scope for individuality, we limit their agency and therefore their autonomy. There is then an important correlation between autonomy and identity.

There are three lines of connection between autonomy and identity which are important to my concept of autonomy. They are: self-definition, the idea of separateness and belonging, and the idea of a process.

#### ***1:1 Self-definition***

Self-definition connects autonomy to identity because it is a concept that enables us to claim identities as our own. In Wollstonecraft the opportunities for self-definition were limited because of her emphasis on

rational motherhood, she linked autonomy and identity by stressing the line along which woman should develop to carry out her duty of motherhood. Woman's rigidly defined identity appears to limit the possibilities for autonomy in both Wollstonecraft and Mill. Defining ourselves involves recognising what identities we really want – what our authentic identity is, claiming our identities as ours. It involves being in control of our identity and having the imagination and creativity to think about how we define ourselves. These notions connected to self-definition are discussed below in the section on themes and ideas but what is important here is the idea of self-definition itself.

The idea of self-definition suggests both autonomy and identity, self-definition implies that we are in control as we approach identities or as we question the identities imposed on us. We move between various identities depending on time and location, where we are and whom we are with and this is all part of defining ourselves and doing so in relation to our environment. Self-definition can serve two seemingly opposite purposes, it can be vital to asserting our identity against oppressive circumstances in which identity is being imposed, and here identity works as a point of separation. Yet it can also be essential to formulating bonds with others, we see other people's identity and are drawn towards them and here autonomy serves as a point of connection. There is a triumvirate relationship between autonomy, self-definition and identity for none will work without the others. Self-definition is a vital link between autonomy and identity. The emphasis on self-definition leads to the second line of connection which links autonomy to identity: the idea of separateness and belonging.

### *1:2 Separateness and belonging*

Identity and autonomy work as a point of contact yet they also require separation. The concept of autonomy suggested in this thesis needs to address both separateness and belonging, that is, both the solitude



necessary to reflect but also the capacity by which we come to be a part of our community. Being part of a community is valuable because we draw strength from it but we also need to be able to consider our identity alone, so autonomy needs to be about identifying with groups (be they social, political, family etc) but also about having the space to contemplate our lives in solitude and this requires the ability to withdraw from the community on some level. Therefore my concept of autonomy is not about separating the agent from her relationships with others in order to render her autonomous and self-defined nor is it about identifying her with a specific group ('woman' for example) in order to allow her to define and assert a common identity and with that group. It is not about choosing independence over a fear of encumbrance by others. Rather it seeks to allow for self-definition whilst making room for our need to belong; it understands that we know in common what we cannot know alone but also that we know alone what we cannot know in common.<sup>10</sup> Autonomy is often understood to be the project of the solitary individual but for my concept that cannot work because identity is not a solitary concept. We show our identities to others and we see the identities that others have, we are recognised and we recognise. We need a process of autonomy and we need to be able to undertake it without interference but this is not the same as being permanently separated from others.

Our identities connect us to others but they also separate us because they are ours. When and where we connect and when and where we separate is something we have to decide for ourselves. The idea of separateness and belonging requires us to have autonomy over our identity, we need to manage our identity. The way in which my concept of autonomy seeks to manage identity is by emphasis on process (the term manage here encompasses the creative element of identity as well as the mechanism for control we also need).

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<sup>10</sup> This phrase is taken from Michael Sandel, the original reads "when politics goes well, we can know a good in common that we cannot know alone" (Sandel 1998: 183).

### ***1:3 Process***

The idea of process links the concept of autonomy to that of identity. Autonomy is the process by which we change and develop our identities. This process is most clearly set out in chapter 4 on Hegel in the analogy to his property process which builds solid foundations for conceptualising autonomy as a process. We claim identity for ourselves; we take possession of an identity, we use it and we alienate it. It is a gradual process of developing our identity and also of changing our identity. As was pointed out in chapter 1, the process of autonomy is not of value itself but the identities which we claim as a result of that process are. The process is a means to controlling and creating identity but the emphasis on autonomy is important because it enables the agent to state clearly that an identity is hers.

We all have identity but without the connection between autonomy and identity we cannot be sure that these identities are really the ones we choose for ourselves, that they are authentic (or at least as authentic as is possible as authenticity is difficult to achieve), we need autonomy, we need the process to prevent identities being imposed and to allow us to explore new, diverse and multiple identities ourselves. The emphasis on process means there cannot be a simple definition of autonomy in this thesis. The reason for this lack of simple definition is that the concept of autonomy put forward is multi-layered, there are many stages in the process and many concepts connected with that process.

### ***2. Themes and ideas***

Some of the ideas presented throughout this thesis as important to autonomy and identity can be discussed with reference to the five themes described as integral to my concept of autonomy in the introduction and others, such as recognition for example, appear to belong to more than one

theme. However, it is generally the case that most of these ideas do come under the broader heading of one of the five themes therefore this section will consider the five themes with reference to the various ideas which correspond to them but inevitably, there will be some crossover.

### *2:1 Autonomy as a process*

The first theme outlined in the introduction was autonomy as a process. As was noted above, Hegel best reflects the idea of autonomy as a process with his process of claiming property which I have used as an analogy for claiming identity. The analogy is important because it reflects the process as taking place in stages but also because it involves making a definite claim for identity; it is a process with a goal. The idea of autonomy as a process, broadly speaking, runs through the other four themes. The process begins with creativity, self-reflection and self-direction as the agent moves towards self-recognition, the understanding of her authentic desires. It then becomes a matter of taking direction of our autonomy through controlling it ourselves and moving towards recognition from others and of others (the second and third themes). Entering into the arena of outer recognition requires a balancing of self-control in order that the agent is able to remain in control of her own process and should not seek to control others; this also involves grappling with the threat of social control. The part of the process in which the agent negotiates her autonomy in an arena in which others are doing the same requires awareness of and cooperation with others; this is where the theme of reclaiming autonomy from the 'masculine' view of the isolated rational male is important. Rather than this view the agent requires relationality, reciprocal recognition and self-sovereignty in order to recognise that her own quest for autonomy is bound with the quest of others. The final theme of autonomy as thriving, flourishing and dynamic can be seen both at the beginning and at the end of the process. Creativity and dynamism fuel the agent's imagination when thinking about her identity but the reward of reciprocal recognition and of

interaction with others is to share and combine identity and to allow individual identity to flourish in an environment of diverse identities.

Three of the ideas central to the theme of autonomy as a process are: autonomy by degrees, agency and self-development. The emphasis on autonomy by degrees is designed to recognise the complexities of autonomy with which my concept hopes to cope by emphasising autonomy as something that can be gained and lost to varying degrees. The work of Hegel, Mill and Beauvoir all reflect this notion. The process in Hegel means we gradually become autonomous and the emphasis on self-development and becoming free which can be found in Mill adds to the emphasis on autonomy by degrees. This point is given more force by the reading of the five characters in de Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity* who can be seen to develop their freedom gradually by progressing (and sometimes regressing) from one level to another. This can also be seen in the discussion of constraints in Chapter 1 which argued that constraints can affect autonomy to varying degrees. Constraints are everywhere but affect agents' lives to varying degrees. Acknowledging autonomy by degrees here allows for the possibility that constraints which appear formidable are not necessarily devastating, even the victim of domestic violence discussed in the chapter on Hegel has the possibility of redefinition. In this case the constraints to autonomy are severe but it remains more useful to conceptualise autonomy as gained and lost by degrees, as partial, rather than accepting the stark dualism of either being autonomous or heteronomous. Autonomy by degrees means that we can never lose autonomy completely, for to do so would deny us the possibility of any agency at all.

I seek to include agency as a component for liberation and follow Seyla Benhabib's argument that we need agency because without it we lack the coherence and control necessary to combat social and political stereotypes (Benhabib 1992: 15-6). Agency is vital if autonomy as a process is to work for it is required both for self-direction and for the link it provides between

inner recognition and outer recognition discussed in Chapter 2 by allowing the agent to assert her own identity and the prospect of acceptance of that identity.

We need to be able to develop our identities and to have them recognised by others and this requires agency, consequently misrecognition, not being recognised as who we wish to be, can thwart our agency. It is for this reason that in the places in this thesis which have identified Wollstonecraft and Mill as over-prescribing women's roles, that is not presenting women as they would be but rather as these thinkers think they should be, it has been noted that this would be difficult for my concept of autonomy. A situation in which women's identities are narrowly defined denies the possibilities of agency, of freely choosing our own identity and doing so limits the possibilities for the process of autonomy. Identity options need to be open-ended. As the example of nomadic identity in Chapter 2 showed, we require agency to enable us to move through different identities.

Despite these limits, both Wollstonecraft and Mill are arguing for more agency for women (some women in Mill's case) and for both thinkers this is necessary for developing the individual. Wollstonecraft's individual must develop towards rational citizenship but needs the space agency allows to do this and Mill's individual requires agency through being given space from other people. Neither of these paths is ideal, agency is limited by Wollstonecraft's somewhat rigid depiction of women's identity and by Mill's insistence that we need some distance from others. His view that autonomy has to be guarded from others is troubling for my concept of autonomy because it denies the importance of other people. However, it is worth noting that agency has to be tackled in a context of other people for agency alone is not worth having. Moving into a social context, seeking recognition for our identity, is fraught with danger and limitations. Social conditioning can place severe limits on the diversity of identity we are willing to display and social structures can limit our options. The discussion of problem

communities in Chapter 2 revealed that stereotyping (gender and sexual for example) and attitudes to difference can stifle opportunities for agency in the process of autonomy but it should be remembered that so too can more concrete forms of inequality (such as economic structures and, as was noted in Chapter 2 with reference to Nancy Fraser, distribution).

The degree to which agency can be thwarted by non-tangible forces such as loss of self-esteem was demonstrated in the example of domestic violence in the chapter on Hegel. What the violent partner takes, or at least drastically reduces, is self-esteem and this grinds the process to a halt by putting the brakes on agency. Without self-esteem there is a lack of motivation and there is a stasis. However, the domestic violence example also demonstrates the possibilities for agency, however remote. The violent partner has imposed an unwanted identity: that of victim. However, it was argued that if 'victim' were seen as a transitory identity then this need not deny agency. Following from the discussion in Chapter 1, 'victim' suggests a lack of agency but not a complete absence of it. This is important because the status of victim still retains the hope of self-direction, which, however fragile, remains.

Agency is also important for the final feature of autonomy as a process: self-development. Changing and diverse identity depend on us having the agency required to go through the process of autonomy. Self-development is an idea closely linked to Mill's arguments and his argument that self-development benefits not only the individual but also wider society is useful for my assertion that autonomy is not a solitary project. Again though, Mill's thought has limits for my concept of autonomy, self-development is not always an open-ended project in Mill's work, it is important for my concept of autonomy that it should be. Autonomy is a process but it must be on-going, identity is an open-ended project and needs to be sustained. In terms of our self-development, autonomy as a process has two stages; we begin with the inner self, the arena of self-reflection, imagination and

consideration of what we take to be our authentic identity and then progress towards evolving our identity in relation to other people. In Chapter 2 this was described as inner and outer recognition and this takes us to the second theme which forms a key part of my concept of autonomy.

### *2:2 Recognition*

Recognition requires us to recognise our own desires about our identity in order to attempt to ensure that our identities have a degree of authenticity but it also requires others to recognise our identity and us to recognise the identity of others – reciprocal recognition. Reciprocal recognition was discussed in Chapter 2 and developed in Chapter 4. Reciprocal recognition benefits the individual because individuals see how others approach their identity, how they combine various identities within them to become unique (or in Maeve Cooke's term 'irreplaceable' selves) we learn about identity options by observing others. We are all part of a whole and other people have to be recognised as equally valid parts that constitute that whole. All are as parts that make up a jigsaw.

Other people may at times constrain our autonomy, this is the danger of misrecognition – a danger that was present in the chapter on Wollstonecraft and on Hegel – but because the concept of autonomy suggested here is by degrees this means we always retain an element of autonomy. This is not always easy when we consider ourselves as part of a wider whole. Social conditioning and stereotypes may make some resort to self-deception and, as was discussed in Chapter 2 with Morwenna Griffiths' suggestion, some might feel they have to hide parts of themselves. However, reciprocal recognition implies a duty at least to try to recognise others as who they want to be seen as and not to impose identities and not see the world through a series of stereotypes. The notion of authenticity put forward here at least hopes to guard against some internalisation of unwanted identities. Part of self-recognition involves considering who we really want to be not

who we are told we are. The reciprocity of recognition is vital to my concept because it allows for the recognition of the validity of our claim to our identity, part of claiming our identity as 'ours' involves having it recognised by others. We need other people for this, this is part of understanding that our freedom is bound with that of others, misrecognition of the identity of others impedes their autonomy but it affects the whole as well, following Mill's argument: it limits the amount of diversity available. It fails to recognise individuals as self-defined and separate from us. We cannot help but see others as separate from ourselves but this view of other people brings with it an acknowledgement of their sovereignty – we are all sovereign over our process of autonomy and identity. We can see this in Wollstonecraft's work which emphasises that how we relate to others affects how we relate to ourselves thus the exercise of arbitrary power in Wollstonecraft is damaging to all because it fails to see individuals as sovereign selves, for Wollstonecraft we must consider others.

### *2:3 Control*

Self-sovereignty is a key idea for the third themes connected to my concept of autonomy, that of control. There are two emphasises on self-sovereignty that are important to my concept of autonomy, the first pertains to this theme and the second to the following theme in terms of seeking a more relational approach to autonomy.

The idea of self-sovereignty was developed in chapters 3 and 4, it was argued that self-sovereignty gives the individual control over her own process of identity claim. Wollstonecraft's work emphasised the need for self-direction and for being in control of oneself. It should be remembered that this claim was explained in Chapter 4 as a claim the agent makes over her identity and her autonomous process, she is claiming the process and her identity as hers. This is not the abstract notion that she is claiming to own her self. In a similar way Mill's individual is also sovereign, and this too



suggests self-control. Self control was also discussed in relation to de Beauvoir who emphasises sovereignty as self-control and self-direction. We become sovereign selves by taking control of our autonomy and directing it towards the identities we desire and this is a process of becoming as is suggested by de Beauvoir's discussion of transcendence and immanence – moving away from immanence and taking control of our destiny. The emphasis on directing ourselves is important here and also reflects the arguments in Chapter 2 for being accountable and being able to take responsibility for our own actions, if we direct ourselves in this sense of taking responsibility for our own identities then we demonstrate that we are in control of our process of autonomy and identity. However, we do need agency in order to have sovereignty, we need to be able to move along the process towards our identity without constraints, or failing that we need sufficient agency to deal with the challenges to our autonomy – the challenges to our ability to assert our own identity.

#### *2:4 Reclaiming autonomy*

Self-sovereignty plays another important role in the fourth theme of my concept of autonomy, the attempt to reclaim autonomy for feminist purposes. The element of self-sovereignty which relates to this theme is its relational nature. Here self-sovereignty allows for a rejection of the dualistic thinking which conceptualises our relationship to others in a self-other dichotomy. Self-sovereignty allows the individual to retain control over her process of autonomy without doing so in isolation from others.

Wollstonecraft's argument that individuals develop through their relation to others and through active participation in society shows that autonomy is something undertaken in the company of others and not in isolation both because that is a realistic account but also because Wollstonecraft believes that it is genuinely better to do so, as does de Beauvoir.

As was discussed in the chapter on Hegel, the notion of a sovereign self takes us away from a territorial self, a self with rigid boundaries. Instead it suggests a self who can relate to others and whose identity benefits from doing so, from being inspired by other people. Self-sovereignty offers the externalisation the agent requires in order to translate her inner recognition into outer recognition. The relational self is also the critically reflective self discussed in chapter 2. However, as that chapter demonstrated, there needs to be a point available for critical reflection in order to escape communities that are damaging to us, communities that do smother our process of identity formation with a blanket of rigid identities. The sovereign self at least has an element of control over how she relates to other selves and when she wishes to draw away from others. This provides an element of relationality which is vital to the concept of autonomy suggested by this thesis – individuality, self-reflection and self-direction are important but equally important is the ability to relate to others and to flourish in a community of diverse identity. The boundary between self and others needs to be permeable but if we follow the skin metaphor suggested in Chapter 4, we see that this permeability does not lead to engulfment, rather it provides a porous barrier between ourselves and others. This barrier is part of us, it reflects our unique identity and it is controlled by us, we decide when to let people through.

The emphasis on relationality is important to my concept of autonomy because it reflects the nature of both autonomy and freedom as being bound up with others. This emphasis is demonstrated in Wollstonecraft and de Beauvoir; it can be found also in some places in Mill. Autonomy is a process we undertake as socially situated agents, in the company of others. We must recognise others as needing to exercise their autonomy as we need to exercise ours, in order for everyone to develop their identity. This is a process we must control but must not stifle, a process we undertake with others but not by controlling others. Yet it is also a process we undertake

alone in order to gain self-recognition. We need this in order to be able to establish a coherent identity of which we are in control.

However, the need for coherence and control can lead to an exacting relationship with others when it comes to thinking about individual autonomy, as it does in Mill. The two forms of freedom taken from Mill and de Beauvoir appear to form an unusual alliance between the two theorists. The importance both attach to freedom in opposition to nature is worth emphasising. What makes us human for these theorists, and for Wollstonecraft too, is our ability to control nature and the association of nature with uncontrolled debauchery, animality, unreason and stagnation, all present nature as something set apart from us as human actors.

Mill and de Beauvoir differ in their descriptions of what I have termed the second form of freedom. For Mill this second form involves separation from others and suggests a somewhat masculine understanding of autonomy requiring isolation from others. However in de Beauvoir's thought the second form of freedom involves consideration and accommodation of others. Reciprocal recognition unites us and encourages our capacity for autonomy by recognising that we all have a shared project of autonomy and identity. This offers a useful interpretation of autonomy, recalling Robert Young's comment, noted in Chapter 1, that 'autonomy involves more than just being free' (Young 1986: 8). The two forms of freedom found in these theorists' work allows a glimpse of what autonomy requires. To be autonomous, for Mill and de Beauvoir, we must have these two forms of freedom. Mill insists that the second form be in the form of protection from others, and de Beauvoir argues that it be in the form of cooperation with others.

De Beauvoir's autonomy is concerned with emphasising the links we have with others: we are inextricably linked to others, what helps us to become more free helps others too and, like Wollstonecraft, to place limits on

another's freedom (as some of the failing freedom characters do in de Beauvoir and as the exercise of arbitrary power does in Wollstonecraft) is to limit our own. To be free we need to recognise our links with others and to be autonomous we must forge these links with care. Freedom for de Beauvoir is about recognising the importance of others to our freedom. This idea of freedom relates to my concept of autonomy, following from the description in Chapter 1, of freedom having a wider application of autonomy but here emphasis on process and the contingency of freedom which de Beauvoir expresses (the five characters who fail to be free can move up and down the 'ladder') make her concept applicable to my idea of autonomy. It is concerned with how we relate to others, how we assert our identity and how we control our process. There is a wider picture here (which is how it was suggested freedom could be thought of) but my concept is concerned with what takes place at the level of the relational individual and hence my concept is concerned with the intricacies of autonomy. As such it is concerned with the way in which the individual can develop her identity, this requires autonomy to be dynamic and open to change.

### *2:5 Dynamic and flourishing autonomy*

The emphasis Mill places on the link between the flourishing of the individual and the flourishing of society is important to the final theme of my concept of autonomy. Mill's autonomy is about protecting the individual in order for creativity to flourish and to avoid stagnation, which will benefit 'mankind'. The promise of individuality in Mill's liberalism which suggests a dynamic version of autonomy that offers the prospect of an adaptable and contingent version of autonomy becomes problematic when Mill appears to see others as a threat.

To return to the idea of the individual as unique, Mill promotes individuality rather than the isolated individualism described in Chapter 1. His is an

individual who needs to flourish and who is situated in society, although Mill's arguments appear to descend into an argument for control there is something valuable in his concept of the individual taken alone. Mill promotes diversity, flourishing, creativity and dynamism and this suggests an agent who can be self-renewing and who can actively seek identity. This positive emphasis on individuality provides the motivation and creativity necessary to drive the individual along the process of autonomy, to seek new identities. This is an argument for self-development and can be seen in his metaphor of human nature as a tree. The idea behind this metaphor reflects the importance of growth and renewal and this is why autonomy needs to be dynamic and adaptable to change.

The process of autonomy put forward here is not one which seeks uniformity but one which endeavours to allow the individual to experiment and to change her identity as much as is possible whilst retaining control of that process in the company of others who do the same. Chapter 1 argued for a concept of individuality based on both Mill's work but also that of Dan Avnon and Avner de-Shalit and it was argued that these versions of individuality promoted the idea of a relationship with others as a positive aspect of autonomy for it allows for new identities to be formed and for the possibility of being inspired by the identities of others.

These themes are difficult to separate at times as they form part of a concept of autonomy as a whole and therefore it is inevitable that some themes contain ideas which belong in more than one theme but all these themes and the ideas which go with them are important. Recognition, control, relational and flourishing autonomy are all part of the process of autonomy which allows us to claim identity – autonomously. It is important for feminism and for mainstream political theory that autonomy can be used in this way in order to allow the individual to explore and enjoy her own multi-faceted identities.

### **3. *Towards a richer concept of autonomy***

This thesis has tried to reconceptualise autonomy in order to provide a more extensive account of autonomy and identity, in so doing it has tried to develop a concept of autonomy rich in dimension. It is a concept which incorporates the five themes and many ideas which go with them described above. It is also a fuller concept because of its emphasis on process; it presents an understanding of autonomy which has to be approached in stages. The concept hopes to be versatile enough to deal with an agent who finds herself at the beginning of thinking about her identity as well as the agent who is struggling to assert her identity. This versatility demands the drawing together of the many facets and features of autonomy found in the five themes explored in this thesis. Taken as a whole, aspects of this concept of autonomy appear to conflict; aspects such as control and creativity for example. However these aspects might not be required at the same time; sometimes we need control, sometimes we need creativity and on occasion we need a balance between the two. The versatility of this concept, of knowing which aspects we need and when, means we need to consider autonomy in stages.

To some extent the original question (how to construct a richer concept of autonomy which emphasises autonomy as a process with which we develop our identities?) contains its own answer – process. A concept of autonomy which aims to deal with identity has to be versatile and able to work in stages – sometimes we draw on assertive aspects of the concept such as agency or control and others we need the reflective capacity that creativity or recognition can bring us; identity can be episodic and contingent and this requires a flexible concept of autonomy to respond to it because identity is multiple and changing.

The process of autonomy is a project that requires a fine balancing of the aspects pertaining to my concept of autonomy. This is not to suggest that

these aspects are dichotomous: control and social control, recognition and misrecognition, individuality and belonging to a whole, and authenticity and the ability to let new ideas into our imagination are all part of being an autonomous agent. They are not two sides of a whole that denies 'an open-ended kind of difference' (Prokhovnik 2002: 30), but aspects of an ongoing process. To some extent my concept of autonomy adheres to Hegel's epistemology described in Chapter 4, that the flower supplants the bud and the fruit the flower. We can have more control over our identity than we do a fruit tree but, just as one stage of growth follows another on the fruit tree, so too does our identity alter. Like the tree we develop our identity (not always with the certainty that it will bear fruit) but our identity is multi-faceted and never complete, there is always more blossom to develop, and our identity forms an organic unity because it is who we are.

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