

How Much Should We Pay for Autonomy?

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Human beings—for the most part, anyway—are autonomous creatures. And it's a good thing, too. The exercise of autonomy is plausibly essential to much of what is valuable in life: the fulfillment of our desires, plans, and projects and the pursuit of our interests in a prudentially rational manner. Without autonomy, we would be unable to shape our lives in a way we see fit, or in a way that is best for us.

That there is a connection between autonomy and quality of life therefore seems indisputable. But the nature of this connection is the subject of substantial controversy. Though most agree that autonomy and its exercise is *instrumentally* valuable, perhaps a necessary instrumental value, some have argued that the exercise of autonomy is itself *intrinsically* valuable: autonomy and its exercise is prudentially good for its own sake.

In this paper, I do not wish to argue that autonomy is not intrinsically valuable to any extent whatsoever, or that autonomy and its exercise can be instrumentally valuable only. Rather, I hope to show that *if* autonomy is intrinsically valuable, its value is insignificant, indeed. The central question of this paper, stated in the title, runs as follows: how much should we be prepared to pay, in terms of non-autonomy welfare benefits, including elements of our lives about which we may care very deeply, for the sake of autonomy? My claim is: nothing. If this is correct, though I will not rule out the intrinsic value of autonomy, its comparative intrinsic value is too weak to maintain the explanatory power the intrinsic value of autonomy is generally intended to play in moral and political argument.

1. Autonomy and its Importance

Autonomy plays a number of potential roles in a theory of prudential choice,

and it is thus important to clarify just the sort of claim I take myself to be evaluating. First, many people hold that the fact that ϕ is *valued* by x is a reason to believe that ϕ is good for x . But autonomy might play a role in identifying the nature of prudentially relevant *valuing*: some have argued that only autonomous valuing is relevant to prudential value.¹ If so, autonomy is important in determinations of life quality: to fully understand whether ϕ is good for x , or the extent to which ϕ is good for x , one must know whether x does, or would under specified counterfactual conditions, autonomously value ϕ . This position is not my intended target here. I am perfectly willing to accept the view, at least for the purposes of argument, that autonomously valued goods are intrinsically valuable in a way that non-autonomously valued goods are not, or that autonomously valued goods should be purchased at a price, perhaps a very high price, in non-autonomously valued goods.

Second, some people will *value* the exercise of autonomous action and choice in their lives, and will regard the exercise of autonomy as an intrinsic benefit. For instance, I might desire to live an autonomous, rather than non-autonomous life, no matter what other goods I might otherwise obtain. Furthermore, in terms of that which I prefer or value, I might rank-order all non-autonomous lives as worse than all autonomous lives. If so, one might think that autonomy itself is intrinsically valuable for me. This proposal is also not my target of discussion. For someone who values autonomy, it could very well be that this person should trade off a number of non-autonomy goods for the sake of mere autonomy; the price one should be willing to pay for autonomy, if one prefers to pay it, may be quite high. I therefore leave this possibility fully open.

Finally, some have held that the exercise of autonomy, or the living of autonomous rather than non-autonomous lives, is a *per se* intrinsic value for x independently of whether x actually takes a valuing attitude toward autonomy itself. For the sake of brevity, one might identify this view as accepting the following principle:

Value of Autonomy Thesis (VAT): the exercise of autonomy is intrinsically valuable in a way that does not depend on its being valued by the individuals for whom it is intrinsically valuable.

VAT suggests that autonomy is an “objective” welfare value, i.e., something that is good for a person no matter what attitude is taken toward that thing.

¹Elster, Sumner.

VAT is accepted by many. For instance, Will Kymlicka writes that “my life only goes better if I’m leading it from the inside, according to my beliefs about value.”² Steven Wall argues that

[a]utonomy is an intrinsic value. It is intrinsically good for people to make their own choices about how to lead their lives. It is intrinsically good for them to adopt and pursue projects, not because others have tricked or coerced them into adopting or pursuing them or because they have no other worthwhile options to choose from; but because, according to their own lights, the pursuits are worth adopting and pursuing. More strongly, autonomy is not just one intrinsic value among many; it is one of special importance. For most people it is, or so I shall argue, a central component of a fully good life. However well their lives may go, if they do not realize this ideal to some substantial degree, they will fail to live a fully good life.³

Along the same lines, George Sher argues that: “autonomous lives are, all else being equal, far better than nonautonomous ones.”⁴ Indeed, some believe that the following passage indicates just such a commitment from none other than John Stuart Mill:

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. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision. And these qualities he requires and exercises exactly in proportion as the part of his conduct which he determines according to his own judgment and feelings is a large one. It is possible that he might be guided in some good path, and kept out of harm’s way, without any of these things. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being?⁵

²Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Culture, and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 12.

³Steven Wall, *Liberalism, Perfectionism, and Restraint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 129-30.

⁴George Sher, *Beyond Neutrality: Perfectionism and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 176.

⁵John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* III.4.

So far, the partisans of VAT have stated views that demand greater precision to be properly assessed. Sher, for instance, speaks of autonomous lives versus non-autonomous lives; he claims that the former are “far” better than the latter. Kymlicka claims that a life “only goes better” if one is autonomous rather than non-autonomous. Wall claims that autonomy is a good of “special importance” and a “central component of a fully good life”. It is worth wondering to what these claims are intended to amount. What does it mean, for instance, to say that a life is autonomous rather than non-autonomous, and to what extent is a life improved, in a cardinal or even an ordinal comparison with non-autonomy goods?

Kymlicka seems to accept a very strong weighting, i.e., that without autonomy, *no* additional goods can affect the quality of one’s life.⁶ Wall and Sher seem to temper the comparative intrinsic value. Both, however, seem to insist that autonomy is a “central” component, i.e., that a person whose life is autonomous is “far” better. And though their claims are somewhat less than clear, these thinkers seem to share a common presumption, viz., that the intrinsic value of autonomy is *worth something* in terms of non-autonomy goods. In other words, they seem to share, at the very least, the following rather weak thesis:

Fungible Value of Autonomy Thesis (FVAT): for some m , there is some n such that a marginal increase in autonomy to degree m is at least as good as a marginal increase in non-autonomy goods to degree n .

In this paper, I make it my business to argue against FVAT. My argument proceeds by considering the various ways one might interpret the comparative intrinsic value of autonomy in comparison to non-autonomy goods, compatible with FVAT; I begin with the strongest possible weighting of autonomy, and go from there.

A few notes before I begin my positive argument. First, it would do to know more about that to which ‘autonomy’ refers in VAT. The term ‘autonomy’ is, in the words of Nomy Arpaly, overworked. Many different concepts have been designated by this term, to confusing effect. Arpaly helpfully distinguishes four major concepts that have been variably tagged by the term ‘autonomy’. As I understand VAT, ‘autonomy’ is similar to

⁶Incidentally, this claim is absurd. Imagine an individual that lacks autonomy, but that is beaten by a sadistic jailer five times a day. To say that his life can only be better if it is “lived from the inside” would seem to imply that the cessation of daily beatings is of no welfare value for this person.

that which Arpaly designates as “agency-autonomy”.⁷ For Arpaly, “Agent-autonomy is a relationship between an agent and her motivational states that can be characterized by the agent’s ability to decide which of them to follow: it is a type of self-control or self-government that persons usually have and that nonhuman animals do not have.”⁸ Autonomy, for VAT, certainly has something important to do with self-control or self-government. But VAT as I understand it values not simply the capacity for such self-control, but its actual exercise. Stephen Wall writes: “autonomy is the ideal of people charting their own course through life, fashioning their character by self-consciously choosing projects and taking up commitments from a wide range of eligible alternatives, and making something out of their lives according to their own understanding of what is valuable and worth doing.”⁹

The distinction between a capacity for autonomy and the exercise of autonomy is crucially important. To maintain autonomy in the sense declared valuable by VAT, it is not enough that one “not be dominated or controlled by someone or something else”.¹⁰ Autonomy in the sense under consideration requires not simply that my life not be controlled by forces external, it requires that my life be *directed by* my capacity for practical rationality. If one’s path through life is chosen simply on whim, caprice, or compulsion, one does not possess that which is declared valuable by VAT.¹¹ Rather, one must choose one’s activities, or select states of affairs rather than others, on the basis of their conformity to that which one recognizes as being valuable.

To maintain autonomy as understood in VAT, then, it is not sufficient simply to live a life that one values, or that one believes is valuable or that achieves things one desires. Though this may be a necessary element of maintaining an autonomous life, it is not sufficient. Someone might live a life that responds to that which has value, but not as a result of his own planning or deliberative decisionmaking—he may live such a life merely as a result of whim, caprice, or external control. To be autonomous, there must be a causal relationship between one’s conception of the good and the life one leads. Only if there is such a causal relationship (i.e., only if one’s life is chosen or pursued on the basis of its *being* something that *x* values), is one’s life autonomous.

Second, it is important to note that lives can be autonomous to a greater

⁷Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 118.

⁸Arpaly, 118.

⁹Wall, 132.

¹⁰James Griffin, *On Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 33.

¹¹Cf. David Brink, “The Significance of Desire” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* v. 3, ed. Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 31-45.

or lesser degree.¹² Hence there is no sharp distinction between lives that are autonomous and those that are non-autonomous; there is instead a continuum from the least autonomous life to the life of greatest possible autonomy. In claiming, e.g., that autonomous lives are “far better” than non-autonomous lives, it is most charitable, then, to explain this in terms of the intrinsic value of individual moments of autonomy, i.e., each time an individual’s life gets more autonomous, i.e., by making some choice on the basis of one’s own conception of the good, it gets better.

Third, in wondering how much we should pay for autonomy, I am asking specifically for a comparison between the intrinsic value of autonomy and the intrinsic value of other, as I shall call them, “non-autonomy goods”. Which goods will count as non-autonomy prudential benefits will depend on the substantive theory of well-being in question. For instance, one might include pleasure, achievement, the satisfaction of desire, etc., as non-autonomy welfare goods. I here abstract from these differences: one can understand “non-autonomy” goods as befits one’s favorite theory of non-autonomous welfare. Given this latitude, I will feel free to insert my own favorite non-autonomy good, viz., the extent to which a person lives a life he or she values. Nothing will ride on this; my argument can be translated *mutatis mutandis*.

2. *Autonomy as Lexically Dominant*

The views I consider in this section hold that autonomy lexically dominates the achievement of non-autonomy goods. Indeed, this view comes in two varieties, which correspond to two different versions of a lexical dominance relation. James Griffin famously distinguishes a *trumping* relation and a *discontinuity* relation. For Griffin, ϕ trumps ψ if and only if any amount of ϕ , no matter how small, is better than any amount of ψ , no matter how large. ϕ is discontinuous with ψ if and only if there is some amount of ϕ (n), such that $n\phi$ is better than any amount of ψ , no matter how large. (This view is, however, compatible with suggesting that some amount of ψ is fungible in comparison to some sub- n amount of ϕ .)

With this in mind, I distinguish two methods to assign lexical dominance to autonomy with respect to non-autonomy goods. The first is:

Trumping Value of Autonomy Thesis (TVAT): for any m and for any n , autonomy to degree m is better than non-autonomy goods to degree n .

¹²Wall, 144.

The second is:

Discontinuous Value of Autonomy Thesis (DVAT): for some m and for any n , autonomy to degree m over the course of a life is better non-autonomy goods to degree n .¹³

Both views, or so I shall argue, are too strong.

2.1. TVAT

None of the partisans of VAT I have so far considered can properly be interpreted as accepting a view as strong as TVAT. Good for them. Take the following case:

Stan and Roy: Stan is very autonomous. Roy is only *slightly* less autonomous. But imagine that Stan regards his life as a catastrophic failure (and hence, on my view, maintains no non-autonomy goods). Roy, however, lives a life that nears his ideal, i.e., maintains the most possible non-autonomy goods.

According to the view on the table now, Stan's life is better than Roy's. Were it the case that we could make Roy's life more like Stan's, we ought to do so for the sake of Roy's welfare. But this position is too absurd to consider. Surely, even if autonomy is an important good, it is not of importance sufficient to trump the achievement of non-autonomy goods.

2.2. DVAT

TVAT is absurd. But DVAT is another story. DVAT does not claim that the merest amount of autonomy is worth any amount of non-autonomy goods. But it does seem to claim that a life of *sufficient* autonomy, or a life that maintains some *threshold* of autonomy is worth whatever the cost in non-autonomy goods. This view avoids the problems of TVAT. Recall that Stan and Roy are both substantially autonomous. The difference is only a minor degree of comparative autonomy and hence, in this case, it would seem odd to say that there is some relevant *threshold* of autonomy that Roy exceeds and Stan does not. However, for DVAT, though the merest improvement in

¹³DVAT focuses on a particular level of autonomy throughout the course of a life, rather than a particular level of autonomy *at a time*. But this seems to me justified. Most who accept VAT insist not on a sufficient degree of autonomy at all times in one's life, but rather across the whole of one's life.

autonomy needn't be better than any amount of non-autonomy goods, there is *some* degree of autonomy n , the achievement of which is better than any amount of non-autonomy goods.¹⁴

One way to put DVAT in a slightly less technical way is in terms used by Wall. In claiming that “However well their lives may go,” meaning the lives of the non-autonomous, “if they do not realize this ideal to some substantial degree, they will fail to live a fully good life.”¹⁵ Though this claim permits of an alternative interpretation (which I explore below), one might think that it may plausibly be represented in the claim that a “substantial” degree of autonomy—degree m —lexically dominates non-autonomy goods.

One problem for this view is how to set the relevant autonomy threshold against which non-autonomy goods are non-fungible. Given that the extent to which one's life is autonomous forms a more-or-less smooth continuum, at any particular specified threshold one must say that this amount of autonomy is worth whatever the cost—any amount—of non-autonomy goods, while only *slightly* less autonomy, a life that is only marginally less autonomous, could be sacrificed *in toto* for the sake of non-autonomy goods. Offhand, it is difficult to see how this threshold might plausibly be set.

This problem is magnified by the following case:

Geraldine and John: Geraldine fails to maintain the relevant m threshold of autonomy, but nevertheless values her life to an extreme degree. According to Geraldine, her life is the best possible. John, however, maintains the relevant threshold of autonomy—but just barely—and does not regard his life as at all valuable; John obtains no non-autonomy goods.

According to DVAT, John, rather than Geraldine, meets the relevant threshold, and hence John's life is better than Geraldine's. Geraldine should be willing to trade *all* of her non-autonomy goods for a life that just barely passes the relevant threshold of autonomy. But this (a) implausible and (b) illustrative of the general problem of finding a relevant threshold. Notice that whatever threshold we choose, it must be plausible to say that a person *just below* that threshold is made better-off by trading every non-autonomy

¹⁴In principle, n could be an absolute or relative figure, i.e., that being autonomous to degree n across one's life lexically dominates non-autonomy goods (absolute) or that the further achievement of autonomy at magnitude n , at any time in one's life, is better than any amount of non-autonomy goods. I focus on the first view here, insofar as this view seems far more plausible than the second; the same problems will arise with the second view, however.

¹⁵Wall, 130.

good for the sake of *just barely* maintaining the relevant threshold of autonomy. But though this is a possible view, it is difficult to see how any one particular autonomy threshold could support such a strong conclusion, leaving aside the fact that this proposal is remarkably unintuitive. Surely, given that John maintains only a very slightly greater degree of autonomy, and does not value his life to any degree whatever, we would surely trade John's autonomy for the non-autonomy benefits maintained by Geraldine.

One might respond as follows. Suppose that what is discontinuous with the achievement of non-autonomy goods is not just a sufficient threshold of autonomy across a life, but the conjunction of a sufficient threshold of autonomy and a sufficient threshold of non-autonomy goods. Call this:

Discontinuous Value of Autonomy Thesis 2 (DVAT2): for some m and some n , the achievement of autonomy to degree m and the achievement of non-autonomy goods to degree n over the course of a life is better than any amount of non-autonomy goods.

This proposal would avoid the problematic suggestion that Geraldine should trade her non-autonomy goods for a life like John's, given that John, presumably, does not maintain the relevant threshold of non-autonomy goods. This view itself permits of a number of different interpretations. How high are the thresholds to be set? What is the comparative axiological value of a threshold level of autonomy versus a threshold level of non-autonomy goods? Imagine, for instance, that I could achieve the threshold level of autonomy only by giving up the threshold level of non-autonomy goods. Is this trade-off worth it? And if not, why not?

I propose to leave such questions aside, as DVAT2 suffers from a serious problem no matter how it is specified. Take:

Joe: Joe *barely* maintains the sufficient amount of autonomy, and also *barely* maintains the sufficient degree of non-autonomy goods to meet the relevant "good life" threshold.

Now compare Joe to Geraldine, who lacks this minor amount of autonomy, but who nevertheless values her life to a *tremendous* degree—she receives all that she desires and more in terms of non-autonomy goods, her life is absolutely her own ideal. It seems to me we should say that Geraldine maintains a prudential advantage; it seems implausible to declare that Geraldine's life gets better as she sacrifices a life she sees as absolutely ideal for a very minor increase in autonomy. This suggests, at the very least, that Joe's minor improvement in autonomy can be traded-off against Geraldine's very significant improvement in non-autonomy goods. This is implausible no matter

where we set the threshold, and no matter how one assigns the comparative axiological value of the individual thresholds.

There is another problem with DVAT2. Imagine that the individual threshold of autonomy and non-autonomy goods that one must meet to maintain a “good” life is set at 10 apiece. In other words, in an ordered pair of autonomy and non-autonomy goods, we can say that an individual A maintains the adequate threshold if and only if A: $\{n, m\}$ where $n \geq 10$ and $m \geq 10$. But if this is correct, in a comparison between B: $\{9, 110\}$ and C: $\{10, 10\}$, C, and not B, maintains the adequate threshold. If so, C’s ordered pair indicates a better life than B’s. But now compare D: $\{9, 0\}$ to E: $\{5, 5\}$. Because the threshold here is not at stake, the view on the table would allow us to purchase some autonomy for the sake of non-autonomy goods. And hence it could be that E’s life is better than D’s. (The precise axiological relationship between non-threshold autonomy and non-autonomy is not important; the objection can be translated for any other rank-ordering.) But it seems strange to say that, so long as an individual is below the threshold, autonomy can be traded-off against non-autonomy goods for a comparatively minor amount (4 units of autonomy in exchange for 5 units of non-autonomy goods), but that when the threshold *is* at stake, not a single unit of autonomy could be exchanged for *any* amount of non-autonomy goods. This is not incoherent, but it is substantially implausible. No threshold could plausibly support such a strong conclusion.

3. Autonomy as Intrinsically Valuable, but Fungible

The failure of TVAT and DVAT still leave a range of potential methods by which to rank-order autonomy in comparison to non-autonomy goods. For instance, rather than suggesting that autonomy is lexically dominant (in either its trumping or discontinuity iterations), we might instead suggest that the exercise of one’s rational agency and/or deliberative capacity is one intrinsic good among others, that people who exercise autonomy, other things being held equal, live better lives than those that do not, etc. To use a bit of terminology, on this view autonomy and non-autonomy goods are *fully fungible*: there is no amount of autonomy goods or non-autonomy goods that could not be substituted for a sufficient degree of its contrary, preserving (or making better) the welfare value of the life in question.

One might put the view under consideration as follows:

Fully Fungible Value of Autonomy Thesis (FFVAT): For any n there is some m such that non-autonomy goods to degree m is

better than autonomy to degree n , and for any o there is some p such that autonomy to degree p is better than non-autonomy goods to degree o .

According to FFVAT, one never reaches a point in terms of the achievement of either non-autonomy nor autonomy goods at which this point could not be traded-off for a sufficient degree of the contrary good.

Is FFVAT true? Take the following case:

Shannon and Rick: Shannon is not maximally autonomous, but is nevertheless autonomous to degree m . Furthermore, Shannon maintains a very high degree (o) of non-autonomy goods. Rick is autonomous to degree $r+n$. But Rick fails to maintain any non-autonomy goods whatsoever.

If autonomy is worth purchasing at the cost of non-autonomy goods, there must be some amount of additional autonomy that would prudentially compensate one for the loss of o non-autonomy goods. But if this is correct, FFVAT would seem to imply that, for some r , Rick's life is better than Shannon's. According to FFVAT there is some magnitude of the achievement of autonomy, greater than n , that would compensate for the loss of *all* Shannon's non-autonomy goods. But this is *wildly* implausible. It seems very implausible to say that mere autonomy, simply of itself, would compensate for the total loss of a very high degree of non-autonomy goods.

One might hold that this is reason to treat autonomy and non-autonomy goods as fungible, but to weigh autonomy less significantly in comparison to non-autonomy goods. But this proposal cannot escape the implausible conclusion that, for some r , Rick is better-off than Shannon. Even if autonomy is of very *slight* value, FFVAT implies that autonomy in sufficient degree would outweigh any degree of non-autonomy goods. But Rick regards his life as an utter failure, despite its manifest autonomy. And hence it would seem to me very implausible to say that his life is better, no matter *how* much more autonomous it is than Shannon's life. Hence FFVAT cannot be accepted.

3.1. Non-autonomy as Lexically Dominant

The failure of FVAT requires partisans of VAT to explore the possibility that, once again, non-autonomy goods and autonomy are not fully fungible. But this time in the other direction: at some point, one might argue, the achievement of autonomy cannot compensate, in any amount, for the loss of non-autonomy goods.

Like the proposal that autonomy is lexically dominant, there are two ways to understand the suggestion that non-autonomy is lexically dominant. Consider:

Trumping Value of Non-autonomy Thesis (TVNT): for any m and for any n , non-autonomy goods to degree m is better than autonomy to degree n .

Less extreme:

Discontinuous Value of Non-autonomy Thesis (DVNT): for some m and for any n , non-autonomy goods to degree m over the course of a life is better than autonomy to degree n .

Insofar as TVNT is incompatible with FVAT, I have no *per se* argument against it here, and will leave it aside. DVNT, however, allows that at least in certain cases, a sufficient degree of autonomy could be better than some amount of non-threshold non-autonomy goods. And hence DVNT is compatible with FVAT. However, DVNT faces a troubling counterexample.

Take a variant of Rick and Sharon:

Rich and Sharon: Sharon is not maximally autonomous, but is nevertheless autonomous to degree n . Furthermore, Sharon obtains non-autonomy goods to a very high degree. Rich is autonomous to degree $r+n$. Rich maintains a threshold degree of non-autonomy goods, i.e., degree t , but just barely. Assume that Sharon far exceeds Rich's achievement of non-autonomy goods.

In this case, DVNT seems to imply that, for some r , Sharon would be better-off living Rich's life. After all, if we assume that there is some threshold above which the intrinsic value of autonomy is fungible against non-autonomy goods, it would seem as though *super*-threshold non-autonomy goods can be profitably traded-off against a sufficient amount of mere autonomy. But this seems wrong. If we assume that Rich maintains some threshold degree of non-autonomy goods—perhaps just barely—we must assume that because Sharon's super-threshold non-autonomy goods are unrestrictedly fungible against autonomy, for some r Sharon can trade off *any amount* of super-threshold welfare for the sake of an improvement in autonomy to degree r . But this seems quite implausible to me, especially if we assume that Sharon already maintains *some* degree of autonomy. This seems to be an implausible trade-off, and hence a reason not just to reject the unrestricted fungibility of non-autonomy and autonomy goods, but also

the somewhat limited fungibility on display in DVNT.

3.2. A Rationale

So far I have argued against what seems to be an extensive range of potential methods by which to rank-order autonomy and non-autonomy goods. I have, in each case, offered a counterexample to the claim that the weighting under consideration could be correct. However, I think there is a more general rationale to be offered against any of the previously considered iterations of FVAT. The rationale runs as follows.

Consider a distinction between *mere* autonomy and *substantive* autonomy. Mere autonomy is just that: the planning of one's life as an agent, i.e., as a result of one's rational deliberation. However, mere autonomy needn't imply anything about the extent to which one's life is actually successful by one's own lights, or the extent to which one obtains those goods one seeks to obtain through rational deliberation, or the extent to which that which one obtains is actually prudentially valuable. One might decide to ϕ on the basis of a commitment to ϕ 's value, but then come to realize that one's own assessment of ϕ 's value is unstable or incoherent with other things one values; one might deliberate and select ϕ on the basis of certain reasons one recognizes, but then come to recognize that the reasons one acted on were not genuine reasons, or that these reasons actually tell in favor of some alternative action or state of affairs, etc. Substantive autonomy, however, is not simply the use of one's capacity for autonomy, but the successful use of that capacity. It is the use of one's autonomous capacities in a way that actually achieves the ends it is directed to achieve. According to the views so far considered, the value of autonomy itself needn't be conditioned on the successful use of autonomy to obtain further welfare goods, or to obtain that which one seeks through rational deliberation. Autonomy is valuable even when it's *mere* autonomy. But if that's correct, then it must be that the *mere* operation of autonomy is itself intrinsically valuable in a way that, eventually, could overtake the value of a moderately (even *substantively*) autonomous life but that also maintains non-autonomy goods of extraordinary importance.

But this claim strains credulity. Why should we value autonomy if the exercise of one's capacities for rational agency is unsuccessful at achieving that which is genuinely valuable? Insofar as we value autonomy, we appear to value the ability of a person's life to conform to his or her conception of the good. But simply because one exercises one's capacity for autonomy, this does not guarantee that one's life will bear any resemblance to one's

conception of the good, or bear any resemblance to the conception of the good that one, on reflection, would endorse.

In each of the counterexamples so far I have exploited the troubling verdict that mere autonomy is itself intrinsically valuable; in virtually all cases I ask you to consider individuals who pay for the autonomy they achieve with the achievement of their own conceptions of the good, and hence obtain not substantive autonomy, but mere autonomy. It is the *mereness* of the autonomy under consideration, I claim, that renders the views considered so far implausible, i.e., that renders autonomy an all-things-considered life-improver only insofar as the exercise of autonomy is not paid for with non-autonomy goods.

4. *Autonomy as Conditionally Valuable*

The rationale just offered to reject FVAT, viz., that mere autonomy is not intrinsically valuable, or at least should not be fungible against that which is genuinely valuable, permits of an easy response, a response which is considered by Wall. Wall claims that though autonomy is intrinsically valuable, it is not *unconditionally* valuable. That is, though it is valuable for itself, and not for the sake of anything else, its intrinsic value is conditional on other things being present, including (potentially) non-autonomy goods. Another way to put this suggestion is that the intrinsic value of autonomy does not supervene on the intrinsic properties of any particular exercise of one's rational capacities (i.e., which would yield the unavoidable claim that mere autonomy is just as valuable as substantive autonomy). Rather, the intrinsic value of autonomy depends on its being *successful*, i.e., it depends on its being an instance of *substantive* autonomy.¹⁶ Wall writes:

[VAT] does not mean that personal autonomy is the only component of a fully good life. Far from it. By itself, and in isolation from other components, it has no value. Its value is dependent on the presence of these other components. Still, this dependence does not show that autonomy has no intrinsic value or that it is not a central component of a fully good life.¹⁷

To say that autonomy is conditionally valuable, of course, does not fully determine a picture of autonomy's intrinsic value. This proposal leaves open

¹⁶This view needn't be interpreted to reject the common presumption that intrinsic value does not supervene on intrinsic properties. Wall might claim that that which is intrinsically valuable is the state of affairs in which one engages in the exercise of substantive autonomy.

¹⁷Wall, 130.

entirely how valuable the intrinsically valuable autonomy is in comparison to non-autonomy goods. For the sake of brevity, however, I will interpret Wall's suggestion as the:

Conditional Value of Autonomy Thesis (CVAT): the exercise of autonomy is intrinsically valuable only insofar as it is an instance of substantive, rather than mere, autonomy. The intrinsic value of substantive autonomy is fully fungible against the intrinsic value of non-autonomy goods.¹⁸

Insofar as CVAT is weaker than a number of other potential weightings, I will take it that any argument against CVAT is an argument against stronger methods by which to rank-order substantive autonomy. There are weaker methods by which to weigh conditionally intrinsically valuable autonomy (without simply resorting to the claim that substantive autonomy is lexically dominated by non-autonomy goods), I will focus on CVAT here. The weaker alternative, i.e., that a *threshold* degree of non-autonomy goods trumps substantive autonomy, implies the same problematic conclusion implied by CVAT.

3.3. CVAT

CVAT holds that autonomy is conditionally intrinsically valuable to the extent that this exercise of autonomy is substantive. It also holds that substantive autonomy is fungible in comparison to mere autonomy. I think, however, that there is good reason to reject this view. Take the following case:

Madeline and Gussy: Madeline and Gussy had been spending a lovely afternoon together walking in country gardens and discussing mutual interests. Gussy is very attracted to Madeline and *vice versa*, though neither of them really knows quite what to do about it or how to proceed. At the conclusion of their afternoon together, quite spontaneously, Madeline gives Gussy a brief but tender kiss. This kiss surprises both of them, but it is something they come to value highly.

¹⁸Of course, there are a number of ways one might understand the view that autonomy is conditionally valuable. One alternative is to suggest that all forms of autonomy are intrinsically valuable to the extent that one also maintains some degree of non-autonomy goods. This view fails, however, precisely for the same reason that DVNT fails. The problem can be traced, again, to its embrace of mere autonomy rather than substantive autonomy.

In this case we appear to have an uncontroversial non-autonomy good: a tender kiss from one's beloved. I think it would be absurd to say that Madeline and Gussy's lives are not improved by the kiss—even if nothing else ever comes of their relationship.

So far so uncontroversial. But it would appear that if we are to accept CVAT, we must accept that autonomy of itself is intrinsically valuable when it is a substantive contributor to non-autonomy goods. Now imagine that had Gussie and Madeline planned autonomously to kiss rather than letting the kiss occur—as it were, *to them*—spontaneously, the kiss itself would be ever-so-slightly less romantic. They wouldn't have valued it quite as highly as they, in fact, do. According to CVAT, there is some degree of autonomous planning such that, were this kiss to have been autonomously planned to that degree, this kiss would be better for Madeline and Gussy than the spontaneous kiss, despite the fact that the spontaneous kiss generates a higher degree of non-autonomy goods than the autonomously planned kiss. But this claim seems to me utterly, egregiously absurd. What makes this kiss good for both Madeline and Gussy is that it is so *romantic*, that it is an expression of their mutual attraction. I can see no reason to believe that the value of such a kiss would be enhanced by its being a product of rational deliberation on either of their parts, especially if, *qua* non-autonomy goods, the spontaneous kiss is better.¹⁹

Partisans of CVAT will surely respond as follows: CVAT does not imply that Gussy and Madeline's tender kiss would be better were it autonomous. After all, part of its value as a non-autonomy good comes from its *being* non-autonomous. In this case, the autonomy is not substantive. Why? Because it alters the good in question: no longer is it a brief, tender, spontaneous kiss, but rather a brief, tender kiss that was planned and about which they deliberated. But this is not the case I'm imagining. For Gussie and Madeline, the exercise of autonomy in which they engage while kissing is substantive: it generates a non-autonomy good at which they aim. But it's just *not as non-autonomously valuable* as the spontaneous kiss. And so CVAT must say that the kiss would be better were it autonomously planned.

¹⁹Pursuant to my suggestion in the last paragraph of §3.2, this example also causes problems for the suggestion that a threshold degree of non-autonomy goods trumps substantive autonomy. One can assume that Madeline and Gussy will maintain the relevant thresholds no matter what happens. And hence when the threshold is not at stake, non-autonomy goods and substantive autonomy are fungible, and hence even this view must say that they are made better-off by the autonomous kiss rather than the spontaneous one, despite the fact that the former was more romantic, and generated a slightly higher degree of non-autonomy welfare benefit.

At this point, I conclude my positive argument. Though I haven't considered every potential method by which to rank-order the value of autonomy versus the value of non-autonomy goods, I have shown that an extraordinarily wide swath of potential methods are substantially implausible. If we wonder how much we should pay for autonomy, the answer, or so it would seem, is: nothing.

4. *Objection: Deference*

Of course, the problems with the views under consideration here are not dispositive. Perhaps, after all, there are good motivating reasons to accept FVAT despite the manifest implausibility of any potential iteration of this view. I consider perhaps the most important argument on behalf of the fungibility of autonomy here, i.e., the argument from *deference*.

Wall gives the argument from deference its clearest formulation. Wall writes:

Suppose that you are wise and that you have an excellent understanding of what is good for me. You know my talents, temperament and vulnerabilities and you know what types of projects would best suit my nature. Further suppose I know that you are a person of good will who cares about my well-being. Given these facts, we can ask: Would my life go better if I let you take control of it? Would it be a better life if I always turned to you for direction as to what I should do before I took up any project or commitment?

Most of us strongly think the answers to these questions are "no." It can be reasonable to defer to the judgment of others some of the time in some circumstances; but a person who surrendered his or her judgment in all contexts would not lead a fully good human life.²⁰

Here Wall asks us to consider turning over our lives to the deliberation and decisionmaking of another person who happens to be wise and benevolent, and hence would be trusted to make decisions that would garner substantial non-autonomy goods, and hence would result in our lives' conforming to that which we value. He then asks whether it would be better for us to so turn over our lives, and answers "no". On this point, Wall offers a specific case:

²⁰Wall, 146.

Person A is wise and has self-knowledge. He chooses projects that suit his nature and reflect his understanding of what is valuable and worthwhile. Person A leads a good, morally decent, life. Person B is also wise and has self-knowledge. But she finds the process of decision-making irksome and does not enjoy making important life decisions. Fortunately, person B has a friend with the requisite wisdom, knowledge and good will to make these decisions for her. Person B lets this friend take over her affairs and she leads a good, morally decent, life.

In this second case it can be asked whether Person A and Person B lead equally good lives? Once again, most of us strongly think “no.”²¹

First, I should note that Wall’s second argument here is compatible with the rejection of the fungibility of autonomy and non-autonomy goods. If we assume that Person A and Person B maintain the same degree of non-autonomy goods, then it is perfectly in keeping with the suggestion that we should pay nothing for autonomy itself that Person A lives a better life than Person B. After all, TVNT allows that autonomy is intrinsically valuable, if trumped by non-autonomy goods.

However, I think Wall’s argument can be strengthened in accordance with the stronger view he sketched above. Imagine that Person B’s life is only *very slightly* better than Person A’s life in terms of non-autonomy goods. It might be that in this case, we should continue to refuse to defer to a trusted advisor for all decisions. After all, doing so—as Wall argues—is to fail to lead a “fully good human life”. If we accept Wall’s considered judgments in these cases, it would appear that this is very good reason to accept the fungibility of autonomy *in some iteration or other* (perhaps a version of CVAT), despite the implausibility of its various incarnations.

Some hold that the objection from deference is not decisive.²² Valdman suggests that there is no distinction in kind between an individual who allows a financial advisor to take over his long-term financial plans and Person B. And given that we generally do not believe that an individual who turns to an advisor for financial planning is thereby living a worse-life, it would seem we are committed to saying that Person B does not live a worse life. Furthermore, one might expand this example. Many of the large, long-term decisions that we make in life are not a product of our autonomous decision-

²¹Wall, 147.

²²See, for instance, Mikhail Valdman, “Outsourcing Self-Government” in *Ethics* 120 (2010).

making, but are instead a matter determined *by law*. But we don't think the fact that I ϕ -ed because the law commanded it makes my life worse than if I had ϕ -ed given a thorough examination of the reasons in favor and against ϕ -ing.

However, I think these sorts of examples are unlikely to convince. Perhaps there is something bad, after all, about turning over one's finances to an advisor, even if it's merely a minor bad that is made up for by the (assume) tremendous financial benefits one expects to receive. However, I want to press a different response to the argument from deference. To object to deference, or so I claim, is not necessarily to commit to the intrinsic value of autonomy. We can explain the result that Person A lives a better life than Person B in one of two ways. First, we could insist that FVAT is true—autonomy has intrinsic value that, at least in this case, is fungible in comparison to non-autonomy goods. Alternatively, we could insist that welfare is importantly impacted by the extent to which one's life is *self-directed* (though not necessarily autonomously self-directed).

I think there is good reason to think that self-direction has an important impact on one's welfare. To see what I mean, consider for a moment the nature of what I'll call a *project*. Projects are things like “being a professional philosopher”, “climbing Mount Everest”, “maintaining a happy marriage”, etc.²³ Success at these projects has an impact on the welfare value of a person's life that goes beyond the welfare value of individual moments in a person's life. As Velleman notes, these projects help to tell a person's life story. In Williamsian terms, such projects help to determine what a person's life is about: they help to determine the meaning of a person's life.²⁴ And hence, it seems to me, such projects are important welfare benefits of the sort that we are not licensed to ignore.

But how does self-direction figure in all of this? Consider, for instance, the following person:

²³The importance of such “projects” to welfare is accepted by many, including Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), ch. 12., Simon Keller, “Welfare and the Achievement of Goals” in *Philosophical Studies* 116 (2004), T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), ch. 3, John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), §64, Dale Dorsey, “First Steps in an Axiology of Goals” in *International Journal of Wellbeing* 1 (2011), Douglas Portmore, “Welfare, Achievement, and Self-Sacrifice” in *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 3 (2007).

²⁴See, for instance, David Velleman, “Well-being and Time” in *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 3. See also Bernard Williams, “Persons, Character, and Morality” in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 12.

Randall: Randall is Native-American, born into a small tribe that continues to live on reservation land, though his tribe has succumbed to serious social problems including rampant poverty and lack of education. Randall sets for himself the goal of improving the educational system for his tribe, works for his life to do so, and succeeds.

I think we should say that Randall's success at this worthwhile project—that of improving the educational system on his tribal lands—is an important factor in his overall welfare: this project ties together his activities, and helps to provide his life with a direction and meaning. In this way, successful completion of his project to bring a better educational system to his tribe is an improvement in Randall's welfare. However, though this project certainly provides an important feature of the meaning of his life, and forms a crucial part of his life story, another fact about Randall also does this, viz., that he was born Native-American on a sadly poverty-ridden reservation. This is part of his life story, but does not contribute to its value. The difference between the project Randall sets for himself, and the fact that Randall was born a Native American is not the extent to which these facts influence the meaning of his life, or his life story, but the extent to which these facts influence the aspect of his life or life story that are *self-directed*. If that's the case, then it would appear that self-direction has an important impact on one's welfare. An important intrinsic value is success at projects that provide a self-directed meaning to one's life and life story.

If this is correct, then it seems to me that the significance for welfare of maintaining these sorts of projects, projects that impart one's life and life story with a self-directed meaning is large. But this fact alone, rather than the intrinsic value of autonomy, seems sufficient to explain why Person B lives a worse life than Person A. Person B, on Wall's example, "lets [her] friend take over her affairs and she leads a good, morally decent, life." But in so doing, whatever meaning her life maintains is very difficult to distinguish other things over which she does not control, including her gender or race. In this case, Person A's projects are no different than Randall's born-into ethnicity: elements of her life story over which she has little control.

The partisan of VAT might believe that I have capitulated. After all, if self-directed projects are intrinsically valuable, isn't this simply evidence that autonomy is intrinsically valuable? But self-direction does not entail *autonomous* self-direction. For a project to be autonomous requires not simply that the project is the product of one's own actions and/or decisions. Rather, to maintain an autonomous project is to maintain such a project

on the basis of one's own autonomous/rational deliberation. One can direct the meaning of one's life without going through such autonomous processes. Take, for instance:

Non-autonomous Randall: Randall is Native-American, born into a small tribe that continues to live on reservation land, though his tribe has succumbed to serious social problems including rampant poverty and lack of education. Randall, though he possesses the capacity for autonomous deliberation, never actually engages it. Randall acts as he sees fit at the time, but never bothers to deliberate in the way specified by VAT. Nevertheless, it just so happens that Randall "falls into" a long-term project, viz., improving the educational system for his tribe, and is successful at so doing. Though Randall never considers whether this is a desirable outcome, *were he to have considered the question*, he would have regarded this project as worthwhile, indeed.

I am tempted to say that Non-autonomous Randall maintains a self-directed project, and the success of his self-directed project is an important feature in the quality of his life. It is a feature that Person B lacks, and that Non-autonomous Randall maintains. The difference between Randall and Non-autonomous Randall is simply the extent to which he engages in reflective deliberation about what to do, i.e., whether, at the time he engages in the activities that make up this project, his desires to do so are supported by a wider conception of the good. Clearly, then, one can maintain a self-directed project, in a way that significantly impacts one's welfare, without doing so autonomously.

Thus it seems to me that there are two competing explanations for the comparative disvalue of turning over one's decisions to a friend, and hence there is no reason to believe that we should accept FVAT on the basis of the argument from deference. Insofar as FVAT is implausible, and insofar as we can explain the disvalue of deference without it, there is no reason to think that the disvalue of deference supports FVAT rather than the evaluative significance of self-directed projects (whether or not those projects are *autonomously* self-directed).

5. A Response: Weakening CVAT

My response to the objection from deference was to posit a category of non-autonomy goods, i.e., self-directed projects, and the extent to which

those projects provide one's life with a self-directed meaning. But the partisan of FVAT will notice that in so doing one opens up a further variation on FVAT that I have not so far considered. In particular, recall that I rejected CVAT on the basis of a consideration of Madeline and Gussy's kiss. It seems wildly implausible, for instance, to suggest that Madeline and Gussy should prefer an autonomous kiss rather than a spontaneous one, no matter how autonomous the kiss is, especially since the latter is so much better for them in ways not determined by autonomy.

However, the kiss in question doesn't seem to be the sort of thing that impacts the long-term story of either Madeline and Gussy's life. In this way, the kiss appears to be a much less significant minor good, one that doesn't have any impact on the self-directed projects they maintain. But one might reframe the suggestion that autonomy is intrinsically valuable by insisting that only *substantive autonomy that contributes to the long-term structure of an individual's life and life story* (i.e., his or her projects) is intrinsically valuable, and hence is fungible in comparison to non-autonomy goods.

Indeed, this suggestion is made by Wall himself, albeit in terms that are somewhat impressionistic. For Wall, autonomy is important for people to the extent that it gives "meaning to their lives,"²⁵ or impacts their "character" in more than a merely momentary sense.²⁶ But if this is correct, one natural suggestion would be that the autonomous selection of mere momentary goods, such as the brief tender kiss between Gussie and Madeline, is not in fact intrinsically valuable. Consider, then:

Conditional Value of Autonomy Thesis 2 (CVAT2): the exercise of autonomy is intrinsically valuable only insofar as it is an instance of substantive, rather than mere, autonomy and only insofar as it this autonomous choice helps to shape the meaning and character of a life. The intrinsic value of this form of substantive autonomy is fungible against the intrinsic value of non-autonomy goods.

I think there are two problems with CVAT2. First, and less significantly, there is no reason to believe that momentary goods like the kiss between Madeline and Gussy couldn't affect the projects they engage in, or the long-term meaning or character of their lives. In particular, this kiss might have been a turning point, a crucial moment in the story of their lives, one that was not decided upon autonomously. It may even go on to shape the long-term structure of their lives in important ways. But even if it is such a

²⁵Wall, 147.

²⁶Wall, 147-8.

turning point, we are no more likely to say that it would be better for them had they chosen to kiss autonomously rather than non-autonomously. Their lives would be no better for them had their kiss been the product of rational deliberation.

Second, it seems to me also implausible to believe that autonomy, even when shaping an individual's longer term projects, could be fungible against the non-autonomy goods one achieves. Two cases shed light:

Tuppy and Angela: Tuppy has recently had a spat with his long-time fiancé Angela. Tuppy recognizes that his own decisionmaking is clouded by his anger at Angela's continuing to criticize his weight, and her refusal to accept his apology for minimizing a certain traumatic event in her life. He approaches a trusted advisor, Jeeves. "Jeeves," says Tuppy, "I am in your care. Should I marry Angela, or not?" Jeeves suggests that Tuppy should marry Angela. He does, and lives a very happy married life, containing deep, mutual, and abiding affection.

Compare this case to:

Tuppy and Cora: Tuppy has recently had a spat with his long-time fiancé Angela. Tuppy recognizes that his own decisionmaking is clouded by his anger at Angela's continuing to criticize his weight, and her refusal to accept his apology for minimizing a certain traumatic event in her life. Nevertheless, he presses on and deliberates concerning whether he ought to marry Angela. He decides that he simply cannot see himself maintaining a happy life with Angela, and instead proposes to another woman, Cora. They marry, and though their marriage is a good one, it is marked by less substantial affection.

On the current proposal, autonomy is intrinsically valuable to the extent that it is efficacious at structuring the long term meaning of one's life. On this view, Tuppy's exercise of autonomy in the case of *Tuppy and Cora* is intrinsically valuable. After all, it is perfectly substantive; his marriage to Cora is a good one, it is of (non-autonomy) intrinsic value, his life would have been worse had there been no marriage at all. Furthermore, this marriage shapes the long-term meaning of his life in a very important way. But, if this form of autonomy is to be fungible in comparison to non-autonomy goods, this means that Tuppy's autonomous decision to marry Cora must be worth *something* when it comes to the non-autonomy value of the resulting

marriage. There must be some degree of autonomy m such that the decision to marry Cora—autonomous to degree m —will compensate for the relative disvalue of his marriage to Cora rather than Angela. To put this another way, there is *some* amount of non-autonomy goods accumulated in Tuppy’s marriage to Angela that should be abandoned for the sake of Tuppy’s refusal to turn over his decisionmaking to Jeeves. But this, it seems to me, is implausible. It would seem to me very difficult to say that there is *any* amount of marriage-quality lost that could be outweighed by Tuppy’s autonomous decision to marry Cora rather than his non-autonomous decision to marry Angela. Why believe that simply deciding for himself makes it the case that he lives a better life in maintaining a worse marriage, even if worse to a minor degree? Again, this view seems to have implausible trade-offs that, on reflection, we’re better-off avoiding.

One alternative way to put the problem with CVAT2 is to say the following: CVAT2 makes the importance of autonomy depend on the “big” elements of the quality of our lives: our life’s projects, its long-term structure, meaning, and character. But if this is correct, it would seem that any loss in the *non-autonomy* value of these projects is a comparatively very large loss, one that seems implausible to trade-off for the sake of engaging in this project in an autonomous rather than non-autonomous way. After all, though Tuppy engages in an autonomous marriage in marrying Cora, he also loses out on *a better marriage*, which seems, in welfare terms, a comparatively big deal. And so it seems to me that indexing the value of autonomy to the extent to which one autonomously chooses the long-term structure, projects, or meaning of a life is no more plausible than insisting on the comparative value of an autonomous, but comparatively unromantic, kiss.

6. Conclusion: Whither VAT?

In this paper I hope to have shown that even if we assume that autonomy is intrinsically valuable, we should *pay nothing for it*; autonomy is worth nothing in terms of non-autonomy goods. If VAT is true at all, it must be interested under the guise of TVNT.

However, I think the claim that FVAT is false can and should give us pause concerning VAT itself. This is for three reasons. First, if we reject FVAT, any remaining value that might be possessed by autonomy is incredibly weak; indeed, so weak as to make virtually no difference to our prudential deliberations. After all, in determining whether to ϕ or ψ on prudential grounds, only in the extraordinarily rare case in which non-autonomy goods

are equivalent between two options will the exercise of autonomy make any difference to the welfare quality of these lives. Second, this view is *far* too weak to sustain many of the important *normative* claims that are sometimes made on the basis of the intrinsic value of autonomy. For instance, some claim that the intrinsic value of autonomy is reason to reject political institutions that would commit to one particular conception of the good rather than some other conception; doing so may perhaps assist in the achievement of non-autonomy goods, but would interfere, importantly, with autonomy goods.²⁷ However, this view is clearly not supported by the view under consideration: any proposal that would increase the achievement of non-autonomy goods, whatever the expense in terms of autonomy, is prudentially justified.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, any axiological view that accepts the intrinsic value of autonomy, given that we must reject FVAT, has theoretical disadvantages, including a comparative lack of parsimony, in comparison to a view that rejects VAT altogether. Now any view that accepts any intrinsic good is comparatively less parsimonious than a view that rejects that purported good. And so this consideration shouldn't be taken as decisive. But if we reject FVAT, it would appear that the intrinsic value of autonomy makes comparatively little difference to axiological and/or normative inquiry. If this is the case, it is worth wondering what is to be gained by insisting that autonomy remains intrinsically valuable. It seems to me that such marginal differences are not worth the theoretic cost, but at this point I leave this as conjecture.

²⁷For instance, the importance of autonomy, according to Kymlicka, is the "basis of a liberal political theory". See Kymlicka, 13.