

**Thesis Submitted for Degree of**

**Mark Evans**

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## **THE CONCEPT OF SELF-REALIZATION IN POLITICAL THEORY**

### **Abstract:**

This thesis aims to elaborate a plausible conception of self-realization and defend the claims that: {a} the concept in general is a valid concern of modern political theory; {b} the conception it proposes provides an ideal which can play a workable and desirable role in shaping the structure of modern political institutions and the content of specific policies.

I begin by examining the conceptual definition of “modern” thought, proposing to explore how “self-realization” may be conceived in a way which respects the terms of this definition. I justify the separate existence of my proposed theory by showing that its conception of self-realization is clearly distinct from, but compatible with, autonomy and that its consequences for political practice are also interestingly different from policies promoting autonomy alone. The relevance of this is justified by a general defence of perfectionism in politics.

I develop the theory by examination of conceptions of self-realization in the political thought of Aristotle, John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx. The structure, underlying assumptions and political import of each is considered in order to understand how self-realizationist theories work and to see what, if anything, from these thinkers remains pertinent.

My (“general”) theory of self-realization is built from a critique of the Marxist concept of communism. The final chapter consolidates these foundations, constructing the “general conception” with some of the critically-tested ideas from earlier chapters. A new way of conceptualizing the self for the purposes of political theory is offered, justifying this melding of ideas from disparate traditions into one conception. Possible policy consequences of the latter are summarized, drawing heavily on the conclusions of the author-based chapters. The study concludes by presenting an argument which might be offered for the claim that this new conception of self-realization is worth promoting through political action.

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# The Concept of Self-Realization in Political Theory

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### **i The Aim of the Thesis**

It is the privilege of advanced industrial societies such as ours to have before them the promise of an increasing liberation from conditions that reduce so many lives to unfulfilling drudgery. Blessed with wealth, technological achievement and the chance to offer the kind of education that can give people the imagination and the know-how to use these riches to the full, there seems, at last, to be the chance to slip free of lives which are simply led according to the “dull compulsion” of “ordinary”, “everyday” existence. It is no longer idle to contemplate new, better ways of living in place of the monotonously repetitive activities that today consume so much of people’s time and energy. We can ask “what is wrong with the lives we are leading?” with a vision of something more desirable which we no longer have to regard as just an unachievable utopian fantasy.

It seems very peculiar, therefore, that a prevailing tenet of some of today’s most influential political theories, which ostensibly address themselves to that realm of human activity in which changes to usher in these new possibilities could be initiated, should insist upon the greatest possible independence of political principles from substantive conceptions of the good life. For the effect of this has been not only to remove good-life thinking from political theory but also to lead people to theorize political structures that have as little to do with the good life as it is possible for them to have. If one grants that the kind of desirable changes in lifestyle now possible require major political initiatives to restructure existing society, then one can only wonder why such political theories steadfastly abstain from embracing this challenge.

These theories have their reasons, of course; theirs is a principled abstention. The arguments in favour of the scepticism about political theory’s ability to contribute to good-life thinking are based on powerful intuitions and “anti-perfectionism” in political theory has accordingly been a highly influential position.<sup>1</sup> So, readers of this thesis who have accepted this line of thought are unlikely to react too favourably to the statement of its intention.

For in this work, I will attempt to defend the possibility of theorizing the political promotion of good-life ideals. The ideal I have picked to illustrate this is “self-realization”. This is a term which has undergone many interpretations in the history of ethical thought and it still appears in contemporary thinking – but usually in a dubiously unspecific form. My aim is to see what substance might be given to it and how we might attribute political implications to its pursuit. I intend to render the idea of “self-realization” intelligible and sufficiently detailed not only to be distinguishable from other possible good-life ideals, but able to be put to work in influencing political decisions, too. I seek a political theory of self-realization which is appropriate for a modern society such as ours and which therefore might be worthy of acceptance by its citizens. A concrete illustration of perfectionism in politics such as this is the best way to test the viability of my overall suggestion.

Clearly, anti-perfectionists are going to doubt that political theory should indulge itself in such matters – and even some who are prepared to countenance a degree of perfectionism in political thinking and government activity might be unhappy at this bald statement of my project. For a start, there is certainly a sense in which the introductory observations on the promise of liberation from drudgery are grossly blinkered. If “advanced industrial societies” have indeed reached such exalted levels of wealth and knowledge, it is undoubtedly the case that this is distributed highly unequally within them. Vast numbers of people within the richest economies are barred access to any reasonable form of “good life” by these inequalities. Even more pertinently, there are many societies in the world today which fall a long way short of the material base upon which this vaunted liberation might depend – indeed, it is the exploitation of such societies which at least partially accounts for such riches elsewhere.

The question is whether a concern with “self-realization” can tackle pressing problems such as these (which I shall call, following Anthony Giddens, issues in *emancipatory politics*<sup>2</sup>). For reasons to be explained as we proceed, I will cast doubt on the idea that a plausible modern conception of it is equipped to deal with such matters. At this point, as I develop the purposes of self-realizationist political theory as I conceive them, we should not, therefore, presume an automatic identity between “questions of self-realization” and “questions of morality” or “justice.”

The urgent demands of the exploited and impoverished rightly require immediate attention. It seems pretty complacent, therefore, to try to think about how to lead a particular form of good life (a question of *life politics*, in Giddens’s terminology) when such a life may be based upon a certain standard of living systematically denied to huge proportions of humanity. Is it right to think about how to use the material and intellectual riches of our society for our “good lives” and not about how we might share this wealth with others first?

But if political theory should make its contribution to the reduction of global suffering a priority, this is not as yet to say that it is wholly improper to turn one’s thoughts to how life might best be led once injustices have been rectified. In a way, the opening remarks above may stand entirely undamaged by the remarks of the last paragraph. It can be argued that the initial liberation from injustice and subsequent pursuit of the good life require policies that can be implemented in tandem. Perhaps the form that emancipatory politics takes is dependent upon an idea of what sort of life it is good to lead thereafter; there may be no clear divide between emancipatory and life politics.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, this is the attitude of the thesis; hence its belief that thinking about life politics is apposite even though emancipation is far from ubiquitous. We shall develop this point shortly.

First, though, let us turn to another line of argument, which has actually been more central to the academic case against good-life thinking and could be deployed against the kind of project being proposed here. This attributes centrality to “individual choice” in life politics, limiting the extent to which a “general” theory, designed for society as a whole, is able to describe “the good life”. In some arguments this leads to a claim that the good life consists in freely choosing how to live. Others do not even venture this minimal claim,

saying that there is no right answer to the question about what the good life consists in. They stress a principle according to which people's "life-choices" deserve equal respect and tolerance by the political system.

It is necessary to establish that arguments such as these are unconvincing if the subsequent analysis of self-realization is to carry any conviction at all. This is difficult, because some commitment to "individual choice" is generally deemed to be a central feature of modern thought – and I have set out to place the perfectionist pursuit of self-realization in a plausible modern theory. Before saying anything more about my project, therefore, we need to look at how we might argue against anti-perfectionism. We can start by examining the nature of "modern political theory" and a suggested contrast between modern and "pre-modern" political thought.<sup>4</sup>

## **ii Pre-Modern and Modern Political Thought**

The distinction between the two as I initially draw it is stark: pre-modern political thought typically articulates a specific conception of the good life, which enables it to present the political measures needed to bring it about. It can do this because it is based upon a substantive conception of the nature of the universe which includes an account of human nature and the form of the good human life. The crucial point in the meaning of "pre-modern" is that this is offered as objective fact, *existing independently of whatever people may happen to believe and choose*.

A pre-modern world view supplies a person with his whole identity. It is an identity he shares with beings who essentially occupy the same sort of position in the natural order. For although pre-modern theories do not have to deny the possibility of individuating features, identity and the mode of good living are considered to be *shared* characteristics.

If the content of the good life is to be derived from a view of the world whose own content is held to exist independently of individual choices, then it becomes possible to draw up an accurate, detailed set of specific social and political institutions and practices to promote the good life. This account also exists independently of choice and is consequently seen as a description of "nature" too. Deviations from it are cast as objective malfunctions of the natural order.

Not only are pre-modern political theories able to expound full accounts of the "objective human good", they can also present detailed accounts of the "principles of right": emancipatory principles which are to govern human relationships (detailing what is owed every person regardless of their conception of the good). The best form of laws, people's rights and obligations, the principles of justice in distribution of resources: pre-modern thought can address these issues, too. But because life is here believed to be geared towards the pursuit of a specific form of good, the principles of right are intimately connected with the good. Indeed, there is little need for a clear distinction to be drawn between the right and the good and none, therefore, between emancipatory and life politics.<sup>5</sup>

An example of such a view can be found in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. For him, as a Christian, man is naturally directed towards "the good" by virtue of an eternal law as

prescribed by God. Thus, the flourishing of a rational man (the good) consists in virtuous behaviour (acting in accordance with principles of right). Man finds his identity and his good in the “natural-order” world of God’s kingdom and it is in the natural facts, or revealed truth, of this world-view that one discovers how life should be led and society organized.<sup>6</sup>

What is lost to *modern* political thought is the natural-order view which allows such confident, sweeping pronouncements about the conduct of life. The “Enlightened” minds cast away the forms of faith upon which pre-modern thought depended. This cut them away from the kind of context in which identity and the good had formerly been derived. Kant, for example, interpreted the Enlightenment as “man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity,”<sup>7</sup> the pre-modern condition having been nothing but a wilful reluctance to break free of the baseless dogmas used to “explain” the world and the meaning of life. If the thinkers of the Enlightenment continued to believe that there was an objective natural order “out there”, waiting to be discovered, their reliance on individual perception and reason rather than faith ultimately propelled modern thought towards the radical conclusion that nature did not yield ready-made answers to questions of meaning and value to passively discovering minds. The responsibility for creatively interpreting the world and investing their own lives with meaning was their own.

This is the starting point for the problem of *modernity*. It is a *problem* because the losses suffered by the disappearance of the pre-modern condition are not all things with which modern thought believes we must dispense. Specifically, modernity does not believe that people should not have a conception of their identity and the good life. But in asking that modern individuals themselves be the providers of these requirements, Enlightenment gave to people what many formerly deemed to be the province of God – a daunting requirement indeed.<sup>8</sup>

So we might redraw slightly the contrast between pre-modern and modern political thought: whereas the former was concerned to identify the good life and specify what was needed to achieve it, the latter is concerned to do whatever is necessary in political life to help individuals decide for themselves how it is good for them to live. Modern political thought certainly does not *want* to leave the individual self in the limbo modernity forces it into immediately after severing it from natural-order world views.<sup>9</sup>

The achievement of modernity in giving humanity this responsibility is generally held to be a positive one. No longer having our lives ruled by what we now consider to be illusory beliefs, it is good to embrace the view that we are essentially *self-defining* beings – authors of our own identities and our own conceptions of the good life. Thus, individual choice is a definitive feature of modernity and modern political thinkers commonly seek to protect and promote it as much as possible. So if modern thinkers are right about the centrality of individual choice as an ontological claim (“there is and can be nothing else to give meaning to our lives and the world”) then it is only through their choices that modern people can lead authentic, truly human lives.<sup>10</sup>

The kind of political practice required by modernity is familiar enough, of course. For it is the politics of individual *autonomy*, the search for the principles necessary to secure

adequate conditions for choice. The structure and content of modern political thought must, therefore, respect the modern achievement of autonomy. Herein lies the key principle which my proposed modern political theory of self-realization will have to accommodate.

As we could gather from Aquinas, pre-modern thought tended to treat questions of ethics as directed towards discerning the objective content and characteristic behaviour of the good life. Politics was, to put it bluntly, just an extension of the ethical concerns: how to organize society in such a way as to maximize the pursuit of the good. Such issues did not need to be parcelled off into separate “ethical” and “political” spheres. It would therefore have made no sense to a practitioner of pre-modern political theory to have asked, as we have, why such ethical matters should be a political issue.

Because of the centrality of choice, the nature of ethics and politics is transformed in modernity. First, “ethics” as the pre-moderns understood it splits into two types of concern and only one of these halves remains tied to politics. Pre-modern ethics sees concern {a}, asking the question: “what ought I to do?”, as totally informed by the answer to the foundational question {b}: “what is the good life for me?”

In the ethics of modernity, the primary objective is to protect the capacity of each individual to choose. So the answers it gives to {a} invariably take the form of the rights moral agents have with respect to this capacity and/or the duties they have to respect that capacity in others. These principles of right are readily viewed as the main substance of emancipation politics, applicable to everyone. They provide the “ground rules” under which individuals can seek their own various answers to {b}. This would be the sphere of life politics – except that this is not obviously an appropriate realm for politics at all, now. Because of individual choice and variation in how one wishes to lead life, there is no longer one correct, universally applicable account of the good life which a political system can embody or promote.

Ethics of type {b}, are deliberately screened out of the relational principles in {a}. Were these principles left “infected” with particular conceptions of the good, then people’s freedom to choose their own good would be compromised – and modernity’s achievement is precisely to liberate people from just this kind of imposition. We can begin to see the advisability of uncoupling “self-realization” and “ethics” in modern thought: if the former is something which we may or may not choose, then it can only be one of the options protected by {a}. Further reasons for this separation, showing the unworkability of the Thomist approach in modernity, will be encountered as we proceed.

From this, a divide emerges between public and private ethical spheres. In the public, practices which are cleansed of particular conceptions of the good are instantiated. Its impersonal duties and protective rights, designed to maximize the autonomy of the individual in a viable social system, seek to insulate the individuals’ private realm within which people are free to choose their own projects of the good life. Modern political theory, concerning itself with how society should be governed, has become confined to describing the public realm: with emancipation politics. In principle, there seems to be nothing for a general political theory to say about the private sphere – beyond ensuring

that this respects the public “regulatory” morality in each instance. The politics of modernity becomes based upon securing this code of social conduct and this is now the only connection the “ethical” has with the “political” (albeit still an intimate one).

Liberalism, of course, is the paradigm of modern political theory, given the importance it attaches to individual autonomy in formulating the good life. This is not to make the obviously false claim that liberalism has been the only political response to modernity. It has faced competition from other doctrines because the problems modernity presents us with have proved highly resistant to resolution. For many thinkers, the liberal politics of individual choice has failed to make good the losses suffered after the collapse of pre-modernity. The reliance upon the rationality and choice of the liberal individual is not seen by them as offering a sufficiently rich conception of a flourishing life.

Moreover, in the eyes of some critics the impersonal politics of the public realm seems perversely to frustrate this project when it was designed to promote it. For example, many believe that the modern self still requires a deep commitment to, or embeddedness in, a particular form of community. They argue that this self can only find its true identity and a conception of the good most faithful to that identity via membership of a close-knit community. In their opinion a liberal society, whose relationships are based upon protective rights and duties, is flawed. Being so impersonal, it fails to express ideals of membership and belonging, of fulfilling involvement in a humanized context.<sup>11</sup>

These communitarian critics of liberal politics typically condemn it, therefore, with being the politics of *alienation*: from one’s own community and hence from one’s own identity and the real source of one’s good. A host of other failings are listed by them as following on from this. One example is their claim that such reliance on the individual leads to purely egoistic self-gratification, an empty conception of the good from this perspective (illustrated with reference to instances in a liberal market society, where people’s “good” becomes reduced simply to following consumerist fashions). The role of atomized individual desires in giving meaning to life and the world, too, is seen as morally vacuous, irresponsible and ultimately unfulfilling.

Whatever the merits of such charges, we should therefore concede that “modern political thought” has yielded a number of alternatively structured theories which undermine the way we have drawn the pre-modern/modern distinction thus far. But liberalism’s rivals usually find their own claims undermined even more seriously by the condition of modernity. For it seems that the only strategy to oppose liberalism is one that replaces “individual choice” with a more substantive account of what is central to human existence – and this either involves a straight reversion to pre-modern views, or a search for new substantive sources of human identity and the good.

Two examples of these alternatives, both of which we will deal with in greater detail later, are: {a} a new postulation of the human essence, or “real self”, which attempts to make fresh claims about what, objectively, one’s good is;<sup>12</sup> {b} a theory like utilitarianism which offers a substantive claim about the nature of the good life, distilled from what the theory states people actually choose to do.<sup>13</sup>

Both of these show why the pre-modern/modern distinction as drawn above

inadequately centres its definition of the “modern” on “choice”. But the distinction remains pertinent because modernity allows us to challenge the basis of the beliefs which people have to have to accept these alternatives. Do we not now have the freedom to alter, or challenge any of the facts of {a}? Further, how could we claim that only a certain conception of the “human essence”, for example, is the “objectively correct” one? Even if a claim like {b} could be distilled from all our choices (which is highly doubtful), do we not, again, have the freedom to choose something else hereafter in modernity?

So I offer, as a premise for this thesis, the claim that it is now probably impossible to argue convincingly for a view of the good life which does not believe that the latter is to be determined ultimately by individual choice. Modernity’s achievements cannot be properly undone even if they are not seen in a positive light, because arguments to the contrary have been rendered singularly unconvincing due to the distinctively modern effect of choice as a factor in our reflections on the good life. It is now extraordinarily difficult simply to wish away this effect in one’s good-life theory, if one is attempting to theorize relevantly for individuals in the modern world.

But I do not think this means that modern political theory has to be some sort of liberal anti-perfectionism. Earlier, I suggested that emancipation and life politics were not as distinct as is commonly thought; the principles of right usually found in the former are not as independent of specific conceptions of the good life as they might seem to be. The very ideas in a liberal doctrine of universal, protective rights, and the public/private split in the sphere of political concern are not themselves “neutral” with respect to specific conceptions of the good.

Fundamentally, this is because the description of modernity and the concomitant accounts of the self and its search for the good life is contestable. I challenged the anti-liberal views above because of their vulnerability to the scepticism that modernity’s priority of choice casts over perfectionist accounts of the good. But this point only works if we have adopted the standpoint of modernity as I describe it in the first place. I claimed that it is difficult to do otherwise – but there remain many who do nonetheless. Religious fundamentalists, even in Western societies, deny the centrality of choice in determining the good and the advisability of the public/private divide. They need not accept the “pre-modern” label we may be inclined to apply to them either, with its connotations of outdatedness and implausibility for the modern world.<sup>14</sup>

Though we want to accept our account of modernity and its consequences for political thinking as *true*, we should still recognize that others do not. That means that the account of “anti-perfectionist” principles of right it can produce is not neutral, but dependent upon contested concepts of the self and morality. It is implausible to suggest (as Rawls does) that we could get neutral regulatory principles from beliefs which span all the rival conceptions in the debate about the good.<sup>15</sup> We should accept, then, that the principles-of-right/conceptions-of-the good-life divide is not that wide; the two are not divisible on grounds of neutrality (as we shall want to explore other reasons for preserving the dichotomy, though, we shall not collapse it).

A similar line of attack on the supposedly neutral principles of right would focus both

on the very concept of a “right” and the account of the rights neutralist theories claim humans have. Neither are incontestable even among modern thinkers alone. Marxists, communitarians and feminists all attack the conception of the self typically tied to the notion of a rights-bearer and consequently the idea, or the need, for the liberal principles of right.<sup>16</sup>

Further, among those who accept the latter there are disputes about what rights people have and what counts as the correct account of justice. People disagree on what is essential or valuable enough in any human life to be protected by the principles of right. Again: we lack a neutral, incontestable account of how people should be treated. Though we need emancipation politics, we enter into debates about specific conceptions of the good life when we try to describe them.

Now, one might grant that we can bring these specific conceptions into political theory after all, as we do not avoid doing so in talking about the principles of right. That does not mean we should abandon the practices of liberal anti-perfectionism. The foregoing argument might only entail that we drop the “neutral” label but continue to act according to its precepts (this is how we shall now understand “anti-perfectionism”). We need other arguments to establish the acceptability of politics promoting a good-life conception more single-mindedly, or positively, than this approach (which still tries to be as open as possible to different good-life conceptions, but within boundaries set down by a specific, contestable conception of its own).

This is what the thesis sets out to provide – but accepting the modern centrality of individual choice. In a sense, I am exploring the possibility of having something richer than anti-perfectionist politics whilst remaining relatively faithful to the philosophical beliefs which underpin it. I believe this is necessary because there is considerable validity to the charges of vacuity directed to the anti-perfectionist politics, introduced above. To explain the feasibility of bringing traditional perfectionism into modern political theory, we can now bring “self-realization” more actively into the discussion.

### **iii Concepts of The Self, Self-Realization and Autonomy**

To discuss anti-perfectionism, we need to direct our attention to one form of contemporary liberal discourse in particular, a predominantly American “philosophical liberalism”.<sup>17</sup> Ronald Dworkin supplies a definitive characterization of this approach by stating that, for liberalism, “political decisions must be, *so far as is possible*, independent of any particular conception of the good life, or of what gives value to life” (my italics).<sup>18</sup> This position can concede that one cannot screen such conceptions entirely out of political theory and practice completely, but urges that no effort should be spared in trying. If we want to reverse the modern stand-off from such thinking, we will need arguments as to: {a} why political practice should not be tempted to purge itself as best it can of specific conceptions of the good; {b} why political theory should not adopt a principled abstinence from good-life thinking.

I propose to answer these in a slightly roundabout way, turning first to the specific good-life conception, self-realization, which concerns us here. This provides the

opportunity of identifying some of the themes to be developed in the main body of the thesis. The immediate purpose of this preliminary discussion, though, will be to test the compatibility of the concept of self-realization with the concept of autonomy.

{i} *self-realization*: first of all, a distinction needs to be made between the concept of self-realization and its rival *conceptions*.<sup>19</sup> The concept establishes the common ground between people who are debating what they understand by the word. It functions, for a start, to ensure that they are not arguing about two different words (referring to unrelated things), providing a core meaning that the disputants will accept. However, concepts alone usually provide little more than a formal schema in which to place different beliefs and values (such as varying ideas of human nature, divergent understandings of what is good or valuable). It is around these that debates are focussed and it is these differences that lead to the rival conceptions.

Self-realization is typical, therefore, in that its concept, when explained, does not tell us very much, but I think we can tease out of it some features that distinguish it from other concepts. We need to do this in order to justify the *idea* of a modern political theory of self-realization, to show that it uses a concept which is not already to be found, in another guise, in a different kind of theory.

If the concept of the “self” still provokes controversy in philosophy, its meaning in political thought for our purposes can initially be treated as straightforward. It denotes an individual personality, which is at least potentially conscious of its own existence and identity. The idea of a self “being realized” suggests that the attributes which identify the self in question are being brought to some kind of fruition. It refers to something that is already given, or latent, in the self. This could include dispositions to do certain things, or behave in certain fashions: powers or potentials, as well as expressions of certain traits and commitments which disclose the fundamental nature and identity of that self.

So, not only is the process of realization concerned with bringing these to the fore in one’s life – whether by exercising the powers, developing the potentials, or acting so as to express certain characteristics – but it is about doing this in the way that makes a statement about the nature of the person in question. Self-realization is not a half-hearted or piecemeal expression of what one can be and do. The kind of development and expression that would count as self-realizing has to be such that reflects *as best as possible* one’s identity: who the person is and what he/she is capable of doing. It is about *full* development and expression, in some sense.

This may look dubiously vague as it stands. But it is difficult to say much more about the concept of self-realization without invoking ideas that are, strictly speaking, only applicable to some of its conceptions. Because the concept has not been subject to extensive analysis, there is a danger that an understanding of what it *could* mean becomes restricted by what it *has* meant in certain conceptions only. Typically, these confusions arise from the use of a specific conception of the self when trying to understand what the concept might mean.

A good example of this can be found in the beliefs of Isaiah Berlin. He contends that “self-realization” is too tied up with ideas about metaphysical “real selves”, separate from

whatever we might contingently be on the surface, to be trustworthy.<sup>20</sup> (Such an approach would fall under the “alternative modern” or even the pre-modern categories.) Since this could be used to justify the forcible imposition of this form of life over the alternative “erroneous” forms chosen by people’s “false” selves, Berlin fears that the concept has totalitarian implications. He wants to leave the formulation of the good life with the individual. The modernity of his thought cannot tolerate the possibility of a “real”- and a “false”- self distinction which operates like this.

There have certainly been conceptions of self-realization proposing the best way for humans to live which are completely divorced from whatever they might happen to choose. As noted above, such theories typically base themselves upon an account of the human essence, which informs us of the most authentic and most fulfilling way a human can live. Any lifestyle that diverges from this is deemed to fall short of the full realization of the self. In some conceptions, the self’s realization embodies all of the central human attributes in the individual. In others, “humanity” can appear as a “self” – a collective subject in its own right – with each human expected not to embody all of the attributes of developed humanity, but just a part. The individual’s self-realization in this kind of conception consists in contributing a small element of the realization of the whole.

Now it must be true that “self-realization” is different from “whatever a person happens to choose” if the concept is to have any meaning distinct from the concept of “an autonomous life”. The person in question might choose to do nothing but watch television all day, whereas his realization – the activities that express deeper identifying commitments – would consist in something else. One of the tasks of this thesis is to explore possible meanings of self-realization as independent from mere choice, in ways to be explained shortly.

But it should be noted now that the difference between these two does not commit us to saying that the self-realizing life’s content can be specified *wholly* independently of people’s choices. Not only will this thesis show the implausibility of some of the “real-self” arguments, but it will also show that the ideas behind the concept of self-realization are not necessarily tied to the common “real-self” way of interpreting it. I will be suggesting how to understand “self-realization” without relying on the “real-self” approach since this is what is required if we are properly to respect choice in our theory.

It could be argued that there are as many conceptions of self-realization as there are ways of conceiving of the self. This is one of the points that gives us cause to dissolve the traditional, virtually automatic link between “self-realization” and “the moral life” (that is, seeing self-realization as having an essentially ethical content). Past conceptions of the ideal have often maintained either that “self-realization is something that is morally valuable” (self-realization defines morality), or (as in the Thomist view) that “self-realization consists in the living of the moral life” (morality defines what is self-realizing). Therefore, the self-realizing life has been seen as morally commendable.

But, as we have seen, modernity allows the self to disengage from a “natural” ethical order and define itself in many new, individualized ways: this is what makes self-realization such a pluralistic concept. Given this latitude in interpretation, we cannot

assume that all possible conceptions will deserve the label “moral”, however we define the latter. For example, if we do not have a moralized universal form of “real” self-realizing life that we could say Hitler failed to identify for himself, then it could be that the full development and expression of his deepest commitments were indeed those that made him a genocidal maniac. As long as it is possible to have a conception of self-realization which does not guarantee that it is always morally worthy, then the concept should not be seen as necessarily about how we *ought* to live.

Here, then, are two major themes this thesis needs to address: how to conceptualize self-realization in a way that does not rely on the kind of “real-self” hypothesis which has grave difficulty commanding assent in modernity; what relationship self-realization has with morality, given the reasons we have for keeping the two separate. Later, I shall outline exactly how these issues will be tackled.

{ii} *Autonomy*: while it was claimed above that self-realization should not be equated with however one simply happens to choose to live, I insisted that the concept does not have to rely upon metaphysical postulations about objective human essences which lie beyond the realm of choice either. To find a place for self-realization in modern political thought, we want it to respect the possibility of autonomy, but we are not equating the two. So what is the relationship between them?

One possible problem in relating the two is that the concept of self-realization relies on *something particular* that is given to the self and not chosen: at first sight, it looks to be tied to a totally different way of conceptualizing the self. So we now need a closer inspection of the concept of autonomy – and this will entail further refinement of the ideas about modernity upon which this discussion has relied thus far.

Now, as with self-realization, the concept of autonomy can also operate with various conceptions of the self and two of them will be considered here. The first is derivable from Kant’s philosophy and is called the “unencumbered self” by Michael Sandel. He believes that this conception necessarily underpins the politics of liberal autonomy. It is unencumbered because:

*the self is prior to its ends – this assures its capacity to choose its ends – and also prior to its roles and dispositions – this assures its independence from social conventions and hence its separateness of person, its individuality.*<sup>21</sup>

Autonomy is established by separating the self from all of its specific commitments and ends since these are in principle revisable. They cannot be thought of as inseparable constituents of the self. Rights and duties, untainted by any bias towards particular conceptions of the good life which could be obtained from contingent commitments, are derived from the wills of rational, choosing, unencumbered selves. For Sandel, this is the source and content of liberal political theory.

This idea’s promise to secure moral and political principles that do not embody biases makes it appear quintessentially modern; the “unencumbered self” seems almost an inevitable conceptual product of modernity. As it has been described, modernity does indeed appear to have split the self from anything intrinsically unchosen or unchoosable.

If this were an accurate account of the modern self, it would confirm the reason why political practice cannot impose conceptions of the good life: this would compromise the priority of the self over its ends and commitments (thereby confirming the desirability of liberal neutrality).

So it is crucial for our purposes in this thesis to demonstrate that the unencumbered self is not the conception required by liberal theory (nor, indeed, is it an accurate description of the self in a liberal society). A simple argument can be deployed to show that the concept of autonomy itself has to rest upon the idea of something given to and unchosen by the self. This utilizes another conception of the self, deriving in part from Hume.<sup>22</sup>

We can take “an autonomous life” to mean one that: {a} we have freely chosen to lead; {b} with which we identify because it is a product and expression of our free choice. In {a}, only the fact that something is freely chosen is identified as what makes something autonomously affirmed. {b} introduces an expressive element: it is not just choice that matters in autonomy, but that the choice expresses what I want to do. Now, when considering the meaning of “autonomy” people typically focus on {a} and often neglect the addition in {b} (as if these two dimensions of autonomy are actually discrete conceptions, underpinned by different views of the self). Those who think it depends upon an unencumbered self would seem to conceive autonomy in terms of {a} only, as {b}’s expressive element is not purified of contingent, unchosen attributes.

A familiar criticism of {a}’s characterization can be seen when we try to conceptualize the process of autonomous choosing. For it is easy enough to show the practical and logical impossibility of “pure” choice in autonomy by using Harry Frankfurt’s well-known distinction between “first-order desires” and “second-order desires” (and third-... n-order): desires about what I want to be/do; and desires about whether I want to follow or reject/modify these initial desires (and onwards), respectively.<sup>23</sup> Frankfurt does not want to locate autonomy at the first level. This would mean that the autonomous act would be just the blind following of a desire, involving none of the discrimination deemed necessary for choice.<sup>24</sup>

But the move below the first level cannot sensibly be motivated simply by a worry that first-order choices are unreflectively determined by unchosen desires at the lower levels. For no level at which we might locate “autonomous choice” can be seen as an arena of pure choice. Without some given commitments, there would be nothing there from which a determinate choice could be made *anywhere*. Something substantive, at whatever order we decide to locate autonomy, has to be there to make us choose X rather than Y. A conception like {a} alone, seeking to remove unchosen elements from the autonomous act, gets caught in an infinite regress down the orders of desire, as it will never find a level untainted by unchosen commitment from which to start.<sup>25</sup>

The limits on pure choice and the consequent impossibility of the unencumbered self do not have to be seen as curtailing autonomy in practice, though. Frankfurt claims that it is probably not necessary for a person to delve too far into the orders of desire to secure autonomy. In general, he remarks, this person will have a “sufficiently decisive” second-

or third-order identification with selected first-order desires. This shows the importance of including dimension {b} in the characterization of autonomy. For the latter is concerned with the discovery of one's deepest commitments and expressing them in our choices; it is not just about "choice". The expressive element positively resists the need to progress ever deeper down the orders of desire. Commenting on this theme, David Archard notes that:

*[w]hen Frankfurt speaks of "a person identif[ying] himself decisively with one of his first-order desires" we have to understand the third-order pronominal use as consistent. And who is the "he" if not some set of identifying commitments and traits?<sup>26</sup>*

If we believe that each person represents a unique combination of dispositions, characteristics and capacities, then it is the expressive aspect of autonomy which actually demonstrates the content of this uniqueness to the world. Pure choice, as embodied in the unencumbered self, is deliberately bereft of any such particular features. What choice does is to guarantee that the "autonomous life" is indeed freely shaped and affirmed by the individual (we shall continue to develop the nature of autonomy later in the thesis).

So the extent to which the concept of autonomy is really reliant on the idea of such unchosen attributes is an indication of how compatible it might be with the concept of self-realization. Indeed, it may seem from what we have said that, as both are concerned to make a full statement about the character of their subject, the connection between autonomy and self-realization could be an intimate one indeed.

Of course, this is not suddenly to admit that they are one and the same thing after all. Much more needs to be said before we can finally say how self-realization links with autonomy in a modern political theory. But we have established that the two concepts do not rely on opposed views of the self, a misconception easily encouraged by talk of the unencumbered self.

#### **iv Conceptions of the Good Life in Politics and Political Theory**

Anti-perfectionists could easily accept that there is no conceptual incompatibility between self-realization and autonomy without abandoning their position. We still have as yet no warrant either for thinking that specific ideals of the good life can be described by a theory independently of how individuals choose to frame those ideals, or that political practice should still do anything other than simply secure the conditions of autonomy.

So we now need arguments about why conceptions of the good life like self-realization ought not to be edited out of modern politics and political thinking. I believe that the argument for perfectionism relies in part on an argument about how to conceptualize the self. So we shall focus on the origin and nature of the unchosen "stuff" postulated at the heart of the "encumbered self" which emerged from the discussion of section {iii}.

From their commitment to securing the protection of the individual from social pressure in the pursuit of his own conception of the good life, one might be forgiven for thinking that proponents of autonomy would need to view this constitutive matter as *uniquely* the individual's own, untainted by social influences foisted upon the person. Yet

this is a wholly implausible idea and we need a much more realistic picture of the autonomous condition that has been opened up by modernity. No self can exist in such disdainful isolation. It is much better, therefore, to conceptualize the self for modern political theory as being “partially socially situated”.<sup>27</sup>

This conception of the self wants to avoid the idea that people are merely passive products of their social system, acting out its traditions and customary ways of living with no variation initiated by themselves. Not only do we want to acknowledge the possible existence of individualistic elements (not derived from social sources), but people’s attitudes to their cultures vary. This means, for example, that different people might respond to the same traditions in different ways (an example of different second-order reactions to first-order commitments, perhaps).

The idea of the comprehensive social determination of the self is further weakened by recognizing that, typically, modern societies encompass a variety of traditions, not all of them compatible with each other. Modernity certainly loosens the hold of such customs upon people and opens up new sources of social influence on their behaviour: the multiplicity of constantly shifting consumerist fashions, for example. The notion of individual autonomy is only qualified, not lost, by the recognition that modern individuals have to construct lifestyles out of such diverse influences for themselves.

But the “raw material” of the autonomous person always contains the heavy imprint of social practices, traditions and institutions. For a start, the very possibility of having a conception of one’s own identity depends upon such a conception being framed by the terms of the language with which we think and speak. And language is a social institution, acquired in a certain social context, embodying its norms and beliefs. But it is not hard to accept that the identities which autonomous individuals reflect upon are commonly constituted by far thicker social inheritances too: of gender, family, nation, race, creed, for example.

This point might be accepted by the proponents of autonomy, who could respond by saying that they are seeking to insulate the self from as many social influences as possible and to promote the possibility of revision of (and perhaps even escape from) the initial socio-cultural characteristics. They might want to claim that the essential, authentic or truly definitive part of the partially socially situated self is the individualistic.

But it is hardly obvious that the essence of the self’s identity has to lie exclusively in individual uniqueness. As suggested, much of the material upon which a person reflects in conceiving of an identity is typically social in nature, connected to the social tasks she performs and the groups to which she belongs, the practices and customs which help to determine her behaviour. These can be just as much part of who she is as any uniquely individual attributes. To remove them from considerations of her identity is arbitrary and misleading. To discount them as potential contributors to her formulation of the good life is therefore unwarranted.

So the socially originated elements in the self help to *make up a specific sort of character*, inherited and not individually picked out by the self. This inheritance forms an essential part of the identity one may want to express and of the conception of the good life which

one could pursue. The theoretical push towards individual autonomy ushered in by modernity should not mislead us into thinking that, in reality, our choices can or should be separated from a heavily influential set of unchosen, socially determined characteristics. Now most liberal thinkers would accept these obvious points about the self. What I believe must be denied, though, is the claim that one could accept them and *still* cling to a principled commitment to precluding conceptions of the good life from politics. Despite the non-passive and non-comprehensive nature of traditional inheritances in identity (in that they do not exhaust identity and are not immune from individual alteration), a political system that seeks to have as little input as possible in the content of people's characters *is not in fact going to be neutral with respect to the composition of characters*. It will implicitly sanction whatever specific character determinants are imparted to people by the culture in question.

These in turn can bias people's conception of their own identity and their particular mode of good living towards specific types. Customs and traditions, certain forms of social relationship and types of social institution all contribute to this determination. A political system that effectively leaves this alone is implicitly accepting that the kinds of character which emerge from this context are commendable – or at least not condemnable enough to rectify.

The point to consider is: how different is this social influencing of the self from a perfectionist policy pursued by the state? Not a lot, one might think, if we accept that perfectionism does not need to be coercively or oppressively imposed, or even actively hostile to alternative good-life conceptions. A state could pursue policies that promote one form of life rather than another, but in ways that can be resisted by individuals if they so choose (in the same way that we presume the modern, partially socially situated self can act upon its socially inherited identity).

One reason why anti-perfectionists shy away from a thought like this is that they tend to assume that, as long as the state leaves them alone, people can pursue their own good-life ideals entirely free from unchosen exogenous influences. The above argues that this atomistic approach is misguided. People are inevitably influenced partially by society in how they shape conceptions of the good life. To this extent, the kind of things autonomously chosen by people in an anti-perfectionist state will be influenced by external factors in ways they do not choose, screening out possibilities they might otherwise have chosen. Perfectionism is not unusual in this respect.

Now, in the same way that we would ask whether a perfectionist theory's character ideal is admirable or desirable, we might consider ourselves in a position to ask whether the types of character which partially emerge from society without state involvement are good for people. To do this, we would need a character ideal against which to test them. Here we can begin to see why a modern political theory can – and perhaps should (we deal with this in a moment) – abandon anti-perfectionist caution and adopt a specific character ideal when it makes political recommendations.

It could be argued that we still need nothing more than the concept of “the autonomous person”, freely choosing in her particular context. This would tolerate any

conception of the good life so long as it did not violate principles of right. As argued in the previous section, we should not regard this as a neutral ideal in the first place, anyway. But the argument which challenges this ideal as the appropriate one for the analysis of character described above lies in the point that a reference to autonomy alone in “testing” characters tacitly sanctions whatever influences are propagated through civil society’s culture and traditions.

In short, the anti-perfectionist stance {a} depends upon a non-neutral conception of the autonomous self and {b} implicitly, if inadvertently, promotes the thicker character traits, self-perceptions and ideas about the good that the partially socially situated self is likely to absorb from its context. Now, political action could be taken to alter this context if the kinds of character which emerge from society are not ones that are deemed acceptable. Or, more strongly, action could be taken to improve upon what is produced even if what emerges is tolerable. An anti-perfectionist theory of politics which sweepingly disclaims responsibility for this is simply being wilfully blind to the degree to which politically controllable forces contribute towards imposing specific character-elements and conceptions of the good life upon people outside of the liberal political sphere.

But this *still* does not mean that political practice *should* intervene against the effects of society on autonomous individuals. More needs to be said to strengthen the possibility of perfectionism. Two other questions also require answers here: {a} what is the relationship between the absorption of “a character ideal” from a (politically manipulable) social context and the imposition of “a specific conception of the good life”? (we need to tighten our understanding of these two concepts, to see if we need to maintain a distinction between the two); (b) what attitude should political theory take to the inescapable involvement of politics with questions of the good life?

First: it may be conceded that political decisions in practice sanction support for some substantive character ideal. But it could be argued that the stance of political anti-perfectionism should still be retained as far as possible, in one (or more) of three ways:

{i} *the sort of character which emerges from the least direct political interference is best;*  
{ii} *the sort of character which emerges from the practices of liberal democratic institutions is best;*  
{iii} *the sort of character which emerges from liberal democratic practices may not be the best we can conceive, but political interference is not likely to succeed in improving it. Therefore, it is best to abstain from perfectionist intervention as much as possible.*

Answer {i} seems most faithful to the spirit of the original non-interference argument. It seems to allow individuals to pursue their conception of the good as independently as possible, affirming that the greatest possible freedom from unchosen influences on our choices is the thing for which we should aim. One justification for this would be to say that the most freely-led (interference-free) life is the best form of life. But it is by no means obvious that autonomy can be secured by the least state interference, since it is quite possible that the prevailing social practices and institutions curtail autonomy more than is necessary (as with the fundamentalist example mentioned above). Political intervention could alter these to increase the scope of individuals’ choice.

Further, this answer also seems to assume that what emerges from the least

interference is actually rather good in nature – or tolerable, at least. But this is something that can obviously be challenged. It is implausible to suggest that the “freest life” can form the character ideal needed for the “character test” described above. Bad characters as well as good can develop independently; unregulated social practices and institutions may promote badness just as much as goodness. Such cultural contexts can – and obviously do – promote the development of racists and sexists, for example. Unless one thinks that no types of character can be so bad as to warrant political intervention in support of an alternative, we must countenance the desirability of using politics to correct the effects of faulty social influences (as well as undesirable individual impulses, perhaps).

A slightly different justification for answer {i} which might cope with this problem better is the “respect-for-persons” argument, which we can formulate from the account of anti-perfectionist politics given above. This values and protects people’s freely-led lifestyles because of the respect and dignity accorded to the independence of the individual: anti-perfectionist politics usually accords people the right to this respect. Here, the individual may not have chosen the best form of life for herself (she may have given up a promising medical career, say, to become a blue-movie actress), but the fact that her choice is held to be worthy of respect independently of any value judgment about it means that it is rightfully preserved from interference.

One advantage of this approach is that interference is justified when lifestyles violate, or threaten to violate, the rights which people are said to have by virtue of this respect. Insofar as racism and sexism are guilty of such violation, this approach can condemn them and act to combat them in a way that the first answer did not.

But, as we have argued, the adoption of a set of rights and duties depends upon specific conceptions of the self and of morality. This approach cannot be advocated via a claim that it remains neutral with respect to questions of the good life, pretending to lift itself out of the arena of controversy on this matter.<sup>28</sup> It has to be compared with other views as a particular conception in itself.

I hasten to add that I am not advocating the abandonment of such respect; I merely wish to stress that it involves a specific character ideal that is contestable within the typical modern society, just like the perfectionist theories to which it erroneously attempts to oppose itself.<sup>29</sup> It should therefore take its place amongst the conceptions which compete for political pursuit, rather than pretend it automatically offers a case against such a competition.

{ii} suggests a way of enforcing a respect-for-persons approach that implicitly accepts this point. First of all, this answer works best by making a clearer distinction between a “character ideal” and a “specific conception of the good life”. Now, liberal democratic institutions are not concerned so much with promoting maximal individual autonomy as the production of “good citizens”. The liberal democrat wants to achieve an ideal social order, governed by the principles of right which are to be derived from the specific notion of citizenship within this ideal. This achievement requires people who are able to recognize and act by the principles of right, since these regulate the relationships between the citizens in order to ensure the workability of the social order.

There is no necessary pretence that this is a neutral ideal; liberal democratic politics enthusiastically adopts it and seeks, by whatever means appropriate, its acceptance. But this remains independent of the individuals' specific conceptions of the good life lived within the conditions of citizenship. For the shared character ideal of citizenship is not intended to exhaust the content of individual characters, since there is a lot more to life than simply the nature of the public, political relationships one has with another. What there is left to determine is held to be the individual's own preserve, beyond politics' sphere of competence (above, it was this *partial* stand-off from promoting a specific conception that I used to "re-distinguish" anti-perfectionism from its opposite).

The problem here is, again, the possibility that existing social practices and beliefs which stand outside of the liberal democratic political system, if left unchecked, will distort the pursuit of possible conceptions of the good life by individuals. Because of the effects of social influences upon people's character formation, the benign neglect of such matters by liberal practice may mean that rather too much more than simply the ideal of citizenship could be imposed by people's social context. Thus, the liberal state may have to decide whether or not to intervene in order to break the hold of such practices. If it decides it must (in order not to be implicitly sanctioning whatever specific character forms are being imposed by the culture), the limits on its resources will probably constrain its action. It will only be able to tackle the domination of a certain number of social and cultural practices, in only a certain number of ways too.<sup>30</sup>

In practice, therefore, it is tricky to maintain the character-ideal/specific-conception-of-the-good-life distinction and perhaps we should not be concerned to maintain it rigidly. We can begin to see more clearly the possibility of arguing that it is desirable for the state to operate with a character ideal which is rather more specific than those of "autonomous lifestyle" and "good citizen" to govern this intervention.

There may be a further, yet more serious consequence of limiting political activity to the enforcement of the good citizenship ideal. For the neglect of other, specific influences on character formation could act to frustrate the possibility of good citizenship by failing to combine the different lines of activity – good citizenship *plus* one's own good-life activities – in one, all-embracing and stable character ideal. It might lead us to half-formed, or unstable characters who are unable to match up the ideals of citizenship they have inculcated with the myriad influences, left unchecked, that attach to these other aspects. To stick to promotion of good citizenship alone could seriously undermine the possibility of the *unity* of the self.

To illustrate this danger, we can think once more of a society where fundamentalist traditions still influence certain people to a certain degree. Whereas the state in this society might be trying to promote the ideal of liberal democratic citizenship by enforcing rights and leaving people a private sphere to choose their own good life, the religious culture in which people are actually being raised is influencing them in ways that contradict the state's ideal.

Sexist beliefs, exclusionary practices, dogmatically rigid standards of conduct in all of life's activities could be inculcated in the private sphere, making it difficult and confusing

for people to act as genuinely good citizens in the public arena. These are not necessarily influences to be counteracted by the respect-for-persons argument. Informal customs that kept women in the home and out of public life can survive and have survived even when “equal respect” is formally guaranteed. Here, we encounter another point from the last section: the interpretation of rights (of respect and so forth) is contestable. Does good citizenship require a formally, or legally guaranteed set of rights (so the housebound women could have the formal guarantee without exercising the option), or does it require actual performance of citizenship activity?

We should note that “good citizenship” is open to different understandings, obtainable via different conceptions of how it is good to live (“should one be an active citizen to be a good citizen?” is one of the questions dependent upon this). Anti-perfectionism misses this point and therefore misses the possibility that political intervention in both public and private aspects of life’s conduct may be required even for the apparently minimalist aims of promoting autonomous individuality and/or good citizenship. The pretence that the enforcement of citizenship is not inextricably and deeply intertwined with the more specific pursuits of individual lifestyles should be abandoned.

This argument will receive further development and defence during the course of the thesis; it is crucial to the overall theory I propose. But there is still one more way of arguing for a political stand-off from good-life questions to be considered. Answer {iii} could easily concede the main arguments against {i} and {ii}, accepting that the “natural” workings of social influences and the independent expression of individual characteristics probably do not always work to produce acceptable types of character. It copes with this not by advocating attempts to remould these characters, but by proposing that we stick to a system of rights, enforcements, punishments to mitigate and control the bad effects of such characters and *nothing more*.

This is because it is deeply sceptical about: {a} the possibility of choosing in an acceptable way a character ideal that is unambiguously better than what might emerge if anti-perfectionist politics was left to run its course; {b} the efficacy of political attempts to transform characters and impose new ideals upon people. Neither is dependent, unlike {ii}, on the idea that the system of “control” is neutral, though.

Its scepticism about *positive* perfectionist activity could be rooted in, for example, a belief in the highly recalcitrant nature of human beings when subjected to such a process. This argument would say that character-shaping would stand little chance of achieving precisely the desired effect on people. Indeed, it could backfire by yielding unintended side-effects. Human nature, the argument continues, is composed of so many contradictory elements, obscure and unfathomable in their origins, that it is simply naive to think that it could respond faithfully to any redesigning, however admirable the intention might be.

The argument against the efficacy of “social engineering” of this sort is often coupled with a fear about the inherent dangers of introducing such a process, captured by this very phrase. For if we offer up to politics the role of character-moulding, we may be starting down the road to the totalitarian domination of people. A host of worrying, powerful

doubts can be raised about the possibility of politics imposing character-ideals, such as: who is to decide which ideal is to be imposed? Would even a democratically-controlled selection of the ideal guarantee a humane choice (or might not such a selection potentially threaten minority lifestyles, for example)? At what degree of attempted control of character should we stop? Does this project sanction eugenics – the biological and psychological pursuit of a breed of perfect “super-beings”?

Certainly, {iii} demands a very sympathetic hearing. Too many atrocities have been committed with the intention of imposing new modes of living upon people for it to be ignored. Our intuitive reaction is that some principles of right, based upon the ideals of autonomy and respect for persons, should not be waived when pursuing such a goal. Arguments for perfectionism certainly do not entail having to abandon any notion of limitation grounded in considerations similar to those which yielded anti-perfectionism. But because of this, it is not clear that the fears which ground argument {iii} should deter us from the move away from anti-perfectionism altogether. They might simply warn us, instead, that any attempt to use politics to promote particular character ideals has to be approached with the utmost care.

Note, first of all, that the two points made here which typically support a position like {iii} – the recalcitrance of human nature and the danger of totalitarian social engineering – actually pull apart from each other with regards to just how malleable one thinks human nature to be. Supporters of {iii} could not deploy both points without there being some inconsistency in their reasons for holding to this position.

Whilst I agree that intentional projects of character-moulding must be aware of the resistance that the subject matter may put up, I suggest that this need only lead us to moderate our ambitions in them and perhaps to make provisions for the possibility of unintended side-effects. There may be something in the claim that human nature is unamenable to whatever pattern to which people might want to force it to conform. But this is not necessarily due to any strict rigidity on its part. The variety of cultural differences exhibited in different society, plus the changes that occur in people’s characters in the same society over periods of time, shows just how deeply human nature *can* be shaped in accordance with the tendencies of a particular cultural context.

Because of this fact, therefore, the problem of totalitarian abuse is probably the strongest argument which can be offered against making room for good-life thinking in political decisions. Yet, as this kind of abuse is not an inevitable consequence of this project (for, as I suggested above, principles of right can be on hand to supervise and limit it), this cannot be a decisive objection. So as long as we respect some such limits we have no compelling reason to accept any of the above three positions.

Political theory’s job, I submit, can be to propose candidates for *both* the principles of right and the possible conceptions of the good life. Thereafter, it can explore the possible relationships between the two in a political order. It can also be a legitimate part of its job to inspect different good-life ideals: identifying their content, testing their compatibility with principles of right and analyzing specific policies, values and institutional arrangements which could be used to promote the ideals.

It should be stressed that the emphasis is on political theory showing how particular conceptions of the good life *can* be put to work in political thinking. We have claimed that political practice should adopt some specific conception of the good life in its decision-making and that political theory can inspect such conceptions. But this is not to say that political *theory* can tell us *which* ideal to adopt and which political activities we *should* be pursuing. This is not a responsibility political theory can shoulder. As a matter of principle, we can insist that it should not seek to force its conceptions upon us.

As stated earlier, modern political theory should accept the achievement of modernity and in particular the fact of the individual's autonomy. Although we have revised our understanding of what that means, we have *not* said that individual choice should be totally neglected in politics. What renders it consistent to talk of perfectionism in a politics that respects autonomy is that it is part of what it means to be free to be able to opt for a political system that pursues certain, specific ideals, rather than one that does not. Political theory can explore the forms that this option can take.

We must see to what extent a specific character ideal can be implemented without compromising that autonomy *to an unacceptable degree*. We might have to accept that some autonomy is inevitably lost by such political action, but no more – and quite possibly less – than what is lost by the “non-political” working of social influences. But this thesis will argue in detail that the selection of good-life ideals for pursuit in political activity must ultimately occur through a democratic decision-making process, for no other way properly serves the requirement of autonomy. The character-ideal should not be forced upon people by the apparent strength of theoretical argument or be conceivably implemented over and above their wishes by a purportedly benevolent dictator.

## v The Structure of the Thesis

Hopefully, the above provides sufficient justification for talking about self-realization in modern political theory. We can now move on to elaborate the concerns of this thesis.

The ultimate aim of the thesis is to propose a modern conception of self-realization which avoids the kind of objections that have been levelled against other variants. It will be an ideal that could feasibly be adopted democratically by a community seeking a good-life ideal. Overall, this presents a concrete example of political theory and practice utilizing a specific conception of the good in ways which remain compatible with commitments to autonomy and democracy.

It will be shown that self-realization as I conceptualize it is intimately related to democratic practices and to individual autonomy, building upon the argument begun in section {iii} above. I will explain how it can be put to work in helping to overcome some of the problems of modern life briefly characterized at the start and largely unaddressed by anti-perfectionist political thinking. I will specifically demonstrate what I believe to be the uniquely strong contribution it can make to the promotion of a stable, unified character by combining the ideal of good citizenship and the other elements that tend to constitute a typical lifestyle.

Thus, I hope to demonstrate its desirability as an ideal – but, to stress again, this does

not mean the theory insists upon its own implementation over and above what people may choose. All that can be achieved here is to show how the conception of self-realization can avoid the objections which might otherwise cause people to decide not to accept it.

In order to develop a modern conception of self-realization, studies will be made of the concept as it is used, implicitly or explicitly, by three major thinkers whose ideas have contributed more than most to the understandings we may already have about what “self-realization” means. The goal is to uncover the kind of assumptions needed for each theory to work, to see how they characterize self-realization and what they believe is necessary for its achievement, in particular the role explicitly assigned to politics in its pursuit. For this purpose, we will seek to fashion a coherent and consistent theory of self-realization from amongst the various writings of each author.

By testing which elements of the theories stand up to scrutiny, we will gather some of the material to be incorporated into what I will call the “general conception” of my own, to be elaborated in the final chapter. Now, the selection of these thinkers – to be introduced and justified in a moment – might obviously bias the sort of conception of self-realization that emerges. Of course, there may be other ways of conceiving of it in modernity. The main aim here, though, is to explore the possibility of a viable theory *of this sort*. Though I present the general conception as the best way to understand it, I do not insist that this is the only possible way of conceptualizing modern self-realization.

The three authors selected are Aristotle, John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx. Aristotle’s presence here, as an archetypal pre-modern theorist, is due to the detail his theory can provide in characterizing self-realization and describing the means for its pursuit. My aim is to see how far a political theory of self-realization which is as detailed as this can be plausibly advocated in modern thought. One way of doing this is to consider just to what extent the assumptions and arguments of a pre-modern political theory are unavailable in modernity. When we turn to Mill and Marx, we shall be looking at the similarities and differences in assumptions, principles and techniques of argument to see whether we can replicate a suitably up-dated self-realizationist conception of such comprehensiveness.

Shortly, I will outline the format of the next five chapters to summarize the themes discussed in pursuit of this conclusion. Before this, though, I want to present a possible line of attack against the very idea of a political theory of self-realization, which encapsulates a group of issues that the forthcoming analysis has to address. The attack will be deflected as we proceed. Here I will simply introduce it and elaborate some of the issues from it which will concern us, to indicate the challenge it poses to the overall project.

The attack can be formulated from the claim that the direct pursuit of self-realization is “self-defeating”. This has been made recently by Jon Elster, who says that:

*[a]lthough self-realization can be deeply satisfying, the satisfaction must not be the immediate purpose of the activity. Self-realization belongs to the general class of **states that are essentially by-products**, i.e. states that can only come about as the side effect of actions undertaken for some purpose ...<sup>31</sup>*

To illustrate: an example of a self-defeating activity would be trying to get to sleep by

consciously willing yourself to sleep, rather than, say, counting sheep or reading a Jeffrey Archer novel. It is not something that can be achieved if one sets out with the intention of achieving that end.

Elster's claim, if true, is obviously crucial for it would mean that we could not adopt a political theory that either enjoined people to pursue self-realization or provided practices designed directly to facilitate it. We could not justify any set of policies or institutional arrangements by saying that they produce the psychological benefits of self-realization.<sup>32</sup> This would actually fail to yield the intended effect. Thus, it seems that a political system that does indeed facilitate self-realization should not have been designed with this purpose in mind.

Now, it is unclear that willing self-realization is like the insomniac vainly willing himself to sleep. In critical analysis of the idea, Joseph Chan and David Miller argue that self-realization's possible self-defeasibility is not equivalent to the insomniac example, pointing out that there are other ways of reaching states of being that are essentially by-products.<sup>33</sup> Here, I want to consider one way in which self-realization's direct pursuit might indeed produce a state of mind that blocks its achievement, for this raises a question (which can be treated separately from this) about the whole desirability of self-realization.

I shall call this the *narcissism-nihilism* objection to self-realization (deliberately running together two phenomena which can occur separately). "Narcissism" refers to an obsessively self-indulgent, wholly egoistic concern with one's own life. Critics of contemporary ethical attitudes (the anti-liberals cited earlier, for example) attack this as a typical symptom of a modernity which gives us nothing but our own autonomy in which to ground our conceptions of meaning and worth in life. Christopher Lasch, for example, detects in modern life a "culture of narcissism", a social environment in which self-concerned projects of life hold dominant sway, neglecting duty and altruism in favour of a morbidly hedonistic self-love.<sup>34</sup>

This is a variation on the point made in {i} that pursuing projects of self-realization in a modern world, where they have lost any necessary connection to the tasks specified by morality, seems to be an unwholesome priority if they are placed ahead of these distinct moral tasks. But it extends this critique by depicting the condition more forcefully as an ugly, debilitating attitude to life (even if there are no immediately pressing moral demands upon the person). It is from this that one might suggest that narcissistic self-gratification can degenerate into "nihilism" – a belief in nothing and the meaninglessness of everything. If one has nothing greater than one's own self-gratification with which to organize one's life, if nothing other than one's own concerns mean anything, it could be very easy to slip into a nihilistic attitude if (for whatever reason) this self-concern loses its appeal as a way to live.<sup>35</sup>

Now, if the direct pursuit of self-realization does open up the possibility of narcissism and the potential slippage into nihilism, we have an Elsterian example of its self-defeasibility in the destructively frustrating attitude that a belief in nothing typically fosters. The problem stems from leaving the important existential questions – of meaning and value to life – to the individual self. If the modern individual's own desires and

imagination is *all* modern political theory has to answer these questions, then the narcissism-nihilism danger threatens to be an intrinsic problem with it. An individual's own inconstant whims may be too weak to sustain the type of understanding that resists the nihilistic vacuum.

During our examination of the three authors, then, we shall consider the extent to which their conception of self-realization: {a} is directly pursued for its own sake; {b} is self-obsessive and prone to narcissism; {c} possesses conceptual resources to resist the slide into nihilism. Their approaches will be used to structure the general conception's attempt to by-pass this attack.

One topic which can be addressed to deal with this is the relationship between self-realization and the community. A community's history, traditions and purposes are more extensive and longer-lasting than those of the isolated individual. If the person were to share in them, she may be much less self-obsessed and less inclined to challenge their point (because, unlike purely self-generated commitments, they do not simply disappear when one changes one's mind). So, we need to think about how the self is to be conceptualized with respect to the community and how far, if at all, the latter can inform the content of the self's realization.

The importance of studying how community should be theorized in a conception of self-realization stretches beyond meeting the narcissism-nihilism objection, of course. Fundamentally, it is in this issue that we may find final justification from lifting self-realization out of the purely personal sphere of concern and into the realm of life *politics*: something that a society as a whole can be mobilized to promote.

This brings us to another issue that arises from the self-defeasibility thesis: even if we suppose that self-realization is not narcissistic, can a society *work* if its political institutions and practices are geared towards its direct pursuit? Elster thinks not, citing a personal example where the attempt to gain self-realization through participatory democracy frustrated the separate criterion of efficient decision-making to such a degree that participation became a boring chore as the decision-making process slowed.<sup>36</sup> Not only is an uncondusive state of mind for self-realization produced here, but the mechanism designed to produce self-realization fails to work properly precisely because it was so designed. Self-realization had to be treated as a by-product, according to Elster, because practices and institutions do not function properly in any respect if self-realization is their intended product.

There are other ways in which a society may malfunction if it has nothing but self-realization as a rationale for its organization. For a start, it is not clear that "self-realization" can provide the organizing principle for all social practices and policies. For example, providing a certain level of health care is only very tortuously justified in terms of self-realization at best and is sensibly left to other principles.

In fact, we are also led to this point by our modern assumption that uncouples self-realization and morality. Given that the latter is distinct from self-realization in some sense (our author-studies will explore this relationship) we have this separate source of principles by which to organize particular institutions of society. On top of the other,

different goals to social activity (such as “the need to take and execute decisions efficiently” as the one that replaced “self-realization” as the purpose of decision-making in Elster’s example), “morality” has a major role to play in this organization. We have to identify this role, to see if there is any other part that “self-realization” can take.

Plainly, our answer to this final point will help to determine the point of having a political theory of self-realization. If, as Elster seems to think, there is no role for this character-ideal to play then there seems to be no grounds for having such a theory. It could not be used to specify one policy over another. So we have to consider whether self-realization really is barred from taking part in policy formulation, or the choice of particular constitutional arrangements.

If not, we have to clarify where “self-realization” stands with respect to the other principles a society may want, or have, to follow. To propose a political theory of self-realization requires a full appreciation of the compatibility – or otherwise – of self-realization with other principles that regulate social life. Our author-studies offer varied answers to this and we will review them in order to furnish Chapter 6’s “general political theory” with a conception of self-realization that plays a part in these principles in the most plausible way. They will pay particular attention to the relationship between “self-realization” and the account of morality they offer.

It should be stressed that I certainly do not intend to provide a full account of *all* the purposes, principles and goals to be found in the “workings” of a political society. But even if we dismiss the Elster objection, it has made us very much more sensitive to the usage of “self-realization’s promotion” in determining whether to have one policy rather than another. Any advocate of a modern political theory of self-realization has to recognize that its character-ideal must sit alongside other principles and purposes, both moral and non-moral, if they wish people to use the theory when selecting policies and practices (those who content themselves with an anti-perfectionist theory might believe, perhaps justifiably, that they need not show the same degree of sensitivity to this<sup>37</sup>).

I shall say no more about the Elster objection and the questions it raises for now. As can be seen from the challenges they pose, they are central to the debate this thesis enters into and we shall encounter them at several points in what follows (Chapter 5 confronts them comprehensively). To see more clearly how the arguments unfold, we end with the summary of what is to come.

Chapter 2, on Aristotle is, as stated, primarily the model of a *full* theory of self-realization and I am primarily interested in seeing whether this fullness is so reliant on pre-modern assumptions and arguments that it cannot reasonably be matched in modern thought. Aristotle’s conception is based on the famous *ergon* argument, by means of which he derives (what he takes to be) an objective account of self-realization which thereafter underpins the comprehensive picture of the good society. We will ultimately consider the extent to which something like the *ergon* argument is unavailable to us in modernity.

The point of this question is as follows: some modern ethical theorists, also turning their attention to the moral and existential failings of modernity described earlier, believe that these can be rectified using the form of virtue ethics deployed in Aristotelian

argument. On one level, I would agree with critics of this approach that this sort of ethics is doomed because we cannot have the naturalistic account of the human good in modernity upon which this sort of theory depends. But the use of the *ergon* argument by Aristotle himself is actually much more complex and confusing than it is often held to be, in a way that makes it far less obvious that virtue ethics are inappropriate for modernity.

After presenting a description of Aristotle's theory, then, I shall turn to this issue and outline this possibility. It is developed later in the thesis, once we have obtained material from the modern theories with which to give it substance. This will also serve to qualify somewhat the stark division between pre-modern and modern political theories set up earlier in this chapter.

Chapter 3 deals with Mill's political thought, best known for its commitments to individual liberty in lifestyle and thus a paradigm of political thinking in modernity. I want to show that, with the help of a few key assumptions on his part about human nature, his ideas can be seen quite accurately to amount to a distinct theory of self-realization. After a defence of some of his key concepts against common criticisms, we turn to some critical questions. These focus on the acceptability of even his rather minimal beliefs about the content of human nature – these, too, seem to be challengeable given the modern presumption of choice's primacy.

We also have a problem pulling the other way, in that it is difficult to commit Mill, by dint of his own arguments, definitely to one ideally best form of political and social arrangement. I suggest that one reason for this indecision may be in his relatively minimal conception of self-realization. It is possible that, lacking anything more, we find it difficult to decide whether certain specific practices would help or hinder self-realization. Straddled between trying to respect choice and presenting distinctive substance to a conception of self-realization with political relevance, it may be that Mill's theory fails to meet either of these aspirations. Perhaps, as we have suggested, this an endemic problem with any attempt at a modern theory of self-realization.

The point of studying Marx's ideas, in Chapter 4, is that he offers us more substance in his conception of self-realization, via a philosophical anthropology that concentrates (at least at certain stages of his thought) on free, creative labour as the paradigmatic self-realizing activity. This holds out more hope of a substantive, plausibly modern theory. Thus, this chapter sets out in detail Marx's conception of the self-realized human, by identifying the opposite characteristics of the "alienated" worker.

In criticism, I argue that some of the reasons Marx gives for believing in self-realization as he sees it are not wholly acceptable within the terms of modern thought. However, not only are elements of the non-alienated life still likely candidates for inclusion in a modern conception when stripped of these unconvincing foundations but – most crucially – arguments can be offered independently of the Marxist philosophical anthropology to support the idea that labour can be the paradigmatic self-realizing activity. These will be developed at some length, since I want to argue that it is around the provision of a certain type of labour in quite specific conditions that "modern self-realization" could be based.

Chapter 5 moves towards the general theory of self-realization by a critical discussion

of the Marxist view of communism, as *the* realm in which full and free Marxist self-realization would flourish. I argue that, by addressing the main problems of communism, we can get a better understanding of how a political theory of self-realization might work. The development of the general conception of self-realization begins as a revision of the Marxist conception. In particular, we begin to see how the ideas from the Aristotelian conception can survive translation into modern form to be used in our general political theory. The critique of communism also allows us to tackle the problems of “self-realization”’s relationship with other principles to organize social life. A sketch of the structure of the self-realizationist political society thus emerges from this chapter.

The final chapter pieces all of the material together in the general conception. Starting with a revised statement of what I argue to be the most plausible conception of the self in modern political theory, I move on to show how political decisions can influence the character of the self towards pursuit of self-realization in ways that: on the one hand, do not cut it off from society; on the other hand, might promote its well-being and certainly cannot be held to pose a serious infringement of its autonomy. A new way of conceptualizing a link between self-realization and morality will be explained and defended. I will also recast the arguments for a particular sort of democratic politics to pursue self-realization.

In short, I hope to show that politics is the prime vehicle by which to promote a character ideal that {a} represents the ideal of a good citizen in a healthy society; {b} respects individual autonomy and combines {a} with a person’s own projects in a stable, unified and satisfying form of character. As the self is partially socially-determined, we have the opportunity to alter, in a non-ominous way, the nature of the typical modern self to help it embrace social requirements and ideals. But we can also alter social practices to harmonize them more effectively with certain individual projects.

The effect of this will be, it is hoped, to suggest a way of overcoming frustration in individual lives and alienation in society by using politics to encourage a particular form of lifestyle. Because I am suggesting that this can be achieved by the flourishing and not the denial of the self, the political theory of self-realization can thus present itself as a possible cure for the ills of modernity. I claim that it is partly because politics has denied itself such intimate concerns with character-ideals, for the reasons this chapter has discussed and rejected at length, that these ills have persisted. Because politics has eschewed its share of the responsibility for the sort of characters people possess, it has wilfully left unbridged the gap between individual lifestyles and their social contexts.

Only by grasping these tribulations of the modern self as deeply political concerns can we deal with the existential problems of modernity – and the theory of self-realization developed here is one way of doing this.

## CHAPTER 2

### Aristotle: Self-Realization and Virtue-Ethics

#### i Introduction

Despite the relative popularity of attempts to revive and rehabilitate the kind of virtue-ethics found in Aristotelian ethics, nobody seriously pretends that the world-view which underpins Aristotle's own theory is viable from a modern perspective. It is not what Bernard Williams calls a "real option".<sup>1</sup> Too many of its central beliefs and propositions are unsustainable or morally repugnant, given what modern people now know and/or believe.

However, some modern moral philosophers have argued that these can easily be replaced, yielding a form of virtue-ethics that (they believe) is more plausibly a real option. Further, they argue that such a theory improves upon other modern moral philosophies by providing a better theory of the self and personal identity, along with a more substantive and attractive account of personal conduct that has wide-ranging social and political consequences. In effect, they offer their revised version of virtue-ethics as a political theory of self-realization.

Our task, then, is to consider whether a pre-modern theory really can offer substantial inspiration for a modern approach to self-realization. This chapter returns to Aristotle himself, whose ethical theory was intrinsically political in the way Chapter 1 suggested was typical of pre-modern thought. In a necessarily incomplete exposition of Aristotle's ideas, we want to see how the theory works: what its central concepts are, how pre-modern ideas inform its structure and what kind of practical political prescription it produces.

Inevitably, we will have to fashion a coherent theory ourselves out of some confusing and contradictory ideas in Aristotle's works (this is particularly true of his thoughts on democracy and citizenship). To consider critically whether our distilled Aristotelian theory can contribute anything to a view which is a real option for modern political thought, the conclusion will isolate some deep ambiguities in the way Aristotle's argument works.

#### ii Teleology, *Ergon* and *Eudaimonia*

To begin the presentation of Aristotle's theory of self-realization, we can turn to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where we find the assertion that all rational human activity is considered to aim at some good.<sup>2</sup> The supreme human good – or *telos* – is that which is desired for its own sake. It provides the ultimate reason why we want any other goods since its achievement is that to which everything else is directed.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, rational human activity is ultimately directed towards the *telos*; "politics" is explicitly identified as the science concerned with this supreme human good.<sup>4</sup>

Like other natural organisms, man is goal-directed and nature itself is seen as an inner process of change.<sup>5</sup> This idea is familiarly illustrated by the answer that Aristotle would give to the question, "what is the substance of an acorn?" He would say it is an oak tree,

for we can only understand the changes it undergoes with reference to the fact that these changes turn it into an oak tree. Ernest Barker connected this to Aristotle's general view about the relation between "matter" and "form", akin to "raw material" and "end-state", wherein matter moves to form in a way informed by form. Change, then, can be teleologically understood as the movement from potential to actual.<sup>6</sup>

We now need an account of what this supreme good is. Crucially, if (as Aristotelian teleological explanation holds) it is said to be immanent in the existence of mankind, the supreme good cannot be the product of human choice. Instead, it is awaiting discovery by those seeking the good. It is not necessarily easy to discern. Many people fail to identify it and pursue something that is less good in the mistaken belief that the latter is best for them. Certainty in knowledge of the good is therefore crucial for those pursuing the best life. Aristotle believes he has the answers, putting an end to further inquiry about the nature of the good life. He uses his analysis to identify precisely those practices and institutional arrangements which best promote it.

Aristotle thinks that man's supreme good must be "complete", in that it includes everything that is desirable, and "self-sufficient", meaning that it is what makes life desirable and is not desired as the means to anything else.<sup>7</sup> He identifies this as *eudaimonia*, a somewhat problematic term. Sometimes it appears in translation as "happiness". It is important to note that the latter has a typical pre-modern meaning here, referring to an objective state of being specifiable independently of people's subjective choices about their condition (thus distinct from "pleasure", which Aristotle thinks is a subjective feeling that supervenes on activities and states of being<sup>8</sup>).

"Flourishing" is more often used to interpret the term, because it comes closer to characterizing the *eudaimonic* state than "happiness". But "self-realization" seems to be more appropriate still in helping us to understand the nature of the best life. It captures the idea that such a life can be explained as a progression towards ("realization of") the achievement of the *telos*.

Although Aristotle talks of self-realization as the "end" *in* life, we should not understand this as meaning it will only come as the conclusion *of* a certain sort of full life. In an influential paper on the subject, J.L. Ackrill states that "*eudaimonia* ... is not something to look forward to (like a contented retirement), it is a life, enjoyable and worth while all through."<sup>9</sup> Although, as we shall see, this does not mean self-realization can be enjoyed when too young, the theory's aim is primarily to describe how one can live life as an end in itself, not just how to live it so that its conclusion is of the right sort.

To uncover the content of this life, Aristotle uses the famous *ergon* argument. This begins with the observation that the goodness and proficiency of people performing a specific *ergon* – which, for now, we shall understand as "function" – is taken to lie in the excellent performance of that function. So, the goodness of a "carpenter" can be identified by answering the question, "what does it take to be a good carpenter?" Analogously, if man *qua* man had a specific function, we would therefore be able to work out what it would take to be a good man. Aristotle then asks:

*is it likely that whereas joiners and shoemakers have certain functions or activities, man as such has none, but has been left by nature a functionless being? Just as we can see that eye and hand and foot and every one of our members has some function, should we not assume that in like manner a human being has a function over and above these particular functions?*<sup>10</sup>

The modern reader would almost certainly reply that we should assume no such thing. It obviously does not follow that just because our constituent organs have definite functions the whole man also has to have a function. This point of Aristotle's could only convince if we were prepared to say that man, too, was an instrument designed for some *use*: a prime example, apparently, of a pre-modern concept utterly implausible from a modern perspective.

However, this "functionalist" interpretation may mislead us in grasping what Aristotle intended by *ergon*. It is better understood as referring to the "essence" or "characteristic activity" of a thing. In the case of the bodily organs and the occupations this will still be the same as their function, but it suggests that the concept can be applied to "man as such" without entailing that "man" is an instrument.

Whatever it is, Aristotle claims that this characteristic activity has to be something that is *peculiar* to man and this he claims to be "an activity of the soul in accordance with, or implying a rational principle."<sup>11</sup> This leads him to conclude that:

*the good for man is an activity of soul in accordance with virtue, or if there are more kinds of virtue than one, in accordance with the best and most perfect kind.*<sup>12</sup>

As a prelude to picking out some themes from this, we can unpack these assertions for a basic understanding of what Aristotelian self-realization means. Firstly, though "the soul" does not have quite the metaphysical connotations with which we are familiar, it is explicitly postulated as the mental, or psychological equivalent of the material body. Aristotle divides the soul into two parts, the "rational" and "irrational". The latter subdivides into a "vegetative" part (in which are lodged the natural inclinations for nutrition and growth) and an "appetitive" part (wherein one can find the desires which are potentially "submissive and obedient" to reason).<sup>13</sup> "Soul" is used to identify the "form" possessed by man. Its activity is self-realizing because it is what shapes the development of the human being and that shape is formed according to rational decision and action.<sup>14</sup> It takes an explicitly mental dimension when referring to man because "practical rational activity" is offered as the man's unique attribute, his *ergon*.

According to Aristotle, other creatures' activity is not guided by reason; only men are so endowed. He could also draw a contrast between mortals and the gods which would also establish his conclusion, namely, that man's *ergon* must be active and practical, not merely mental and intellectual, since this pure theoretical activity is peculiar to the gods. This raises a perennially vexing problem in Aristotle exegesis, for elsewhere in the *Ethics* pure contemplation (*theoria*) is presented as the highest human good. I will deal briefly with this contradictory conclusion in section {vii}. This chapter will mainly take "reason-guided practical activity" as the *ergon*.

It is this idea of rational, practical activity, along with the concept of virtue invoked, which provides the main substance of Aristotelian self-realization which we can now inspect.

### **iii Choice, Life-Planning and Virtues**

A rational agent is identified by his capacity to act upon a deliberative wish, a reason-disciplined desire from the appetitive part of the soul, rather than an instinctive, “vegetative” desire. He is able to set up for himself a rational “life-plan”, based upon a correct identification of his *ergon* and an ability to act virtuously:

*everyone who is capable of living in accordance with his own decision sets up some goal of living finely ... with reference to which he will do all his actions; for not having one's life organised with reference to some end is a sign of much folly.*<sup>15</sup>

Now, we must remember that, because man's good is objectively determined, his individual choice plays no part in deciding where that good lies. But that is not to say that choice has no role at all in the conduct of the good life. The Aristotelian self-realizer does not sit back and wait for the philosophers to tell him in precise detail how he should conduct every stage of his life. He must use the discoveries of the philosophers in tandem with his own specific circumstances and inclinations to organize his own specific way of life. This is the purpose of the life-plan and this is where “choice” fits in.

For the rational, deliberative capacity which life-planning involves is, of course, what is unique to man and so is the central activity of Aristotelian self-realization. Aristotle stresses that this capacity is strictly concerned with choosing the *means* (formulated by *deliberation*) to a given end,<sup>16</sup> thus confirming that choice in determining “what the end is” has no place in this conception. The rational activity which is the content of self-realization is located in the choosing of appropriate means to realize one's *telos* in a life-plan.

What is meant by saying that the “activity ... according to reason” in the life-plan is “activity according to virtue”? Basically, the virtues are those dispositions which enable their possessor to perform his *ergon* excellently.<sup>17</sup> They subdivide into the “intellectual” virtues governing the rational part, which possesses reason and initiates it, and the “moral” virtues, which regulate the appetitive desires. In Michel Foucault's perspicuous phrase, virtue:

*consists in perfectly governing oneself, that is, in exercising upon oneself as exact a mastery as that of a sovereign against whom there would no longer be revolts.*<sup>18</sup>

Being dispositions, virtues are not co-extensive with activity, but they only become manifest in action. The Aristotelian self-realizer has to act well in order to live well. The possibility of acting rationally upon a deliberative wish depends upon the control of the appetitive irrational part of the soul. So virtues, or “technologies of the self” as Foucault might call them, are displayed as operations upon the “souls, thoughts, conduct and way

of being” to discipline the actor’s behaviour in order to reach the lifestyle which accords with the excellent performance of the *ergon*.<sup>19</sup>

A life-plan should, therefore, be shaped according to the virtues. They are generally identified by the “Doctrine of the Mean”, which locates the virtuous exercise of a trait in a mean relative to the agent in question (emphatically not absolutely) between the flawed extremes of excess and deficiency. For example: the two virtues which are designed to control the non-rational impulses over fear/confidence and pleasure/pain – *courage and temperance* – are the means which lie between rashness and cowardice, and licentiousness and insensibility, respectively.<sup>20</sup>

Running briefly over the other virtues of character listed by Aristotle, we have; *liberality* (with respect to acquisition and spending on a small scale), *munificence* (acquisition and spending on a large scale), *magnanimity* (estimating one’s personal worth with respect to the highest honours), *proper ambition* (one’s attitude to the honourable on a smaller scale), *patience* (when feeling angry), *friendliness* (for relatively immediate social interaction), *truthfulness* (for self-expression) and *wittiness* (in social discourse). Finally, there is *justice*, the most complicated of the Aristotelian virtues. It has a multi-layered “particular” sense (governing the fair treatment of others in society as a whole) but it also refers to “complete virtue”. The Aristotelian idea that the self-realizer must be “just” means that such a person must exhibit all the virtues; they come as a unity or not at all.<sup>21</sup>

Without complete virtue, Aristotle thinks, one would not be following the good, or adopting a sustainable life-plan in society. He discusses a number of ills that could arise out of imperfect control of the self through imperfect virtue. Such a person could be *akratic* or weak-willed, unable to follow the rationally-dictated course of action even though he knows it to the best. Or he could be “vicious”, with an undisciplined irrational side dominating the rational, causing self-loathing and possible suicide.<sup>22</sup> He must not do anything to sacrifice his self-respect, for this is a crucial part of living well.<sup>23</sup>

So the virtues seek to discipline and order the self in its life-plan to avoid such failings and they can do this in a number of ways. For example:

{a} they seek to regulate the kind and degree of desires a person typically has, so that they do not adversely dominate one’s personality;

{b} they help to equip the person with the right kind of dispositions and skills to be used in some of the paradigm self-realizing activities, such as life-planning itself;

{c} they aid the person in forming the right kind of relationships which, as we shall see, is integral to self-realization. Many of the virtues are, after all, relational in character, governing how one responds to others and the manifestation of virtue is typically done in public activity.

It is pertinent to wonder whether this conception of complete virtue actually cuts down the scope for individual choice in life-planning. It seems to specify types of behaviour in considerable detail and implicitly requires certain distinct forms of activity in order to display the virtues. Aristotle’s teaching is meant only to begin to set out the nature of the good life, but as he himself remarks “the beginning is more than half the whole task.”<sup>24</sup> His readers’ life-planning seems to be partially pre-empted by his work.

The virtues are primarily meant to tell us how to govern our relationships and our activities, rather than specifying what relationships we should have and what activities we should undertake. They are analogous to, say, the specifications and design requirements which have to be incorporated in a building plan for a house; these do not rule out considerable individual variation in building materials, style and layout.

But it is pertinent to wonder what room there is for variation in individuals' life-plans, even though Aristotle's emphasis on choice would suggest that pluralism is to be expected. If life-plans do indeed differ, we need to think about how we account for the differences: are they due mainly to innate individual characteristics, or to variations in external circumstances which have to be accommodated in different ways within life-plans? In what follows, we will gather material to attempt to answer this question.

#### **iv The Leisured Man as "Political Animal"**

We now move to explain Aristotle's contention that the self-realizer is "leisured". To do this, we first need to address the notorious exclusion of women, slaves and indeed many other categories of men from the possibility of self-realization. Here, we find the most repellent of pre-modern assumptions, classifying human beings based upon claims concerning different types of natural disorder in the souls of the different types of being.

First, the argument for "natural slavery". In the *Politics*, Aristotle states that "he who can be, and therefore is, another's, and he who participates in reason enough to apprehend, but not to have, is a slave by nature."<sup>25</sup> A natural slave can obey what is reasonable, but cannot reason for himself. He does not possess the rational part of the soul, but he does have that part of the irrational which is nevertheless amenable to reason. So the slave is not an animal, which cannot even apprehend reason (this seems to be the unhappy lot of the "barbarian"). Importantly, the slave is said to have a peculiar *ergon* of his own: it is to obey (a practically rational master) and his particular excellences are based upon this.<sup>26</sup>

Next comes the nature of women. They do have the capacity for reason, says Aristotle, but "it is without authority" except in rare cases.<sup>27</sup> By this, he means that their rational faculty does not restrain and command their emotions (a fault that successive generations of thinkers have purported to identify in women). He argues in his *Generation of Animals* that a woman is basically a disabled human, existing primarily for the purposes of reproduction and even this is done imperfectly since it is the male and not she who gives the child its soul: "a woman is as it were an infertile male" ... "a male is male in virtue of a particular ability, and a female in virtue of a particular inability."<sup>28</sup> Supplementing her reproductive purpose, the woman also maintains the household in which her self-realizing man lives. As with the slave, she can possess her own set of "virtues" to secure the best performance of her *ergon* (after all, "excellence of character belongs to all"; they are just not the same excellences<sup>29</sup>).

Aristotle believes a biological deficiency bars women and natural slaves from self-realization. Their nature gives them a different and inferior *ergon*, which is expressed in activities subordinate to, and in the service of, self-realizing men – and dictates that their

goodness lies in excellent performance of that service. But there is something else that can bar people from self-realization, involving very many non-enslaved men. It occurs when they find themselves in a position where their existence is not organized around a life-plan of their own. Instead, they have to perform “necessary services” *solely* (or so it is presumed by Aristotle) for the existence of the community.

Anyone whose life is exclusively organized around what we would call a “profession”, in the service of others, ends up being only a means to the sustenance of others’ self-realizing lives. They also have to work simply to survive – not to self-realize, says Aristotle. Farmers, artisans, tradesmen, seamen, for example, are specifically excluded; these forms of life are “ignoble and inimical to excellence”.<sup>30</sup> They have no life-plan of their own, in the sense that they are not living for their own self-realization. The whole life of a non-enslaved farmer, for example, is centered around the fact that he has to make a living to survive. Once in the occupation, the conditions of service impose further restrictions, all compounding the fact of having to work to support someone else’s good life in order to survive.

So Aristotle thinks that producing such necessities is not *self-directing*: it is done because it has to be done, and is intended to meet another’s requirements. Because it is a subservient function, one’s good is qualitatively different from those whom he serves. It consists in the excellent performance of his subservient duties. Further, concerned as they are with the production and sustenance of life’s necessities, menial activities are repetitive because demand for their products does not diminish. They are thus monotonously non-developmental, not sufficiently distinct from the nutritive and habitational behaviour of animals (and therefore unbecoming to man).

The crucial assumption here, clearly pre-modern in form, is that there is no distinction between “who one is” and “what one does”. Aristotle automatically concludes that those performing menial tasks have to be menial people. He does not offer any real argument for why having a “profession” has to be so exclusive and “other-serving” (why, that is, one cannot adopt this as a rational life-plan of one’s own). For him, it is not the fact that people are doing menial jobs which makes them menial people. It is because they are imperfect humans that they are doing menial jobs. Not only is it necessary for them to do that work to sustain the self-realizers, but they are also by nature necessarily the sort of people suited to this kind of work.<sup>31</sup>

This latter point is particularly relevant when trying to interpret Aristotle’s oft-noted flight of fancy about eliminating slavery in production “if every instrument could accomplish its own work.”<sup>32</sup> This does not mean, as some may be tempted to believe, that only technological limitations prevented the Aristotelian form of self-realization from being shared by all *homo sapiens*. Certainly, Aristotle was imagining a society free of slaves and labourers. But technological wizardry could not overcome their natural deficiencies. It would only mean that self-realizers could dispense with their services, leaving these poor wretches, we must presume, to fend for themselves in the wilderness beyond the city walls.

So what does it mean for self-realizers to be “leisured”? Aristotle contrasts “leisure” with all those activities described above as menial, or “necessary”. Anyone involved in

such activity is “unleisured”. Aristotle says “the first principle of all (self-realizing) action is leisure” and specifically opposes this to action done for the sake of pleasure or “play”.<sup>33</sup> Thus, leisure activity does not really have these familiar modern connotations in this context. The leisured self-realizer, not in the service of others and with a substantial income to keep him from the need to labour for subsistence, has a much larger sphere for *deliberative* initiative and choice. He does not have to adopt a life-plan based upon the needs of others.

Aristotle famously proclaimed that man is a *zoon politikon*: a political animal.<sup>34</sup> This provides the basis for my claim that we can think of leisure as, in the first instance, the realm of “active citizenship”. Let us think about what the “political animal” claim means in order to understand this point. It does not entail a life devoted entirely to politics. This would mean adopting politics as a profession and the pursuit of power as the end of one’s life, which is not self-realizing on Aristotle’s terms.<sup>35</sup> The claim is meant, first of all, as a biological description: “political animals are those whose joint *ergon* is some one common thing.”<sup>36</sup> They are animals who naturally come together in their life activities: bees, ants, wasps, ants and cranes are identified along with man as similarly gregarious by Aristotle. Man is not, therefore, peculiar in this respect, though he is distinguishable by the fact that he is more highly associative than the animals, as we shall see.

Politics is also primary in the sense that the *polis*, or city-state, is said to be prior to other units in society (individuals, households, villages): it is the development of the city-state which informs the changes which these, as constituent parts of the state, undergo.<sup>37</sup> Thus, man is “political” in the sense that he is ultimately destined to live as a member of a political community in pursuit of the good life. This life is therefore conceptually and practically dependent upon the *polis*.<sup>38</sup>

Although Aristotle’s ideas on this cannot be rendered totally consistent or cogent in argument, his claim that politics is the art of the practical good implies that the *polis* is an artefact of practical reason (contrary to his own attempts to argue that it is natural). This sets humanity apart from other political communities in the animal kingdom.<sup>39</sup> We can surmise that political activity is the supreme form of reason-guided, self-realizing practical activity. Although politics does not take up all of the self-realizing life, it is as a citizen of the *polis* that such a life is ultimately to be led.

To explain this rather vague point, we need to concentrate on the teleology which explains all human behaviour in Aristotle. As previously noted, the identity of the “sub-humans” is totally given by the social role they possess: this is their *ergon*, and the excellent performance of this constitutes their good. Here, the instrumentalist connotations of *ergon* rendered as “function” are entirely appropriate. Because self-realizers are explicitly not “tools” to be used by others, it was obviously wise to reject “function” for them in this sense. But, given that an *ergon* argument is used for both “sub-humans” and self-realizers, it is reasonable to suppose some similarities in their form.

Although there is a critical ambiguity here, which is discussed in the final section, I suggest that the similarity consists in the idea that the “good for man”, self-realization, is also the performance of a social role: the role of “citizenship”. There is no such thing in

the pre-modern, Aristotelian world-view as a man apart from all natural and/or social roles, for such an abstraction is a product of the modern mind.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Aristotle considers that this kind of “absolute freedom”, living “according to one’s fancy” would only “unleash evil.” “Men should not think it slavery to live according to the rules of the constitution,” he states, “for it is their salvation.”<sup>41</sup> This is because “freedom” is, in effect, a *social status*, possessed by a certain “class” of people which assigns them responsibilities as well as liberties under the constitution. This is very different from the archetypal modern liberal view of freedom, which would treat social roles as contingent encumbrances.<sup>42</sup>

John Casey has recently summed up what such a view entails (casting it in terms of “virtuous nobility”):

*it is an idea of being-in-the-world, of one’s self being fulfilled in a social role or function, and of an identification of oneself with the public world which is revealed in feeling and action.*<sup>43</sup>

The role of citizen is distinct from all others in that it does not render its possessor a means to someone else’s ends. But it grounds the identity (and therefore the good) of self-realizers in a non-contingent place in a society geared to the pursuit of the good.<sup>44</sup> It is a role which has its own characteristic activities and these necessarily constitute the self-realized life, for the “free man” does not stand apart from the role. This is how best to think of the meaning of man as a “political animal”: his *ergon*, or characteristic activity, is the performance of his role as a member of his political community.

The political dimension to the Aristotelian conception of self-realization is now clear, though there are in fact a number of ways in which politics is central to its pursuit. For example:

- {a} politics assumes ultimate responsibility for the education of its future citizens – a necessary precursor to self-realization;
- {b} it provides and protects the context for the pursuit of non-political self-realizing goods;
- {c} though not exclusively so, political activity itself is central to the self-realizing existence.

Now there are those who believe that the *polis*, which provides all of this, can be made to contrast favourably with more modern political institutions. These, so they feel, are generally experienced as oppressive, alienating, dehumanizing. Like those who argue that the pre-modern assumptions concerning women and slaves can be discarded without losing the fundamental form of the theory, advocates of such a position hope that, with a few suitable amendments, the idea of the *polis* can be rendered a desirable political form for modern times. This is a claim we need to judge as we progress if we want to consider whether there is anything to Aristotle’s self-realizationist theory that is not irretrievably pre-modern.

## v Education for Self-Realization

Aristotle knows that the disposition to act according to virtue is not something that men are immediately inclined to possess. They are not born as complete citizens, after all, but have to learn the disciplines and responsibilities of the role. It would not be too much of an exaggeration, therefore, to say that he believes the fate of the *polis* and the self-realization of its citizens lie in the hands of the teachers. This is why he thinks that, wherever possible, education should be in the hands of the state in order to secure a uniform excellence. It is through formal education that the citizens of the future accumulate the knowledge and acquire many of the skills which make up the self-realized life. Moreover, they come to recognize themselves as members of their particular *polis* in learning its ways: education is also a process of self-knowledge, or self-disclosure.

In the pre-modern Aristotelian world, what seems to us a peculiarly parochial and authoritarian preaching of the social rules and norms of one's own political system is not only what guides the person to pursue the good, it is actually instrumental in constituting the identity of that person. It is because what constitutes the goodness of the good person has been discovered – and requires only that the person work out a particular life-plan to instantiate it – that people can be “taught” self-realization.

The young, future citizens are trained, by habituation and induction, to possess “good characters”, capable of choosing rightly for self-realization. Their education is designed to promote knowledge of the good, dispose them towards embracing it and develop the various skills and attitudes required in a successful self-realizing life-plan. Aristotle intends education to be concerned to pass on the collective wisdom about the good life for the future citizens to use for themselves, rather than the teaching of rules and regulations by which to regiment their lives.

He stresses that rules are necessarily general: “agents are compelled at every step to think out for themselves what the circumstances demand.”<sup>45</sup> So the young cannot be taught exactly how their life-plans should be shaped – which is why it is crucial for a potential self-realizer to be able to choose for himself the form his plan is to take. Education readies people for the possession and exercise of complete virtue and the capacity of practical rationality, but it cannot itself produce ready-made, fully functioning and fully virtuous citizens.

Take, for example, the five distinct stages we can identify in practical rationality. Aristotle says that the subject must be able to {a} characterize his particular situation; {b} reason from knowledge of what is good for him to the good as such; {c} understand his good as a participant in an activity appropriate to his role; {d} reason from his understanding of the good as such to an assessment of which specific goods it is possible for him to achieve; {e} be able to deploy these four in conjunction.<sup>46</sup>

Each of these five steps of practical reasoning must be mastered in a specific context – i.e. that of the *polis* – where the system of education has first disposed the subject to this kind of mental process and supplied him with some of the necessary background knowledge to make the various judgments. But no textbook from the Directors of Education, the powerful state controllers of the curriculum postulated by Aristotle, can

show him exactly how to deploy each step in every situation in which he would need to reason practically. What rule book would tell him how to characterize every single situation he might find himself in, for example?

Aristotle says “presumably, it is impossible to secure one’s own good independently of domestic and political science,”<sup>47</sup> which education provides. But this is not sufficient, for one needs the *experience* of actually reasoning practically to master the capacity.<sup>48</sup> His philosophy can map out important features of the life the citizen will have in education, from soldier to husband, administrator, juror and legislator (the “sub-roles” that make up the composite role of “citizen”). But he has to plan his life and experience these things for himself; they cannot be taught. The mind of the pupil, “has to be prepared in its habits if it is to enjoy and dislike the right things.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, education has to be based upon obedience: the young are made to obey what is right in order that they will come to do what is right habitually. But as the self-realizing life-plan is chosen by the agent, we can see how far removed the experience of life-planning is supposed to be from the experience of education.

Being of an impressionable nature, the very young will find themselves insulated from any bad influences by the Directors of Education. The latter take whatever steps are necessary to make sure they are told, for example, the right kind of story (whatever exactly that might be), shielded from the wrong kind of language and kept away as much as possible from the family slaves (lest they be corrupted by the ignoble).<sup>50</sup> All of these and other things (such as satirical and comic plays) are deemed to have the potential for hindering or distorting the nascent understanding of the good, crippling the emergent capacity for its pursuit. So, given the degree of censorship in general that he thinks will need to be exercised throughout a person’s formative years, it is quite clear from Aristotle’s brief treatment that the Directors of Education are going to have enormous power in the production of future generations of citizens.

Aristotle is also concerned that people should be in a fit enough physical as well as mental condition to be able to exercise their self-realizing capacities. Fine self-realizing characters cannot flourish in a weak body. In Foucault’s terminology, “caring for the self” is thus a vital part of the self-realizing process and again consists of skills which it is the purpose of education to foster.<sup>51</sup> It is thus an important principle in Aristotle’s political theory.

Although physical exercise is an important part of this (since the care of the body precedes the care of the soul and dominates what formal education can teach the young about caring for the self<sup>52</sup>) it is by no means the only part. Aristotle argues for a strict diet and an appropriate balance of activities so that the physical side of one’s life does not swell disproportionately with respect to the other (most notably on “the evil of excessive training in early years” which produces Olympian youths but debilitated, non-rounded men<sup>53</sup>). But he also stresses regulation beyond the period of formal education and in the other activities of life, too. A regimen for sexual relations within marriage, for example, is designed to maximize the excellent performance of a duty to procreate for the state.<sup>54</sup>

In a way, though, the regulations for sexual intercourse are exceptions to the rule I

would like to suggest: that the business of caring for the self is a central sphere for the deliberative choice of self-realizing individuals. It is at the heart of life-planning. Once people have learned about the needs and various techniques for it, they take charge of their own lives in caring for their own selves. Directing their own pursuit of the good, they gain greater self-respect. Certainly, there are experts on hand for advice on the various activities of life. There is also the Doctrine of the Mean to guide us on what policy takes the best care of us. But the self-realizer has to work out for himself what regimen is the mean relative to himself. No rules or fixed principles could determine this exactly for him.<sup>55</sup>

It is true that Aristotle thinks a state concerned with its own well-being is going to be concerned with that of its citizens, as the whole is concerned with the well-being of its constituent parts. But, as the above argues, this should not be understood as meaning that the state has to impose a draconian life-plan upon each of its citizens. It provides the resources so that they can plan that for themselves, shouldering responsibility only for larger projects beyond individual competence.

Of course, one could only accept fully these various elements of education if the Aristotelian concepts of the self and its political *telos* are accepted. From a modern perspective, the whole process can be readily identified as the politically induced conditioning and regimentation of people's lifestyles. To use Foucault's terminology again, in Aristotelian caring for the self what appears to be teachings to practice technologies of the self looks to us to be a "technology of power", the external determination of individual conduct, forging submission to domination.<sup>56</sup>

Caring for the self, as one of the concerns of life-planning, may indeed allow for individual choice, but the most important resource for good life-planning – ethics itself – is actually *excluded* from the curriculum by Aristotle. Only much older people are able to handle such knowledge. The theoretical room left in the above exposition for adult individual choice should not be allowed to obscure the real possibility, even in pre-modern conceptual terms, that in practice the Aristotelian educational practices *do* produce a more regimented, indoctrinated or "programmed" self than it sets out to achieve.

We can see what space may be salvaged for individual choice in the aftermath of such an education by considering the self-realizing activities of the adult world. One must bear in mind that Aristotle does not think men are ready for self-realization as soon as their formal instruction has finished. Their "education" continues, in the first activities they undertake for the *polis*.

One of the problems with the idea of non-political leisure activities for the Aristotelian self-realizer is: what exactly are they? The problem implicitly arises in Aristotle's discussion of something that looks decidedly odd in a treatise on politics to modern eyes: the importance of music, introduced to the young in their formal education. As simple relaxation, the playing of – and listening to – a musical instrument is one of the best ways to alleviate the strains of toil and Aristotle does not neglect the importance of relaxation in a life of self-realizing exertion.

More novel is his suggestion that music is character-forming, in the way it excites emotions, "supplying imitations" of dispositions which prompt the soul to undergo a

change.<sup>57</sup> If this is so, then good music is one way of instilling dispositions to respond to the virtuous and become virtuous oneself. However, it has its limitations, which is why its importance diminishes after formal education:

*[it] is evident that the learning of music ought not to impede the business of riper years, or to degrade the body or render it unfit for civil or military training, whether for bodily exercises at the time or for later studies.*<sup>58</sup>

Pleasurable and relaxing though it can still be, this casts some doubt on the significance that music – and perhaps an aesthetic sphere more generally – would have in the self-realized life. Because Aristotle thinks of music as a representation of some reality, it is clearly going to be inferior to the real thing. He is worried that it could be a corrupting diversion from the more serious business of self-realization. One should not sing songs or play tunes depicting noble and courageous deeds; one should actually do the deeds. Although activities such as music would make better relaxations than the vulgar pleasures, which make no such representations and are more inclined to excess (such as eating and drinking for pleasure), one wonders whether they can have much more of a role than relaxation in self-realization.<sup>59</sup>

It is this depreciation of the value of aesthetic pleasures like music which raises the problem about non-political leisure activities: what alternatives might there be, which are not similarly fallible? One Aristotelian solution would be to concentrate not so much on the nature of the activities themselves but on the kind of relationships in which they are undertaken. Self-realization becomes less of a question about what one does and more of a matter of with whom one spends one's leisure time.

## **vi The Importance of Friendship**

Aristotle says that friendship is the greatest of the external, non-political goods.<sup>60</sup> He thinks that “a man becomes a friend whenever, being loved, he loves in return.”<sup>61</sup> But friendship comes in different types. The type most central to self-realization is the one that best reflects the depth of emotional tie implied by the Greek word “*philia*” which we may call “character friendship” and which predominates in leisure activities.<sup>62</sup> The other sorts of friendship are more diluted. For example, Aristotle called the ideal relationships between husband and wife, and master and slave, examples of friendship. They are what Aristotle calls “dissimilar friendships”, since the two are unequal, not loving each other for their characters but essentially for the services they provide for each other. The relationship can be characterized thus: X has an (imperfect) friend because X loves *his own* good and the other can contribute towards it.

The importance of character friendship lies in the following. Because of the relational character of many of the virtues, a certain type of relationship is required to exhibit them and character-friendship provides the best type. People in such friendships are thus able to self-realize – and the relationship itself gives them the crucial knowledge of their own goodness. But, more importantly for Aristotle, character-friendship is supposed to be a good in itself.

It is the fact that leisure activities are performed in relations of friendship, rather than anything particular to the activities themselves, that contributes to self-realization. If Aristotle convinces us that his conception of self-realization depends on this, then the latter might be able to resist a charge that it is too self-centered as an ideal, prone to a possibly self-defeating narcissism on the part of its practitioners.

Character friendship involves treating one's friend as an end in himself, recognizing his goodness. Because of the reciprocal nature of the relationship we appreciate that there must therefore be goodness in us (one must be good if one is able to have good friends). Self-knowledge, the confidence in knowing that we have reached a certain, flourishing moral state, is thus a central *by-product* of the friendship.

Clearly, it is crucial that Aristotle does not want this to be a utilitarian relationship, whereby people are friends "only in so far as they derive some benefit from each other." But it is not *obvious* that he avoids this result in the way he describes it. For he continues to stress the benefits that accrue to the individual when he makes a friend. He says that this friendship is an "absolute" good, but that such friends are useful to each other *as well*.<sup>63</sup> The latter point affirms that the instrumentalist dimension which characterizes other forms of relationship does not disappear. The bonds of the deep kind of friendship to which we presume Aristotle alludes surely need to be based on something stronger than the contingent fact that I happen to want something from you and you want something from me. We would be involved in each other's self-realization only in an instrumental way; you really wouldn't be any more a part of my self-realization than the artefact or service you provided.

The idea of "absolute good" in friendship is meant to suggest some such deeper tie. The strength of a character-friendship is held to lie in the fact that the two friends are similarly good. Consequently, "these people each alike wish good for the other *qua* good, and they are good in themselves ... the friendship of such men lasts so long as they remain good."<sup>64</sup> It is because X's friend is *good* that he is a character friend and the friend is loved because X loves the good.<sup>65</sup>

A.W. Price provides a concise understanding of how such a friendship operates in practice, stressing its most communitarian dimension: "to love another actively for his own sake is above all to identify with him in action by making his acts also one's own as realizations of choices that one shares with him."<sup>66</sup> So there is a major role for co-operation in Aristotelian self-realization, as this passage shows:

*friendship is a kind of partnership, and a man stands in the same relation to his friend as to himself ... everyone wishes to share with his friends the occupation (whatever it is) that constitutes his existence, or makes life worth living .... indeed in their desire to spend their lives with their friends they follow these pursuits and share in them as much as possible. Consequently the friendship of worthless people has a bad effect (because they take part, unstable as they are, in worthless pursuits, and actually become bad through each other's influence).<sup>67</sup>*

Whatever activities people choose, the central point here is that they are best done in company with others. For not only can one appreciate one's worth in these activities

because we share them with good friends, but co-operation can enable one to do things that cannot be done alone. Philosophical argument is a case in point: Socrates obviously needed people to teach and argue with. Thus both he and his interlocutors were together able to experience the good of debate and dialogue only available to those with friendly company.

In the previous section, we saw that an activity like music was somewhat undermined by Aristotle as a constituent of the self-realizing life-plan. But if such activities are performed together by friends, the nature of the activity itself is transformed as far as its contribution to self-realization goes. For they allow us to appreciate the good of shared excellence and the good of things that can only be done in shared activity.

So the Aristotelian self-realized life features all of those activities popularly attributed to the idyllic Graecian lifestyle: philosophizing and debate, music, hunting, athletics, all of which develop certain skills and capacities. As long as they are done in relations of friendship, they will display the virtuous nature that is the core of self-realization.

It is noteworthy that, on top of Aristotle's own natural-functionalist arguments to bar the self-realizers from undertaking menial tasks, there is the fact that the leisured life of self-realization is probably too full of other things to accommodate anything else. Apart from the processes of education and the times spent as soldier, legislator, household master during life, one has the caring of the self to which to attend, the pursuit of one's own particular excellences *and* the participation in the self-realizing activities of one's friends (the last in particular potentially fills up much of the time).

This provides another reason against the thought that a sharing-out of the menial tasks could have been a way to open up self-realization to the unleisured professionals. So extensive is this life's activity already that one should not contemplate sacrificing some of its time for more non-self-realizing pursuits than are absolutely necessary.

Aristotle thinks that one can have only a few character friends. Not only are they rare, but the commitment is supposed to be of an intimacy that cannot by definition be spread amongst many. Intimacy is required because Aristotle says this is the only way one gets to know that the friend is good.<sup>68</sup> Although self-realization has now acquired a relational aspect, one can hardly call it "communitarian" as yet. The relationships of the self-realizer with other citizens in the wider *polis* are necessarily of a different sort. Citizenship also provides him with a qualitatively distinct set of self-realizing activities.

## **vii Politics and Citizenship**

Before describing this last dimension of Aristotelian self-realization, two points should be noted, although they cannot be explored in detail here. First: given the failure of attempts to show that Aristotelian self-realization can avoid the strictly hierarchical, discriminatory society described by Aristotle himself, it is quite clear that we cannot forget that the social system must be rigidly enforced and protected as and when necessary. That is to say, it is essential for all "sub-humans" to perform their roles excellently and without complaint; they are the necessary props for self-realization. Insofar as it is reasonable to assume that, as "defective" people, it may be difficult to secure them willingly to their tasks sometimes

(at least!), Aristotle would have to sanction any means necessary, no matter how coercive, to enforce compliance (of course, there is no reason why this should not be extended to unruly citizens either).

This should not be forgotten whenever one encounters idolizing characterizations of the *polis* as a humanized ethical-political realm. Not only does it not differ from other types of state in its need for coercion, but in all probability it has to use force far more pervasively since its whole viability rests upon ensuring that whole classes of people all perform their different, highly specific functions.

The second point relates to the citizen self-realizers specifically. For though this section deals with them in their political maturity, we mentioned above that there has to be a lengthy time-span of “apprenticeship” between their formal education and this stage of their lives. They have other roles to play in the course of life, most significantly that of soldier, the defender of the *polis*.<sup>69</sup> They develop new skills, acquire more virtues (“courage” being the obvious one in military service) and learn to accept new responsibilities, before being able to take part as a fully active member of the *polis*. Thus, although it was earlier denied that self-realization is about ensuring that “life’s conclusion is of the right sort”, we should appreciate that it cannot be achieved until one’s middle years, according to Aristotle.<sup>70</sup>

Now, in the *polis* Aristotle thinks it is possible “to be friendly with many in the civic sense and not be obsequious – in fact to be a man of really admirable character”.<sup>71</sup> This is not to contradict the conclusion of the previous section, for “civic friendship is according to utility”.<sup>72</sup> Here, we have another qualification to the claim that we are dealing with a deeply communitarian, “humanized” society, for its relations are not built upon love or fraternity. Political activity may be developmental in its own right, but the relationships one has with other members of the *polis* in general are not ends in themselves, like character-friendships, but are utilitarian in nature. This fact, plus the argument against the adoption of politics as a profession, shows that people’s participation in politics must not preclude activity in the realm of character friendship.

Puzzlingly, Aristotle thinks that, were there one sub-section of the citizenry always and in every respect superior at governing, they should become a permanent ruling class.<sup>73</sup> Obviously, this seems to contradict the argument the centrality of politics in all citizens’ self-realization; this will be discussed in a moment. But as he denies this possibility in practice, he has another way of avoiding professionalization: citizens should rule and be ruled in turn.<sup>74</sup> They will engage in political deliberation and hold office – but not all of the time.

What specific contribution to self-realization can be made through participation in the *polis*? Clearly, the wider range of relationships in the *polis* provide more opportunities for virtue-guided activity (for this is not *exclusive* to character friendship). But the high status of politics is probably best explained by the scope it gives for deliberation promoting the good, transcending the more narrow self-concern of caring for the self. For in the same way that identification of the objective good does not rule out scope for choice in the formulation of life-plans, so it does not mean that there will be no political decisions to be

debated and taken in running the *polis*.

It must not be forgotten that “politics is the art of the practical good”: thus, the joint work of citizens is to use their reason-guided practical activity to form and maintain an ethical community in which self-realization may be pursued. In tackling political problems, arguing about and taking political decisions, the citizens are using their self-realizing faculties in relation to that community which ultimately sustains the possibility of self-realization. It is due to this that politics can be seen as the highest, or supreme activity.

To illustrate one possible source for internal political debate: Aristotle thinks that citizens’ separateness is to be guaranteed in the *polis* by private property.<sup>75</sup> As the heads of various households are not all going to be character-friends with each other, it is certainly not inconceivable to imagine disputes when interests clash. For even where their appreciation of what is good is identical, their ideas about means may differ. So institutions will be required to regulate and co-ordinate dispute and discussion. However, these are “non-antagonistic” differences, which do not fundamentally pit individual against individual and thereby undermine their joint commitment to the good.

Co-operation is embodied in common participation in the actual running of *polis* institutions. Because Aristotle wants all citizens involved in some way at some stage through their lives, he is well aware that the *polis* will have to be relatively small.<sup>76</sup> Participation simply in the execution of political directives will not be enough and nor, it is clear, will simple voting. People will have to reason about and deliberate upon political issues. The latter are the material upon which the aspects of self-realization are developed and practised.

The institutional arrangements he identifies with a democratic system might be seen to be the most appropriate for these aspirations. They allow full and regular participation in the the various offices of state, including legislative, executive and judicial branches.<sup>77</sup> However, Aristotle actually thought that democracy was a flawed arrangement – here is where we encounter the contradiction in political commitments mentioned above. Worried that the *demos* would be too susceptible to demagoguery, he shared Plato’s criticism of democracy, which famously points out that, as the most expert helmsman should be the one to steer the ship, so the most expert statesmen should steer the ship of state.<sup>78</sup>

Hence his preference for aristocracy, defined as the rule of the best men. But, conceding that this is beyond the reach of most states, he settled for the concept of the *polity*, an unspecific mixture of democracy and oligarchy with greater emphasis on the latter.<sup>79</sup>

It may be impossible to reconstruct consistently Aristotle’s recommendations on the best constitution, particularly given this slippage between the accounts for the *ideally* best *polis* and for the best in the “real world”. All we can hope for here is a reconstructed account which is consistent with *some* of Aristotle’s statements.

For the account of the *ideally* best *polis*, one wonders why we should attribute all the flaws of *actual* democratic practice to the ideal world’s citizenry; more than just a small elite could count as being among “the best men”. If we assume that virtue rather than just

freedom (the “real world” aim of democracy for Aristotle) could be achieved within democracy’s institutional framework, then it is possible to make more use of Aristotle’s account of democracy in explaining the claim that political participation is central to self-realization.<sup>80</sup>

The ideal *polis*’s firm commitment to the good of self-realization could well provide the kind of social mores and customs Aristotle thinks would help to secure the foundations of the ideal democracy against usurpation and tyranny.<sup>81</sup> Here, we should recall that he postulates a link between individual character, social form, and constitutional structure.<sup>82</sup> Self-realizing citizens will be gaining in ability all the time and can expect to transcend the kind of severe limits to qualification placed upon some portions of the democratic citizenry. He seems to think that it is (only) the relative poverty of some citizens that contributes to their incompetence – and this is something he believes that a democracy can well rectify, by redistributing wealth.<sup>83</sup> In this respect, “the best men” could be thought of as largely co-extensive with “the citizenry” in a steadily advancing self-realizing *polis*.

The injunction that one has to learn how to rule by being ruled indicates that, logically, a citizen will first have to take orders and execute decisions in the administrative branches. This reinforces the earlier point concerning self-realization’s advent in the middle years of life, when the requisite experience has been acquired. Now it might be thought that, whereas political deliberation is necessary for self-realization, actual office-holding is not. Otherwise, the point that a sub-set of superior citizens alone would do the latter if only they existed would be contradictory. But, even if Aristotle did suggest that office-holding is not essential, it would not contradict his conception to construe arguments which state that office-holding is instrumentally valuable in self-realization, because of the opportunities it offers for further, extensive rational deliberation.

It is entirely plausible to argue that rational deliberation in political execution deepens one’s knowledge of the achievement of the good, by coming to know more about, and participate in the sustenance of, the good life. If politics as the supreme good is self-sufficient, that is not only because it embodies self-realization as practical activity in accordance with reason, it also includes the means by which it is achieved. Another point in favour of office-holding: although, as Martha Nussbaum points out, life in the *polis* is not wholly insulated from fortune, if one attempts to put into practice what one has also shared in deliberating upon, one’s own volition is as much in control against external events as is likely to be possible for humans.<sup>84</sup>

It is not necessary to think that political participation will be painless or untroubled, for even in the *polis* many tough decisions will have to be made and debating forums will be necessary to facilitate discussion. Indeed, these matters could well prove to be time-consuming and this point reinforces the argument of {vi} as to why menial tasks would interfere with self-realization.

Finally, we should return to the issue, mentioned above, concerning the effect that the contradictory advocacy of contemplation as the supreme good has on the interpretation of Aristotle. Although I do not claim that the two positions can be satisfactorily reconciled on his own terms either, it is possible to suggest one way in which contemplation could

complement the Aristotelian conception of self-realization.

The exegetical problem presented by the advocacy of contemplation as the content of *eudaimonia* is that it pulls away from the characterization of the latter as a life of *practical* rational activity. Further, it appears to fail the *ergon* peculiarity test anyway, since the gods also contemplate (being spirits, they do not exhibit *practical* rationality). As far as the *ergon* goes, Aristotle distinguishes between divine and human contemplation; he says that the former is better because it is unbroken, perfectly complete and self-sufficient.<sup>85</sup> This is impossible for humans, who must break their contemplation from time to time, are dependent upon others to sustain their lives and who cannot therefore easily enter contemplative solitude. Given this, we may have no reason to insist that human contemplators be ascetic, monastic meditators. Instead, they supplement practical activity by reviewing and ordering in their minds the wisdom and knowledge of the good they possess.

A case for introducing the contemplative element in this form into the otherwise practically rational life-plan has been put recently by David J. Depew.<sup>86</sup> He stresses that, on Aristotle's terms, neither the non-contemplating political man nor the apolitical contemplative intellectual are able to provide an adequate account of political reality, given their life-activities. Briefly put, the contemplator's retreat from the contingencies and vagaries of the social and political world cuts him off from the source of political wisdom. He will be (rightly) repelled, for example, by a leader who pursues external goods, such as wealth, as an end in itself.

But from his insulated vantage point he will be less able than someone engaged in politics to tell when such a pursuit is the product of a true despot's action, or of a well-intentioned but akratic statesman. Depew suggests this makes him more prone to dismiss the political world *per se* as inimical to excellence – which ironically impairs his knowledge about the political realm, a realm that only the gods can truly transcend.

It is equally problematic to pursue self-realization whilst ignoring the contribution contemplation can make to it. For this, along with the activities partaken in friendship, might be what prevents a slide into politics-as-profession. As Depew argues, when people do not contemplate the unchanging good, they are less familiar with it and are prone to mistaking means for ends. "Contemplation," he writes, "precisely because its value does not increase with the addition of instrumental value, and because its adepts have a strictly functional attitude toward necessities, is far less subject to this confusion."<sup>87</sup>

Because contemplation can be concerned with the human good, Amelié Oksenburg Rorty has suggested that:

*we can contemplate the moral life in activity as well as the starry heaven above. It is only in a corrupt polity that the contemplative life need be other-worldly ... and ... that the policies promoting the development and exercise of contemplative activity would come into conflict with those establishing requirements for the best practical life.*<sup>88</sup>

To prevent corruption, contemplation may well be necessary, but contemplation alone is other-worldly in its pretence at solitude, obscuring from view one's rootedness in the *polis*. That is why politics and contemplation can and perhaps should go together.

### viii Summary

Let us now review briefly the main elements of the Aristotelian conception, identifying its central ideas and critically considering the kind of self-realization it offers.

We began with the *ergon* argument, which purported to provide an objective account of the human good whose development and exercise constituted the flourishing, or realization, of the human personality. From this we drew a picture not only of what the self-realized life was like but – crucially for the *political* theory – how it was to be promoted. The idea of the life of practical rationality yielded the concept of the *life-plan*, the intelligent ordering of the various pursuits by which self-realization is to be achieved. Although the *ergon* argument discovered the general form of the self-realized life, the life-plan is designed to facilitate individual deliberation and choice in the selection of means for its pursuit.

Among the types of activity featuring in the typical life-plan are: *caring for the self*, the detailed procedures by which the body was maintained in a fit physical and mental condition for the self-realizing life; *friendship*: the planning and execution of joint activities in pursuit of the good; *politics*: the joint deliberation over the affairs of the *polis*. Menial activities, done purely for the sake of other's self-realizations, are excluded – a sufficiently sweeping proviso to bar the majority of people, whose lives unavoidably include such things.

The life-plan in general displays activity guided by the *virtues*, the specific set of traits and dispositions designed to secure self-realization, rationally applied by the agent to meet the needs of a particular situation. Believing that, left to their own devices, people would struggle to achieve what is nevertheless good for them, the conception is heavily reliant on the advocacy of *educational* practices to promote the skills of life-planning and a propensity to strive for the good.

This conception could defend itself against charges that it promotes narcissistic self-indulgence in the following ways. The self-realized state is identified as being composed of several pursuits which may be treated as ends in themselves i.e. not everything is done with the motive of one's own self-realization in mind.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the self-perception even of the self-realizer in the Aristotelian world is that of the occupant of a particular position in the social order. His identity is tightly bound up with that order, his life-plan framed with the aim of excellently executing *citizenship's* pursuits in mind (even though directly political pursuits do not exhaust the good life).

The notion of character-friendship reinforces the avoidance of narcissism, by locating many self-realizing activities in relationships where friends are treated as ends, not means to one's own projects. The possibility of nihilism is avoided by the presence of the objective good for people to believe in (and should complete virtue ever be achieved, *contemplation* of that good provides a final purpose for their activity).

Finally, the specifically political dimensions of the theory: it is the responsibility of political institutions {a} to secure the specific form of society required for self-realization; {b} to promote the pursuit of self-realization, primarily through education. This alone makes it a highly perfectionist theory. But there is also the argument that the activity of

politics itself is the highest self-realizing good, thus bringing politics to the very core of the Aristotelian conception of self-realization.

It is not our purpose here to pick up every single critical theme this good-life ideal has managed to generate. But before addressing the question of whether the very structure of the theory is irretrievably pre-modern, it is worth summarizing a few of the points that can be raised against it. For, salvageable or not, it is hardly obvious that this conception of self-realization provides an appetizing account of the good life.

We have already doubted whether there really is as much room for choice in the life-plan as is theoretically provided. We have also queried the reasons one could still retain for believing that life-plans are plural, not uniform, in content. There is so much emphasis on disciplined habituation and induction in education, designed ultimately to secure people to the self-realizing role of citizen, that one cannot help but feel that Aristotle's approach involves a much more rigid imposition of lifestyle than it would like to suggest. If people really are not considered ethically competent until middle age, then we should ponder whether they would not already be too set in the ways they had been made to grow up with to produce much individuality in their life-plans. This makes it less plausible to attribute much of any plurality that there might be in the content of self-realizing life-plans as a whole to innate individual characteristics. Variety is more likely to result from differing external circumstances, promoting adaptations in the basic form of life-plan.

Clearly, this conception entails that a poor upbringing and education frustrates the possibility of self-realization. But if a person starts in such a disadvantaged position, what sense does it make to say that it would still be best for him to be other than he is, i.e. self-realizing? The problem lies in the strict, trans-contextual identification of the human good, a typical pre-modern conceptual move. The account of the best life is supposed to hold regardless of situation. Yet we know that it takes a very particular set of conditions, carefully nurtured by political action, for this life to become possible (and even then, the accident of fortune may intervene). Our query challenges the idea that "what is best" is in no way affected by such contingent variations. If this is a legitimate point, then the pre-modern theories of the good are disadvantaged by their inflexibility in providing guides to good living under different conditions.

Finally, even if we accept the actual limitations on choice and assume the appropriate conditions hold, there are some pertinent points to be made as to whether the Aristotelian self-realized life is really "the best". Despite the sociability of self-realization as presented above, I think there are lingering doubts as to whether an unpleasant self-obsession has been entirely eradicated from the interpretation. The centrality of relationships should not be allowed to disguise the fact that a concern with self still underpins activity (we have friends because of the self-knowledge their goodness provides, even though we do not treat them just as means to such).

If there is nothing wrong with getting self-directed benefits from such relationships, it still seems that Aristotle shifts those benefits too far to the self. This can be seen in the fact that the virtue of "truth" is contrasted not with "lying" but "false modesty". This betrays a peculiarly obsessive concern with the character of the self, failing to capture what most

would think is really wrong with the vice of untruthfulness.<sup>90</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that the idea of the Aristotelian “magnanimous man”, he of complete virtue, disciplined, coolly rational life-planner, moving between set spheres of activity, striving to act in the correctly virtuous way at all times in the dutiful performance of his social role, seems inappropriate in modern times. It seems almost brutally rigid, inflexible in its specificity, stifling in the absence of spontaneity.

Modern thinkers are unwilling to advocate a lifestyle that ties people down to such detailed patterns of activity through the course of that life. The modern “free spirit” is not only free because it can choose its own good; it is also free because it desires spontaneity, not just scheduled routine in life. It may even want to abjure the constant emphasis on action we find in the Aristotelian conception, preferring the passive, reflective fruits of the inner spiritual life to the virtuously *active* strivings depicted here (though, obviously, should contemplation be included as suggested this point, at least, is catered for).

Aristotle’s virtue-ethics as a form of self-realization may not, therefore, be something to embrace enthusiastically as a model. But before a debate on this can be taken any further, we must return to the central issue about its pre-modernity and consider whether, even when shorn of apparently contingent and outdated factual assumptions, the adoption of its conceptual *form*, or structure is a real option today.

### **ix *Ergon* Reappraised: The Possibility of Virtue-Ethics**

The *ergon* argument, which grounds the entire Aristotelian conception, has been the object of what are now very familiar criticisms. They challenge the claim that the human good is to be found in whatever function, or characteristic activity, is peculiar to humans – the upshot of this point being to ask why the good life could not perhaps be rooted in non-unique faculties, or be an irreducible complex rather than a single kind of activity (apart from anything else, there are very many things that humans alone do, so the peculiarity argument is not enough to whittle the list down to one). A more fundamental critique, rooted in modern scepticism and commitment to self-determination, would attack the very concept of an unchanging, objective human essence (a weaker version of this point could concede that there might be some common attributes in human flourishing generally, but there are so many individual and cultural qualifications that it is impossible to yield a single, unified account of it).

Alternatively, one could accept the idea of a human essence and claim that Aristotle has misidentified it. An attempt could be made to find an *ergon* that does not subordinate women and pretend that there is such a thing as “natural slavery”. This could preserve the initial approach of the Aristotelian conception, but result in a rather more palatable (from a modern perspective) ethical theory. Or one may decide that the human essence is not good but reprehensible and that human nature should be repressed, rather than encouraged to flourish. This view, best captured in some (non-Thomist) versions of Christian doctrine which have opposed Aristotelianism through the ages, severs the identification of “the good” with the self’s innate purposes and desires, establishing morality as something external to the self – one of the key developments in modern

thought, as we have seen.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, this approach gives us theories which are basically designed to *prevent* self-realization.

As has been suggested, though, Aristotle's use of the *ergon* argument is much less straightforward than might be thought. This may mean that these common points against it do not hit quite the target they had in mind. To illustrate this and to make some judgments on the viability of Aristotelian virtue-ethics in modernity, I shall briefly run over part of the argument again, this time picking up some of the oddities missed out earlier (drawing upon a recent investigation into this issue by A.W.H. Adkins<sup>92</sup>).

The first point to note is that, taken in isolation, the *ergon* argument is *not* all that informative: "practically rational activity in accordance with the highest virtue" is actually rather bereft of specifics. This is particularly so if we consider that the definition of "virtue" we gave did not rely upon common modern ideas of "moral rectitude". It was more functional in nature: "an intelligent disposition for excellent performance of one's *ergon*".

Further, it must be noted that the invocation of "intelligence" in the definition is inferred from the *ergon*. It is not part of the definition of the word used by Aristotle for "virtue" generally. This word, *arete*, is usable with reference to anything that could be said to be "good", including inanimate objects (ships, as well as horses, for example). This explains why slaves and women are attributed their own set of virtues. Thus, there is nothing peculiar to self-realizers in the possession of "virtues": it is just that they are rationally self-applied.

Lacking much specific content from the *ergon* argument as it stands, we must work out where, exactly, the picture of the self-realized life presented here came from. Probably the most common answer to this has been to invoke the idea of an Aristotelian "metaphysical biology".<sup>93</sup> Basically, this would entail the claim that the types of roles and the concomitant behaviour exhibited in Aristotelian society are biologically natural. So, all citizens would perform self-realizing activities for the same, natural reasons that all squirrels, for example, eat, sleep, procreate and hibernate.

In the foregoing, much support was found for this view. We saw, for example, that the arguments for the subordination of women and slaves are based on a view of their naturally defective psychological make-up. This is why Aristotle *seemed* to suppose that their actual roles were the only possible roles. But, as Adkins points out, there is an ambiguity here when he talks of their virtues. All people, citizens, women, slaves, "should partake of [virtues] ... *but only in such manner and degree as is required by each for the fulfilment of their function*" (my emphasis). This pulls away from his other idea that people like women have their own distinct virtues. The implication, instead, is not that a woman, for example, is unable to partake of self-realizing virtues, but does not *need* to in order to fulfil her *ergon*.<sup>94</sup>

The suggestion carried with this, that the "metaphysical biology" is actually a spurious attempt to justify highly prejudicial *social* practices, is reinforced by the way Aristotle uses *ergon* more generally. As Adkins argues, this usage does *not* as a rule reflect biological beliefs, but customary social and political understandings of his time. He *thinks* that his

view of biology informs his account of the natural order of humanity. But the *ergon* arguments for the various types of person show specific cultural biases which, even on his own conceptual terms, Aristotle would have trouble in attributing to biology.

The biological approach seems to run aground, for example, in accounting for the exclusion of the non-leisured but non-enslaved men, due to their lack of wealth (rectifiable, as we have seen, by redistributing that wealth). Also, as an artefact of practical reason, the *polis* does not actually seem to be a product of nature anyway and this raises obvious questions about how its social structure can plausibly be depicted as “natural”.

Aristotle argues that because there are different forms of constitution there must be different kinds of good citizen. Being a good citizen is relative to one’s *ergon* in the constitution under which one happens to live.<sup>95</sup> This remark is an example of *ergon* being used specifically to denote a social role. But defenders of the metaphysical-biological interpretation can point out Aristotle’s point that “the good man” is distinct from “the good citizen”. This should be allowed: the excellent performance of one’s role in a corrupt tyranny is surely likely to run counter to human goodness.

But they can also point out that Aristotle distinguishes the best man from the best citizen, again trying to separate the *ergon* argument from social role-play.<sup>96</sup> This, of course, runs entirely counter to the conception outlined in this chapter and I find it enormously difficult to reconcile it with the main thrust of his theory. It separates the best man from the *zoon politikon* claim, which seemed to be at its heart. One wonders in vain how the best man can be anything other than the best citizen in the ideal Aristotelian world.<sup>97</sup>

The counter-claim in *The Politics* to contradict this, which underpins the Aristotelian conception as I have presented it and justifies self-realization as a political theory is: “the end of the best man and the best constitution must ... be the same.”<sup>98</sup> This helps to clinch the point made by Adkins against the “metaphysical biology-advocates” that, though biology might play some part in the assumption that humans have an *ergon*, “the identification of that *ergon* (by Aristotle) is derived from the presuppositions and attitudes of daily life in ancient Greece.”<sup>99</sup>

The upshot of this for our general project here seems to be as follows. We should not say that the *ergon*/role approach to self-realizationist theory is not a real option in modernity because it is based upon erroneous views about the nature of mankind. The way Aristotle’s theory actually works betrays the fact that the *erga* can be determined by social understandings, with no necessary connection to beliefs about how people are naturally constituted.

The theory itself is no longer a real option because we are not prepared to accept the repellantly oppressive social practices it embodies, all of which were necessary, as we saw, to preserve the self-realized life as he described it. More generally, a theory that defines self-realization in terms of any socially or culturally informed role looks to be too “conventionalist”. If, as Chapter 1 argued, the modern self is not wholly and helplessly immersed in its social context, the Aristotelian self is too closely equated uncritically with a position in such a context to qualify as “modern”.<sup>100</sup> It seems to inherit unwittingly its social role, with no possibility of revising or escaping it conceptualized in its life-possibilities.

These points might seem to kill off the possibility of using the Aristotelian conceptual structure in modernity. But there may be a way in which *some* form of the “social *ergon*” argument can work in modern theories of self-realization. For it does not immediately seem unacceptably contrary to the conditions of modernity to suggest the possibility of *autonomous* identification by people with certain social roles. These could also involve specific activities, whose excellent performance could be meaningfully thought of as “self-realization” (the development and expression of talents and identifying commitments one possesses as inhabitant of a social role). The role would be informed by modern beliefs and practices, which might screen out (for example) sexist assumptions as being based upon redundant pre-modern attitudes.

From these understandings, we could work out certain virtues by which to promote this self-realization-as-role-performance, just as Aristotle did. We may be able to use the concepts of life-planning and caring for the self, and use his ideas on education, friendship and politics in similar ways, too. These can attach to an *ergon*-type argument purged of its misogynistic, exclusionary assumptions. Indeed, the central Aristotelian notion of rational deliberation survives the passage into modern thinking, so much of what was said above concerning the self-realizing life-plan may be salvageable.

But this is to run far ahead of ourselves. At this stage, it is enough to suggest that some form of role-based virtue-ethics, possibly retaining some of Aristotle’s prescriptions for the good life, might actually be used in a modern theory. Interpreting the content of one’s good life from one’s social role as defined by a particular context remains an intelligible idea (or a real option) in modernity. In Chapters 5 and 6 we will see how we might use this result and address the possibilities mentioned in the last paragraph.

Clearly, we ought not to embrace an updated pre-modern approach just because it promises a substantive political theory for a change. It might still look uncomfortably disciplinarian and conventionalist for the modern self. But how, exactly, do modern political theories try to accommodate the idea of “free spontaneity” in the self-realizing life? For one answer to this, we turn to a thinker often held up as a spokesman for this ideal: John Stuart Mill.

## CHAPTER 3

### Mill: Self-Realization in Modernity

#### i Introduction

Given the initial distinction between pre-modern and modern thought, Chapter 1 suggested that the latter's commitment to choice – in self-definition and one's particular good – naturally inclined towards the familiar anti-perfectionist politics of liberal autonomy. But even if the modern subject is more amenable to the idea of “social role-play as self-realization”, as the last chapter proposed, it is hardly clear as yet that we can adopt anything like Aristotelian perfectionism instead. Can any approach other than anti-perfectionist liberalism sufficiently respect the freedom required by the individual in the determination of her good life?

John Stuart Mill is famed as a champion of diverse individuality and esteemed as a spokesman for the spontaneously creative modern free spirit. His whole world-view seems to offer the starkest contrast possible with Aristotle's and this, one might have thought, would have prevented him from even wanting any form of self-realizationist political theory. However, this chapter shows that the contrast is not as stark, that Mill does have a conception of self-realization with clear political implications to distinguish it from anti-perfectionism. Indeed, as the Millian conception is developed, certain significant resemblances to Aristotle's emerge.

The point of this is to see what a self-realizationist political theory which wants to come to terms with the conditions of modernity might look like: what kind of assumptions it has to base itself upon, what conceptual structure it requires and what prescriptions it can yield. The chapter constructs this picture methodically, identifying some of the practical implications of Mill's thought and defending some of his key concepts against criticism. His commitment to utilitarianism, which I shall argue is crucial to the defence of his self-realization theory, is deferred until the latter half of the exposition, though only to avoid confusing what is in some respects a novel reinterpretation of Mill at the outset. In conclusion, we shall see whether Mill can inform us of some of the limits to self-realizationist political theory in modernity.

We start, though, with an important point about Mill's conception of modernity that affects how we should interpret and use his political theory. In his 1831 essay on *The Spirit of the Age*, he describes British society (and, we assume, any “civilized” Western society) as being in “an age of transition”.<sup>1</sup> By this, he means that it had outgrown those old institutions, beliefs and practices which formed the pre-modern world view. There were no longer the “truths” on hand by which people formerly understood themselves and their world. Crucially, this lack is not seen as a permanent condition; people are searching for new truths to believe in and act by. Thus the age of transition, characterized by this search, is destined to give way to a new “natural” state, where new truths come to command the same degree of faithful acceptance as their predecessors.

Mill stuck to the belief that he was in an age of transition for the rest of his life – and

that means we have to interpret his thought as a response to society's transitional nature. This introduces a crucial (and rarely noticed) potential flexibility and transience on even his most fundamental theoretical and practical principles. The most famous of these, his principle of liberty, was designed precisely to reflect this, for in his *Autobiography* Mill explicitly identified it as the principle most appropriate for the transitional age.<sup>2</sup> Its primacy as *the* principle for the age lay in his belief that it was through free thinking, debate and action that the “new truths” – vital for the goal of human progress – would be reached and the age of transition thereby transcended.

This is a major reason why Mill is a liberal: it is the doctrine which allows this modern transitional age to be overcome. But does it mean that liberal tenets are *only* suitable for this age? This is clearly not what he intends; it seems that much of his work should be interpreted as his own contribution to the debate about the content of the “new truths”. It may be that the principle of liberty when concerned with *freedom of speech* is essentially transient, (of course, Mill argues that free debate over such matters must continue to stop these truths from becoming simple-minded dogmas, but clearly the argument for free speech is altered and weakened in the post-transition age<sup>3</sup>).

But when the principle turns to *freedom as individuality* – the central concern of this chapter – there seems to be no such equivocation. As we shall see, Mill tells his readers at least something about what the good life *is*. He would see further argument about it as warranted only to keep this particular truth “alive”.

So he is consciously moving on from any position that says nothing about the questions formerly answered by pre-modern world views on the good life. However, he does not pretend he has all the answers for the new natural state. Some of his truths he believes in unswervingly, but other recommendations – particularly concerning political institutions – he holds to be temporary, promoting a gradual evolution out of the age of transition and eventually – perhaps – replaceable. In the conclusion, we shall see where he is at his least certain: on the form that full self-realizing society should take. But his whole theory should be understood as a combination of confident assertions about how certain things are and should be, and temporary suggestions to cope with the vagaries of transition.

This suggests a different way of interpreting the characteristics of modern thought from that offered in Chapter 1. First, by suggesting that the vacuum in understanding left by the collapse of pre-modern world-views is only temporary, the argument for individual choice in formulating the good life changes. Choice is now primarily justified as the means to discover the new ways of good living. It is not presented as something that is and always will be the good life's *only* generally identifiable characteristic.

Second, by virtue of this, modern thought may itself try to reach for the new truths. If it does this, then perhaps it is not as disabled from tackling questions of the good life as the familiar argument laid out in Chapter 1 commonly leads us to believe. Consequently, it does not rule out in advance the possibility of a return to a substantive world-view sustained by the kind of faith found in pre-modern thought. We are not necessarily stuck in the “modern condition” for evermore.

Whether this indicates the best way to treat the condition of modernity will be for this

and subsequent chapters to decide.

## ii A Substantive Claim About Human Nature

It is, of course, pretty unconventional to describe Mill as a proponent of a conception of self-realization. He is best known for his none-too-obviously compatible commitments to the principles of liberty and utility. This section will offer some reasons why these might be more accurately thought of as constituents of a self-realizationist theory.

It was from Benthamite utilitarianism that Mill's intellectual development progressed and the theory examined here grew as his critical reaction to it. Among the many charges he was to level against his former mentor in "Bentham", Mill complained of his depressingly banal, one-sided conception of human nature. Whereas Bentham notoriously saw humans as motivated by undifferentiated notions of the "pleasure" and "pain" which were to be derived from both selfish and sympathetic (or antipathetic) actions, Mill believed that this unduly neglected the pursuit of other ends, including "perfection" in its own right. He affirmed the possibility that motivations and affections could be trained in "self-culture".<sup>4</sup> Feeling that Bentham had been blind to the extent of possible human diversity, he sought a more refined moral outlook which enriched the account of human nature and potential.

This quest began in the aftermath of the mental breakdown he suffered early in life.<sup>5</sup> The reading of Romantic poetry (Wordsworth and Coleridge in particular) stimulated an appreciation of the role played by feeling and emotion in the development of a good life. Here was a cornerstone of "aesthetic individualism": the conception of the good life as akin to a work of art, something beautiful and emotionally satisfying. Mill came to appreciate that people were more than just beings who experienced pleasure and pain, for feelings stretched beyond such narrow boundaries.

His ideas on this seemed to have been crystallized through acquaintance with the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose *The Spheres and Duties of Government* was to provide the epigram to *On Liberty*. He embraced its stress on "the absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity",<sup>6</sup> finding his own ideas neatly encapsulated in the notion of the richly developing, rounded personality Humboldt urged upon his readers as the most worthy character-ideal. Rather than eschewing any such preference, then, Mill shared this desire to promote a particular ideal. Further, it is misleading to think that this simply entailed a statement of what Mill thought was most *choiceworthy* – and herein lies the warrant for attributing to him a theory of self-realization.

The key lies in the *assumed facts*, derived from the Romantic, Humboldtian influences, which Mill proclaims about human nature. All substantive political theories rest upon a particular conception of human nature, of course: nothing remarkable about that. But in Mill's case these facts work to transform the standard interpretation of his theory. It shifts from an advocacy of freedom and liberal autonomy, resistant to the adoption of a particular character-ideal, to an advocacy of self-realization as we defined in Chapter 1: the development and expression of potentials and powers in a harmonized personality. These facts also form the core of the "new truth" as he sees it, the implications of which

should move people beyond the age of transition.

The following, rather innocuous paragraph from *On Liberty* captures his main claim. Human nature, he argues:

*is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing.*<sup>7</sup>

Note how this tree metaphor presents us with a specific characterization of human nature. Firstly, by rejecting the idea that human nature is like “a machine to be built after a model”, Mill attacks that part of his Benthamite inheritance which held that a person was akin to a *tabula rasa*, trainable to accept any particular pursuit as constitutive of his own happiness and bereft of input from his own, inner feelings.<sup>8</sup> It affirms the idea of an inner content to the self, the material that provides the basis for any conception of self-realization. But there is more to it than that.

Now, as is well known, the thrust of Mill’s position is that “the only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs”,<sup>9</sup>: a demand for individual autonomy in how one leads life. But the above statement implicitly insists that autonomous people do not *choose* whether or not to pursue full, all-round development. It is *in their nature* to grow in this way (our nature “requires” us to “grow and develop on all sides”). Insofar as “our own good” is predetermined by our nature, this good does not lie in leading a narrow or one-sided lifestyle.

The tree metaphor can only be pushed so far without misleading us as to what Mill thought. For example, the fact that the tree grows according to a precise genetic pattern, variations in final form due only to geographical conditions or mutation (neither of these being induced by the tree itself), means that the metaphor would allow no room for choice at all in determining the particular shape of the fully-developed self. Mill is not committed to such a strict (and wholly implausible) view, as we shall see. The idea of all-round development as it stands here is fully compatible with the possibility that there could be many different forms which could realize this all-roundness. As will be argued, this is the crux of Mill’s theory of individuality.

But the point remains: he believes that fully autonomous people (i.e. those with the right rational capacities to choose properly, his precondition of the theory’s applicability) will choose to develop in a particular way that conforms to the general categorization of “self-realization” offered in this thesis. The Humboldtian character-ideal is not one that can be simply chosen or rejected: a proposition in which Mill wishes us to have post-transitional faith.

### **iii Further Qualifications to the Role of Autonomy**

Having seen that Mill does not think that an autonomous person will choose to live anything other than a flourishing, all-round life, we ought now to note that Mill imposed some strict limits on the possibility of human choice from a rather different direction.

These come in his most thorough attempt to analyze the concept of liberty, in Book Six, Chapter 2 of *A System of Logic*. Here, as Geoff Smith has amply demonstrated, Mill appears to be so confused about the concept of liberty that it seems impossible to make clear sense of his theory as a whole.<sup>10</sup> This study cannot digress too much to follow what are nevertheless important interpretive issues, but one or two points are worth extracting for our purposes.

Smith points out that Mill wants to preserve the possibility of human liberty in the face of another truth, as he accepted it: that of philosophical determinism. Particularly concerned to reject the fatalist political consequences of Robert Owen's interpretation of the latter, Mill claimed that a person:

*has, to a certain extent, a power to alter his character. Its being, in the ultimate resort, formed for him, is not inconsistent with its being, in part, formed by him as one of the intermediate agents. His character is formed by his circumstances (including among these his particular organisation); but his own desire to mould it in a particular way is one of these circumstances, and by no means one of the least influential.*<sup>11</sup>

This re-affirms the idea of a given set of dispositions (the "encumbered self" which any conception of self-realization requires as its starting-point), but it has more to tell us about Mill's theory.

First, we have the concept of "self-alteration". For Mill, our nature leads us to develop in a specific way but – and here is a way of expressing how the tree metaphor breaks down – we have *some* power to decide whether to follow its dictates, or to amend them. It is not a mass of irresistible impulses; we can "intervene" in our nature. Excepting abnormal cases, Mill argues that no one motive holds such sway over a person that it is immune from the influence of any other motive. This point can be put in Harry Frankfurt's terminology from Chapter 1: the impulse to self-alter is a second-order reflection on our first-order desires, as self-alteration is an expression of our autonomy. But we need not assume that it is the only second-order commitment one can have (i.e. that the only thing an autonomous person can do is self-alter); one could, for example, autonomously affirm one's first-order make-up as it stands.

To explain Mill's idea that self-realization is "in our nature" and therefore most likely to prevail, we have to locate the desire for self-realization fairly deeply down the orders of desire. The questions we need to ask now are: what is the relationship between this desire and self-alteration? Do we self-alter only to resist the natural inclination to self-realize, or can self-alteration play a positive role in self-realization?

We also need to think about the consequences of the claim in Mill's thought, pointed out by Smith, that the very desire to self-alter is *not* self-induced, but generated by a particular set of *external* conditions (as we shall see, it is this claim that moves the whole discussion fully into the realm of social and political theory).<sup>12</sup> In what follows, I attempt to address these issues in a way designed to bring consistency to Mill's beliefs about self-realization and autonomy.

#### iv Character and Custom

Mill applies the liberty principle – and hence the theory of self-realization – to people who have reached “the maturity of their faculties.”<sup>13</sup> These are the faculties which can be exercised by autonomous, choosing agents: “perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity and ... moral preference.”<sup>14</sup> Maturity is not equated with the actual exercise of these faculties, but only with the capacity to do so. But Mill says that those who can but do not so act lack a *character*; the only faculty they actually *need* for their type of life is “the ape-like one of imitation.” Let us look at this idea of “character”, for this identifies the Millian self-realizer.

A person has a character when his “desires and impulses are his own – are the expressions of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own culture.”<sup>15</sup> It is noteworthy how the ownership of the person’s desires and impulses is attributed not to a claim that he has chosen them so much as that they “are expressions of his nature”. This supports the Frankfurtian analysis of autonomous choice as a second-order identification with components of the first-order level. The characterless person does not make this second-order identification, unreflectively following first-order desires instead.

Note, too, that Mill says someone who has a character has had his nature “developed and modified by his culture”. His desires and dispositions could therefore be as much a product of social forces as they are a part of his intrinsic make-up. Given the claim that the initial desire for self-alteration has to be kindled externally, the idea of the socially-dependent character has clear political implications. Here is the crux of his fears about “the despotism of custom” and the tyranny of the majority, the major social ills he identified in the modern age of transition. In his time:

*everyone lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship ... I do not mean that they choose what is customary in preference to what suits their own inclination. It does not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary. Thus the mind is bowed to the yoke ...*<sup>16</sup>

He believed passionately that the habituated manner in which beliefs and customs (many of them banal and vulgar to Mill’s mind) was simply not conducive to encouraging self-alteration. There was a pressure to conform to a certain pattern of thinking and living, which was such that “society (had) fairly got the better of individuality”. The modern era had “levelled” society, by destroying the traditional hierarchical divisions, leaving nothing but individuals *qua* individuals. This had simply made the propagation of uniform beliefs and attitudes all the easier, producing a tyranny of the mind much more insidious than any naked, physical oppression by the state. People were oppressed without really appreciating the fact any longer. Because society’s instant reaction to anyone breaking this mould was hostile, people had become used to adopting its standards, thinking nothing of it but losing their autonomy and the chance for self-realization in the process.

As Smith has stressed, a dispositional or negative conception of freedom (the conception commonly attributed to a liberal theory like Mill’s) entirely fails to capture his

conviction that this social conformity was tantamount to unfreedom.<sup>17</sup> It would identify unfreedom only if someone wished she had the capacity for autonomy but was prevented from acquiring it. Mill, on the other hand, believes people to be unfree even when they do not have the wish and are blissfully unaware of any constraints on autonomy.

So Mill thinks that the “free person” will be able to exercise the autonomy she necessarily desires. He also thinks that the autonomous person will naturally choose a self-realizing lifestyle. But further, as Smith points out, Mill believes that the desire for autonomy becomes compressed with the desire to self-alter; a conflation which also leads us to a positive conception of freedom.<sup>18</sup> Given this conceptual tangle, we need an account of how, exactly, “self-alteration” figures in “being autonomous” and how these two relate to “self-realization”.

First, though, we must consider whether the equation of freedom and what is, in effect, a particular character ideal is really in keeping with the choice, heteronomy and diversity which Mill himself thinks is demanded in modernity. Does this not involve the kind of “real self” hypothesis which, as I argued in Chapter 1, is extremely difficult to hold given modernity’s fundamental presumptions? We can already see how Mill’s theory differs in significant respects from the typical structure of modern thought discussed earlier – but the difference here threatens to damage its plausibility.

An equation of autonomy and a natural desire for self-realization would obviously rule out the possibility of the truly autonomous agent simply not choosing to pursue self-realization. But Mill could rebut this by asserting that the desire for self-realization can be overridden, as he thinks any desire can. We have seen him grant a person some power to intervene in and alter his own natural constitution and direction of development. This power works in the same way that a driver can intervene in the “natural” direction of a car hurtling downhill by braking and then reversing. If there is no such intervention, then the car’s movement remains destined to proceed in a very specific way.

So we should not treat the claim that the human organism is naturally predisposed to self-realization as meaning that this predisposition must always predominate. We should appreciate, instead, that this is a factual claim, an empirical observation of a general tendency that does not always hold, rather than being either an empirical rule with no exceptions, or a logical/conceptual definition. That means the Millian definition of autonomy ought to resist a collapse into “self-realization”, a point we can account for by theorizing self-alteration as the operation by which we can *restrain* self-realizing impulses.

This helps us to untie the conceptual knot identified above and suggests the resources Mill could offer to avoid the charge that he is committed to an overly tight character-ideal in the manner of “real-self” theories. Another way to deflect such an attack can focus on his notion of the self-realizing lifestyle. How tightly is the latter defined on Millian terms? It will be recalled that Chapter 1 conceptualized the “raw material” of self-realization in terms of potentials, dispositions and powers. Now, whereas in Aristotelian self-realization these terms are given concrete content according to the social role possessed by the agent in question, Millian self-realization does not start with predetermined content in this form.

Take, for example, a person whose self-realization lies in being a good athlete. It is very plausible to suggest that the kinds of potentials and powers that go to make up a good athlete – to reach a certain level of fitness, agility with sharp reflexes and sense of timing – could be equally well-developed in a totally different sphere of activity, such as soldiering. A person fitting this description was thus, prior to the start of self-realizing development, a potentially good soldier as well as a potentially good sportsman.

Obviously, then, the idea of possessing a certain set of potentials and dispositions in the Millian theory does not mean that their realization can only end in the development of one given set of powers in one type of life. Because the initial base is so formless, the fullness of development that self-realization requires could be pursued in any one of a possibly very extensive set of life-plans. In marked contrast with the Aristotelian conception, Mill's liberal theory of self-realization does not propose that the end it seeks can only be manifest in one specific way of living.

The danger with a response along these lines is that self-realization becomes ever more vague in definition, so that we end up with nothing to rule out its conceptual equation with simply "what one happens to choose". The following example shows how this can be avoided. The dispositions of a potentially brilliant polymath are not going to receive adequate expression if she is stuck working on a factory line all the time. Mill would call it unfreedom if she wanted to pursue a lifestyle that would be self-realizing but was prevented from doing so by whatever constraint tied her to activities like the factory job (be it governmental dictate, economic necessity or social pressure). It would also be unfreedom if the role of factory-worker had become "internalized", accepted blindly without autonomous affirmation, overriding the desires for self-alteration and realization.

But what if she chose her role autonomously? More generally, can people freely choose non-self-realizationist lifestyles consistently according to Mill's thought? Where he addresses this problem (in *Utilitarianism* for example), he describes such non-developmental choices in terms of weakness of the will.<sup>19</sup> This indicates that the standards which specify what counts as self-realizing have to be independent of what people choose.

To make the question a little more testing, let us now assume that, in the factory example, the work does develop some skills; it is not wholly monotonous and unchallenging. We have to ask of the Millian theory: are we able to tell the difference between a self-realizing life and one of non-self-realizing development? Does "all-roundness", for example, mean anything specific, or is it to be understood fairly loosely? Are there any independent criteria to help us decide, or is this something that the liberal will leave up to the individual's choice (rendering a liberal theory of self-realization over and above that of autonomy superfluous)?

It is in the Humboldtian goal upon which Mill bases his theory that these independent criteria are to be found: "the end of man ... is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole."<sup>20</sup> Thus, the self-realized end for man involves the "highest and most harmonious" development to "a complete and consistent whole". "All-roundness" therefore *is* to be taken almost literally.

These sound tough requirements indeed and it may be argued that such stringency

makes them undesirable. They seem to be advocating a fullness in development which, even if it were humanly possible, may lead to a peculiarly disjointed kind of life. Consider, for example, a person whose dispositions and powers make him a potentially good author, singer, dancer, concert pianist, husband, business associate and social worker. Trying to develop all of these potentials to their full is doubtless impossible; no one will have that kind of time, let alone the order of ability, to bring each to full realization.

But even if the person tried to do what he could in as many fields as possible, he would be leading a life that would be forever fragmented, constantly shifting between the different spheres. Moreover, he would be spreading his energies so thinly that he would be at best a “jack-of-all-trades and master of none”. He would not be able to pursue excellence in one or two spheres, since this would require almost exclusive attention to these spheres. Unlike Aristotelian self-realization, which is concerned with the development and excellent exercise of skills appropriate to a particular social role, Millian self-realization would seem to resist being constrained thus. It thus appears to be a bar to and not the promoter of excellence in realized capacities.

Certainly, Mill would want to avoid this, not least because it is excellence that produces the crucial dynamic for human progress. However, only the “complete” element of the highest/most harmonious, complete/consistent Humboldtian couplets would seem to entail fullness in this sense. Such fullness can be conceptually negated by the harmonious/consistency requirements, which could be understood as seeking the avoidance of a disjointed “jack-of-all-trades” lifestyle. They do not suffice to characterize the self-realized life, for one’s existence could be harmonious with its elements consistently cohering with little or no active development and expression. The “highest” requirement emphasizes the pursuit of relative excellence, pushing one to develop as much as possible within the terms of the other elements. The “complete” element, while not plausibly requiring full development of everything we potentially are, retains the sense that self-realization *is* something that can only be successfully pursued in more than one direction, granting that powers and potentials are held to lie in more than one sphere of existence.

So Mill’s conception of self-realization can be described more tightly than “any lifestyle we happen to choose”. The highest/most harmonious, complete/consistent requirements should still be left deliberately vague, for it remains up to the individual to choose which way of living appropriate to herself best meets these requirements.<sup>21</sup> This is an important corollary of autonomy’s centrality in self-realization. People are “characterless” without it, unable to guarantee that it is *their* self that is being realized. Even with the Humboldtian specifications outlined, autonomy is still the main determining factor in the particular shape of the self-realized character. In picking certain identifying commitments, the person chooses which particular way of self-realization she finds most congenial, emphasizing her individuality.

It is appropriate to pause and consider the idea of “individuality” in Mill at this point. For it is easy to neglect the importance of social context to his theory – as noted in his definition of character “developed and modified” by that context. Not only is a particular

sort of environment necessary to stimulate the initial self-altering desires, but it is plausible to suggest that the kind of self-realizing lifestyles chosen could draw upon some of the particular ways of life on hand in social traditions. Now, this obviously appears to run counter to Mill's famous animus against his own society which has prompted a common criticism of him as being "anti-social" in his conception of individuality. To explain the above suggestion, then, it is worth examining this criticism, articulated again recently by John Gray.

Gray argues that "[t]he man who accepts the way of life in which he was born as an inheritance to be explored and enjoyed, and who has no interest in trying out alternatives cannot for Mill exhibit individuality."<sup>22</sup> This is highly misleading. Mill is *not* saying that pursuit of what is customary *per se* is non-autonomous and non self-realizing. There is no "modernist prejudice" against "traditional conduct" which holds the latter to be "incapable of embodying or expressing individuality". For example, *On Liberty* stresses the absurdity of pretending that "people ought to live as if nothing had been known in the world before they came into it"; there is value in the "traditions and customs of other people" as they are "to a certain extent, evidence of what their experience has taught them."<sup>23</sup>

Further, Mill says it is quite possible that customs can be "both good as customs and suitable to [the individual]"; all he requires is that people do not do the customary thing simply because it is the custom.<sup>24</sup> What individuals should do is to use and interpret that experience in their own way, to find out what is valuable and applicable in it, what is inappropriate, wrong or in need of reinterpretation.

This sifting of experience, customs, social norms and values is carried out by that set of faculties Mill identified as the one used when a life-plan is chosen. Gray says that these "cultural traditions, or established forms of life, contribute greatly to the variety of experience among us. They ought to be cherished by all humanists and liberals."<sup>25</sup> Maybe so – and this is exactly what Mill caters for. Given what he says about the indispensability of social context to selfhood, it would be surprising if he felt that *none* of them were to be appropriate for one's mode of living. That he has nothing against custom *per se* is captured by the claim that people should seek "uncustomary things in order that it may in time appear which of these are fit to be converted into customs."<sup>26</sup> This clearly ties in with the idea of the age of transition's search for "new truths". The point is: people do not *have* to lead the existing traditional lifestyles, particularly if these are stiflingly conformist.

Mill would recognize that there is more to the individual than the social side. A life of Millian self-realization would seek to promote the other dimensions to its existence just as much as it could affirm the individual's unique nature. But to enable this to flourish and to give him the chance to express for himself his identification with his culture, a social and political condition which does not exercise conformist pressure is absolutely vital. If Gray is trying to defend the value of traditions in lifestyles in a way distinct from Mill, it would appear that his account would have to suppress the uniquely individual part of the self's identity, conservatively equating the latter *wholly* with "cultural artefacts" instead. This, of course, was basically how we defined the *pre-modern* self in Chapter 1. To the extent that

my thesis on modernity and the self is valid, Gray's position has to be less plausible than Mill's on any interpretation, since Mill at least attempts to take the modern condition into account.

Mill's liberal theory of self-realization is a poor target for those who wish to criticize liberalism as being committed to an anti-social atomistic individualism. His definition of character explicitly roots that individuality in a social context – a conception of the partially socially situated self, in effect, as encountered in Chapter 1. Thus, it is clear that society could be as likely a contributor to the identifying characteristics of the autonomous life as the individual's unique or peculiar traits.

We can now develop some of the political implications of Mill's conception and, in the next section, we can bring back into play the idea of self-alteration.

### v Experiments in Living

Mill's idea of "experiments-in-living" is the key element in his idea of self-realization as a political theory.<sup>27</sup> On the face of it, the idea simply seems to be another way of couching the familiar liberal politics of autonomy. But once it is placed alongside other elements of Mill's theory and we consider how it might work in practice, differences between this form of politics and Mill's self-realizationist politics begin to show.

The context of the "despotism of custom" must be borne in mind when we consider his presentation of the idea. Such is the deadening oppression of this context that it appears something pretty extraordinary would be required to break it and promote individuality. Fortunately, Mill thinks something pretty extraordinary is at hand: the eccentric genius with an "energetic character", prepared to defy monolithically conformist social opinion and live an alternative way of life.

Not the least extraordinary thing about this person is that he appears to have undertaken autonomous action in an environment that does not look conducive to encouraging this – an apparent counterexample to disprove the idea that self-altering desires have to be externally stimulated. To avoid inconsistency, we should present Mill's point as only a generalization as well, breakable by "extraordinary" people, rather than a rigid ethological law.<sup>28</sup> However they come about, Mill believes they exist and, as far as he is concerned, they are humanity's salvation.

The argument for eccentricity in the self-realizing life is, understandably, often misinterpreted as advocating that self-realizationists need to be unconventional in a "batty" way. This forgets the fact that what is deemed to be eccentric is judged according to the *relative* standards of normality in a specific context. Anything deviating from the rigid conformism Mill perceived in his society would doubtless be regarded as eccentric, whereas the same behaviour today might well be regarded as quite normal. Particularly given the point that self-realizationists do not have to reject social norms and customs, we certainly do not need to interpret the insistence on eccentricity as an argument for a society of whimsically bizarre "odd-balls".

Whatever, the "eccentric" self-realizationists are distinguished by the fact that they undertake experiments-in-living. In rejecting custom and convention for their own sakes,

they assess their own desires, potentials and powers and experiment with ways of life in order to find the one that most satisfactorily leads them towards their self-realization. In fact, Mill has his own conception of life-planning.<sup>29</sup> In it, a person uses his autonomous, rational choice to formulate an appropriate lifestyle and work out a life-plan that allows this to flourish. But, again, what distinguishes Millian life-planning from its Aristotelian predecessor is that it lacks what the latter provided: an objective good for man grounded in location in distinctive social roles, which entailed no need to experiment to find suitable lifestyles; these were on hand already.

Before they can plan for a particular mode of living, Millian subjects must work out for themselves what mode to adopt. Experimenting-in-living develops people's capacity for choice (helping them to become better choosers and therefore choosers of the better) and formulating their own approach to meeting the standards that define the self-realized life (if that is the kind of life they wish to pursue).

Here is where we might fit "self-alteration" into the story. Previously, we used the idea to explain the possibility of resisting the natural autonomous tendency to self-realize. But given the assumption of this tendency and the compression of the desires for autonomy and self-alteration in *A System of Logic*, we need to describe a *positive* role for self-alteration in self-realization. By "experimenting", one would indeed be re-evaluating and reshaping one's commitments, perhaps restraining some desires for the sake of others in search of the rounded Humboldtian character. Self-alteration is the process employed in the experiments. So, given the compression of autonomy and self-altering desires, one presumes Mill believes that autonomous people generally want to experiment-in-living.

It is now pertinent to wonder whether experimenting-in-living is a good way of living. John Gray has objected that there are many desirable forms of life which are incompatible with the attitude of the experimenter. These demand a level of commitment that cannot be reconciled with a detached "try-it-and-see" approach to living. But the idea of experiments in living does not have to be understood as the living of one's *whole* life as a scientist testing out various styles of living out of intellectual curiosity alone. Experimenting-in-living does not *constitute* one's life-plan. The concept is meant only to convey the idea that the way of life most appropriate to each individual is not necessarily readily at hand, but has to be worked out by that person.

As Gray himself observes, our identities are "ramshackle and contingent affairs, the upshot of chance as much as of natural endowment and choice."<sup>30</sup> Indeed so – and it is precisely because of the amorphous, messy nature of our identities that we need to experiment when working out what ways of life best harmonize them and express our deepest commitments. It seems most faithful to Mill's ideas – and is anyway most plausible – to argue that the complex desires and commitments of the self do not automatically fall into a complete and consistent identity (it would be an extraordinary coincidence if a partially socially situated self could come ready-equipped with a completely harmonious set of desires and commitments, with individual and social traits fitting neatly together).

Self-alteration comes hand-in-hand with autonomy because of the need to form a

coherent identity (identifying what we want to do and what matters to us in life) out of this “ramshackle” raw material. The experiments’ intended result is a harmoniously reordered identity, no longer quite so ramshackle and hence more predictable, less perturbingly contradictory in content and more amenable to yielding happiness (the significance of this final point will be explored in the next section).

Once the most fulfilling ways have been discovered, the experimenting is at an end, insofar as the solution continues to meet the individual’s requirements for a good life. Thus, there is no contradiction between experiments in living and a good life of deep commitment, since the former is a thesis on how to find the good life, not how to live it. It is not an affirmation, for example, of Alasdair MacIntyre’s claim that the good life is one spent in search of the good life.<sup>31</sup> This is just as well. It is hard to see why a life comprised of a *search* for the good life that had as yet no prospect of a conclusion, for example, would necessarily be “good” itself. The possibility of an interminable search is more likely to lead to a life of frustration and disillusionment.

Gray’s critique latches on to an important general truth which the “expressive” element of the concept of self-realization accepts: a good life *is* usually led according to some deep commitment, because a life based upon more superficial or less significant (for us) commitments is obviously more vulnerable to yielding a sense of dissatisfaction, or pointlessness (i.e. narcissism and/or nihilism). Experiments-in-living are concerned with finding the best sort of commitment for the individual, by accommodating the likelihood that this kind of life has to be discovered and moulded by and for oneself.

The arguments from section {iv} should also serve to rebut Gray’s other complaint that “the idea of an experiment in living is a rationalistic fiction which ... does not acknowledge the dependence of personal individuality and human flourishing on a cultural tradition.”<sup>32</sup> Not only is it not this, but it seeks to ensure that individuals do not end up simply as the hapless inheritors of traditional identities. This is the upshot of the alternative Gray is implicitly putting forward. Given Mill’s appraisal of how dire traditions and customs were when assimilated blindly, it is a position that Millian self-realization rightly avoids.

Where does politics come into experiments-in-living? Mill’s principle of liberty is designed to facilitate the experiments by limiting legitimate political interference in the lives of individuals to the prevention of acts which harms the interests of others. By allowing non-harmful experiments, Mill hopes the liberty principle will promote examples of diverse, self-realizing lifestyles for the conformist “dullards” to follow, eventually leading them to break with their own monotonous way of life. This is not to countenance a form of “hero-worship”; the self-realizationists only “point out the way” for others to follow. Mill wants to qualify his otherwise low opinion of the masses by noting their ability to embrace “wise and noble things” once shown them.<sup>33</sup>

Mill has often been castigated as an elitist, in the prominence he gives to a certain class of people above the “ordinary mass” of humanity (in practice the Victorian bourgeoisie, according to some of his critics<sup>34</sup>). We can see why because of the way he places virtually complete faith in this small class of people who point the way to the good life. If we grant that this elite will typically experiment to find the most suitable form of self-realizing

lifestyle, then “self-realization” is the example they are to set.

But this is not an elitist theory of self-realization in the same way that Aristotle’s was, because the possibility of self-realization is not in principle restricted to one class of people alone. All we have is the idea that, for the age of transition, one requires a class of self-realizers “doing their own thing” in order to stimulate the desire in everyone to do likewise. Millian self-realization does not require a *permanently* class-divided society (we shall later deal with other considerations in this charge of elitism).

To summarize, we can think of “experiments-in-living” as the activity that capable autonomous people generally undertake in search of the good life and it is from an empirical generalization on Mill’s part that we assume the outcome of experimenting will generally (but not always, necessarily) be some form of self-realization. But the liberty principle is not the only political consideration in facilitating experiments. Here we shall consider two others: {a} education for the young; {b} provision of an appropriate external environment for the adult. Both of these can accommodate a positive role for the state in their promotion.

{a} *education*: in his early essay on *Coleridge*, Mill claimed that education should:

*train the human being in the habit, and thence the power, of subordinating his personal aims and impulses to what [are] considered the ends of society; of adhering, against all temptation, to the course of conduct which those ends prescribed ...*<sup>35</sup>

On the face of it, this looks like an anti-libertarian idea of education as a “restraining discipline,” the kind of principle we might expect Mill to modify or reject altogether once the principle of liberty comes to dominate his thinking. Now, section {vi} will indicate the extent to which Mill retained the idea of “securing” individuals to their society, rather than left to roam free of its norms. But the gist of this statement can be preserved and cast in a more libertarian light, if we consider society’s “ends” to be concerned to facilitate self-realizing experiments-in-living. For Mill, education helps to equip people with the skills for successful experimenting and life-planning.

Unsurprisingly, he was much impressed by Humboldt’s concept of *Bildung*, the process of educating a person towards fully rounded lifestyles. Mill shared its belief that the point of education was to encourage the development of potentials in a wide variety of disciplines: teach the pupil a large number of subjects and he will develop in a large number of different directions.<sup>36</sup> Given the idea that the external environment stimulates whatever taste for development one may have, the educational institutions through which people pass are highly influential. As their youngest years are their most formative, it is the character of the social environment in childhood that is likely to have the deepest influence on the kind of personalities they come to have through life.

Mill stresses that the state must guarantee elementary education (for here the market is likely to fail). He is adamant, though, that the state should not impose a uniform curriculum because of the danger that this would stifle diversity (we shall develop this point later). This is why he required different types of school: state, private and church. The state institutions were to provide a standard of excellence that others had to follow,

but they were not there to provide a detailed blueprint for the running of a school; that was to be left to individual variation.<sup>37</sup>

But he does feel that certain skills should be developed in whatever is taught and these are, basically, the discriminatory mental faculties involved in autonomous self-alteration. They are to be tested by public examination for all children, a very extensive exercise given the number of subjects one can plausibly attribute to the ideal Millian curriculum. English language and literature, classical literature, one or two foreign languages, natural sciences, religious knowledge, political theory and possibly political economy (given its prominence in Mill's own education) all feature in his remarks on education.<sup>38</sup>

The acquaintance with different value-based theories in religious and political instruction for example, where no "right-or-wrong" answers can be given, is noteworthy: children are taught about the variety of things they might believe, not what they must believe.<sup>39</sup> By avoiding pure indoctrination in education, children eventually come to appreciate that questions of value are ultimately for them to answer. This is all part of an education that, "in making human beings other than machines ... makes them claim to have control of their own actions" so that they will "acquire the appetite for freedom",<sup>40</sup> – a by-product of which, as we know, is the promotion of general human progress, to move beyond the age of transition.

It is highly significant that Mill does not think that school is a place for vocational training "[t]he empirical knowledge which the world demands, which is the stock-in-trade of money-getting life, we would leave the world to provide for itself".<sup>41</sup> In general, the job market itself provides the best source for such training. But, more pertinently, with its wide-ranging intellectual disciplines the ideal school curriculum is obviously not geared to manufacturing workers for the capitalist labour force, as left-wing critics sometimes charge of liberal education. Mill does not want people simply to be "fitted" to the prevalent social requirements – these, of course, are regarded with deep suspicion.<sup>42</sup>

The all-round education offered is much more obviously geared to promote the flourishing of the all-round development towards which Mill believes autonomous people naturally tend. By exposing children to all-round activities, it may encourage them to self-realize later in life. Insofar as the state assumes some responsibility for the curriculum, this indicates a specific self-realizationist politics. But particularly given the de-emphasis on factual instruction, Millian education looks to be less disciplinarian than the Aristotelian variant. It is thus less likely to mould people rigidly into self-realizers, as the latter seemed to do, which would obviously prejudice the possibility of an autonomous move away from self-realization.

Mill shares Aristotle's belief that education is a preparation only; the skills are only fully learned when they are exercised in adult life.<sup>43</sup> As we shall see later, he readily talks of "educational experiences" beyond formal instruction. But we turn now to the way in which an environment which allows people to exploit the dispositions instilled in education might be provided.

{b} *the external environment of self-realization*: the social and political import of a commitment to self-realization is brought in by Mill's use of another Humboldtian claim:

“[e]ven the most free and self-reliant of men is hindered in his development when set in a monotonous situation”. Now, Mill primarily uses it to contrast different sorts of lifestyle, for example rural and urban, such that there should be a variety of lifestyles within one society.<sup>44</sup> But clearly the quote directs us to the idea that an individual should move amongst different spheres of activity during the course of his life.

We have seen the variegated curriculum equipping people with the taste – and hopefully the requisite skills – for a variety of activities in a life-plan. The variety of types of school backs up Mill’s own interpretation of his principle in providing for variety *among* lifestyles. One interesting consequence of the variety-of-situations stipulation here is that, not only should there be state schools to provide tuition where required but also that the state should also actively support the private sector where required. Schools operating for profit in the marketplace were necessarily exposed to the winds of fortune and Mill was prepared to countenance state aid to ensure their survival, precisely because of the alternative “situation” they offered.<sup>45</sup>

This policy recommendation is usefully described as an element of the politics of “liberal individuality” rather than simply the “politics of freedom”, which is often more suggestive of a *laissez-faire* approach that justifies the disappearance of any private or church schools, say, through market forces as the result of free choices in what people demand and supply. Mill’s position can easily be used to justify state backing for a plurality of “alternative situations” in civil society: to guarantee, for example, a variety of churches, or newspapers, or youth organizations. The state is to act as the “central depository, and active circulator and diffuser” of the results of experiments-in-living in various situations. How Mill intended this claim to be interpreted is ambiguous. But the argument for its active support for a plurality of organizations and clubs in civil society that it deems worthy is one way of translating this into practice.<sup>46</sup>

Mill famously doubts the efficacy of state intervention in most spheres of activity, opting in general for a relatively minimal state. This might make one fairly suspicious of an attempt to invoke the state to any great degree when describing his political thought. Leaving aside the point (which is important nonetheless) that Mill stresses the crucial role of local government to avoid potentially authoritarian centralization in any political activity,<sup>47</sup> his position is a consequentialist one only. His “minimal-statism”, as we might call it, does not *necessarily* hold in all situations. Only because of his beliefs concerning the sub-optimal consequences about state activity does it apply in what he writes.<sup>48</sup>

When one is trying to encourage autonomous development, it is obvious that state activity in *directing* people’s lives is not generally going to produce the most desirable consequences. But, as we have seen, the state steps in when market failure deprives people of what they need for autonomy. Now, particularly given his extremely low opinion of the masses’ mental abilities in his time, any empirical assumption about the sagacity of leaving people alone is always going to look dubious. Might it not be “better” sometimes to guide them? Earlier, we encountered his idea that the “ordinary man” finds inspiration from “eccentrics”. It is hardly obvious on Mill’s own terms, though, that such a man will not simply follow the lifestyle of his exemplar, rather than “do his own thing”.

Mill recognizes that people choosing for themselves may still require guidance in the forms of life it is best to lead:

*[h]uman beings owe to each other help to distinguish the better from the worse ... [t]hey should be forever stimulating each other to increased exercise of their faculties and increased direction of their feelings and aims towards wise instead of foolish, elevating instead of degrading, objects and contemplations.<sup>49</sup>*

So we have a society of people *persuading* each other to follow developmental lifestyles (or, if we gave a stronger reading to “increased faculties”, we could depict them as recommending self-realization, particularly given the assumption that this is most likely to be in the “advisee”’s nature). If the state is indeed to be a repository of wisdom on experiments-in-living it, too, is likely to adopt this advisory role. Indeed, Mill granted it this role in his article on “Coleridge”, where the principle of state neutrality is specifically rejected: it can use its resources to promote a conception of the good, so long as it does not monopolize this advisory role in society.<sup>50</sup>

The problem with this way of acknowledging a role for the state lies in the danger of paternalism. For here we could have state and certain bodies of opinion in society proffering recommendations for one specific lifestyle – and how might “the ordinary man” resist the pressure of such opinion? The social pressure of opinion was how the despotism of custom was exercised; what Mill recommends here hardly seems any different in form. Only the form of lifestyle recommended differs – and it is not obvious that people could come to embrace a good lifestyle *in the right way* (i.e. autonomously) in this process (which contradicts what we ascertained to be the gist of Mill’s thought).

So consequentialist justifications could easily bring quite extensive state involvement in people’s life-planning. Even if it recommends self-realization, facilitates it through its educational philosophy and argues from the claim that people’s nature tends towards some form of it, the state could be going too far in foreclosing the possibility of non-self-realizing autonomy by such an approach. When we recall that the desire for self-alteration is externally encouraged, we can appreciate even more the potential problems of *any* approach that reduces the extent to which people need to act for themselves in life-planning. Instead of testing the consequences of each possible instance of state involvement, then, it makes more sense to follow Mill and adopt as *maxims*, or rules of thumb, principles which generally deny the efficacy of state activity.<sup>51</sup> This would de-emphasize the possibility of the state’s advisory role and thereby reduces the paternalist danger.

At this point in our study, the politics of Millian self-realization looks like remaining a fairly minimal affair, resisting the highly activist support for the ideal that Mill implicitly thought permissible in *On Liberty*. The effect is to make the theory’s political recommendations little different from those of liberal autonomy – but in educational policy and the variety-of-situations stipulation, we do have *some* reason for calling this a theory of self-realization. To this extent, Mill’s politics does encourage self-realization (or, better, encourages the presumed natural tendency to self-realize), but this encouragement

should fall a long way short of socially pressurizing people to do so.

To end this section, we return to the question of providing a variety-of-situations in one's lifestyle. We can categorize the situations by using the "public" and "private" terminology from the first chapter. In the public, we can include social and political interaction; we shall deal with these in section {vii}. Now, we might expect a liberal political theorist like Mill to avoid conscientiously any in-depth commentary about the nature of the good "private life". But he does not shy away from it completely. For example, given the aesthetic nature of many of the pursuits that Mill finds most admirable, he thinks self-realizers will (or should) have an intellectually and culturally stimulating leisure-realm with opportunities aplenty to indulge such artistic tastes.<sup>52</sup>

However, I want to concentrate on one other aspect of the private realm which features in Mill's political theory. As suggested in Chapter 1, the enjoyment of close personal relationships and commitments can also form an important part of self-realization. In the Aristotelian conception, "character friendship" provided the crucial framework for much self-realizing activity. From what we have said so far, it would seem as if Millian self-realization concentrates exclusively on the individual's self-directed development, without acknowledging a place for emotional relationships in one's life-plan. But his views on women and the nature of marriage in Victorian society show how his conception of self-realization opens up to this aspect.

Mill argued a most devastating case against male domination in marriage. He saw women as nothing more than "domestic slaves" in it, with their capacities spent seeking happiness not in their own life, but dependently working for the happiness of men; a wife ends up "sinking her own existence in her husband."<sup>53</sup> In *The Subjection of Women* he attacked the customary subordination suffered by women, which effectively forced them into a marriage relationship which took an oppressive and unjust form, preserved in such a state by basically misogynistic laws. This "forced repression" denied them self-realization. Stuck in the one, inferior situation in the home, there simply was not the opportunity necessary to stimulate self-realizing development. Women were thus reduced to non-autonomous lives of dullness and petty trivia, obedient and unreflective.<sup>54</sup>

Significantly, Mill felt that men suffered as a result of their oppression of women, too. In an argument markedly similar to the Aristotelian argument for character friendship, he effectively states that self-realization requires the correct kind of self-knowledge, lest one's life-plan be based upon illusion. So, the obverse of women's self-perception as living purely for their men with no autonomous life-plan of their own was that men also lacked appropriate self-perceptions. For instance, a boy who might be "the most frivolous and empty or the most ignorant and stolid of mankind" was usually encouraged to think that "he is by right the superior of all and every one of an entire half of the human race", in accordance with customary beliefs. He urges that men and women should both "learn to cultivate their strongest sympathy with an equal in rights and in cultivation."<sup>55</sup>

It is worth pausing to comment on this idea of fundamental equality of status and respect. We encountered it in Chapter 1, falling under the "principles of right" which attempted (unsuccessfully, I argued) to defend anti-perfectionism. That it embodies a

particular view of the self and a particular view of the self's good might be further justified if we bear in mind its absence from the Aristotelian world-view that discriminates between "types" of *homo sapiens*. But the bare idea that all people are equal and should be equally free must be an integral part of *any* modern theory, i.e. one that makes no discriminatory assumptions and centres itself on choice.<sup>56</sup> Thus, any modern conception of self-realization must recognize that this underpins the only valid self-perception and the only way in which one should relate to others; anything else is delusory.

This can be interpreted as the intention behind Millian self-realization's insistence on men and women having the right kind of personal relationships. *The Subjection of Women* therefore argues for a new ideal form of marriage based not only on equal rights, but friendship in mutual respect – and politics has a role in promoting both.

Mill knew that the legal establishment of equal formal rights would not be enough; the practices and attitudes to women were the most explicit examples of the social despotism of custom he attacked in his writings. New habits, attitudes and practices had to be inculcated and encouraged – education again can be a primary source for this. Perhaps here we have a clear role for the state in persuading people what is best, in an effort to transform the sexist culture. The reason why the fear of a deleterious paternalism does not come into play here, too, is that this political education backs up the *legal* fact of women's equality. For Mill, there is no dispute about the correct normative status of women, as there is over the best lifestyle.

It might be conceded that this particular policy approach is more readily encapsulated in a straightforward politics of autonomy than the others seen thus far. Indeed, the concentration on autonomy rather than self-realization may have inadvertently led Mill not to question his own assumption that autonomous women would still choose a life of domesticity and motherhood, which does not obviously fit the all-round model of the self-realizing life. It is not wholly clear that women as Mill saw them would actually follow self-realization as he visualized it, even though he wanted them to have the same opportunities in life as men. As many feminists argue, he does not tackle the possibility of limitations to personal development in any form of relationship that preserves the traditional sexual division of labour.<sup>57</sup> On these grounds, then, it might be argued that greater effort should be made to ensure that women are incorporated more fully into Millian self-realizationist theory.

## **vi Self-Realization and Utilitarianism**

So far, Mill's theory has argued that, once properly encouraged by their external conditions, people's free development generally takes a self-realizing form. To complement the autonomous space in which they experiment to find the most suitable form, steps can be taken to provide conditions conducive to encouraging self-realization. We now come to the missing piece in the Millian conception as presented so far: his utilitarianism. Many think that this is actually incompatible with his libertarian commitments and we need to discuss this claim. But without seeing what his utilitarian theory can contribute to his overall view, we fail to grasp the true character of the Millian

self-realizing life and neglect another way in which the theory entails political intervention to support self-realization.

The utilitarian dimension also promises the resources necessary to tackle some of the problems from Chapter 1 which any self-realizationist theory has to address. I have shown that Millian self-realization does not demand that people divorce themselves from society when experimenting-in-living. It also allows for the importance of deep personal relations. But one might fear that it remains a very self-obsessed project, embracing no further goal than the goodness of one's own life. If this is all it amounted to, it would seem a prime candidate for the narcissism objection. It might also be condemned as self-defeating, offering nothing but the direct pursuit of self-realization as a motive for action. A total insensitivity to issues beyond the encouragement of self-realization would cripple it as a practical and desirable political theory.

I believe that Mill's utilitarianism goes *some* of the way towards removing these complaints from the conception of self-realization. But as his ethical theory has hardly passed unscathed through successive generations of philosophical critics, it would be unrealistic to hope that this will provide a totally satisfactory response. This is not the place to run through all such critiques, but the standard query is immediately relevant: the actual compatibility of the principle discussed in *On Liberty* with that presented in *Utilitarianism*. Using the concept of "self-realization" shows how the two might be reconciled.

As far as this study is concerned, this controversy is manifest in the question as to whether the claims of individual autonomy and self-realization are consistent with the "Greatest Happiness" principle of *Utilitarianism*.<sup>58</sup> The latter would always seem to sanction social intervention in the private sphere whenever it serves the claims of maximal utility, trumping the individual quest for self-realization when required. This tension suggests two differing accounts of human interests and motivation within Mill's thought. The self-regarding life-experimenter of *On Liberty* would seem a poor candidate for the kind of self-sacrificing, other-regarding altruist required by *Utilitarianism*.

A resolution can be sought by focussing on how Mill defines "happiness", the concept he extracted and refined from its Benthamite roots. Infamously, he distinguished between "higher" and "lower" qualities of pleasure, a controversial move for an ethical theory supposedly able only to deal with *quantities* of utility. Mill is at pains to stress that he is using "happiness" to denote only a certain kind of pleasure, noting that it should not be equated simply with "contentment". But I suggest that the grounds for this distinction are most clearly grasped by relating it to the account of self-realizing human nature developed out of *On Liberty*.

Mill writes:

*a being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type ... in spite of these liabilities he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence.*<sup>59</sup>

This passage implies (though it is not put this way by Mill) that the higher/lower pleasure

distinction actually rests upon a distinction between “beings of higher faculties” and “inferior types”. The former are able to experience both types of pleasure and, having done so, prefer to aim for the higher. Those who lack the higher faculties are unable to experience the higher pleasures and so typically remain content with the lower.

It is not difficult to see how the “higher/lower being” distinction can be recast as the “self-realizer/non-autonomous conformist” distinction from *On Liberty*. The self-realizer, autonomously developing in an all-round way, steadily acquires higher faculties. Notably for Mill, these are typically mental or intellectual attributes, only to be acquired when one begins to reflect autonomously on a life-plan. Hence he says that:

*a cultivated mind ... finds sources of inexhaustible interest in all that surrounds it; in the objects of nature, the achievements of art, the imaginations of poetry, the incidents of history, the ways of mankind, past and present, and their prospects in the future.*<sup>60</sup>

From the content of the Millian curriculum, we can already suggest that it is in activities connected with these interests – reading, writing, painting, philosophizing, arguing – that people would pursue the self-realizing development and deployment of capacities. But we can now give a more faithful Millian answer as to why people will generally choose to do self-realizing activities in their experiments-in-living. Typically, they are what gives them “greatest happiness” – and Mill’s theory operates with another empirical assumption, namely, that the greatest happiness is what people desire.<sup>61</sup>

We have still to pinpoint what, exactly, “happiness” means for Mill, bearing in mind that it is not wholly the same as “pleasure”, “contentment” or “satisfaction.” Given the equation between the higher person’s happiness and the exercise of her highest faculties, there seems no better definition than to say that a person’s greatest happiness is the *state-of-being* derived from the use of the highest faculties they have thus far developed. As Mill says that it is “better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied”, it is fairly clear that “happiness” does not necessarily mean *successful* or otherwise *satisfying* exercise of any faculties; their mere usage is sufficient.<sup>62</sup>

But all this does is to define happiness in terms of self-realization, which obviously does not save the theory from the self-defeasibility objection. We are still left with an ethical theory which believes anything self-realizing is morally praiseworthy and that social morality is based around its promotion. Now, to a certain degree, Mill must intend this link. We know he thinks that autonomous people naturally want to develop in a self-realizing way. Because of this natural tendency, they will not be happy not to develop, i.e. remain with the lower pleasures. So even though they might be frustrated when attempting to live by the higher faculties, they would be even less satisfied if they did not attempt it at all – their very nature impels them to develop beyond the lower.

However, there is a lot more to Mill’s conception of happiness than this simple link suggests. For, shaky though the philosophical ground upon which he makes these moves may be, he does attempt to give utilitarianism an altruistic, other-regarding character in a way that still remains compatible with *On Liberty*. He also argues that, in practice, “utility” can be decomposed into constituent ends, which we follow for their own sakes.

To take the first of these points: one of the less reputable parts of *Utilitarianism's* argument comes in Mill's effort to argue from the claim that "each person's happiness is a good to that person" that "the general happiness ... is a good to the aggregate of persons."<sup>63</sup> Whatever the difficulties there may be with the logic of the argument, the sentiment which motivates it is clear: the happiness of society in general is a crucial element of the utility of individual people.

Utilitarianism takes a while to move towards this conclusion. Mill is first prepared to "honour" people who sacrifice their own interests for the happiness of others – as an example of what they *can* do, not what they *should* do. Later, however, this attitude as to how promote general happiness is refined:

*[n]ot only does all strengthening of social ties, and all healthy growth of society, give to each individual a stronger personal interest in practically consulting the welfare of others; it also leads him to identify his feelings more and more with their good ... [t]he good of others becomes to him a thing naturally and necessarily to be attended to ...*<sup>64</sup>

Mill could very easily invoke the self-defeasibility argument to explain this claim. One's personal self-realizing project is not ideally to be thought of as directed towards one's own self-interest, because this is not likely to maximize utility. Self-interest shifts a life-plan towards narcissistic self-indulgence and nihilism, extinguishing much of the genuine pleasure in life and consequently stunting development and growth. So, given the overarching commitment to the principle of utility, self-interested self-realization should therefore be dropped as the main kind of life-activity.

But happiness and self-realization remain compatible for the following reason. We saw that the Millian self-realizing life can take a number of forms. The purpose of experiments-in-living was to find the form that the self-realizer found most congenial. However, the forms to be chosen are always susceptible to whatever influences are on hand in society. This environment is politically manipulable – highly relevant if the existing environment is not sufficiently sensitive to the requirements of all-round development.

What Mill's position implicitly advocates once we take utilitarianism into account is the manipulation of social influences to encourage the adoption of life-plans that are at least in part other-regarding. Because "the self-realizing life" can be lived in a number of forms, there is no reason why this would necessarily prejudice the possibility of full self-realization. This qualifies, at least, the idea we expressed at the end of Chapter 2 that the "modern free spirit" is characterized by spontaneity. It advocates a "disciplining" of sorts, although Mill believes that feelings of both sociality and morality are a natural outgrowth of human growth. But the moral sentiment in particular is susceptible, due to multifarious, malign influences, of cultivation "in almost any direction."<sup>65</sup> He is therefore unwilling to leave the formulation of such sentiments to chance.

We can now see the central contribution of a certain type of education to the Millian conception. For Mill argues that a commitment to the general happiness should be embraced as something akin to a "civil religion", a faith to be believed in as the basis for

any individual's life-plan and this can be secured and that education should impart this faith to all. People should be encouraged to conceive of their self-realization as, in some respects at least, serving the good of all so that "no one ... will feel any misgiving about the sufficiency of the ultimate sanction for the Happiness morality."<sup>66</sup>

Now, this approach obviously pulls away from the earlier insistence that morals should not be taught as matters of fact. The reason we seem to run into this contradiction can be traced back to a point raised earlier: Mill offers post-transitional "new truths" (the liberty and utility principles, the "natural tendency" to self-realize) *as well* as principles to safeguard the transitional age's search for truth. The former help to give his political theory distinction from the neutralist politics of autonomy, but to the extent that we doubt these "truths" we feel uneasy about moving on from the semi-minimalist theory outlined in the previous section.<sup>67</sup>

To retain some consistency between these recommendations, though, we might point out the following. Even in the semi-minimalist situation, some "substantive" truths were recognized, even incorporated into law (e.g. the equality of women). One must doubt whether any society cannot help but impart some disputable value-assumptions for the sake of its own survival, contrary perhaps to the views of Mill in {v}.<sup>68</sup> The utilitarian civil religion should be treated as one of these. As long as it does not extinguish all personal projects and can be resisted if the adult chooses (which Mill does not deny<sup>69</sup>), it need only qualify, not contradict, the ideal of an education for free thought.

Mill's account of utilitarian morality can make the idea of "civil religion" less ominous, too, by the way he allows it to accommodate "virtuous action", as familiarly, conventionally understood. Unlike their Aristotelian counterparts, the Millian virtues are not directly and exclusively related to self-realizing excellences: one could be virtuous on Mill's terms without being self-realizing. The virtues are ultimately justified by utilitarian considerations, but Mill recognizes that if people act virtuously simply because of happiness considerations this is likely to be self-defeating. Thus the utilitarian doctrine:

*maintains not only that virtue is to be desired, but that it is to be desired disinterestedly, for itself ... [people love virtue as] a good in itself, without looking to any end beyond it ... the mind is not in a right state, not in a state conformable to Utility ... unless it does love virtue in this manner ...*<sup>70</sup>

So Mill's conception of the good life is one in which people act according to conventional virtues as ends in themselves. These virtues, which we may presume form the core of the "moral religion" to be taught and otherwise disseminated through culture, are ideally things that people would willingly adopt as key elements in self-realizing life-plans.

To sum up: the individual is not going to be narcissistically self-obsessed, for her self-realization can be socially influenced towards promoting the good of others. This does not mean that there will be no self-regarding projects in the Millian life after all, but education can weaken the potential of self-defeating self-concern. For example, we saw how Mill stresses that a major justification for allowing self-realization is that such individual

development is the motor of human progress, i.e. that society in general will benefit from one's self-realization. Given this, it would be consistent for him to suggest that people undertake self-realizing life-plans with the general good, rather than their own good in mind.<sup>71</sup>

Mill would acknowledge that the standards of conduct set by the virtues would have to be revisable in principle, as a concomitant part of the doctrine of tolerance appropriate *both* to the age of transition and the post-transitional age of new truths.<sup>72</sup> But it does not mean that there should be no such enforceable standards. Society should allow pluralistic experiments-in-living and diverse lifestyles, but within the framework of activities guided by conventional virtue and directed towards the general good.

Further, he can argue for the encouragement of certain ways of living and certain standards of conduct which we can reasonably and justifiably expect to influence how people actually choose to live. In developing and deploying skills and expressing one's identifying commitments, self-realization allows for the partial social direction of its practice towards things that satisfy the general good, performed directly according to conventional virtues.

## **vii Institutional Implications**

A coherent conception of self-realization can thus be obtained from Mill's work. The nature of the good life it specifies and the possible political implications of its implementation suggest a meaningful contrast between it and a liberal anti-perfectionist theory. It is a modern conception because of the role that individual choice plays in the formulation of the form that the self-realizing life takes. But its modernity does not preclude the theory from resting on certain assumed facts about human nature and these help to determine what the best life is said to be. They also help to determine what may be promoted by the state and society to influence people's behaviour.

It is this last point with which we shall conclude this part of the study. We need to see just how much of a substantive social and political theory can be obtained from this conception of self-realization. Does it suggest a specific form of constitutional structure? Does it move us towards a particular form of socio-economic system, or is it as compatible with a capitalist society as, say, a socialist one? Finally, what bearing does the principle that even the assumed facts are in principle revisable have on producing a substantive theory?

In response to these, we shall focus on two themes from Mill's writings: {a} his defence of representative government; {b} his later conversion to some form of socialism. Both commitments can be justified by the conception of self-realization, but I want to suggest that the equivocation in Mill over {b} in particular suggests important limits to the ability of this conception to provide a comprehensive political theory.

{a} *Representative government and the development of character.* Mill's arguments for representative, constitutionally constrained government shifted the familiar justification of this system from rights-protective to consequentialist, developmental grounds. As even the liberty principle relies upon a claim that limited government produces the best

consequences, a more activist state can be justified if consequentialist considerations sanction it, in a way unavailable to the purely negative rights-protective position.

The importance of remembering the qualification concerning the “age of transition” is never more relevant than when considering Mill’s ideas on representative government. He believed that, *in his time*, the majority of people were not yet able enough to be fully participatory in politics. He shared Aristotle’s concern that government should be performed by the best, most capable people. He thought that, as yet, the masses have yet to acquire the skills and the self-discipline necessary for anything like mass participatory democratic system to be workable. His pronounced concern with education was largely due to his recognition that political pressure would yield a universal franchise sooner rather than later. Thus, people had to be prepared for it, to avoid a democratic tyranny engendered by ignorance.<sup>73</sup>

Mill thought it advisable to limit politics for the ordinary person to the airing and discussion of opinions in his time. However, this alone is far from insignificant in the conception of self-realization. To be sure, Mill’s theory sets out to provide a constitutional arrangement which does not give undue power to the unready citizenry. But it can also open up avenues of activity which will promote the appropriate level of development. This *can* be done, according to Mill, both through political education and participation in political debate, to culminate (for the time being) in the casting of a vote.

One of the many aims of elementary education for Mill is to prepare people so that, one day, they will become fully active citizens. “If society has neglected to discharge two solemn obligations”, he writes in *Considerations on Representative Government*, “the more important and more fundamental of the two must be fulfilled first: universal teaching must precede universal enfranchisement.”<sup>74</sup> However, as hinted earlier, education is not limited to formal tuition in childhood. The learning process continues in the adult world.

Mill’s thoughts about the *political* education of the working class are most instructive here. He commends their reading of political tracts and newspaper reports, perhaps not “the most solid kind of instruction” but “an immense improvement upon none at all.” Lectures and public debates on political matters, particularly those organized in trade union activity “all serve to awaken public spirit, to diffuse variety of ideas among the mass.”<sup>75</sup> Given the centrality of this in Mill’s idea of the general interest, we can deduce the possibility of state support for this if it is not forthcoming privately in civil society. Government is fully justified in making good such market failures (in setting up printing presses, for example, which is relevant to this aspect of education). The one proviso is that, once such enterprises can be sustained in civil society alone, the state withdraws.<sup>76</sup>

This process of political education is a necessary prerequisite for people to take the next step into political participation, in voting. One of the criteria for good governments Mill is prepared to identify in *Considerations* is “how far they tend to foster in the members of the community the various desirable qualities, moral and intellectual ...”<sup>77</sup>. The pertinent question here is how far directly political activity can itself foster these qualities. Given his fears about the masses’ prevailing level of intelligence, it is not surprising he feared that “too early attainment of political franchises by the least educated class might retard,

instead of [promote] their development” by confronting them with the need to choose when they do not properly know how to. But he also thought that “there can be little doubt that “[personal development] has been greatly stimulated by the attempt to acquire” developed faculties”.<sup>78</sup>

Arguments similar to those used in the Aristotelian conception provide good Millian reasons for the instrumental value of politics in self-realization. Its appropriateness in developing faculties of deliberation and choice lies in the point that “Millian people” cannot escape from the fact that they are affected by political questions. Their education in virtue, for example, helps to drive home the point that they are partially socially situated selves and that their self-realization will not take place totally apart from a social and political context. If they want to govern their own lives as autonomy requires, it follows that they should want some say in the political decisions that affect them.

Mill’s idea of the self-realized life is certainly not as politics-centred as Aristotle, but politics is not neglected as one might fear of a modern theory which, as suggested in Chapter 1, tends to “privatize” its account of the good life. Aside from the deliberative skills it develops, political activity – by bringing people into contact with social issues – can consolidate the promotion of utilitarian-communitarian motivations section {vi} attributed to the ideal Millian self-realizing life-plan.

People gain individual critical skills, a sense of dignity and self-worth and share in the “public spirit” if they are actively included in a political society.<sup>79</sup> The willingness to listen and debate with alternative points of view aids not only critical self-reflection but the critical reflection of social principles.<sup>80</sup> Political participation also yields a moral education, teaching tolerance and the respect for the opinions and interests of others.<sup>81</sup> In political deliberations, people are required to call upon different sources of knowledge and different concepts of what to aim at than those that could be utilized in shaping their separate, self-regarding projects.

But the highest/most harmonious, complete/consistent requirements entail that these two spheres of activity should be balanced in one’s life; the faculties used in the private sphere ought not to be pursued at the expense of those used in the public.<sup>82</sup> This being the case, a wholly privatized life looks likely to fail the requirements of Millian self-realization: hence the often underestimated importance of the place of politics in Mill’s view of the best kind of life.

Famously, Mill believed that, at his point in time, mass political participation was best limited to the airing of opinion. The business of drawing up and administering legislation should be left to an educated elite.<sup>83</sup> Undoubtedly, this is one of the reasons why commentators miss the contribution of politics to Millian self-realization. But the next section suggests that a much more intimate involvement with politics will figure prominently in the self-realization of the masses in the post-transitional age.

{b} *Workers’ co-operatives*: obviously, to accommodate growing involvement of the people in politics, decentralized government would be necessary, as not everyone could be actively involved in the procedures of a centralized state (not without creating an overbearing monolith, certainly).<sup>84</sup> But Mill’s thoughts on participation reached beyond

the formal constitutional structures to the workplace, embracing some form of socialism in so doing. The compatibility of capitalism with self-realization was an issue that vexed him greatly. Two elements of the Millian conception are relevant in considering this ideological shift: the encouragement of a commitment to community in life-plans; and the need for an environment that stimulates the initial desire for self-alteration.

At times, Mill could be fiercely disparaging about capitalism as it was in his day. This comes through in his discussion of the working class gaining the first flickerings of autonomous reflection through schooling and enfranchisement. He believes this will break the hold of an automatically customary deference to “superiors”. Consequently:

*[i]f they have not now, still less will they have hereafter, any deferential awe, or religious principle of obedience, holding them in mental subjection to a class above them ... they will require that their conduct and condition shall be essentially self-governed.<sup>85</sup>*

The reasoning behind this and its implications are as follows. When political liberalism and education stir the initial desires for autonomous self-alteration among the “non-elite” masses, the latter quickly realize that they are almost totally unable to fulfil them. Autonomy cannot be realized if one has to work at the behest of a capitalist boss. Insofar as work has to figure in a person’s life, the possibility of an autonomous, self-realizing life-plan is obviously going to be frustrated in such a situation.

Whether or not there is a consistent rendering of Mill’s account of freedom, it is clear that his understanding of it would allow him to see the workers’ general position in capitalism as essentially unfree. It is true for Mill that a worker may be free to enter into the wage contract. Once bound by it, though, he is located in a situation which renders him subservient to the dictates of the employers (themselves subservient to the profit motive). His mental faculties are debilitated by the numbingly monotonous tasks he is typically ordered to perform. These entirely fail to employ the capacity for autonomous choice, though they are vital to him for reasons of economic necessity.<sup>86</sup>

This, of course, is highly reminiscent of Aristotle’s point about “necessary labour”. But because Millian people are not functionally defined by the tasks they perform or the social roles in which they perform them, it is possible to conceive of non-subordinate (autonomy-promoting) relationships in which stimulating work might be undertaken. Obviously, though, Mill has doubts as to whether capitalism can supply this.

If capitalism cannot encourage autonomy, Millian self-realization for the average working person seems to be deferred to a post-capitalist era (as opposed to the “elite”). The move away from the age of transition would seem to be a move away from capitalism, so that all can initiate experiments-in-living. Mill says that “the aim of improvement should be ... to enable (workers) to work with or for one another in relations not involving dependence.”<sup>87</sup> But he has not provided concrete blueprints for future society and abhors doctrines, such as revolutionary socialism, that believe social change can be suddenly and comprehensively imposed.

Even though we have seen some role for the state in promoting the good, Mill gives it no warrant for any forcible, wholesale imposition; he thinks this will be necessarily

injurious.<sup>88</sup> He believes, instead, that the inequalitarian (in terms of power, as well as wealth) relationship between workers and employers will be gradually transformed, either into a much more equitable relationship between the two classes, or (what seems closer to the tenor of Mill's own comments) co-operative partnerships among workers alone.<sup>89</sup> He has faith that conventional capitalist relations will disappear – but he will not force the hand of society by the violent revolutionary imposition of an alternative system.

So Mill holds out some hope for a better system than capitalism, particularly in the idea of the workers' co-operatives which he believes (and wishes) will prevail.<sup>90</sup> But he is very cautious about offering exact details of the form that the best society would take. This is because he believes that people should experiment for themselves in different types of social and political organization. In contrast with the pre-modern Aristotelian conception, which put forward a detailed description of the ideal society, this modern approach does not venture such claims in abstraction from the choices people actually make. The idiosyncrasies of personal preference and the variations in social circumstances affect the nature of the good life far more in the Millian account than in Aristotle's thought.

This helps to explain why Mill's political theory of self-realization ultimately delivers less in terms of political prescription than we might expect of a theory which we have treated as perfectionist in some respects. He is prepared to make a distinction between the workers' co-operative system and "communism" (the latter he defines as that system "according to which not only the instruments of production, the land and capital, are the joint property of the community, but the produce is divided, and the labour apportioned, as far as possible, equally."<sup>91</sup>) This definition denotes a familiar ideal of a post-market egalitarian society and it was subjected to speculative analysis by Mill. But, though he is worried that this system will not promote autonomy and self-realization particularly well, he does not offer an unequivocal judgment:

*it is yet to be ascertained whether the Communistic scheme would be consistent with the multiform development of human nature, those manifold unlikenesses, that diversity of tastes and talents, and variety of intellectual points of view, which not only form a great part of the interest of human life, but by bringing intellects into stimulating collision, and by presenting to each innumerable notions that he would not have conceived of himself, are the mainsprings of mental and moral progression.<sup>92</sup>*

The key question for Mill seems to be whether communism – or any alternative social system – provides the space for experiments-in-living and the pluralistic variety-of-situations upon which Millian self-realization is based. A particular worry he has about communism is the monolithic centralization he fears it will propagate. He fears the public regulation that will be required to distribute equally will stifle individual initiative by removing incentives to maximize production and establish a monotonous regime to preclude diverse autonomous life-plans.

But he is afraid of overstating such objections, particularly in the absence of proof.<sup>93</sup> Should people wish to experiment with such forms, then they should be allowed to do so – once they had developed beyond their current low level of political sense and intelligence.<sup>94</sup>

A similar attitude pervades his consideration of “non-Communitarian” forms of socialism (“workers’ co-operative” systems). This form removes the subordinating worker-employer relationship but, because these co-operatives ideally trade in a relatively free market, there is neither the same stifling of incentive nor the same drive to centralized control Mill attributes to communism as its likely consequence. His worry about it centres on whether it might not generate too great a *social* pressure (as opposed to the state centralized pressure of Communism) to conform to comprehensive social norms, stifling the large degree of individuality he wishes to flourish.

To be amenable to self-realizing life-plans, a workers’ co-operative must continue to allow room for sufficiently extensive experiments-in-living (indeed, if it is to be seen as a superior form of social organization, there ought to be more room in it than in any other type of society). The doubt about the possibility of this can be explained as follows. The private sphere, which Mill rightly thought could be extinguished by a wholly centralized socialist state, needs to be as potentially expansive as its continued compatibility with ordered social living makes possible. People need the space to work out their ideal life-plans without being overly constrained by social impositions, to work out their private pursuits (should, as the Millian conception typically assumes, people choose to have private as well as social pursuits). Free individuals should never be *subsumed* by a social body. There should always be some part of their lives which stands apart from it.

Could a workers’ co-operative guarantee the requisite private space? Might it not provide an environment which is biased too far towards the social at the expense of the individual? Certainly, it is not intended to be an authoritarian organization. The system is designed to remain compatible with a form of representative government. People within the co-operative would be free to offer their opinions on whatever subjects concerned them, with such debates being brought to a close with a democratic vote. Intellects will be brought into “stimulating collision” (particularly with the absence of managers telling people what to do in the process of democratic deliberation). Capacities for deliberation and choice on this score will be maximized by their participation in the running of the co-operative.

But Mill is worried that the greater communitarian orientation of the co-operative over its capitalist rival would foreclose on the possibility of the more individualistic parts of life-plans. There could always be the problem of too many shared activities taking precedence over private activities. After all, the running of a co-operative will probably stretch beyond a regular working-day, since the workers will need much time to discuss and decide upon, as well as to implement, its activities. Perhaps this form of socialism is flawed on self-realizationist grounds because the social body’s affairs would indeed take up too many evenings.

Of course, it is entirely possible that the alteration in the organization of production entailed by workers’ co-operatives will have no such implication for the private sphere. Again, the ultimate point of Mill’s political theory is that we cannot be sure about such matters until we have tried:

*the things to be desired, and to which [all ... varieties of Socialism] have a just claim, is opportunity of trial. They are all capable of being tried on a moderate scale, and at no risk, either personal or pecuniary, to any except those who try them.*<sup>95</sup>

The upshot of this is that, if at all possible, we should have experiments-in-social-forms to see which form is best. The point I believe Mill would want to stress is that, in his time, it *remained an open question* which social form best suits self-realization. This is consistent, for example, with his observation that certain reforms are perfectly capable of initiation within capitalism. It is also consistent with his personal belief that capitalism will, gradually, reform itself into some form of market-based workers' co-operative system.

To conclude: Mill's political theory looks, at first sight, to be primarily concerned with the promotion of autonomy. But it exploits factual assumptions relating to the autonomous person's tendency to self-realize by advocating policies that encourage this tendency, without necessarily obstructing the possibility of autonomous but non-self-realizing lifestyles. This is largely to be done through education, but measures can also be taken by government to enrich the resources in society that people may wish to use in self-realizing life-plans.

The role of political participation, the need for developmental work and a utilitarian public spirit all show that Mill's idea of self-realization is not just a private, leisure-based pursuit. One way to interpret the "all-round" requirement in the idea is that self-realization will straddle both public and private realms. It is this point that helps us to interpret his discussion of workers' co-operatives, for example, as specifically part of self-realization: one of his worries about socialism is that it may not meet this all-round requirement.

So we can confirm the justification of calling this a "theory of self-realization": Mill's concerns are more specific than the promotion of autonomy. But it does not say *that much* about the promotion of self-realization through political initiatives. Because Millian self-realization is not tied exclusively to specific activities and is not said to be manifest in certain, very particular social roles only, perhaps we should not be so surprised that it does not yield as detailed a set of social and political prescriptions as the Aristotelian conception.

The question we should now ask is whether a modern theory can plausibly provide any more detail about an ideal of self-realization and its political promotion, with a more definite commitment to a particular political form than this. For a conception that holds out such promise, we turn to the thought of Karl Marx.

## CHAPTER 4

### Marx: Self-Realization Through Labour

#### 1 Introduction

In the Aristotelian conception of self-realization, the detail about the nature of the good life and the political prescriptions it might entail was obtained largely because individual choice had little role in the determination of its content. The Millian conception showed us that the modern respect for choice does not have to be purchased at the expense of all such detail. We were able to distinguish a perfectionist Millian approach from the politics of liberal neutrality – but this still fell some way short of the kind of “blueprint for the good society” Aristotle offered.

This discussion of the Marxist conception is primarily designed to consider the plausibility of identifying a richer, yet more distinctive modern theory of self-realization from which one might construct more concrete political proposals. The activity around which the Marxist conception is based is free, creative labour, an activity that a typical pre-modern theory such as Aristotle’s saw as subordinate, “sub-human” even. The conception can offer a number of related arguments as to why it proposes labour as the modern definitively human activity, the heart of self-realization. We will need to consider whether these arguments are, again, ones which might plausibly be asserted when we want to retain pre-eminence for individual autonomy.

One of these arguments is worth noting now, to emphasize further the modernity of this conception. For Marxist self-realization is not based upon a view of the human essence which is frozen in time. What constitutes self-realization evolves and changes through time – and it is by working, on ourselves and on our environment, that this evolution is propelled. Labour is transformative: it is what promotes the development of humanity. Marx believes that, under capitalism, fully developed individuals (those properly qualified for the label “self-realized”) have at last become a possibility.

But capitalism itself does not provide the conditions to allow the possibility to be actualized. His idea of self-realizing labour requires the development and expression of human identity in a number of different aspects – we know this from the different aspects of the alienation of workers – and capitalism can be shown to fail on each score. So, despite Marx’s own well-known refusal “to provide recipes for the cookshops of the future”<sup>1</sup>, we can use the critique of capitalism to deduce at least some of the practices needed to facilitate self-realization in the realm where it becomes fully actualized: communism.

The first part of this chapter, therefore, will be concerned to describe Marx’s arguments for labour’s priority and to work out the various aspects to labour-based self-realization, by seeing what the obverse of the alienated condition may entail. Then, the desirability of centring self-realization around labour is discussed – prompted by Marx’s well-known rethink of this very claim, at the end of *Capital III* (hereafter C. III). Reasons why Marx might have had second thoughts on labour-based self-realization are suggested. These will lead into a general consideration of how far labour might be able to provide the

concrete practice for which we are looking to construct a more substantive social and political theory.

## ii Self-Realization as Historical Product

To begin with, we should deal briefly with two doubts concerning the appropriateness of talking about self-realization in Marx's thought. An important source for analyzing Marxist self-realization is the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (hereafter: E.P.M.s). Strictly speaking, perhaps, these should be referred to as "pre-Marxist" in the sense that Marx had yet to develop his historical-materialist conceptual framework when he wrote them. Crudely put, this "early Marx" sees the overcoming of alienation and the achievement of self-realization as what explains historical change. The "mature Marx" sees this as simply descriptive of the human condition in a history propelled by the development of productive power. It should be stressed, though, that alienation and self-realization are concepts which remain throughout Marx's work; they are not abandoned simply because they lose their explanatory role.<sup>2</sup>

Next: many readers of the sixth "Thesis on Feuerbach" in particular would deny the intelligibility of a Marxist conception of self-realization on the grounds that "the essence of man ... is the ensemble of social relations."<sup>3</sup> The strict structuralist position this *seems* to support would insist that there cannot be anything to the self apart from the content given it by its place in social relationships, i.e. there is nothing else to the self from which man can be said to be alienated.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, this misreading of the Sixth Thesis has been decisively refuted by Norman Geras in arguments which will not be repeated here.<sup>5</sup> Suffice it to say for now that Marx is not committed to the structuralist view (I shall comment further on this). By having a conception of the self whose essence lies in more than just the occupancy of a position in a given social structure, he has a means by which to criticize that structure – an opportunity he does not fail to grasp.

However, as observed in {i}, the modernity of this conception lies in the claim that the essence is not a an ahistorical, immutable attribute, as the *ergon* is in Aristotle's argument. The development of the essence and the achievement of self-realization are historical products. Social institutions and practices help to transform human nature over time, forming and re-forming self-images which shape the way people interpret themselves, their achievements and the possibilities for fuller development.

The conception of the essence can be used in social criticism when institutions and practices have prompted a potential which they themselves cannot bring to fruition. In Marx's view, not only has capitalism done this, it has, at last, put the fullest development, self-realization, "on the historical agenda." It renders self-realization a concrete possibility, rather than a utopian ideal. Reasons for this may be found in both the *Grundrisse and Capital I* (C. I), where it is stressed how capitalism has increasingly required workers who have the ability to diversify their capacities,<sup>6</sup> whilst the vast expansion of productive power provides the material prerequisites for the actual exercise of all-round abilities by everyone.

But capitalism is described as being fundamentally contradictory in nature because it

cannot allow the self-realizing potentials it has brought into being to become actualized in all individuals. Its workings continually block the exercise of the all-round abilities they have created as potentials, whilst its increasingly volatile labour market and revolutionizing technical base robs the proletariat of ever more control of their own lives. So the possibility of self-realization is the unintentional by-product of capitalism, which directly pursues the “mutilation” and “fragmentation” of the worker in its relentless pursuit of surplus value, “squandering not only flesh and blood, but nerves and brain as well.”<sup>7</sup> The historical irony prompted by capitalism’s contradictory effect on human development lies in the fact that, though there has been a correlation through time between the growth of productive power and humanity’s powers and potentials:

*[in] fact it is only through the most tremendous waste of individual development that the development of humanity in general is secured and pursued, in that epoch of history (i.e. capitalism) that directly precedes the conscious reconstruction of human society.<sup>8</sup>*

Self-realization in the Marxist conception is not just a possibility; it has become a *need*, because the potential has been prompted to such a degree that its absence is an objective lack in the lives of modern individuals. As in the Millian conception, the central claim here is that fully free people will typically choose self-realizing lifestyles. Self-realization’s place in the Marxian idea about how we would naturally choose to live seems to provide the thought behind his statement that “Milton produced *Paradise Lost* for the same reason that a silk worm produces silk. It was an activity of his nature.”<sup>9</sup> “Life-activity” in communism, the fully free, stateless, super-productive realm at the “end of history” is thus “the absolute working out of (one’s) creative potentialities ... which makes ... the development of all productive human powers as such the end in itself.”<sup>10</sup>

As in Mill, there is no specific, pre-determined form which the self-realizing lifestyle takes. The idea that one must labour to realize oneself does not tell us exactly how to conduct life generally. Here, then, we might say that the modern respect for self-creation in the form taken by one’s good life is preserved. But, as I have suggested, the centrality of labour helps us to pin down self-realization’s content to something quite specific.

### **iii Arguments for Labour’s Centrality**

The first concept we might use to explain labour’s role in self-realization is *expressivism*, located by Charles Taylor in Hegel’s thought and inherited by Marx. This refers to the desire to see the world around us express our own authentic nature. In the Marxist conception, it must reflect back to us our achievement of self-realization in communism.<sup>11</sup> A key claim in the conception is that self-realization as labour mediates man’s unity with nature. Even for pre-historical materialist Marx, the possibility of self-realization is based upon an objective transformation of the environment. Self-realizing man comes to control nature and sees his purposes embodied in it (we will consider this idea later).

Another argument for this centrality in the E.P.M.s bears some relation to the *ergon* argument. It asserts that man’s productive activity is unique in that it can be freely done, at least potentially extended beyond a response to immediate need, transcendent of

natural limits and consciously governable by rational standards of one's own design. Marx asserts that self-realizing activity must exhibit all of these characteristics, lest man feel himself to be nothing but an animal. So it is productive activity performed as an end in itself which forms the *human* essence and makes our other activities (e.g. "eating, drinking, procreating") *human* activities.<sup>12</sup>

Another decisive quality of labour for Marx was identified when he enthused over Hegel's identification of the "producing principle":

*[t]he great thing in Hegel's Phenomenology ... is that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process; objectification as loss of object, as alienation and as sublation of this alienation; that he therefore grasps the nature of labour and conceives objective man ... as the result of his own labour.*<sup>13</sup>

In Hegel's dialectic of spirit's self-actualization, Marx saw the philosophical, idealist reflection of a material process where man achieves self-realization through his own labour.<sup>14</sup> He was impressed by the idea that "self-realized man" is achieved by *objectification*: the embodiment of self-activity in external objects. This means, at first, estrangement between man and his object and then requires reappropriation by the former of the latter, for objectification to be complete. So labour utilizes man's powers to produce the objects whose existence reflect back to him who he is, by embodying what his powers have produced. It establishes self-knowledge, an essential condition for a project of self-realization (for as we have seen in other conceptions, it is necessary to know oneself before one can be sure that one's life-project is really one of self-realization).<sup>15</sup>

Now, although Marx rejects the idealism of the Hegelian approach, we can appreciate the importance of expressivism and objectification in his conception of self-realization from the E.P.M.s onwards.<sup>16</sup> It is by labour, man's uniquely personal attribute, that he establishes a *mediated unity* between himself and nature. That is to say, he is neither passively dependent upon or subsumed by nature, nor able to create his world from nothing. Productive activity mediates the relation between them and provides a principle of development and transformation of the two.<sup>17</sup> This asserts his control over the environment and provides the self-knowledge element of his self-realization. His environment is not alien to him, but shaped by his own projects. Thus:

*[i]t is just in his work upon the objective world ... that man really proves himself to be a **species being**. (see n. 18) This production is his active species life. Through this production, nature appears as **his work and his reality**. The object of labour is, therefore, the **objectification of man's species-life**: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in a world that he has created.*<sup>19</sup>

The idea of "objectification", demonstrating to us the fruits of our use of essential powers, looks overly metaphysical. Taken literally, it may sound odd to say that the objects we produce "objectify our essence", providing the information about the nature of our selves. Do the facts that Fred built a shed, Mavis dug over the park's flower garden and Dave produced 500 toilet rolls at the factory today really tell us anything about their

“essences”? An object of production becomes rather mystified if it is said to “embody its producer’s essence”, particularly when that object cannot, by its nature, do any justice to that essence.

However, there is a less literal, “minimalist” way of approaching objectification, because it is not odd to say that our products *can* reflect *to some degree* our capabilities and represent *one way* in which we have had an impact upon the world. Or rather, it is a reasonable demand that our activity should have as its end-result products which are “meaningful” in these senses.

I take this as a major requirement of Marxist self-realization: productive activity which demonstrates our capacity for free, conscious, fully developmental exercise of powers, objectifying our self-realization in an expressivist fashion. The degree to which our products do not capture this can constitute exactly the sort of critique of our activity’s inadequacy and meaninglessness that Marxists want to offer.

These, then, are the reasons why labour is important for Marx: its unique incorporation of essential human nature and its role in shaping the environment expressively for objectification. But at this stage, the idea of a good life based upon labour looks distinctly unappealing. Could it not even lead into totalitarian arguments about “liberation” through intense exertion in workhouses? (worse still, it is reminiscent of “Arbeit macht frei”). This is where we need to examine the differences between alienated and self-realizing labour.

#### **iv Alienation: The Separation of the Worker from his Essence**

There are two ways in which capitalist labour causes alienation by separating the worker from his essence: {a} the division of labour precludes the exercise of manifold capacities by individuals; {b} the worker finds himself working so hard in his alienated labour that his capacity to do anything else is progressively sapped. Both will be examined in turn.

{a} From his early writings onwards, Marx makes it abundantly clear that self-realization can be achieved only with the abolition of the division of labour.<sup>20</sup> As explained above, one of capitalism’s critical flaws is that it produces the potential for multi-capacity self-realization but is unable to bring it to fruition. What Marx sees as the necessary link between capitalism and the division of labour is part of the explanation as to why. To understand this, we can start with a very brief, simplified review of the historical developments Marx believes led up to the division of labour.

In “primitive communism”, without classes, there is no definite sense among people of individual interests.<sup>21</sup> One of the reasons behind this is that tasks in material production are not rigidly or systematically divided up between them. This division comes about as one of the effects of the emergence of class society. “As soon as the division of labour comes into being,” Marx writes, “each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape.”<sup>22</sup>

In what can be called pre-capitalist “craft production”, Marx believed that, because of the limited nature of social interdependence, “every man who wished to become a master had to be proficient in the whole of his craft. Medieval craftsmen therefore had an interest

in their special work and proficiency in it.”<sup>23</sup> To this extent, man is *already* shown to be capable of performing more than just one-sided, narrow tasks. But Marx says that craftsmen stand in “a complacent servile relationship” to their work; in G.A. Cohen’s phrase, the producers were “engulfed” by it.<sup>24</sup> In his total identification of himself with his work, the labourer is subjugated by it because he does not conceptualize himself as being something apart from the work he does.

Therefore, alienation is not experienced by craft producers; they feel “at home” in their working environment even though, from a modern perspective, we see them as constrained and unindividuated.<sup>25</sup> It is capitalism that ruptures this apparent harmony. Its technology splits up each production process “into its constituent movements, without any regard to their possible execution by the hand of man.”<sup>26</sup> This disregard also splits the immediate identification by the worker with his work, so he becomes formally free of engulfment. He conceptualizes himself apart from his work because he sells his labour-power, now an alienable commodity, to whoever will buy it for whatever purpose happens to be required for a certain number of hours per day. The worker’s identity and existence are no longer grounded in the work he does. But further, he now finds himself in an utterly alien, non-expressive context which shows no regard for his needs and nature.

The relevant development promoting this state of affairs occurs when mental and manual tasks are split up and divided between people. At this point the manual worker “is brought face to face with the intellectual potentialities of the material process of production as the property of another and a power which rules over him.”<sup>27</sup> He is allocated a single or very narrow range of boring, repetitive functions. Gradually, many of these functions are transferred to the machines, abolishing many of the specialized/unskilled distinctions (i.e. making work almost uniformly non-developmental).

A much-quoted segment of *The German Ideology* (G.I.) condemns this specialization and makes the forecast that communism will bring its end:

*in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow ...*<sup>28</sup>

The character of the general production described by Marx and Engels is noteworthy: “hunting”, “fishing”, “rearing cattle”, “criticizing”, “painting”: all hardly paradigm activities in the industrialized life-world of the proletariat. Given that communism is not supposed to be a reactionary rejection of capitalism’s material transformation of the world but an improvement *upon* it, they seem peculiarly inappropriate examples for the self-realized life. It is arguable, therefore, that they are too frivolous to be taken as serious contributions to modern self-realizationist theory. However, having already observed Marx’s commitment to the ideal of “all-roundness” we cannot as yet rule out the possibility that this image of the self-realized life, which embodies the ideal to a degree, should be taken as the core of Marx’s developed conception. It should not be dismissed immediately just because of its apparent playfulness and we shall return to it in due course.

That Marx urges the transcendence of the mental-manual division of labour is clear. A system of production in which the labour process is broken up with each constituent task parcelled out to different individuals unambiguously violates the requirements of self-realizing labour. But to think further about this requirement, we can distinguish two different arguments against the division of labour: the “weak” and the “strong”.

The weak case condemns permanence in the allocation of tasks. This freezes the possible range of activities and means that people only ever get to relate to each other as performers of their set task. Rotating tasks within society would cure the ills identified by the weak critique, since people would have the opportunity to perform different activities at different times. They would not, therefore, have to relate to each other all the time as the performers of just one task. The strong case is not satisfied with this prescription, since it condemns task specialization *per se*. It would seek instead to maximize the number of capacities being utilized at any one time. We need to think about which position is required by Marxist self-realization.

In stark contrast with the way we construed the Aristotelian conception, Marx does not want people to relate to each other according to their professions or social roles, but as *individuals* who happen to undertake certain tasks. “The very name (of e.g. “painter”)”, he writes, “aptly expresses the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on the division of labour. In a communist society there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities.”<sup>29</sup> This rules out any idea that full development can be achieved through one type of pursuit alone – lest the capacities in this one activity, even if it is multi-capacity, become reified.<sup>30</sup>

His ideas might imply that people will relate to each other only in the impersonal, instrumental way when there is a task-specializing division of labour. This would mean that rotation of tasks *alone* might not be enough to overcome alienation, since the worker would still be the performer of a single task at any one time. But no argument is offered by Marx for this claim; the strong case is as yet unsupported.

In the E.P.M.s human alienation is located not only in the result of production, the formation of classes, but in the act of production too: the division of labour. Ali Rattansi’s analysis of the division of labour at this stage in Marx’s thought demonstrates a conceptual conflation of “class” and “task specialization”, or “social” and “technical” division of labour, respectively. This prompted the postulation of the latter’s abolition with the disappearance of classes. The two become distinct when Marx introduces the concept of “relations of production”, which identifies social relations based on class antagonisms as something distinct from a specific technical organization of the labour process.<sup>31</sup>

With this conceptual dichotomy, it becomes possible in principle to advocate the abolition of one of these without entailing the concomitant disappearance of the other. It also suggests a reformulation of the weak and strong cases against the division of labour. The weak case might now be said to condemn a permanent social division, which only contingently reflects a technical division in capitalism. This implies that, if Marx’s ire was primarily directed against social division, his theory can avoid the strong case’s insistence upon multi-capacity activity at all times. A rotation of tasks with specialization at any one

time may meet the theory's requirements.

This interpretation might be considered more viable as political prescription than the strong case, since the latter's insistence on multi-capacity work is an enormously demanding and by no means obviously desirable stipulation. But supporters of the strong case could offer the rejoinder that, even if social and technical division are no longer conceptualized together, task specialization is still going to affect social relationships to an unacceptable degree.

To illustrate how this point might be argued: though you may no longer be socially designated as a "blue collar worker" in a system that accommodates some task rotation, you only *actually* relate to your workmates at the car factory in your capacity as a tyre-fitter one month, the dashboard wirer the next, the shopfloor foreman the month after that. It might still not overcome the one-sided form of human relationship that Marx generally condemned. Strong-case supporters could also argue that this solution does not yield the right kind of all-round activity. Workers should not act with different fragments of their capacities and simply change the fragments used every so often, since they need a lifestyle that integrates the different facets of their personality much more for self-realization. So perhaps *this* form of social-but-task-rotating division of labour has to disappear, too.

Marx's writings do not help us sufficiently in deciding which of these two positions should be adopted when working out the consequences of self-realization. It is a crucial, perhaps crippling ambiguity if we are to use the Marxist conception of self-realization in working out principles of social organization. Some arguments from outside Marx's own thought will be used to tackle this problem in Chapter 5.

{b} Now to the claim that the worker finds himself working so hard in his alienated labour that his capacity to do anything else is progressively sapped. Capitalism's drive to yield profit does more than just destroy the chance for self-realization; it unhesitatingly "usurps the time for the growth, development and healthy maintenance of the body."<sup>22</sup> It pushes the worker to his physical limits, not worrying about his premature exhaustion, decrepitude and death as long as the labour supply is replenished somehow.

Obviously, Marxist self-realization is not intended to praise idleness because of these sentiments. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx explicitly rejects the idea that self-realizing labour will be "mere fun, mere amusement ... really free working ... is at the same time precisely the most damned seriousness, the most intense exertion." This latter point is overstated, perhaps, since communist labour would not be as hard-driving as the most intense capitalist labour. But it would still offer a stimulating challenge to both mind and body, not least because "the overcoming of obstacles is in itself a liberating activity."<sup>23</sup>

What Marx is after here, therefore, is productive activity which does not cause "mutilation" and "fragmentation", but makes optimum use of various talents in harness. He is best thought of as requiring a harmonious combination of multiple, developed capacities, balancing serious, rigorous effort to develop oneself in the control and execution of productive tasks, with the leisure time necessary to ensure mental and physical well-being.

The emphasis on activity explains why Marx thought there are important respects in

which the most abject proletarian is already closer to self-realization than the capitalist. Because it is not part of his life-activity to produce use-values himself, the capitalist's "self-realization" is based entirely on something else: the satisfaction of "morbid appetites", the purely acquisitive needs generated in bourgeois society. Devoid of the truly human needs for developmental self-realization, his "realization" can consist of nothing but "fantasy, caprice and whim."<sup>34</sup> So:

*what we are confronted by [in capitalism] is the alienation of man from his own labour. To that extent the worker stands on a higher plane than the capitalist from the outset, since the latter has his roots in the process of alienation and finds absolute satisfaction in it, whereas right from the start the worker is a victim who confronts it as a rebel and experiences it as a process of enslavement.<sup>35</sup>*

This is not designed to make us think that the proletarian's is a "better" way of life, but it emphasizes the point that the future lies with the workers and not with the "idle, parasitic" bourgeoisie.

#### **v The Separation of the Worker from his Activity**

Obviously closely connected with {iv}, this section stresses the fact that *capitalist* production is carried on by the worker only to meet basic subsistence needs. His labour is purely abstract as far as he is concerned – producing for sheer survival and not for its own sake. So not only is the labour not self-realizing, but it is carried out for motives which are totally different from those of the self-realizer. This idea of the impossibility of self-realization being achieved from motives of necessity is the same as Aristotle's stricture against labour. Where the Marxist labour-based conception differs is in the denial of the claim that production can only ever have this character.

The alienation felt by workers from the destructive unfulfillment of capitalist labour (which is why it is only pursued for survival's sake) is heavily reinforced by the fact that the worker finds himself in a savagely inhumane environment. His surroundings accurately reflect his degrading condition ("the stagnation and putrefaction of man"). In the realm where he needs to pursue self-realization, he is confronted by regimentation, monotony, danger, filth: a scene of crushing humiliation from which he is only too pleased to flee at the end of the day.

Marx's lengthy analysis in C. I of the means by which machinery and large-scale industry ravage the very being of the worker should emphatically dispel any idea that his conception of self-realization would commit us to a workhouse-based life. He is appalled at the utter indifference of capitalism to the quality of labour as a human activity, let alone a human self-realizing one (not that he would expect any different of it, of course). The transfer of even limited skills to machines for more profit is just one demonstration of this.

But the use of machinery also demonstrates quite starkly the historical irony and contradiction over human liberation embodied in capitalism. Its development is based upon "that great human advance represented by the technical and scientific developments that increase human control over the labour process", but:

*[t]he capacity of humans to control the labour process through machinery is seized upon by management from the beginning of capitalism as the prime means whereby production may be controlled not by the direct producer but by the owners and representatives of capital.<sup>36</sup>*

This culminates in the use of scientific methods to regulate, minutely and machine-like, every aspect of the worker's labour-time itself, a phenomenon best exemplified by the notorious Taylorist methods of production. With outrageous shamelessness, these use scientific/technical techniques to regiment the worker, completing the division of mental and manual labour and consolidating the removal of his will and purpose from the labour process.<sup>37</sup>

Self-realization transforms labour into "life's prime want."<sup>38</sup> It is a lifestyle desirable enough for its own sake, responsive to its subjects' needs for development and objectification. Its expressive dimension focusses attention, too, on the need for a suitably humanized environment in which people can feel "at home". What might be necessary to meet these requirements will become clearer as we progress through other aspects of the Marxist conception.

#### **vi The Separation of the Worker from his Product and Control of the Production Process**

If objectification of productive activity is the final stage of a self-realizing process, one cannot have a situation where the product of labour is wrested from the control of the worker. He should not be deprived of that which embodies and reflects back to him his achievement. What happens in capitalism is that the product becomes a commodity, subject to the laws of the market in which the capitalist sells it, rather than the will of the workers who made it. The profit from it, in another bitter irony, strengthens the capitalist and enables him to reproduce the workers' exploited situation.

Other phenomena in pre-communist society betray the lack of control the worker has over his environment, which has to be overcome in self-realization. The investment of things with power they do not intrinsically possess is analyzed by Marx in his discussion of fetishism, such as that of the commodity which "reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves."<sup>39</sup> The world under capitalism appears to be dominated by objective, immutable laws and powers – which are nothing but mystified, transformable social relations.

So self-realizers must reclaim all of these powers for themselves. If these powers are not reclaimed, then individuals' self-activity will always be seen as the powers of something else. Such an illusion must be transcended. It requires being armed with an accurate appreciation of society's workings, the principles that govern production and interaction. Furthermore, it requires a society whose principles are laid bare and consciously, freely embraced by all. A society still requiring ideology to "explain" itself to people, still necessitating social science to dig beneath these for its real workings, is not the society for Marxist self-realizers.<sup>40</sup>

The upshot of this is that, for the self-realizers, not only must the objects of production

somehow remain theirs to control but that the insistence upon conscious control of the product can be expanded to include the production process and indeed the production of social reality itself. Here, then, we have the basis for an account of the powers a self-realizer must possess in controlling the circumstances of his life. But is this positing a realistic and desirable ideal? How strongly should we interpret this requirement?

“Control” may be said to become effective once people overcome the need for ideological, fetishizing illusions and experience a transparent social reality for what it is. But there could be a far more direct, tough requirement for self-realization: each individual producer directly controls the destiny of his product. It should be put to the use he wants.

Before we ponder what level of control might feasibly be expected, however, we should consider the extent to which this line of thought remains compatible with Marx’s other commitments in self-realization. I will illustrate the problem Marx may have here with a point in the next section.

### **vii The Separation of the Worker from his Community**

Self-realizing labour creates the type of fully human relationship without which man, as an intrinsically social being, could not develop. The need for community was originally met, in an imperfect and inegalitarian way, in pre-capitalist society, where people were bound together in relations of domination and servitude, engulfed by their social situation. With the establishment of the “individual” as a category in capitalism, the need does not disappear even though capitalism’s workings reduce relations between people to bare, competitive material interests. Indeed, the need is felt all the more pitifully in the hostile modern world.<sup>41</sup>

In communist society, Marx believes, “free individuality ... is founded on the universal development of individuals and the domination of their communal and social productivity, which has become their social power.”<sup>42</sup> Whereas capitalist production is impersonal and dominated by those who own but do not produce, communism seeks production for the direct satisfaction of people’s needs. This ultimately entails two things: intimate involvement of the producers in each other’s self-realization, and the exercise of joint control over the economy and society. Marxist self-realization’s communitarianism lies in the fact that it involves production *with* and *for* others.

It is this fact which generates the problem hinted at in {vi}. For can we guarantee that “production to meet the needs of others” is always going to be compatible with “producers keeping control of their product”? One would have to assume that it would always be the intention of producers to let their products be used to meet the needs of their fellows. If we were to abandon this assumption for being excessively optimistic, we have a situation in which we cannot tell whether the demands of meeting others’ needs trumps the producers’ claims over their products’ destinies. Therefore, we ought to establish a priority between the two commitments.

It seems more in keeping with the tenor of the Marxist argument that production should meet needs first and foremost. The idea of control is not thereby abandoned.

Communities will consciously direct their products towards needs – but overruling the wishes of individual producers who might at times desire alternative fates for the end-result of their labours. Though we might stretch credulity if we claimed it could disappear altogether, we can plausibly argue that this discrepancy between social need and individual control would be much rarer in a system of socialized production than in capitalism.

It seems quite clear that Marxist self-realization ideally requires the complete supersession of the market, because market or exchange economies do not exhibit socialized production. Within them:

*the result of my production has as little connection with you as the result of your production has directly with me ... our production is not man's production for man as a man, i.e. it is not social production ... as men, we do not exist as far as our respective products are concerned.*<sup>43</sup>

The communitarian dimension of self-realization is not met by the impersonality of market exchange. Socialized production, Marx writes, not only “objectifies my individuality” but, in my apprehension of its use by you the consumer:

*I would have the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a human need by my work ... having objectified man's essential nature, and having created an object corresponding to the need of another man's nature*

which confirms both my human, communal nature and yours in your pivotal role in the process: “our products would be so many mirrors in which we reflected our essential nature.”<sup>44</sup>

Backing up the priority of need-meeting over individual control in case of conflict, we see again the echoes of Aristotelian character-friendship in the idea that human interaction provides self-knowledge. Given this similarity, it is pertinent to wonder whether this way of establishing communal ties retains the instrumentalist undertones identified in Aristotle. Participation in community serves our individual self-realization by providing self-confirmation, catering for our need for community and easing the path of development by undertaking joint production. It is not yet wholly clear whether the *Manifesto's* famous communist principle that “the free self-realization of each is dependent upon the free self-realization of all” actually goes beyond saying that a self-realizing person needs the self-realizing activities of others in order just to continue his own development (i.e. that their self-realization is a means to his).

This instrumentalist reading is only reinforced by the Hegelian argument for self-esteem that Elster offers in support of Marxist self-realization. He claims that self-esteem is “[t]he *most important* value for human beings” (my italics). A self-realizing person gains more self-esteem than someone doing something else, but this can only be gained through the esteem of others. Therefore “the self must be made part of the public domain.”<sup>45</sup> What Elster has done is to prioritize a purely self-regarding value in a Marxist argument and argued for sociability on instrumental grounds, in service of this value. Yet, in the absence

of a more thoroughgoing account of community, one is unable to argue with much conviction that this is a wholly un-Marxist claim.

Obviously, the comparison between Aristotle and Marx stops at the latter's rejection of role-based interaction. This point lessens the instrumentalist appreciation of Marx's communitarianism (since people are not supposed to relate to others as performers of roles). But this alone does not necessarily remove the instrumentalist justifications for why people interact at all. Clearly Marx does not *want* this result; self-realizers have to have relationships in which they are treated as ends in themselves.

A model of the type of society Marx ideally requires might be derived by thinking about an idealized family unit. Here, we have people fulfilling various functions in the running of a household in ways which still mean that each member never treats the others as anything other than *unique individuals*. They work to help each other in things necessary to sustain their own lives, but that is not the reason why they live together and work for each other. Between them there are strong bonds of kinship and love; it is because of these that they relate in the way they do, not for self-serving, instrumentalist reasons.

The question is whether this kind of society can be sustained in the Marxist community at large, given that the instrumentalist reasons Marx actually gives for social interaction have yet to be supplemented by much that is more "communal" in our account thus far. Once more, Marx's own writings do not unambiguously solve this problem. "Community" is a far greater problem for Marxism than is usually thought. In section {xiv}, we discuss further the "family" metaphor for community, whilst Chapter 5 will examine more critically the entire concept of "Marxist society".

### **viii The Repression of the Worker's Senses**

The specifically aesthetic dimension to self-realization is heavily stressed in the E.P.M.s:

*only through the objectively unfolded richness of man's essential being is the richness of subjective human sensibility either cultivated or brought into being ... the objectification of the human essence ... is required to make man's sense human, as well as to create the human sense corresponding to the entire wealth of human and natural substance ... [the] established society produces man in this entire richness of being, produces the rich man profoundly endowed with all the senses ...*<sup>46</sup>

Whereas the Millian conception was keen to encourage aesthetic development through education, the Marxist variant concentrates much more on the transformation of one's material surroundings and social relationships as the means by which one comes to live a fully aesthetic, sensuously flourishing existence. The capitalist world "devastates" the senses; the communist world will enrich them.

Now the G.I. vision of man in particular takes the idea of an aesthetic existence almost literally. Marx and Engels talk of communist "artisans", aesthetes who fully appreciate reading good books; going to the theatre, stimulating company and conversation. Such things are ends-in-themselves for the communist, self-realized person. However, the critique of the G.I. vision for its inappropriateness applies here too: how does this fit into

the industrial world of modern production, in labour-based self-realization? The aesthetic sphere could form part of one's leisure existence, but this is relatively incidental to the core of a self-realizing lifestyle in *work*.

However, communist labour is conceived of as being akin to painting in its production of artistry, because the powers it exercises are thought of as aesthetic and creative too. Thus, self-realizing work should offer aesthetic pleasures, in an environment that stimulates rather than repels the senses. This is what helps the self-realizer to perceive a world in which he truly feels at home, a world that meets his expressivist requirements and reflects his essence. Only with the liberation of the senses can one appreciate that the external world is one upon which man has worked according to his own designs.<sup>47</sup>

### **ix The Richness of the Self-Realizer's Needs**

Finally and briefly, I want to consider the "richness of needs" claim that has already figured in other aspects of self-realization. Marx thinks that needs constantly expand through history and that the self-realizer is rich in need-*satisfaction*.<sup>48</sup> It is not my task here to provide a full Marxian typology of needs, but it should be stressed that the five foregoing aspects of Marxian self-realization generate a whole set of direct and indirect needs. That is to say: needs which directly meet the five aspects, and those which are required to enable them to be met. So anything required for the well-being of a communist person is to be considered a need.

This idea can obviously be put to severe criticism, centring around the lack of a distinction between "needs" and "wants" (see quote at n. 49). This means that, not only does it become less plausible that all "needs" can be met (the assumption of communism's material abundance notwithstanding) but that it is less obvious that full need-satisfaction is actually desirable. Although we might sympathetically suggest, with some textual support, that Marx would see the self-realizer's needs shift from the material to the more spiritual, he does say that our needs *expand* – not that they are *replaced* by another set of needs.

It may be, therefore, that the ambitions Marx had with respect to meeting all that now qualifies as "need" should be reduced. However, one important misunderstanding of Marx's position can now be cleared up. It might be thought that self-realization demands the complete, sustained satisfaction of need throughout the flourishing life, i.e. when no one is ever actually *in need* of anything. Given that Marx believes new needs are constantly produced from the satisfaction of existing ones, this would seem to be impossible – and perhaps undesirable, since total need-satisfaction could remove the dynamic in life that compels us to activity: we would be left to wallow in luxuriant passivity. What the "richness of needs satisfaction" requirement could be understood to mean, therefore, is that in communism there will not be needs that cannot be met, *eventually*.

### **x Marx's Reconsideration of Labour**

Having identified the various aspects of Marxist self-realization and suggested how labour might respond to them, we now consider the shift away from labour in C. III. Here, Marx distinguishes two "realms", of "freedom" and "necessity", stating that:

*[t]he realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper ... [t]he true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis.*

Self-realization is still equated with freedom, or its “true” realm but it is now contrasted with the:

*realm of physical necessity [which] expands as a result of [man’s] wants ... [f]reedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as a blind power; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature.”*

So, although labour is still contrasted with its capitalist form as being a kind of freedom (a point which distinguishes this rethink from the view of labour taken by Aristotle) it is a freedom which is now seen as limited, or deficient, for “it nonetheless still remains a realm of physical necessity.”

Before proceeding, it ought to be stressed that it is at least unclear that the *volte-face* of C. III represents the *settled* views of the mature Marx. As late as 1875, for example, he signals an implicit return to the previous conception when (as we have noted already) self-realizing communism is seen once more as a realm in which “labour has become not only a means of life but life’s *prime* want” (see n. 38).

However, this is not to say that the C. III passage was simply a momentary change-of-mind either. The *Grundrisse* also displays a reconsideration about the efficacy of work as a vehicle for self-realization, where “real wealth” – the developed productive power of all individuals” – is no longer measured by labour time but “disposable”, free time.<sup>30</sup> So, although Marx believes the quality of labour must be improved in communism (he is not so utopian as to believe labour can be avoided entirely), this will no longer be what directly contributes to self-realization.

Marx’s reconsideration can provide the starting-point for evaluating the idea that self-realization can be labour-based. We should begin, therefore, by thinking about what might have prompted it.

We have already noted the non-industrial character of the free production he depicted in his earlier writings. An obvious possible explanation for the change is that it was the result of his subsequent theoretical confrontation with the realities of capitalism’s progression to large-scale, increasingly mechanized industry. Unlike the earlier forms of labour with which he was first familiar, the labour practices in “advanced” capitalism are even less able to exhibit developmental possibilities. Here, the worker has continued to decline towards the status of a machine, stifling still further any possibility of flourishing personal development:

*it is the machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker ... the worker’s activity ... is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery ... [t]he production*

*process has ceased to be a labour process in the sense of a process dominated by labour as its governing unity.*<sup>51</sup>

In effect, capitalists utilize machinery “only to the extent that it enables the worker to work a larger part of his time for capital.” By reducing the human exertion needed to produce, machines facilitate the extension of the working day. Crucially, though, with typical dialectical irony Marx believes that capitalism’s (quite unintentional) reduction of total human effort required “will redound to the benefit of emancipated labour, and is the condition of its emancipation.”<sup>52</sup>

Mechanized capitalist industry turns the producer into a “watchman and regulator to the production process.” Marx notes that by shunting the worker aside from the direct production process, machines prevent productive activity from being the way man’s unity with nature is mediated. But he reminds us that “[n]ature builds no machines ... these are natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature ... the power of knowledge objectified.”<sup>53</sup>

What is oppressive about capitalist machines, therefore, is that they are not under workers’ control. If they were, the workers would be able to establish a new form of mediated unity with nature. They would no longer act upon nature directly, but they would have created and they would continue to control the things that now did.<sup>54</sup> There is nothing intrinsic to the machine that prevents this. It is when the worker is *only* the machine’s “watchman” that he is alienated. If he becomes the “regulator”, if he controls it, then he is the determining will in the production process. Thus, in communism people regain control of those faculties of productive conception and control lost in the mental/manual division, but automation reduces the extent to which they labour manually.

Reflections upon the nature of labour in automating capitalism had shown Marx how non-developmental even its potentials were becoming. But he found himself able to conceptualize a substantial non-labouring realm in which self-realization could now take place. He could consistently argue that, whereas in an earlier phase of capitalism the historically constituted basis of self-realization was indeed labour, the activity now no longer captured all that was required for self-realization (such is the flexibility of seeing self-realization as an historically evolving product). Because it had become ever more mechanical in nature, the requirements of all-round, expressive activity went increasingly unmet by labour (it must not be forgotten that Marxist communism is based upon an acceptance and not a rejection of the *technical* achievements of capitalism; the change in labour techniques being described here can be seen as a fact of the technology to be passed on to socialism, not just a consequence of capitalist class relations).

But the way had at last been opened for:

*[t]he free development of individualities and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time so as to posit surplus labour, but rather the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them.*<sup>55</sup>

Thus, as André Gorz has argued in work which can be interpreted as an extended commentary on the line of thought found in the C. III passage:

*the meaning of the current technological revolution cannot be to rehabilitate the work ethic and identification with one's work. It only has meaning if it broadens the field of non-work activities in which we can all ... develop that dimension of our humanity which finds no outlet in technicised work.*<sup>56</sup>

This interpretation of the meaning of the C. III position is a powerful attack on the idea that self-realization can be based upon labour in modernity. To see whether the reconsideration is justified, we can now examine how labour-based self-realization stands up to a variety of criticisms.

### **xi For and Against Labour-Based Self-Realization: Is It Ethnocentric?**

There are two respects in which labour may be found to be inadequate for self-realization: *absolutely*, where there is something in its nature that makes it intrinsically unsuitable, and *relatively*, where there are respects in which it meets the requirements of "self-realization" *less well* than other activities. In the rest of this chapter, we can see which, if either, type of case can be built against labour.

The first challenge to the labour-based conception is that it is "ethnocentrically biased".<sup>57</sup> The kind of activity it prioritizes is only available in certain kinds of society. Any way of life which has been eclipsed by capitalist development is deemed "inferior". The argument behind this claim could proceed as follows. Marx believed that the possibility of self-realization is the product of capitalist industrialization and, as famously proclaimed in the *Manifesto*, he thought that the latter was a global phenomenon. The bourgeoisie:

*compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e. to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.*<sup>58</sup>

So "non-bourgeois" and "non-industrial" actually mean "pre-industrial" and "pre-bourgeois". There is no sense that societies fitting this description (agrarian, "traditional" societies of the Third World, for example) could yield "truly human" self-realizing ways of life; they are simply not advanced enough. Marx's labour-based conception privileges a lifestyle that can only be the product of the kind of full-scale industrialization engendered by capitalism. Perhaps the idea of a striving, achieving, initiating self rationally *dominating* nature implies an industrially sophisticated society (the assumption being that non-industrial societies lack the technology really to master nature; disputable, of course, if we query what "mastery" actually entails). The general point seems to be that, without the market's individualizing effects and the material achievements of capitalism, self-realization cannot become a possibility.

Admittedly, we could dismiss the relevance of this point, along the lines of Marx and Engels themselves, by insisting that capitalism monopolizes the road to the future because

it actually destroys all other cultures and ways of life. Non-industrial societies increasingly fall prey to the global capitalist market. Those which fail to adapt are eventually extinguished. The life-possibilities which emerge from capitalism become the “end” of humanity because they are the only ones to survive the passages of time. But such an argument, insofar as it is even valid, would not prove the labour-based case. It does not follow that the “truly human” way of life must be the one that emerges out of the single mode of production to survive this era in the world’s history. It might easily have been one that did *not* survive – and to believe this to be impossible could be just optimistic naivety about human destiny.

This criticism might be weakened if we think about what “industrial society” means. Capitalism’s growth has created what, following John Keane, we may call “employment societies”, where “to work” means “to have a job”.<sup>59</sup> Marx’s self-realizing labour is clearly “post-employment”; labour-power is no longer sold for a wage.<sup>60</sup> But our ideas about labour are biased by the perspective of employment society. We tend to think of “labouring activities” as *only* those *currently* done as employment now and this probably narrows the range of potential self-realizing activities we have in mind. Not only should we not think of self-realization through labour as being ethnocentric for advocating employment-society production relations, but the understanding of what “labour” means should not be tied exclusively to anything we know as “employment”. Once we open up our thoughts thus, we might find that “self-realizing labour” can encompass activities that *may* be performed in other kinds of society.

But does a society have to pass through the capitalist-employment phase in order to get to the truly human stage for other reasons? Earlier, we saw how Marx argued that the potential of the self-realized individual was revealed by capitalist workers having to move from task to task in a fluid job market: that is how liberation is glimpsed through capitalist degradation. However, if it can be shown that a genuinely developed individuality can emerge by means other than those effected by capitalism’s workings (contra Marx) then we cannot as yet say that self-realization is a possibility unavailable to non-capitalist societies in the world today.

### **xii Labour’s Role in the Development of Powers and Potentials**

One aspect of self-realization where the type of work carried out in non-industrial societies might compare favourably with pre-socialist employment society concerns the development and deployment of capacities. Fully developmental activity is more likely to be found in the less-industrialized societies on Marx’s own terms, given the postulation of progressive de-skilling. Perhaps, when thinking about the practices likely to promote such development, we would therefore be advised to seek inspiration from such societies and not restrain our imagination by sticking to what “more advanced” ones might offer.<sup>61</sup> It may be that the former better secure personal development – and recall again the non-industrial character of the communist work Marx and Engels talked of in G.I., which may (inadvertently) support this point.

So, was the early Marx justified in his belief that industrial labour would promote the

expansive development required for self-realization, once capitalism had been surpassed? If it cannot, if it really can be nothing much more than drudgery, then we either accept the consequences of the C. III passage or, if we place a premium on the development of capacities, we revise our ideas on how we perform our labour and move back, perhaps, towards a way of labouring found in the non-employment societies.

However, the C. III passage does not lend a great deal of support to this way of making an argument against labour-based self-realization work. We noted above that there is still freedom of a sort in the realm of necessity: with freely associating producers collectively controlling production “with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature.” It is not starkly counterposed to human nature and dignity as is capitalist, alienated labour. Only its “necessary” character is held against it. So Marx still envisaged a form of labour which promoted *some* development and deployment of potentials and powers.

Given the crippling one-sided activity that work has typically become under capitalism in Marx’s view, activities undertaken in the realm of freedom are indeed likely to develop powers and potentials far more, in general. But if, as Marx himself supposed, work in more advanced forms of industrialized society is not necessarily of this sort, the advantages of the realm of freedom become much less obvious on this count.

Can we justify the view that modern labour *could* effectively promote the development and deployment of potentials and powers? A consideration of the types of work in today’s society reveals a variety of possible responses to this. Certainly, much labour alone fails to promote development because too few capacities are used and often too strenuously, retarding the possibility of development in any non-labouring situation. Taylorism lives on.

However, not *all* labour is like this. It is easy to over-exaggerate the extent of modern de-skilling (a good example of this flaw in orthodox Marxist thought is Harry Braverman’s *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, a classic text on this subject<sup>62</sup>). Some modern forms of labour still allow the use of a variety of skills in a non-monotonous way, particularly if the activity is such that, say, new techniques of production are constantly developed, with new knowledge about the means of production, therefore, for producers to learn. As theorists of “post-Fordism” would argue, although the development of increasingly sophisticated machinery may not require great skills at the assembly line, it does require greater technical know-how at the design studio and – most importantly for an argument about combining mental and manual labour at the old “blue-collar” level – on the part of those who maintain this equipment.<sup>63</sup>

A claim that capitalism’s internal logic necessarily pushes for a thoroughgoing technical division of labour does not actually hold in all instances. It is plainly uneconomic to have five workers carrying out five maintenance tasks when it is possible to train one worker to have the capability to do all five by himself. The “developed individual” in this sense is more than just “prefigured” by a worker who moves from job to job, since this worker may now need increasingly to acquire new skills in one job alone (if he is to keep it).

Emphasis on the disappearance of old skills in labour can obscure the fact that new

ones often have to be acquired in their stead. For example, computerization has compelled many to learn new abilities and think with new concepts. The replacement of this *new* type of skilled worker is probably much too far in the future to contemplate as yet. So, if our machines require human designers and constructors, we have not yet abolished “human labour”.

I do not want to claim too much for modern labour. There are still too few jobs which provide any real opportunity for the kind of all-round development found in Marxist self-realization. However, we need to remember the qualifications about the meaning of “all-roundness” made earlier {III iv}. The emphasis on mental skills in the computer-work example does not necessarily fail the “all-round requirement” just because it develops no conspicuous physical capacities (we are not expecting self-realization to yield intellectually dextrous weight-lifters). It might be enough to note the variety of mental skills in some forms of computer work for the requirement to be met.

However, the point remains that not enough skills are promoted in most labour today. Too many jobs still sap workers’ energies undevelopmentally. But the case for labour as remaining a (rather than “the”) way to undertake development can be strengthened quite considerably when we consider the alternatives. Even though the early Marxian model of creative labour, which we might try to emulate by de-automation and returning more manual skills to computer-proficient labourers, might still fall far short of producing all-round development, it remains unclear that there are activities beyond the realm of labour that could promote development any further.

Some of the pursuits of the “self-realizing aesthete” of the G.I., such as criticizing and painting, suggested the wide variety of things that could be done in free time. However, it is not at all obvious that any one of these would develop capacities any more than a moderately engaging job. If it is pointed out that free time allows us to choose to do a variety of different things, which a job does not, we can reply with the point made against the “jack-of-all-trades” version of self-realization: spreading one’s powers in this way could be to spread them too thinly to achieve sustained development of any of them. The constraints of a “job” may help one to avoid this dilution.

I suggest, then, that it is eminently arguable on developmental grounds not only that the split between work and leisure be kept, but that the latter does not possess any intrinsic superiority. It is quite possible that there are powers and potentials which can be developed in activities peculiar to each sphere and that Marxist self-realization would be best served by a judicious combination of the two.

The case for retaining labour in a self-realizing life gains further support from substantial sociological evidence concerning contemporary attitudes to work, leisure and unemployment. John Hayes and Peter Nutman, for example, point to survey material which shows that the need for income is far from being the only reason why people work. The dreadful frustration of inactivity felt by many unemployed people is a well-documented fact. Even those who are lucky enough not to have to work often freely choose to return to employment. Not only does work employ peculiar capacities, it *structures one’s time* and provides a sense of purpose to one’s life, which is crucial if we are

to *lead* a life and which may not be easily yielded in a lifestyle that does not have work as an important element.<sup>64</sup>

It might be argued that such negative attitudes to non-work lifestyles are historically-conditioned responses appropriate to the functioning of capitalism. They could be feelings of guilt due to the persistence of the Protestant work ethic, for example. One might propose that people in post-capitalist society will be able to structure their lives and invest them with meaning without recourse to work. There is some support for this: Hayes and Nutman indicate that people's attitudes to non-employment are not static, but can adapt to try to construct life-plans and self-images which do not depend upon work.<sup>65</sup>

However, we cannot automatically assume that history will condition us still further to complete the transfer of all activities required for self-realization to the realm of leisure. It is equally plausible to argue that it will still be by virtue of spending some of our time in ordered, routinized labour that we will find sufficient motivation to spend at least some of our leisure time engaged in alternatively developmental, refreshing pursuits. Without the former, we would be less inclined to indulge in the latter. So not only might work best yield particular self-realizing goods, it might be what will spur us to seek other such goods in our leisure. It might give us a better chance of living a harmoniously developed life.

I think there are still more respects in which there is and should be some resistance to the move away from work to automation. Consider the fact that people very often take pride in objects produced by their own hands. This seems to correspond well with the "minimalist" account of objectification discussed in {iii} and identified as a fundamental dimension of self-realization through labour. "Hand-made" products can indeed reflect back to their producers a sense of their achievement, a demonstration of the skills they have. They are a vehicle for the self-expressive as well as the self-developmental aspects of self-realization.

As a result, the manufacture of goods by one's own hand provides an important source of satisfaction in many people's lives. Automatically-produced goods lack this intimate connection with a person's self-development and self-expression. Consumers also value the "personality" injected into a good if it is hand-made; the "human touch" is valued for its own sake. One can readily think of very many objects that are particularly prized by other people precisely because they are hand-produced. Although things such as handicrafts and artwork might be relegated by the C. III Marx to the realm of freedom, as they can be the products of leisure pursuits, there is no reason why the value attached to the individual skills involved in their production should not also be desirable in at least some of the "bare necessities". Certain examples of building construction, drapery and cuisine illustrate this well in society today.

It is very difficult to see how the expressivist requirement could be met in a social world dominated by maximized impersonal automation. The lack of the human touch in a world of machines would surely fuel, not diminish, alienation. Our liberated aesthetic sensibilities would struggle indeed to find much of humanity's imagination and abilities reflected in such a world when more and more of its artefacts were being churned out by machines (I return to this point in {xiv}).

If I am right in suggesting that labouring activities can be sufficiently developmental, then we can reinforce the argument for treating them as self-realizing by acknowledging that there is *some* potential for treating production in work as potentially aesthetic for both producers and consumers. Only the non-aesthetic, boring, repetitive and dangerous tasks would be turned over to machinery (where possible).

These arguments show how strong is the case for seeing self-realization as an optimum balance between labour-based and non-labour activities. Importantly, the *Grundrisse* offers evidence that Marx could have agreed with this approach. Although he had already switched the focus of liberation to free time by the time he wrote it, he does not set up the rigid freedom/necessity dichotomy. He argues that:

*[t]he saving of labour time [i]) equal to an increase of free time ... for the full development of the individual which in turn reacts back upon the productive power of labour as itself the greatest productive power ... [f]ree time – which is both idle time and time for higher activity – has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and he then enters into the direct production process as this different subject.*“ (my emphasis)

The modifications to the Marxist conception which this section proposes can readily accommodate the idea that the development of one sphere complements and promotes the development in the other (i.e. that the achievement of more humanized labour is partially due to personal development in free time). What we now have no good reason to accept, either from the above quote or the C. III passage, is that “free time” always and exclusively features “higher activity”.

### **xiii Necessity Versus Self-Realization?**

As far as the possibility of a “relative” argument against labour-based self-realization goes, then, labour can stand up as well as any leisure activity. But defenders of the C. III Marx can put forward an absolute argument against it. They can stress that the whole objection to labour is actually based upon something else: its “necessary” character. Regardless of what capacities it might develop, it is intrinsically inadequate because it is something that *has* to be done to survive, not as an end in itself.

This revisits the familiar Aristotelian distinction between necessitated activity to sustain “mere life” and activity to lead “the good life”. Though communist producers are freely associating, joint masters of nature and the production process “with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature,” the C. III Marx told us that the (“true”, self-realizing) realm of freedom “begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends ... it lies by its very nature beyond the realm of material production proper.”

So there are two claims in the C. III claim: {a} that, ultimately, the reason we undertake material production is because we have to (it is still an imposition); {b} that self-realizing activity must be undertaken “as an end in itself” and not as necessitated means to anything else.

Even if we grant {b} it is clear that we need hardly accept {a}. As G.A. Cohen as

pointed out, just because a task has to be performed does not mean that the only reason we undertake it is because it has to be done: “some eating is enjoyable.”<sup>67</sup> After all, the early Marx had said that the purely instrumental motivation for labour asserted by {a} was a specifically capitalist attitude. No reason is proffered for the new claim that this is also going to be a feature of communist labour.

The C. III position also looks somewhat arbitrary when we remember Marx’s belief that self-realization is itself a need – the central need – for a communist person. Self-realizing activity will therefore be a kind of necessity itself. The early Marx thought that work under capitalism was purely instrumental because, having no semblance to “life-activity”, it could only be done to meet other needs, i.e. subsistence. Self-realizing labour responded directly to the need for life activity *even though its performance was no less necessary to maintain material production*. The later Marx cannot reject material production simply because it has to be done. He now has to say that it no longer responds directly to life-activity needs. Given his comments on the improved quality of communist labour, this is not something he can obviously affirm (and the arguments above make it even less plausible).

To make his position secure, Marx would have to demonstrate that there remains something about material production which would prevent anyone from choosing to do it as an end in itself. Here, we must remember that self-realizing labour has to be freely chosen; it cannot be forced. Marxists hold that capitalist labour is forced because there is no *reasonable* alternative to selling one’s labour-power. The C. III position suggests that something like this continues to hold under communism. Yet, again, this pessimistic assessment of the likely nature of labour under communism seems unwarranted. It is hardly too far-fetched to think that it would have sufficient appeal for free agents to want to perform it for its own sake, rather than begrudgingly treat it as a “necessary evil”.

These remarks may not have gone far in assessing *a priori* the compatibility of communist labour and Marxian self-realization. However, I think there is one final consideration which can be adduced to strengthen the case for labour by showing that the distinction between the two realms of freedom and necessity should not lead us to presume a rigid separation of motives in the two.

If we were to accept that labour is undertaken (only) to provide the means of life and we want to lead a life of self-realization, it is at least intelligible to suggest that our motives for the latter could nevertheless embrace the former. To choose freely the path of self-realization could equally be the free choice of doing whatever is necessary for that pursuit. Securing whatever is required to enable us to attempt a life of self-realization need not be seen as a necessary evil, a set of tasks that we would rather, but cannot, do without. Indeed, it would seem decidedly odd to grasp self-realization so wholeheartedly but chafe at part of its means as an inescapable chore if – and this is obviously a crucial proviso – the latter is not plainly unpleasant. Even if labour is not to be life’s *prime* want, there seems to be no reason why it cannot be treated as its second want, an integral part of the first.

#### xiv The Misogyny of the Marxist Conception

The final attack on the idea of labour-based self-realization we shall consider comes from an increasingly influential feminist critique of Marxism. It is no accident that this chapter has employed masculine pronominal terms; to do otherwise would have prejudged the validity of this attack. For, bluntly put, this criticism holds that the whole idea of productive activity as self-realization is a specifically *masculine* idea, with no warrant to masquerade as the truly human way of living. In its brusque subordination of ways of life which are, in fact, typically associated with the female, it is pretty brutally misogynistic. This turns out to have disastrous consequences for the “truly human” relationship with nature.

I take this line of thought to be potentially the most damaging against the Marxist conception of self-realization. By continuing and consolidating the revisions made thus far, though, I believe the conception can offer a response to it. I also propose that this critique compels us to broaden our understanding of “labour”. In what follows, I will introduce these new ideas, leaving their further elaboration until Chapter 6 (where the revised Marxian ideas will be incorporated into the general conception of self-realization).

Two aspects of the feminist charge will be analyzed, namely: {a} that the concentration upon productive activity privileges a predominantly male experience and cannot, therefore, be the paradigm self-realizing activity for which we are searching; {b} that its emphasis on the productive subjugation of nature (in its objectification-expressivist dimension particularly) is a misogynistically destructive doctrine which cannot be called authentically human either and should be abandoned.

{a} The problem of sexist bias in Marx’s world view originates in his analysis of capitalism – in the “womb” of which socialism is nurtured as a possibility (a particularly ironic metaphor, given this charge<sup>68</sup>). Its gender-blindness is revealed in, for example, the *Manifesto*’s claim that “differences of age and sex no longer have any validity for the working class.”<sup>69</sup> Although Marx is obviously not totally ignorant of the importance of reproducing labour power, he seems to neglect how crucial *reproductive* activity (child-rearing, housework) is in the foundations of the social order and human experience.<sup>70</sup>

Marx does have something in his thought to counter this. He would be unhappy at the charge that he chauvinistically favours what Terry Eagleton, elaborating the feminist case, calls “the traditional male preserve, the sphere of production.”<sup>71</sup> He could respond by pointing out that there is no longer anything “traditionally male” about material production; such labelling of its realm simply affirms a piece of bourgeois ideology no longer supportable even under capitalism’s own practices. He asserts that the traditional male-workplace/female-home division is being undermined. Seeking ever more workers, capitalism brings women out of the home and onto the shopfloor.

So “traditional” experiences are irrelevant as far as identifying the essence of self-realization goes, because that essence is dynamically transformed through time, leaving such traditions behind. On this account, then, “reproductive caring” is no more the “female essence” than “engulfing craft production” is the “male essence”, for both are forms of identification swept away by capitalism.<sup>72</sup>

There is evidence aplenty to indicate that this is a misleadingly simplistic analysis. We may identify, for example, a central inconsistency between the idea that capitalism is sucking into material production ever greater numbers of people, and the claim that it is also maintaining a growing “industrial reserve army” of unemployed, without recognizing the gender-structured nature of its ranks.<sup>73</sup>

But the most pertinent point for our purposes is that, even if Marx is correct, the central problem remains. Reproductive activity does not disappear just because women are co-opted into the workforce. Typically, they have had to go out to work *and* assume prime responsibility for care of the household. The upshot of this is that they usually have a much more fractured relationship to the workplace than men: part-time, more intermittent through their lives, even more underpaid, in even less developmental work.

No acceptable doctrine of self-realization should be ignorant of the effects of such bias (or, worse, openly embrace them!); it has to root itself in a lifestyle potentially available to all. One could argue, then, that labour-based self-realization requires social practices that give men and women equal access to productive work. But the solution I suggest explores a different approach. It involves a more decisive break of the link between “labour” and “direct material production” than the one discussed in the analysis of automation. It opens up our understanding of “labour” or “work” to include non-manufacturing activity and I shall take, as one example of this, the “caring” activities singled out by feminists as archetypal female experiences.<sup>74</sup> These illustrate how we might further loosen the connection between this conception’s paradigm self-realizing practice and the practices of industrial societies, consolidating section {xii}’s hope that the conception can be widened to include non-industrial ways of life.

To overcome alienation, self-realizing labour had to be something we freely identified with, not undertaken simply for survival. It had to be expressive of our character, under our fully conscious rational control, aesthetically pleasing and rooted in our life-activity as members of a humanized community. I claimed that productive labour had not lost all hope of respecting these conditions in modern industrial society. However, I also acknowledged that this may not open up vast possibilities of self-realization through work for all. The development of automation in modern industry inevitably militate against this to a degree.

Yet, if we consider the “developmental-deployment of talents and commitments” aspect of self-realization, then I think it would take no very great argument to hold that the “caring realm” now opened up for the category of “labour” could service these requirements particularly well. To explain the kind of work now available to the conception, we can split the caring realm into three: {i} the family; {ii} the neighbourhood; {iii} the wider society.

In the caring labour of the family, tasks have to be performed for the maintenance and development of the household (the people who make up the family and the inanimate structure and objects that comprise the house).<sup>75</sup> The suggestion is: that there are ways of performing these tasks that can go as far as “material production” in meeting the requirements of self-realization. What we need is a greater understanding amongst people

that such tasks are not simply menial tasks for subordinates, but worthy arenas for human fulfillment in their own right.

*If* these tasks can be performed in a genuinely co-operative way – if, that is, the relations by which their performance are organized are not based on subordination and domination and that the *sexual* division of labour in particular is overcome – then it is plausible to hope that the following aspects of self-realization can be achieved: joint control of the immediate environment (which does not, therefore, present itself as hostile and alien); activities which literally aim to aestheticize that environment and meet one's sensuous needs; deep personal relations in the context of co-operation within each other's pursuits (face-to-face interaction); activities that are expressive of one's commitments to others; and activities which develop and deploy one's own personal powers (in e.g. D.I.Y., gardening).

This indicates why “the family” provided a useful metaphor for the concept of Marxist community. We need to conceptualize it in terms such as this if we are to dilute the instrumentalist interpretation we obtained earlier (again, the biases of employment society make it difficult to visualize such personal relations in work, which was what our earlier discussion of community focussed on). If this seems to present too idealized a picture of family life for many, one could reply that it is no more ideal than the hope for similarly expressive and developmental activity in the “workplace”.

Further, it is plausible to suggest that many aspects of self-realization – certainly the communitarian dimension and quite possibly the potential-development and environmental-control aspects are likely to be more nearly realized in the ideal family than in even an ideally “humanized” workplace. It is hardly obvious that an ideal workplace could offer the requisite immediacy and intimacy more perfectly than an ideal family.

Were this to be adopted as part of the self-realizationist perfectionist ideal, the social and political implications would be many, and Chapter 6 will identify some of them. But, as suggested above, it is obvious (particularly if one thinks this an idealized picture) that many deep-seated attitudes and practices about work in this kind of family-community (about, for example, “the woman's place is in the home”) need to be transformed before these proposals can be pursued successfully.

The second level of the caring realm is the “neighbourhood”. In caring for and co-operating with others in the maintenance of their lifestyles and the environment in which all live, all the aspects realized in the family's work could again be met here. Relationships are extended among more people in this larger context and, if they are not all going to be as close as in the family, a person's sympathies are at least broadened by being active in the neighbourhood. It provides another community to which one can express commitment in self-realization.

Again, I defer suggestions as to practical policy initiatives relating to this until the end. But clearly we can see the beginnings of a self-realizationist case for a strongly co-operative local community. The point I wish to stress here is that there is no reason to think this type of community (or the idealized family unit, for that matter) can only be a product of modern industrial societies. Indeed, Chapter 5 will develop an argument that the Marxist

affirmation of permanent, revolutionizing industrialization to reach communism might actually have to be rejected to allow anything like these aspects of self-realization to become reality. For this idea of caring labour does not have any obvious reliance on industrial production, or any notion that people have acquired vastly expanded *material* needs – a key assumption in Marx’s own thought – that require large resources to be met. Suitably amended, Marxist self-realization is available to non-industrial societies (insofar as they have escaped engulfment<sup>76</sup>).

The final level of caring labour does seem to be one that is peculiar to employment-societies: it is where caring is professionalized, becoming a service available to society at large. Now some, such as André Gorz, have suggested that even caring at this level can exhibit the kind of community-commitment identified at the other levels. Indeed, “caring and educational professions ... are only done well when they are performed out of a ‘sense of vocation’, that is, an unconditional desire to help other people.”<sup>77</sup> This is almost certainly false as a generalization: doctors, for example, may only be able to cope with the suffering they face by the adoption of a stoically divorced, impersonal attitude to their work (as opposed to their “bedside manner”). Furthermore, it seems wildly implausible to suggest that society’s caring industries can be organized on a purely voluntary basis, as the Gorzian position requires.<sup>78</sup>

The only point I want to stress here is that caring on this level probably does not yield the same type of affective communitarian commitment as found in the other levels. But granted this, there is no good reason to think that it is going to be less socialized than production might inevitably turn out to be in modern industrial society. If the looseness of community at this level does not, therefore, disqualify it for Marxian self-realization, other considerations can bolster its claim to be part of this conception. For example, caring professions seem far less prone to de-skilling than the latter. Indeed, by improving medical techniques, for example, modern technology does precisely the opposite. It equips people with new skills, furthering the possibilities for personal development. So, if industrial work is being de-skilled, then perhaps we should look to these other forms of work for the kind of activity Marxism requires for self-realization.

My argument, then, is that the kinds of work experiences neglected by the concentration on “productive labour” are just as likely to meet the main formal requirements of Marxist self-realization. The concentration on production directs political concern to the improvement of one form of work only. We should escape these shackles and concern ourselves with other forms as possible vehicles for self-realization. We cannot specify in advance what sorts of labour, and in what proportion, people need to undertake in order to achieve self-realization. The requisite life-plan, it is safe to say, has to be formulated by the individual herself.

Having said that, it seems reasonable to assume that caring labour, being less avoidable than material production (because of the way automation progresses in the latter) and possibly better suited to meeting the communitarian dimensions of self-realization, is probably more likely to figure in most life-plans. Also, if we assume that caring labour replicates many of productive labour’s self-realizing potentials, we have further reason to

believe that self-realization is available in non-industrial societies.

What perfectionist political activity could promote here, then, would be the possibility of self-realization in whatever form of work the individual decides to pursue, improving the quality of productive and caring labour and maximizing the chances for people to choose whatever forms of labour suit them best. Substance will be added to this suggestion in Chapters 5 and 6.

{b} I will deal more briefly with the critique of objectification-expressivism in the Marxist concentration on productive activity. Although these two concepts provided the initial grounding of the conception in productive labour, our critique seems to undermine this position fairly swiftly. Though I have attributed the argument's genesis to feminism, it is a point which can also be formulated by Green critiques of any lifestyle based upon the thoroughgoing industrialization which orthodox Marxism presumes. The Green perspective is well-known now and should not require much elaboration. But I do want to suggest that there may be reasons in the Marxist conception of self-realization which themselves support its resistance to industry and further prompt the move to the other forms of work for which I have been arguing.

Although there are some tantalizing passages in which Marx talks in Green terms of a "metabolic interchange" between "man" and "nature",<sup>79</sup> it is pretty clear that he remains firmly committed to the familiar Enlightenment aspiration to the total domination of nature by "man":

*[c]ommunism ... treats all natural premises as the creatures of hitherto existing men, strips them of their natural character and subjugates them to the power of united individuals ... [its] reality is precisely the true basis for rendering it impossible that anything should exist independently of individuals, insofar as reality is only a product of the preceding intercourse of individuals themselves.<sup>80</sup>*

The drive to objectify ourselves in the productive exploitation of nature, the desire to shape nature expressively to reflect humanity's purposes (as these are interpreted in industrial society) completely ignores any claim that nature and its other living inhabitants may have to be anything other than raw material to be "humanized".

Clearly, this kind of attitude to nature all too easily degenerates into its destruction. A moment's reflection on the spectacle of modern urbanism, of vast factories and industrial estates, the levelled remnants of rain forests, the acid-rain-dead lakes – all the products and by-products of industrial society – is enough to show us that the whole project of subjugating nature totally to our purposes, as Marx conceives them, seems horribly misconceived.<sup>81</sup>

But Marxist self-realization's very commitment to expressivism, suitably modified, may give us a reason to resist this result. For if the point is that self-realization requires us to be "at home" in our environment, then it can hardly be doubted that this landscape of modern society fails to meet this for many – a point already raised in section {xii}. There, the expressivist requirement was used to resist automation. Here, we take it further to urge a move away from concentration on productive activity carried on at the expense of the natural world.

One reason why a society that subjugates nature proves to be so alienating and unexpressive could be that it is typical (male?) arrogance which assumes that nature even can, let alone *should*, be so subordinated. For “man” is not something that can rise right above the limitations of nature and create a world entirely in his own image. Humanity is part of that nature, not wholly subsumed by it, but not wholly free of embeddedness in it either. Marx’s rich but sadly undeveloped idea of “symbiosis” between the two indicates a far better approach to the environment in which self-realization can be pursued.

Nature “as it is” could be far less alienating than the world as industrial society manufactures it. If we think of ourselves as living in and with the “natural world”, rather than as sovereign conquerors of it, then there is no reason to suppose that the expressivist requirement cannot be met through nature as it is. People will feel “at home” in an environment where nature flourishes. Certainly, it is more likely to be aesthetically pleasing than the kind of “concrete jungle” Marx’s own approach seems likely to yield.

Having reconsidered what expressivism might entail in this conception, it just remains for us to rethink the objectification requirement. This is the one that looks most vulnerable to the abandonment of “productive activity” as self-realization’s sole activity. Throughout this chapter, we have already been operating with what I called the “minimalist” understanding of objectification. It is now pertinent to wonder whether it is at all necessary or plausible to assert its indispensability to self-realization. After all, its primary function – as a vehicle for self-knowledge by embodying the “fruits of our labours” – is *also* provided by the social relationships one has (for these, too, were explained as vehicles for “self-confirmation”).

It is within this communitarian dimension that we can relocate objectification. “Material” objectification can still play a role in this conception; I am not now denying the minimalist reading since, if people produce objects that are utterly meaningless to them then this could indeed be a source of alienation. But I propose that we do not *need* material objects to achieve the same effects. We can keep the idea of objectification as making a difference to something in your self-realizing activity – but deny this *must* be done via material objects. The same self-confirming effects, of seeing your self-realized capacities reflected back to you, can be manifest in the social difference you make. People depend upon you in relationships of social interdependence, so the very maintenance of this community confirms the contribution one makes to the social world. The simple act of participating in and sustaining co-operative relationships can objectify the self, reflecting one’s essence as a social being and demonstrating the use of our powers within our joint activity.

## xv Summary

The conclusion of this extended analysis of labour-based self-realization is fairly straightforward. Contrary to the denigration it suffers in the Aristotelian conception and the sentiments behind C. III, work can be made to yield the kinds of goods and characteristics we would expect of a self-realizationist theory. But the Marxist concentration on productive labour is unjustifiably narrow; “work” in a more general

sense can also deliver these.

In retrieving the realm of work, now broadly understood, for self-realization, the Marxist conception locates its variant of the good life in the kinds of activities people ordinarily perform on a day-to-day basis. Thus, “self-realization” as interpreted here is not the activity for the privileged few that it was for Aristotle. Nor is it the kind of lifestyle that the Millian conception seemed to suggest was likely to be tested in the leisured private realm, where one had the chance to experiment with the form of one’s self-realization.

The Marxist view roots self-realization in public, co-operative, interdependent activities – and it is the fact of its social dimension that makes it an obvious candidate for political concern from a modern perspective (in which politics has typically been excluded from promoting specific good-life concerns partly because of the privatization of the conceptions of the good life; their pursuit did not usually spill over into the public realm). By giving self-realization a distinct life-activity through which it is to be achieved – even one as loosely defined as labour now is in this chapter – and by identifying concrete aspects to self-realization, via the account of alienation’s dimensions, the Marxist conception shows how a modern theory can still suggest specific ways of promoting it beyond the simple commitment to autonomy.

As mentioned, Chapter 6 will continue to suggest some of these specifics, as labour takes its place in the general conception. But we now turn to some other problems in Marxist theory which are raised when we think about how to construct a political theory of self-realization.

## CHAPTER 5

### Some Problems in Self-Realizationist Political Theory: A Critique of Communism

#### **i A Sketch of Communism**

Chapter 4's conclusion was that, with certain qualifications, Marx's idea of non-alienated labour is a highly plausible candidate for a distinctive modern self-realizationist activity. We surmised that we could use it to deduce quite a substantial set of social and political recommendations to facilitate it. So, despite Marx's own aversion to blueprints for future society, we can suggest that this conception is capable of yielding a more detailed political theory than Mill's, which was less able to commit itself to definite institutional arrangements. This is what opens up the possibility of having a modern conception aspiring to the comprehensiveness of the Aristotelian theory.

This possibility will be promoted here by examining the Marxist idea of communism, the realm in which Marx thought full self-realization was to be achieved. It aims to show that there are enough problems with the idea to indicate that Marx's view of communism is actually a rather poor model for a self-realizationist society. We need to rethink how we conceptualize it, if it is to provide any inspiration in our speculations about this society.

Although the reflections here are part of the debate about Marxist self-realization specifically, they also form the basis for Chapter 6's general political theory of self-realization. Consequently, the theoretical propositions of this chapter are introduced, to await fuller elaboration in the final chapter. Before indicating which topics will be discussed here, though, it will be useful to have a brief sketch of communism as Marx sees it, so we can be clear about the target of criticism.

Because individual projects and social relationships are all freely entered into, coercion is absent in communism's basic social structure. This is most evident in the fact that there is no compulsory state, but a freely associative social union. People can also freely choose their "life-situation"; specifically the kind of work they do (and hence the form that their self-realization takes).

Freedom is also manifest in the active participation of all in the making and execution of decisions. This is epitomized by an external environment controlled by and expressive of the projects of its inhabitants. This insistence on conscious, rational control of society commits Marxism to the centralized planning of the economy, rejecting any role for the market.<sup>1</sup> Other features of capitalism are also negated, in particular commodity production and wage labour. Production is geared not to profit, but ultimately to "need," which provides communism's distributive principle.

Communist persons in society are not pitted against one another by fundamental, antagonistic divisions (the last great divide, the bourgeois/proletarian class dichotomy, having been overcome). Greatly facilitated by the presumption of material abundance which would seem to remove the possibility of significant conflict over resources, it is this that makes it possible for society to be freely associative rather than coercive and

conflictual.<sup>2</sup> People are bound together in the joint pursuit of self-realization. They do not relate to each other instrumentally, as performers of social roles who are useful means to their private ends.

It is the skimpiness of the communist vision which has generated so many critical questions about its content and coherence, only a few of which can be dealt with here. Firstly, the question of the nature of the communist community and the relationships between the people will be examined. I shall argue that the lack of detail on this in communism unwittingly attests to a paucity of material from which to construct the new form of community Marx requires. After stressing why this presents a problem for a theory of self-realization, I shall look at two ways of grounding community – both of which can be incorporated into a vision of the self-realizationist society.

Woven into this discussion will be the question of the appropriateness, or otherwise, of existing practices and commitments in an account of self-realization. One of the features of Marx's own conception is that it seems to require the wholesale transcendence of what now exists in order to achieve the fully realized self. Communism seems to cut the self away from all that has previously encumbered it. I shall argue that this is probably a mistake, because these commitments could remain the very "stuff" of the identity of the self to be realized. It is prudent to believe that any workable self-realizationist theory should not attempt to slip into a realm purified of them.

The next problem is also based upon the issue of communism's revolutionary sweeping-away of hitherto existing principles. It queries, first of all, the exact motivations self-realizing people may have for their actions, and then seeks to identify the principles by which the communist society organizes its affairs. This area of concern might be problematic for Marxism, as Elster's self-defeasibility thesis could be applicable here. If self-realization can only emerge as a by-product, we need to explore the argument that communism is flawed because Marx's conception leaves us struggling to find appropriate alternative motives for activities we hope will be self-realizing.

To tackle this, we shall re-examine the self-defeasibility objection and suggest ways it can be overcome in the behaviour of self-realizing individuals. We then turn to the principles which determine the purposes and behaviour of social institutions and practices, criticizing those supplied by Marxist communism. I will argue that an adequately comprehensive self-realizationist theory must be able to account for suitable principles by which to organize society, which are not themselves derived from a commitment to self-realization directly. Communism, I suggest, fails badly on this score.

Finally, we shall begin to consider the best forms of political institution for self-realizing society. This clinches the main claim of this chapter, that politics – far from coming to an "end" as Marx forecast for communism – remains a central activity in self-realization and must be accommodated in any vision seeking to promote it.

We begin with the analysis of the self and communist community.

## **ii Communism's "Unembedded" Self**

At the end of Chapter 4, a feminist-environmentalist critique of Marxist labour-based self-

realization was introduced. This expressed dissatisfaction at its emphasis on *self-creating* striving to overcome the limitations of nature. Its point was to query the rather arrogant over-estimation of the self's freedom from its natural context. We can now expand this line of attack, for a similar point may be made about the way the Marxist conception postulates the relationship between the self and its *social* context.

The Marxist self-realizing subject might be said to be “self-creating” because its final identity is acquired through the development of its own potentials and powers alone. Identity is a product of its own activity, in harness with the activity of others. This can be contrasted with an account of identity in which social traditions, customs and practices inherited passively by the self also make up “who one is”. The orthodox Marxist conception rejects this alternative because the social environment, it will be recalled, has to embody expressively human purposes. It is dominated by, rather than a determinant of, these purposes.

So, the communist self does not passively inherit any social attribute as part of its identity. Being entirely a product of its own self-activity, we can think of the realized Marxist self as “unembedded” in its social context. It is “unembedded” not because it is not a “sociable” self, having no need to live in society. The point of the label is to stress the way that the communist person does not have her identity and her purposes shaped by traditional attachments and commitments of community. She is conceived of as being the creator of this social context, not a subject embedded within it.

The reason why the Marxist conception has become counterposed to any idea of an embedded self is due in large part to the view of capitalist modernity presented in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (I do not wish to suggest this represents Marx's settled or overall view, but it is a very influential line of thought and has directly fuelled the debate being entered into here). There, Marx and Engels argue that as capitalism sweeps through society, old traditions and patterns of social relationships are consigned to history.<sup>3</sup> Thus, cultural identities based upon existing “shared cultures” – nationality, race and religion, for examples – are destined to disappear. Basically, these identities are deemed to be simply products of pre-capitalist production relations and identities. Hence, capitalist development inexorably undermines those social relations which sustain such identities.

Capitalism's advanced industrial economy destroys the type of community often picked by contemporary communitarians as the paradigm human society for their emphasis on inherited, affective ties.<sup>4</sup> For no such settled, embedded commitment can be sustained any more: “all that is solid melts into air.”<sup>5</sup> A good thing too, think Marx and Engels, for (as seen in Chapter 4's analysis of engulfment) only this sundering of the individual from a subsuming context allows full, individual self-realization to become possible.

Even commentators sympathetic to Marx are now inclined to feel that this conception of unembeddedness misunderstands the ideal nature of identity for a self-realized person. For example, G.A. Cohen believes that the conception's stress on activity (“what I can do”) does not properly cater for the need for “self-definition”, a sense of “who I am”, the implication being that self-definition (by which we acquire knowledge of our identity) is at

least partly a passive process of self-discovery.<sup>6</sup> To recast this critique in the light of Chapter 4's arguments, we might say that it expresses dissatisfaction with the idea that self-knowledge is something created through the activities of objectification. There is more to self-knowledge than what we garner from the fruits of our activities, because there is more to the self than its activity.

This missing element refers precisely to inherited socio-cultural traditions and commitments. Cohen states that the need for self-definition "has historically been found in identification with others in a shared culture based on nationality, or race, or religion, or some slice or amalgam thereof."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps we should not be surprised that this dimension is rather neglected in communism, because it is easy to argue that this is an endemic feature of modern thought more generally. Back in Chapter 1 we identified the centrality of individual, autonomous intervention in self-definition for a typical modern theory of the self (the "unencumbered self" seeming to follow quite naturally from this premise). Activity rather than inheritance is noticeably to the fore in a modern theory.

But the Marxist conception seems to exaggerate this because, unlike Mill (whose idea of experiments in living, it will be recalled, was theoretically capable of embracing such inherited commitments<sup>8</sup>), there is much greater insistence upon the self-realizers' eventual destruction of the context in which selves were formerly embedded. Insofar as our initial arguments against the unencumbered self and the case for the partially socially situated self stand, this exaggeration counts heavily against the Marxist conception.

Marx simply assumed that a new form of community would emerge through the interaction of individuals, to replace the traditional forms of society. But having given us little substantive indication of its source, this assumption is hardly compelling. The following critique of communism's "anti-embeddedness" reveals the implausibilities and dangers of Marx's approach and leads us to propose that an adequate self-realizationist theory should be able to acknowledge *some* form of embeddedness in its conception of the self. But I want to argue that the "consciously created" community theorized for communism is also a plausible notion in its own right – but only with a set of assumptions conspicuously at odds with that in Marx's theory. Both forms of community, I will suggest, can be incorporated into our view of the ideal society.

### **iii The Persistence of Inherited Identities**

First, we need to appreciate the possible consequences of postulating an unembedded communist self. These become particularly clear in part of Hannah Arendt's penetrating critique of Marx's communism. She stresses the absence in his account (such as it is) of any indication as to what could keep the communist society of free self-realizers together as a "genuine" community (which we shall define as a body of people who identify themselves as members of a group and who can relate to and interact with each other in ways which express their common identity, rather than separateness, or difference). She raises the worrying possibility that communism will actually display "no true public realm, but only private activities displayed in the open."<sup>9</sup> This is because there is nothing to guarantee that the various projects of individual self-realization will actually generate such

a community. Everyone shares the common quest for self-realization, but this is obviously not enough to make it a quest pursued in concert.

It is unjustifiably dogmatic to insist without argument or proof, as some Marxists do,<sup>10</sup> that people will become embroiled sufficiently in each other's self-realization to promote a sense of community. There is no necessary reason why self-realizing pursuits need any great degree of co-operation, particularly given the increased use of automation in production – and some of Marx's paradigm activities (such as the aesthetic individualistic pursuits of G.I. seen in Chapter 4) support this opinion.

So, the ominous potential for narcissistic self-obsession is here in what, ironically, *could* turn out to be a deeply *individualistic* future communist society. This seems to be the main danger with the idea of the unembedded, self-creating self. For confidence in its ability to give itself a strong, stable identity and purpose may be misplaced. As Marshall Berman puts it, with no social anchors for its identity Marx launches “the liberated self into immense human spaces with no limits at all.”<sup>11</sup>

One way in which nihilism might result from this self-obsession (to recall a suggestion from Chapter 1) is that the self-realizer could feel cowed by this infinitude when contemplating her own identity and purposes. She may need a firmer sense of who she is (and, in appreciating her community, *where* she is) than that which grounds her entire identity on the development and expression of her own unique powers and potentials.

Alternatively, her attitude to life might be a recklessly irresponsible self-indulgence, or perhaps a morbid despair, a sense of pointlessness about self-realization: “the futility of a life which does not fix or realize itself in any permanent subject that endures after its labour is past,” as Arendt puts it.<sup>12</sup> In both instances, it is membership of an inherited community, something larger and more persistent than the individual and which connects the purposes of one's life to others, which could “anchor” the self.<sup>13</sup>

Now, the *Manifesto's* sweeping generalization about capitalism's modernizing effect has proved to be severely exaggerated. Not only do many of the traditional ties, customs and traditions persist, there is little reason to think that they are still destined to “wither away” completely. True, capitalism has diminished the significance of, if not annihilated, many of them. But attachments such as nationality and creed have survived because capitalism has not destroyed the very much larger communities upon which they are based. They have proved to be far more resilient in the face of advanced capitalist development.<sup>14</sup>

If people are still likely to identify such traditional commitments in their self-definition in advanced capitalism, we must consider whether it is right to believe that capitalism's legacy must involve their total destruction. We have no real warrant to assume that those commitments which remain are anachronistic “left-overs”, rendered incidental to the self's true realization. They should not automatically be explained as exemplary of the “failed” or “incomplete bourgeois revolution”, a familiar diagnosis on the left (as if yet more vigorous capitalist competition would finally put paid to them). Their persistence may be better explained by the idea that they meet the need for community, for *socialized* self-definition (see Chapter 4 {v}). Remaining as genuine constituents of modern selfhood, they are not easily dislodged or eradicated from people's self-understandings –

and nor should they be if one wishes to promote self-realization. To ignore or repress them would not realize all that is given to the self.

As Berman points out, Marx's view of modernity's experience is of a "maelstrom" of impulses, commitments, fashions – conflicting and contradictory interpretations of identity and purposes, due to the liberation of individuals from stable, engulfing social contexts.<sup>13</sup> If capitalism does indeed push society *towards* such a situation, we have one plausible explanation for why some traditional identities and cultures persist. People resist this push because, in the "constantly revolutionizing" environment of modernity, such attachments help to invest lives with the meaning they wish them to have. They provide a more expansive and settled source of identity and commitment, when modernity fails to provide adequate substitutes to meet the continuing need for socialized self-definition.

If we allow that the self remains embedded in these inheritances, the danger of self-realization leaving its subjects hanging in nihilistic limbo is much reduced. The self need no longer see itself as living and acting on its own behalf alone. Without this, as the Arendtian critique suggests, the communist life of self-realization teeters on the brink of utterly nihilistic impoverishment.

But if it is inaccurate and undesirable to think that capitalism clears away all traditional forms of identity before communism, this is not to say that these cultures are unscathed by the experience of modernity. Nor is it to say that the remaining traditional forms of identity automatically contribute to Marxist self-realization. We must not forget that, according to this conception, a self-realizing activity has to meet the several requirements of "non-alienation". It is quite likely that some traditions are constituted by beliefs which prompts a person to behave in non-self-realizing ways.

One example of this would be the acceptance by a woman of a traditional self-image that depicted the woman's lot in life to be subordinate drudgery in the service of men. As argued in the Millian conception (Chapter 3 {v}), a *modern* theory defined by a commitment to autonomy and concomitant equality of respect cannot tolerate such discriminatory ideas. It would therefore purge traditions that embodied such false self-perceptions (we will develop this as we proceed).

But there is no reason why *all* traditional commitments must necessarily frustrate self-realization. The fact that some obviously do means that an adapted theory of Marxist self-realization which accommodates embedded forms of identity needs to be able to theorize the possibility of such commitments being jettisoned. We must include the modern respect for individual autonomy in this conception. This avoids the pre-modern self's hapless subsumption into its context, even if the self does not slip entirely free from it. I suggest that we think of this as the ties between self and context being *loosened*, rather than cut altogether. The self can reflect upon its identifying commitments and has the power to revise them and reshape its identity, should it so choose.

Now, this is precisely how autonomy was conceptualized in Chapter 1, and elaborated in Mill's idea of experiments-in-living in Chapter 3. If Marx's anti-embeddedness is too radical a separation of self and context, then his conception can be adapted to accommodate the Millian idea of being able to stand back from its commitments

(individual and social), subjecting them to scrutiny and revision if other commitments urge it to do so. Thus, should a person feel that the form of identity she has inherited in her culture is restrictive, this modification acknowledges her freedom to alter it.

But if there is a form of identity, such as membership of an ethnic minority, to which she still feels deeply committed and which does not overly restrict the development of her powers and potentials, then the conception of self-realization should acknowledge that it should be preserved.

As far as its consequences for social and political theory go, this revision suggests that communism should be much more amenable to the need for the sustenance and nurturing of traditions. To be otherwise would frustrate perfectly authentic forms of self-realization. Chapter 6 will explain this proposal in more detail.

The foregoing should not be read as suggesting that the society of self-realizers has only these “fragments of modernity” to provide the complete communal dimension of the self. The question is: could it provide something like the distinctively new form of community Marx believes it furnishes? Some may believe that an idea of “common humanity” becomes rich enough to supply the sense of community required.<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to think that this could work, though. For it is hard to feel commitments that are strong enough to be genuinely convivial and fraternal with every other human being, particularly as communism is supposed to be a society based upon individual difference too. Humanity may have certain needs in common – a usual way of arguing for human identity – but many more needs of individuals will be differentiated.

People are unlikely to be able to spread their reserves of communal sentiment so thinly that they can feel the same attachment to distant, unknown others as they do to their nearest neighbours. This would empty the communal dimension of the interactive sociability for which it is considered desirable. The shared-needs-of-humanity approach remains too sparse for communitarian purposes.<sup>17</sup>

Marx’s writings, however, indicate another source of community, as we shall now see.

#### **iv Community Through Solidarity**

The “embedded” form of community is one whose commitments we *inherit* even if, as our modifications insist, we need to affirm them autonomously if such commitments are to contribute to genuinely self-realizing life-projects. The alternative allows the person to participate more directly and originatively in the constitution of their identity. It is the result of freely chosen interaction (i.e. labour, giving us another reason for preserving it as the central activity of Marxian self-realization). We can call this the “contingently located” account of self-in-community.

It draws inspiration from the one form of community that has been strikingly absent from the foregoing analysis of Marxism and communal attachments. It has been pointed out by Alan Gilbert who, in criticism of Cohen,<sup>18</sup> claims that the latter’s analysis of Marxism’s deficiency over community “overlooks Marx’s admiration for the solidarity involved in political community ... the collective element in social individuality.” It is the notion of solidarity which is crucial here: the comradeship formed amongst people

struggling for a common cause. "Solidarity is a political relationship and a self-chosen way of being," Gilbert emphasizes; "it is *not* the realization of a productive talent." (my emphasis)<sup>19</sup>

Now, in pre-communist society, solidarity emerges through class struggle. It is through unity in the fight against the same oppressors for the same liberatory ends that a communal identity is formed, constituting the class consciousness of the proletariat. The intensity of class struggle, in the depths of the degradation to which the proletariat have sunk and which prompts the virtual "life-or-death" character that their class activity often assumes, deepens the bonds generated between its participants. They share the same goals and come to depend upon each other's moral and physical support ever more, as the struggle intensifies. It is from this that a communal purpose and identity arises, which contributes towards the identity of the self.

The significant problem with this form of community for communism is that it is formed out of the types of adversity that the self-realizing realm is supposed to lack. There are no rival groups or interests against which to struggle and, consequently, less for people to be solidaristic about.<sup>20</sup> This is not to say that solidaristic communities are formed only in situations of inter-group hostility.<sup>21</sup> The significant factor is the *intensity*, rather than the *adversity*, of the situation. Our worry here is that communism might not provide sufficiently intense co-operative activities to promote this type of community.

The worry is reinforced by the early Marx's view of communist aesthetes, whose "association itself creates a new need – the need for society – and what appeared to be a means has become an end." Activities such as "smoking, eating and drinking" are no longer simply "means that bring [people] together."<sup>22</sup> This simply buttresses Arendt's fear that communism will simply bring private delights out into the public eye. It seems a weak form of community indeed if all that Marx can use to illustrate it is the mutual enjoyment of a few cigarettes over a pint or two. Again, the early Marx's ideas might be too "playful" to be taken seriously. Yet, if conflict and strife have been replaced, what else is there?

The Marxist conception of communism is based upon the transcendence of those situations in which solidaristic communities have typically been formed thus far. Yet these seem to be ideal for the communitarian dimension of self-realization. Perhaps the self-realizing society should be conceptualized to include such situations, an argument buttressed by two further considerations.

First, the harmonious tranquility that characterizes Marx's communism does not seem to sit well with an essentially activist conception of the good life like labour-based self-realization. The later Marx, it will be recalled, thought that self-realization is "the most intense exertion". We need to consider whether what might make it "intense" will not be something that makes it tranquil. Second, some of the assumptions which removed the grounds for solidaristic community are implausible and undesirable and should be rejected. These will be explained in what follows.

Obviously, we need to ensure that our idea of the self-realizing society incorporates sufficiently intense co-operative activity to generate a solidaristic community. To do this, we need to query some of Marx's own assumptions about it, which have prompted the

tendency to depict it as a realm of “tranquility.” The key assumption is that communism is premised upon “material abundance”. Now, Norman Geras has pointed out that no level of use-value availability that would qualify as “abundance” is specifically identified by Marx. Therefore, Marx should not be seen as necessarily committed to the vision of a land of fantastic plenty.<sup>23</sup>

Maybe not, but it can hardly be denied that an assumption of *some* considerable level of abundance operates to resolve a great many social problems (such as that of distribution of goods, where people’s expansive needs are apparently met perfectly from the common social product<sup>24</sup>). We cannot pitch the level of “abundance” too far below this familiar understanding of what it entails if Marx’s own meaning is to be respected. This, along with the opinion that such abundance just cannot be achieved,<sup>25</sup> is often considered quite enough for most critics to dismiss communism as totally unrealizable.

Fortunately, it is possible to utilize some ideas from elsewhere in Marx’s own thought to suggest that we should abandon the abundance assumption, at least in the form it has usually taken in orthodox Marxist thought. These are derived from his view of “primitive communism”. In this state, in which man’s limited needs were completely met by the natural resources on hand without the need for productive effort, there was economic stagnation. At this stage, nature “keeps man in hand, like a child in leading-strings. She does not impose on him any necessity to develop himself.”<sup>26</sup> Only the fact of economic scarcity prompts human development out of this primitive state.

If we retain the proposition of material abundance as the prerequisite for communism’s viability, we *might* be left without an explanation as to why people will not fall back into a developmentally stagnant condition. If the reasons why needs expanded now disappear from social life, then it is incumbent upon communism’s defenders to explain why the sphere of needs will not also contract back towards their primitive, limited level (thereby moving us away from self-realization). They could not convincingly argue that the potential for full self-realization is an irreversible achievement which will be passed on regardless to successive generations. Being committed to the thesis that human nature’s content is tied to social context, it is inconsistent to say that this potential can be somehow transferred, no matter what the effect of the changing context upon people’s nature.

So the self-realizing society *has* to preserve the possibility of self-realization by providing situations that continue to generate it. The possibility emerges through humanity’s strivings to increase its productive power, in the drive to overcome material scarcity. But if this is indeed overcome, then we are compelled to wonder what dynamic could thereafter promote productive development, and self-realization thereby. One possible, surprising upshot of this could be that communism’s production might be very conservatively organized. There will be no reason for further productive innovation and every possibility that human development and production will stagnate.<sup>27</sup>

This gives us further reason to resist the C. III Marx’s location of self-realization away from necessitated production towards leisure. Given a conception which says that self-realization emerges as the result of strenuous human activity, it is very peculiar to deprive the self-realizing realm of the motivations for that activity, particularly when this involves

making fancifully implausible economic assumptions. In this respect, communism should be differentiated from capitalism only in that more resources are available – or at least, more equitably distributed – and *not* that all our needs are readily met by what is on hand. There should still be striving for further development in production, to preserve the challenges that bring about self-realization's possibility.

This revision provides the possibility for the creation of solidaristic community, as the next section demonstrates.

#### **v Motivations for Communal Work**

To think further about the kind of conditions required in “communism” to secure self-realization, we can consider the kinds of reasons people will have to undertake self-realizing activity. At this point, we can bring back into play the self-defeasibility objection raised by Elster against the direct pursuit of self-realization.

Let us recall what it meant to say that self-realization is a “by-product”: it is something “that can only come about as the side-effect of actions undertaken for some purpose, such as ‘getting it right’ or ‘beating the opposition.’” Pointing out that the same kind of activity can be drudgery under circumstances and self-realizing under others, Elster claims that what helps to make an activity self-realizing is that it must “offer a challenge that can be met” and be of a “suitable complexity” (see Chapter 1 {v}).

Now, when Marx says that self-realizing activity must be performed “as an end in itself” it is not altogether clear that this condition is respected. If it is not, if people's projects are undertaken with their self-realization as their direct aim, then an ultimately frustrating narcissism does indeed seem a distinct possibility. Previous sections in this chapter have explored the communitarian ways of reducing self-obsession, but can this conception consistently avoid Elster's objection?

By depicting the self-realizing society as a realm in which striving and effort is still very much required to overcome the problems faced in maintaining and developing society, we have before us the possibility of innumerable “challenges”, all of which should be undertaken in order to solve the problems they pose – and emphatically not for the sake of “our self-realization”. Nor need the motivations behind these tasks be ones of reluctant necessity. For though we have talked of “necessary labour” as the self-realizing activity, we can easily have reasons for performing it other than “we have no choice but to do it” (this, of course, being the other reason for action which, when it is the only reason, precludes self-realization).

The following example illustrates this possibility. My neighbour and I are both fairly competent D.I.Y-ers and we often pool our resources in joint projects. Now it so happens that my children both have to have their bedrooms in our new home furnished and decorated. New fittings such as wardrobes, desks and shelves have to be designed and installed. My neighbour agrees to help out. From my point of view, as the children *need* suitably designed rooms, this counts as “necessary labour” in the sense that I would have to do it regardless. If I only carried out this work because I had to, I would almost certainly find it a tedious chore, something that I couldn't wait to be finished and done with. Even

though certain skills might be developed as I work, this drudgery would not count as self-realizing in the Marxian conception because it is not a project I have freely embraced and can identify with. It would therefore not embody my own commitments and fail to meet the expressive requirement.

But it is plainly not the case that the only other possible motivation for this work is “my self-realization”. The alternatives might be: to please my children; to please my wife; to become a skilful decorator; to try out new design patterns and techniques; to make our home a more pleasant place to live in. As for my neighbour, he need not be helping out just because he has to. True, he might feel that helping me is only fair given that he wants me to help him next month. But if we both freely welcome the opportunity for co-operative activity and the benefits it brings, the fact of our co-operation is, again, not born of reluctant necessity – and it is, therefore, potentially self-realizing.

The self-defeasibility thesis does not have to require that we should be unaware and unappreciative of the fact that our self-realization can be promoted by this work. All that it requires is that “self-realization” is not the central motivation behind it. Indeed, this example might suggest that it is probably not that unusual for activities to be undertaken for a *complex* of motives. There is no reason why they can or should be boiled down to just the one.

What the self-realizing society ideally requires are extensive activities which facilitate the kind of co-operation in the above example, performed neither for self-realization’s nor necessity’s sake alone. The idea of coping with the kind of problems in production and distribution that we may visualize in the absence of “material abundance” helps to guarantee that the activities will indeed be “extensive” – enough, that is, to involve a community as a whole to a sufficient degree that forges solidaristic bonds.<sup>28</sup> In the above example, co-operation transforms my relationship with my neighbour from simply “the person who happens to live next door” to something rather deeper: a work-partner, a comrade, a friend. This communal tie did not exist prior to the decision to co-operate, but was formed in the course of interaction.

Many of the activities we seek here will be communal not only in the sense that they will require people working together on the same projects but also that each individual’s activity will be serving social ends. By this, I mean that, as this newly created community emerges out of joint activity, a further motive for action is acquired in that people could now work to promote and sustain this community.

We can suggest, then, that this form of social labour will meet not only the needs for self-developmental, fulfilling activity but “the need to belong” which is a crucial part of self-realization. Hayes and Nutman argue that the erosion of other sources of identity elevates the importance of work in providing a sense of identity derived from the purposes of, and his commitment to, the community: “[w]hatever his or her occupation the worker feels needed. A person’s contribution to producing goods or providing services forges a link between the individual and the society of which he or she is a part.”<sup>29</sup>

Given the argument of {iv} that modernity has indeed undermined the rigid hold of embedded forms of identity on the self, this claim is particularly important. It bolsters

what is left of the traditional commitments and inherited identities used to meet the need of community. If the possibilities for strenuous co-operative action are as widespread as the above suggests, we can have some confidence in believing this need will be readily met.

#### **vi Role-Based Relationships in Self-Realization**

If a community of self-realizers can be formed out of their co-operative strivings, what form might be taken by the relationships between individuals? We must remember from Chapter 4 that the idea that they should relate in terms of the function, or role performed, was rejected in the Marxist conception because of the apparently “one-sided”, purely instrumental character of role-based relationships. But this idea, too, needs rethinking in the light of our proposed revisions. Cohen, for example, doubts the utility of abolishing the notion of role-occupation. He claims that this idea, “reflects a failure to appreciate how the very constraints of role can help to link a person with others in satisfying community.”<sup>30</sup>

The following considerations support the claim that role-based relationships should not be so readily discarded in self-realization. Much suspicion about role-based relationships is derived from the practice (which we encountered in Aristotelian self-realization) of equating “who one is” with “what one does.” But this is not the only way that the idea of “role” can be used when characterizing a person’s identity (here we can begin to follow up the suggestions put forward at the end of Chapter 2).

As we know from Chapter 4, the conceptual distinction between the technical division of labour and the relations of production allows us to sever any necessary connection between the idea of role-based relations and class society. It need not have any implications for the ownership of the means of production: you can have “painters”, “critics” and “shepherds” without having “capitalists” and “proletarians”.

In the Marxist view, these class identifications account for one’s entire social situation and, of course, embody alienating relationships of domination. But the non-class roles need not only lack any inegalitarian implications (thus respecting the modern assumptions of autonomy and equality of respect used to judge the acceptability of traditions earlier), they need not be taken to be exhaustive of one’s identity either. The concept of *role-play* is pertinent here, for it helps to suggest that a role is only an occupation or function that we adopt at particular times for particular purposes, rather than something that subsumes the whole personality. People can relate to each other in role-based identities for certain activities without having their entire life situation being characterized by that role.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, the Marxist complaint is also that role-based relationships are imperfectly partial or fragmented and therefore “sub-human” (this does not necessarily refer to inegalitarian relationships either). Even if a person is not subsumed by his role, this fault could still prevail. But it is not clear why it is still a fault in a non-coercive community of co-operating self-realizers. For a start, it is not altogether easy to visualize the alternative Marx postulates for communism, where people only relate to each other as “fully human” or as “ends in themselves”. How can we relate to everyone else in ways which do not introduce role-play?

True, I might develop a very close relationship with my neighbour from our co-operation in the above example, but can my sympathies be stretched to treat everyone else in my immediate community likewise? The problem with this ideal form of relationship is that it is difficult to think it could be anything more substantive than a vague notional attitude (I might tell myself that “every person is my neighbour” but I could not render the same kind of support, derived from the same feeling of attachment, to a complete stranger as I actually would to the person who really is my “spatial” neighbour).

This is why Marxism has suggested the need for small, face-to-face communities – and the impracticality of these in modern society cripples its communitarian vision.<sup>32</sup> But we need not pursue this, because by preserving “role-play” against the critique that it is an imperfectly fragmented form of relationship, we may also absolve this conception of requiring an unfeasibly close-knit community.

For consider: the fact that I typically relate to the woman who delivers my milk as “the milk lady” need not mean that I can only ever regard her only as the means by which I obtain my daily pint. She is also a member of my community and I have suggested that self-realizing society is characterized by an understanding that people co-operate to overcome jointly whatever specific challenges their society faces. So, even though she is “the one who delivers the milk” in this joint effort, this role-based relationship does not necessarily obscure that we are in this co-operative community.

Indeed, seeing ourselves in terms of a social role actually tells us this fact. Self-perception through role-play inevitably links one to others in a community (“role-play” is relational), since the fulfillment a man gets from performance of a role can be “conceived as his contribution to the society to which he belongs, and located within a nexus of expectations connecting him to other people.”<sup>33</sup> Not being purely self-directed, this form of identifying oneself reduces (if not dispels altogether) the dangers of self-obsession in life.

The appreciation of mutual dependence in community creates a social relationship that may only be partial (in that it does not relate to “the whole person”), but there is nothing necessarily dehumanizing about this. This is partly because extended human communities cannot comprehensively sustain such relationships; they are not “humanly possible” at all levels. But this claim is also supported by the fact that I do not have to neglect that, even though she is the “milk lady” to me, there are other dimensions to *her* life which, in my contribution to the maintenance of the community, *I* am helping to sustain. I relate to her as the milk lady simply because I don’t know her very well – that is why I cannot treat her as a “neighbour”. That does not mean I believe that she is only a means to meet my needs.

To reinforce the above: we usually play (many) more than one role in life. Even though no one role encapsulates all that a person is, one’s identity might be more nearly exhausted by a multiplicity of roles. Further, one may relate to even relatively unknown people in terms of more than one role. If we have a multiplicity of roles, in relationships with different people in different times and spaces, there is *less* fragmentation of identity and social tie than is often feared. More of the “whole person” is expressed within multiple roles.

These roles do not necessarily diminish the possibility of individual fulfillment, though. For example, the satisfaction I derive from being “a parent” in a happy family – supporting, helping, teaching, providing for and loving one’s children – could well be unsurpassable. Being “a good teacher”, or whatever other major task we perform in society, may be a great source of pride and satisfaction. A role can concretize an aspect of our identity which we would wish to be expressed in our self-realization. The successful performance of this role may show us exactly what difference the exercise of our powers makes to the world around us (the objectification-expressivist requirement). The difference, again, is that we need not labour under any illusion that the role is all that we are – but we do not have to abandon role-play in self-perception and social relations to realize this.

Although “playing a role” implies some degree of task specialization, it will be recalled from Chapter 4 that “narrow” lines of activity can still utilize a wide range of skills. Therefore, the full developmental aspects of self-realization are not necessarily lost in the limitations of a role – and if we are indeed players of multiple roles, “narrowness” is even more steadfastly avoidable.

Given this, we are in a position to judge whether we need the rotation of tasks, which Chapter 4 speculated *might* be required by Marxist self-realization. As long as our settled life-plan can feature a variety of developmental, self-expressive roles, a rotation-of-tasks to alter periodically these roles is unlikely to be necessary to secure all-round development. This is just as well, because rotation-of-tasks might be thought to come too close to a confusion between “full development” and “trying out every possible skill”, spreading our powers too thinly in this shifting pattern of activity (a worry raised back in Chapter 3 {iv}). This could actually frustrate expansive development. Further, if I am right that a variety of settled roles can help to encapsulate one’s full identity, then rotation will clearly fail the expressive requirement of self-realization. One’s life-activity will be shifting too often to gain a firm, comprehensive sense of who one is.

Finally: forging community through role-play consolidates the case for keeping “labour” at the centre of the Marxist conception of self-realization. Although role-play need not be confined to the realm of necessity, it is likely to be most prevalent there, where people engage in specific labouring activities for others. “Work” is more likely to be undertaken for ends other than self-realization. Thus, there is less chance of the activity becoming self-defeating – in being undertaken for no other reason than the individual’s self-realization. Community is more likely to be forged through our work, rather than leisure, because in general we come into contact with and support the lives of more people through our labour than our leisure.

In summary, what this line of thought proposes is a Durkheimian solution to the problem of community in Marxist self-realization. For this is highly reminiscent of Durkheim’s concept of organic solidarity which renders individuals “more autonomous ... and yet more linked to society.”<sup>34</sup> The link with society through role-play promotes a certain type of community, but it also contributes to the identity of discrete individuals too. To insist again, such roles must facilitate the development of one’s potentials and powers if they are to be incorporated into Marxist self-realization.

## vii Principles of Social and Political Organization

In this section, we shall take another look at the problem of self-defeasibility, this time from a different direction. The previous sections have dealt with it primarily by referring to individual motivations for individual actions. We now need to think about how people's motives come to inform the workings (providing the point, or purpose) of social institutions and practices.

An example that a Marxist could offer would be the profit motive of capitalist individuals in bourgeois society. This has ultimately prompted the growth of institutions and practices that protect and promote, directly or indirectly, this pursuit rather than something else which could frustrate the profit goal. Now, the principles governing such social structures are precisely the concern of a normative political theory, which would criticize those it found unacceptable and offer alternatives. But if Elster's thesis ought to be applied here too, "self-realization" should not supply the point and purpose of social and political practices.

If this is the approach we are indeed required to take, it becomes crucially unclear as to what (if anything) "a *political* theory of self-realization" could ever set out to say. What can it tell us about the structure and purposes of the ideal political system if this cannot be informed by a direct commitment to self-realization's pursuit? To illustrate the extent of the problem here, I want to show that two alternative principles typically found in Marxism to inform the goals of communist society are actually in danger of frustrating any hope we might have even for achieving self-realization as a by-product.

Firstly, we have the principle of "distribution according to need".<sup>35</sup> This commitment presents a host of problems in its own right. "Self-realization" is itself a need – so its direct pursuit is not actually precluded by the need principle. Even if it is the *central* need, though, it is not the *only* need. The pursuit of other needs might be enough to prevent "self-realization" dominating social principles in a self-defeating way. But it is the problem of conflicting demands among these needs that makes this general principle deeply flawed, or at least incomplete. It could not itself resolve such conflicts (we can avoid conflict confidently only if we retained the material-abundance assumption, i.e. that there are enough resources on hand to meet all needs, precisely the assumption that I argued should be dropped).

Another problem with the needs principle relates directly to the possible conflict between it and a hope for self-realization. Above, it was argued that Marxist communism could be insufficiently dynamic to provide suitably challenging activities for self-realization. This fear is reinforced by the adoption of the needs principle for its social organization. Given that society and the economy are planned in communism, basing this plan upon meeting needs looks potentially very conservative as one would only have *existing* needs to go on (as Chapter 4 {ix} pointed out, Marxist needs are constantly expanding, so it is hardly obvious that accurate planning is even possible). So this principle does not seem to encourage further development and new needs, and this might stifle the potential for self-realization.

So the needs principle is incomplete and counterproductive if we hope for self-

realization. Marxism does, however, offer another candidate for the general principle of social organization and this can be found in its theory of history.

When Marxists look at history, they identify different forms of society at different stages of productive development. The primary purpose of productive activity adopted by individuals in these epochs varies amongst them. For example, the profit motive governs production in capitalism, but is phased out during socialism. However, according to historical materialism, the underlying rationale that governs the progression from one form of society to another is: “*the development of the productive forces*”.<sup>36</sup>

As we have noted, Marxist self-realization becomes a possibility in capitalism and steadily emerges in socialism before it flowers fully and universally in communism. As the possibility is generated it is the drive to develop the productive forces which underpins whatever direct motivations for production happen to be prevalent. According to historical materialism, what puts self-realization “on the historical agenda” is the fact that the material conditions for socialism have been nurtured and matured “in the womb of the old society itself.”<sup>37</sup> All that prevent its realization are the fettering capitalist relations of production which are overthrown by the proletariat for rational reasons of material class interest.

So, particularly given previous sections’ arguments for “productive challenges” in communism, we can suggest that some of the reasons people may have for commencing what might be self-realizing activity are rooted in practices designed to promote the development of the productive forces. This reflects the *productivism* of the Marxist theory: the claim that human liberation is contingent upon a growth in human productive power, with advances in the latter leading to advances in the former. Orthodox Marxism takes as axiomatic the compatibility of self-realization and historical materialism. It holds that, as history progresses, the potential for full self-realization takes shape when people participate in activities which propel the development of the productive forces. Anything that stands in the way of this development *and hence the continued growth of self-realization’s potential*, be they fettering relations of production or outmoded techniques of production, is ultimately swept aside.

Various thinkers have offered critiques of productivism, elements of which we shall now consider. Their main point is usually that the practices thrown up by the push to develop the productive forces have not all been liberatory. Often, they work to prevent the by-production of self-realization, albeit unintentionally sometimes. This is a phenomenon all too easily missed in Marxism, because the “productive forces” as a concept is meant to *include* “human powers and potentials”<sup>38</sup> – and yet it is difficult to think of them as synonymous when Marx explicitly says that capitalism’s explosively expansive development is purchased at the cost of individual human powers. The powers of the generalized abstraction “Man” are the ones that keep track with the development of the productive forces through history; only in full communism do individuals’ powers reflect the productive forces’ development.<sup>39</sup> But simply to assume that this coincidence between the development of productive processes and *individual* self-realization *will* be reached might be dangerously complacent.

The general thrust of the arguments underlying this line of thought can be distilled as follows (in a way that I do not pretend does much justice to the subtleties of the various theories from which it is drawn). First, we have the observation that the optimism Marxists once had about capitalism's likely swift demise and its prefiguration of liberation has evaporated. It has proven to be remarkably resilient, particularly when compared with the alternative socio-economic systems which have borne Marx's name and purported to carry his vision forward. Anti-productivists claim that, as it flourished, capitalism developed techniques and practices which trapped its subjects in an increasingly emasculating system of domination: an "iron cage" of bureaucratic control, as Max Weber described it.<sup>40</sup>

Significantly, it is rationalization *per se*, the inevitable accompaniment to expanding productive forces, rather than capitalism in particular, which is blamed for this in Weber's critique. He therefore denied that socialism, committed to further rationalized economic development, could escape a concomitant expansion of the "iron cage" that Marx believed was a feature peculiar to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Others, such as the Weberian-inspired Frankfurt School thinkers, keep the idea of socialism free from this consequence but, just as pessimistically, see little chance of liberation from the sophisticated domination generated by capitalism.<sup>41</sup>

So this critique denies the claim that the conditions of human self-realization are yielded by the workings of capitalism in action. It argues that history has shown Marx's faith in the development of the productive forces as the "stage-setter" for self-realization was misplaced. André Gorz, for example, claims that history has actually turned the Marxist prediction on its head, for the development of the productive forces has turned out to be:

*functional exclusively to the logic and needs of capital ... [t]he productive forces called into being by capitalist development are so profoundly tainted by their origins that they are incapable of accommodation to a socialist rationality.*<sup>42</sup>

According to this view, liberation has been precluded by the fact that capitalist development has produced a class of workers whose capacities and interests are functional to the existing mode of production. No communist self-realizer is prefigured in them. Far from digging its own grave, capitalism engenders (non-self-realizing) needs in people which it continues to meet, thereby preserving and legitimizing itself (call this claim {a}).

Another, slightly different way in which liberation is blocked (claim {b}) lies in the way that the "economic rationality" behind the drive to increase the productive forces is said to produce new forms of domination to repress people who wish to be free (the difference in this claim being that people are not said to be "conditioned", but are more nakedly coerced).<sup>43</sup> This drive seems to reduce the pursuit of liberation to a matter of promoting greater *technological* efficiency, exhibited in increasing rationalization and bureaucratization of life as scientific techniques are employed to maximize productive development (so the Taylorist-type practices described in Chapter 4 {iv} are not necessarily exclusively capitalist, on this view). But these practices only generate new ways

of frustrating actual liberation. Our supposedly liberatory tools have come to manipulate and enslave us, as Ivan Illich has argued.<sup>44</sup>

According to this line of thought, then, it is obviously not true that capitalism has produced the material conditions for the “real” needs of liberated humanity to be met. Indeed, the phenomena described in {a} and {b} could well preclude a proper comprehension of these. Thus Illich: “[o]ur imaginations have been industrially deformed to conceive only what can be moulded into an engineered system or social habits that fit the logic of large-scale production.”<sup>45</sup>

The anti-productivist argument clearly shows that anyone harbouring hopes for self-realization must pay very close attention to the purposes behind social institutions and practices. We need to be sure that these are of the sort that will allow self-realization to emerge as a by-product – and Marxism’s neglect of this point indicates that it is not as obvious as it should be. I return to this later, but we first need an evaluation of the argument.

Are claims {a} and {b} true? This question opens up a vast new field which would need another thesis to tackle, but I believe enough can be said in summary to cast some doubt on the success of this critique of labour-based self-realization.

As far as {a} is concerned, we should recall from Chapter 4 how Marx is not committed to a purely structuralist view of the self. His postulation of alienation and the emergence of self-realization’s potential show that, for him, human nature is something other than *just* what is dictated by its social context. He believes capitalism breaks any engulfing, immediate identification by the self with its context. But {a} is suggesting that capitalism has manufactured (intentionally or not) individuals whose nature is precisely conditioned to fit their social context.

An argument like this may have superficial appeal as an explanation of why capitalism has not collapsed. It could suggest, for example, that capitalism’s increased ability to control and influence people’s lives yields “capitalist subjects” who view their fate as tied to the maintenance of the capitalist system. They end up perceiving their (non-diminishing) “needs” in terms of the consumer goods capitalism has to manufacture constantly if it is to reproduce itself successfully. But one need not deny the existence of “consumerism” in people’s behaviour, for example, to query this sweeping view. It poses the same problems as the structural-Marxist position criticized above: how can it account for resistance against the system and the lived experience of alienation? Alienation in capitalist society is consciously felt by many of its subjects: already enough to show the limitations of the crude structuralist view.

The domination of individuals claimed by {a} is at best very incomplete. The “agents of production” are something – perhaps a lot – more than the performers of their capitalist functions. It is from this “non-assimilated” aspect of their selfhood that comes the hopes and desires whose frustration leads to resistance to their situation. This fact is consistent with Marx’s account of the possibility of self-realization – so claim {a} is unconvincing.

Whereas {a} argues that it is capitalism which has produced the new forms of domination which have stopped the progress towards liberation, {b} stresses that any

mode of production dominated by the general push to increase productive power will not be sufficiently sensitive to the requirements of individual liberation to promote self-realization's achievement. This is because, by believing that increased productivity alone is enough for liberation, self-realization's possibility is reduced to a mere technological problem. But if to expand the productive forces a society has to adopt practices which end up dominating and frustrating the worker still further, productivism's marriage of self-realization and productive growth breaks down.

If we want to make self-realization a possibility we need to make sure that the goals or principles that determine how our social practices work will not conjure up such unintended obstacles. The goal of "maximized development of the productive forces" must be challenged if Taylorism is the kind of practice its direct pursuit requires.<sup>46</sup>

In rejecting {a} but accepting the lesson of {b} we end up with an argument that Marx was not wrong to think that capitalism has brought us close to self-realization, but that continued, *unqualified* support for the development of the productive forces will bring us no closer. Only some forms or levels of development are likely to do this. So the goals of self-realization and productive forces' development need separating and if we are to hope for the former, we need to identify the appropriate principles and practices for production and its development.

At this stage, Elster's self-defeasibility thesis prevents us from rectifying these deficiencies with orthodox Marxism, by not allowing us to say, "let us organize our social activity with the goal of promoting individuals' self-realization in mind." Now we have yet to accept the complete validity of this thesis. But before we pass judgment on it, we need to discuss the role that other principles necessarily play in the regulation of social activity.

### **viii The Need for Norms**

This is where our discussion encounters the well-known and well-worn debate on Marxism and morality. Briefly put, this debate is generated by Marx's depiction of "morality" as ideological: the presentation of what, at heart, are simply a class's material interests in the form of illusory, transcendental ethical standards. Armed instead with "scientific socialism", communists have no need of ethical ideals.<sup>47</sup> They embrace their material interests for what they are – and, in terms of determining how they must act, this is all they have.

Now a Marxist could have said that it is because self-realization has become an empirical need that abstract ethical norms are redundant. The good life does not have to be promoted by the latter; meeting the actual needs (of which self-realization is one) will suffice. But though the idea that self-realization is not an abstract ideal but a real need might be readily acceptable, this way of circumventing morality is not. We have already raised crippling doubts about using a "meeting-needs" principle to organize society either to supplement or replace productivist principles.

But I want to stress that other, ethical norms – not simply ones derived from self-realization – are absolutely vital for a workable Marxist theory. To justify this, we can see how such norms could be used to tackle the problems raised in section {vii}. We also need

them for other reasons which become obscured in Marxist non-moralism. The Marxist conception is a prime example of the kind of self-realizationist theory, identified in Chapter 1, that uncritically assumes that the full and free development of people's powers is always a positive achievement. Put another way, it implicitly holds that any base, worthless, abhorrent or otherwise unacceptable lifestyle must be one that has somehow thwarted the self-realization of the person in question.

As argued from the start, this assumption is plainly unacceptable, because people possess capacities to do "bad" as well as "good" things – which shows that we cannot attempt to derive a positive normative judgment about the value of self-realization from the mere possession of its potential.<sup>48</sup> So we need independent normative standards to judge the worth of individual projects of self-realization, not only to ascertain whether such a project should be allowed to proceed but also to adjudicate between projects which come into conflict (demanding the same resources, for example). In short, we need principles for emancipatory politics which, as argued in Chapter 1 {ii} are not co-extensive with those of life politics, such as self-realization.

We have returned to this point because of our assumption about non-abundance. That is: there may be sections of society demanding special treatment – extra resources, for example – and it is hardly obvious that it would be appropriate to pass judgment on these by invoking "self-realization". If certain resources still remain somewhat scarce, then perhaps these should be distributed according to more immediate, non-self-realizationist needs.

More generally, it is probably asking far too much of "self-realization" as a potential normative standard to pick the appropriate policy or course of action in every particular area of concern. We do not even have to consider whether the self-defeasibility thesis bars such a project in the first place to establish the point that the "political norms" of society (as I shall call them) could not function properly if they were directly and primarily committed to the promotion of individual self-realization. These establish policy priorities, determining how our institutions should work to regulate conflict within society.

Examples of such norms would be found in the understanding of justice within a society, detailing how people should be treated, what is owed them by right, how benefits and burdens are to be distributed. We would start constructing these from the modern assumptions of autonomy and equality of respect, which we have used in both the Millian and the Marxist conceptions as integral to the requisite self-perceptions of modernity.

As argued back in Chapter 1 {ii}, even these basic principles (of "right") exhibit certain, non-neutral biases in their identification of what is valuable enough in human life to be protected by such principles. It is not the case, then, that by introducing the idea of "political norms", we are smuggling back into account the kind of anti-perfectionist principles of liberal neutrality. Chapter 1 {ii} asserted that "emancipatory" and "life" politics overlap in the sense that they both depend upon specific conceptions of the self and its good. But the need to regulate Marxist self-realization by a different set of norms shows the point of making the distinction between principles that establish what is right

and permissible, and a theory that describes human good and flourishing.

Political norms – the principles of right in emancipatory politics – delineate the boundaries beyond which theories of life politics may not cross (barring the self-realization of Hitler, to use this example again).<sup>49</sup> Political norms are central to a political theory offering an account of how best to structure society. But if I am right that self-realization plays a relatively small part (if any) in the political norms, can we even speak meaningfully of a political theory for this (or any other modern) conception of self-realization? I believe we can, though we have to recognize “self-realization” must not sit in splendid isolation at the heart of a political theory. To show how such a theory should be structured, we turn to an issue raised from the foregoing: how should these other norms be derived?

### **ix Democratic Dialogue and the Selection of Political Norms**

We can start by imagining a situation in which a group of people have decided that, because of the inconveniences of living apart, it is desirable to come together in a community. Situated in modernity, they seek to respect each other’s autonomy, without discrimination. They then have to decide how this new community will be run. This will be informed by the purposes behind setting up the community (they will not choose organizing principles for matters which they do not desire to be the community’s concern). Now, Elster’s self-defeasibility thesis as we have used it thus far insists that, because it is a by-product, “self-realization” cannot be the direct principle, or motive, behind any of the stages in this process, namely: {a} the decision to set up a community; {b} the process of choosing the norms and practices by which to organize the community; {c} the purposes of the practices themselves (i.e. “self-realization” cannot *be* their purpose).

It has to be said, though, that it is implausible to suggest that “self-realization” would be foremost among the group’s intended outcomes at any of these stages. Take {a}: people are likely to want a community for many things other than their own self-realization (and even if some of the goods of community, such as the sense of belonging it provides, are described as contributing to self-realization, that is not to say that these goods have to be desired *because* they are part of self-realization). As for {b}, it is pretty obvious that the point of deciding what norms to have is to obtain a workable and acceptable structure for society, and not because this decision-making process will be self-realizing.

Finally, in {c}, it is again extraordinarily unlikely that the only reason a particular principle would be adopted is because it promotes self-realization. Quite apart from section {viii}’s argument that we need principles that have nothing to do with self-realization, people will typically have other reasons for picking a social practice that could also have “self-realization” as its purpose. The thought behind this point is that people are just not likely to be so bereft of diverse commitments and motives that they only have “self-realization” as the reason why they pick one thing rather than another.

An example of a norm in {c} would be a commitment to free speech. In this thesis, we have encountered arguments that justify it because it promotes self-realization. But,

surely, this is unlikely to be the only reason why people might adopt it for their society. An obvious alternative is that this norm best respects people's autonomy equally; the simple premise of modernity which is not exclusively tied to self-realization. Or they might value the role of free debate as an end in itself – without even considering its self-realizing benefits.

The upshot of this seems to be that instances when people pick principles and policies for the direct benefit of self-realization alone are rare enough for us to be relatively untroubled by the self-defeasibility thesis. But, further, I want to suggest that the existence of other motives is enough to forestall self-defeasibility even when “self-realization” actively participates in the decision to adopt one principle rather than another. This, I submit, provides the basis for a political theory of self-realization.

To explain, we can consider a proposal for the derivation of norms from Jurgen Habermas, whose ideas also emerged from a critical confrontation with Marxism. He contends that moral norms are justified, or legitimate, if they are the outcome of an “ideal speech situation” – a full and free dialogue between equals (meaning that there are no relations of domination, such that one person could pressure another into accepting his view through anything other than force of argument). His idea seems to be that, though we might articulate our own particular interests in this dialogue, a consensus only emerges when we identify and accept interests that are held in common (“communicatively shared”).<sup>50</sup>

Until some of his more recent responses to critics, Habermas seemed to think that this dialogical model sufficed for deriving the most general moral principles and for tackling more concrete political disputes (or, at least, no independent theory of politics was offered to supplement this scheme for deriving norms). I shall consider some of the limitations of this model later, but let us think about how we might argue for this model as the ideal basis for a theory of politics that can accommodate self-realization.

For the “ideal-speech” dialogue is obviously not the only way in which the principles according to which society will be run could be derived. A committee of elected representatives, or a benevolent philosopher-king could do it instead. Given that there are rival decision-making procedures, we need to look for reasons which might help us opt for one system rather than another – and this is where self-realization can come in.

There is nothing wrong with arguing that the dialogical model is to be preferred because it promotes self-realization better than the alternatives. That this is the case is readily indicated, from the arguments of all three conceptions of self-realization analyzed so far in this thesis. The individual developmental benefits of participation are obviously less likely to be obtained in a less-than-fully participatory system. The Marxist conception explicitly builds upon this with its emphasis upon bringing people's external environment under their conscious, expressive control. The dialogical model can respect this by empowering everyone to participate in the process by which the nature of the social context is determined.

Note that “the benefits of self-realization” is not the only reason why the dialogical model can be chosen. People might come together to construct a community already able

to articulate other shared values which the dialogical model best respects, (such as an ideal of equal human worth in decision-making, again derivable from the simple premise of modernity).

But even if “self-realization” is the only criterion we have to choose among decision-making systems, this would not make the choice self-defeating. The dialogical model is still being picked to make decisions, not to produce self-realization. The fact that the expectation of a certain by-product being yielded is now part of the reason why the model is picked does not make it any less a by-product. This is easily grasped by the observation that we will not have defeated the point of the dialogical system if our decision-making does not produce the forecast self-realization, since the point of the system was (just) to make decisions.<sup>31</sup>

The system does not “fail” if it does not produce it, because its primary purpose are something other than self-realization. That would not stop us altering the way it works to increase the chance of self-realization, however. It only becomes self-defeating when this endeavour frustrates its primary purpose (if, for example, we tinkered with our constitutional decision-making process so much to maximize the developmental benefits of participation that, when we actually came to use the system, we were unable to *reach* a decision – as in Elster’s personal example mentioned in Chapter 1 {v}).

This argument allows us to offer a characterization of the role self-realization can play in politics and political theory. It cannot provide the main purpose of a society’s practices and, in that sense, it is not the primary consideration of politics. But it can be a secondary consideration, because it is a legitimate factor in deciding what kind of system to have. What the Elster thesis does not rule out is the acceptability of making decisions which alter activities so that their performance is more likely to provide self-realization. So we can pick particular constitutions, policies, codes of behaviour because of the expectation that they will promote self-realization, but this does not make the choice self-defeating.

We can now see why it remains perfectly appropriate to articulate a conception of self-realization in political theory, even though the ideal is pursued sufficiently indirectly to maintain it as a “by-product”. By characterizing the ideal, we can thereafter see what policies and practices would promote it, should we be in a position to invoke secondary considerations to decide between competing types of policy and practice. Though it cannot and should not of itself provide a comprehensive political theory, self-realization can play an important secondary role if people want it to.

As we can see from the argument above, this is how “self-realization” operates to pick the dialogical model for the selection of norms and contributes to decisions on the constitution (broadly understood) of a political society. To end this chapter, I shall indicate how we might develop this use of the ideal, a task to be continued in the next chapter.

It should be noted that the dialogical model is, in practice, likely to act only as an ideal to which the actual decision-making process should attempt to approximate as far as possible. Consensus on norms may be difficult, if not impossible to achieve in some instances. Indeed, the later Habermas concedes this and the radical form of participatory

democracy his theory advocates becomes more limited to the articulation of the most general, abstract norms for society. It might work, therefore, to establish a political society's basic constitution, but the more specific and controversial policy issues are unlikely to be resolved in the ideal-speech situation (Habermas says they should be decided by the rather more familiar, less radical process of sectional bargaining and compromise; the impossibility of consensus would seem to confirm the claim that the norms are non-neutral<sup>22</sup>).

It is certainly desirable for self-realizers that society's basic norms and purposes reflect people's freely affirmed commitments. Thus, the fullest possible debate about these must be allowed, to do justice to the individual-developmental and expressivist-objectivist requirements of self-realization. Unlike the Habermasian dialogists, though, the Marxist conception as we have constructed it does not begin with rational choosers operating without reference to a particular social and cultural context. The first part of this chapter provided us with two forms of concrete community to start with: the surviving traditional commitments, and the solidaristic community, formed for specific purposes. Both forms of community come with norms already established and understood. This, indeed, is a necessary condition for the possibility of "community" in the first place (and, further, agreement to adopt the ideal-speech situation must itself reflect shared commitments to the values that make it the appropriate choice).

So the dialogical model will not have to create norms out of thin air. But it can be used to affirm whatever existing norms that people may wish to preserve. This will ensure that the norms are indeed expressive of people's free commitments (which cannot be taken for granted, of course). They can be revised, supplemented, or rejected through time. Insofar as it is possible, a commitment to self-realization insists that all people have meaningful opportunities to register their acceptance of these norms. Further, there should be fully accessible channels through which people can scrutinize and alter their foundational principles, maintaining expressive control over their social environment.

Now, the kind of full, free democratic participation in decision-making that is embodied in the ideal-speech situation clearly remains the constitutional arrangement which is most likely to meet these requirements. But even if this kind of radical participation is most likely to yield consensus at the most general, fundamental level only (if Habermas's gloom is justified), it is nevertheless unclear that "self-realization" recommends anything other than full participatory democracy at the other levels where political decision-making is required.

But because self-realization should not be the primary consideration in the purposes of political society, there is no problem about the ideal recommending unworkable and self-defeating political arrangements *on its own*. We have got to have other purposes behind these arrangements. Even if, as I have argued, "self-realization" can help us choose between alternative arrangements, we invoke these other purposes to ensure that the political system can actually produce decisions – and if this tempers the degree to which it is likely to encourage self-realization, then so be it. As we said that the primary point of a constitution was to provide a decision-making process, we will choose arrangements that

facilitate *this* first and foremost.

Given the way this chapter has suggested restoring some forms of conflict, struggle and challenge to “communism”, the pessimism about the possibility of consensus at these levels is pretty much justified. There will not be the kind of fundamentally hostile conflicts that one finds in class society and I have postulated that the society of self-realizers should be united around certain communal, co-operative purposes. But there should still be plenty of substance to political argument, giving us the dynamic activity that could promote self-realization – and the reason why “communism” should not dabble with misleading ideas of the “end of politics”. Trotsky’s view of communism is worth citing at length to illustrate the kind of politics postulated here:

*[t]here would be struggle for one’s opinion, for one’s project, for one’s taste. In the measure in which political struggles will be eliminated – and in a society where there will be no classes, there will be no such struggles – the liberated passions will be channelized into technique, into construction ... [a]ll forms of life, such as the cultivation of land, the planning of human habitations, the building of theatres, the methods of socially educating children, the solution of scientific problems, the creation of new styles, will engross all and everybody. People will divide into ‘parties’ over the question of a new gigantic canal ... over a new theatre, over chemical hypotheses ... over two competing tendencies in music, and over a best system of sports.”*

We can plausibly suggest that a participatory system with provision for majority rule is the kind of political system most suited to self-realization. There is much more that can be said about this, of course. So we shall carry these reflections on the form of self-realizationist political society into the last chapter, where we will incorporate them into a more fully elaborated general political theory of self-realization.

## CHAPTER 6

### Self-Realization: A Perfectionist Theory For Modern Politics

#### **i Introduction**

In the last chapter, we examined Marx's idea of communism and, by revising its approach to community and politics, laid the foundations for an account of the political system which would best promote Marxist self-realization. This chapter suggests how we might build upon this, but by using instead what I have referred to as the "general conception" of self-realization. This conception is inspired by selected ideas and themes from all three theories studied thus far. When combined, they provide what I propose to be a more plausible account of what "self-realization" entails than we find in the three theories taken separately. Armed with this general conception, this chapter aims to offer a "general political theory of self-realization", designed to provide a clearer picture of the role politics can play in the promotion of this good-life ideal.

To bring us to this conclusion, the chapter proceeds as follows. After a brief review of Chapters 2 to 5, we shall consider why it is appropriate and non-arbitrary to use all three conceptions in characterizing the general conception. This involves an explanation and defence of what I call the "multi-faceted conception" of the self. The contributions which can be made by the three to the general conception will then be presented, with descriptions of their possible political implications. The latter are intended as generalized summaries of the policy directions identified in the previous four chapters, modified where required. I will also indicate how self-realization raises other political considerations, discussing the relationships these have to other debates in political theory. It is, of course, beyond the scope of this thesis to develop these separate issues; its point has primarily been to place self-realization into political debate and we can only introduce these extra themes.

The thesis closes with an argument as to why the general conception of self-realization might be important to perfectionist political activity, followed by a summary of how we should understand the relationship between self-realization, politics and political theory.

#### **ii The Three Conceptions Reviewed**

We have been concerned to explore the possibility of a modern political theory of self-realization – with the significance of "modern" being understood as affirming the centrality of autonomy in the individual's formulation of the good life. Given that we wanted to see how we might theorize the promotion of self-realization in perfectionist political practice, the problem with this possibility has been as follows: either we leave so much latitude in defining what counts as "self-realizing" for individuals' choices that the promotion of "self-realization" becomes no different from the liberal promotion of autonomy (clearly making redundant the idea of a distinct theory of self-realization); or we define self-realization more tightly, which raises the danger of failing to do justice to the wide potential in modernity for individual variation in what could meaningfully count as

self-realization. As a result, its proposed political promotion would therefore compromise individual autonomy (specifically, that of those who want to do something other than self-realization but also to those who do choose the latter but interpret it differently from the state).

To gather ideas with which to explore this problem, we examined the three different political theories to see how they built upon the basic concept of self-realization (summarized as “the development and expression of identifying talents and commitments”). We began with the pre-modern Aristotelian conception, to see how a pre-modern approach presented self-realization as a political concern and to find out why, exactly, a modern critic would find it unacceptably restrictive of autonomy.

Its central feature was the *ergon* argument, which supplied details about the particular dispositions and activities said to be naturally specific to a human, the flourishing of which counts as “self-realizing”. From this, the Aristotelian conception was able to yield: {a} a *moral* theory, based upon the teaching and exercise of the virtues that were to secure self-realization; {b} a *political* theory, since not only could politics play a role in providing for this moral education and guaranteeing the appropriate conditions for self-realization, but political activity itself was deemed to be the central self-realizing activity.

Despite the *ergon* argument, “choice” could theoretically play a key part in the selection of the means appropriate to pursue these given ends. “Choosing” was embodied in the activity of rational life-planning. But the adult self-realizer planned his life from the perspective of a given social role which encapsulated the *ergon*. He was a “citizen”, with particular rights, duties and responsibilities. The “self” was not conceptualized apart from this role, so the *ergon* argument tied the possibility of its realization to the maintenance of a very specific social order.

It was this identification of the self with a “natural function” tied to a specific social role which, we suggested, could not be maintained in modern thought. Modern autonomous individuals prize the possibility of revising the way they lead their lives and the highly disciplinarian theory which emerged from Aristotle’s conception seems radically at odds with such “free spirits”. Thus, it seems inappropriate to postulate such a static, wholly given “natural essence” for the “moderns”.

But some ideas for potential transfer into modern thought could be garnered from this, particularly from a crucial ambiguity in Aristotle’s thought over the “metaphysical biological” way the *ergon* argument is commonly believed to work. This is as opposed to the social-culturally relative way in which the substance of the *ergon*-determined life was *actually* derived in his theory. We may not be able to argue plausibly that our self-realization consists in a *natural* function we have to perform. But the idea that even modern self-realization might incorporate some notion of social role-performance was not so readily dismissed. This was because, as proposed in Chapter 1, it was most plausible to see the modern self as partially socially-located. This theoretically reduced the extent to which non-social, wholly individualistic elements could exhaust what “self-realization” entailed. Given this possibility, I suggested that something like the Aristotelian virtue-ethics approach to self-realization might yet have some relevance in a modern theory.

John Stuart Mill's conception of self-realization was discovered in what is usually thought of as a paradigmatic modern account of individual autonomy. What turned it into a conception of self-realization were certain empirical assumptions which held that autonomous people generally choose to develop in the all-round fashion that is definitive of a self-realized life. These assumptions were not so extensive as to lead to something wholly akin to the *ergon* argument. But we saw that it is somewhat misleading to distinguish a modern theory from a pre-modern by its *total* non-reliance on some conception of the "natural" content of self-realization. Nevertheless, individual choice played a significantly greater role in determining the content of the self-realized life in Mill; his factual assumptions were relatively minimal in what they specified.

Hence the importance of "experiments-in-living" in this conception, by which the individual works out a self-realizing life-plan out for herself. The features which differentiated this theory from one simply concerned with promoting autonomy were:

{a} the state could permissibly *encourage*, though not *coerce*, people to live "according to their nature" and pursue self-realization; certain social and political institutions and practices could be shaped accordingly – educational policies and the forms of political participation being examples;

{b} even the fairly minimal details of what Millian self-realization meant ultimately necessitated a gradual transformation of the political and economic system from capitalist democracy to some form of market socialism – illustrating this conception's use as a tool in political critique.

Doubts over the consistency between the joint commitments to the factual assumptions about human development and the thesis of individual autonomy threatened to leave us with contradictory conclusions about the theory's viability. On the one hand, if we constructed political recommendations from Mill's assumptions, we had to acknowledge that the latter, minimal though they may have been, were still highly controversial and perhaps overly restrictive of "choice". The modern self might still have felt unduly constrained by the political structures that could be derived from them.

On the other hand, if the commitment to autonomy is emphasized instead, we end up with an unambitious, if not rather vague political theory, unsure of whether to aspire to anything more than a standard autonomy-promoting theory. This seemed to support our initial concern that a modern self-realizationist theory could not match the substantive distinctiveness of the pre-modern.

The Marxist conception was studied as an example of how modern thought might summon resources to remedy this deficiency. We saw how its idea of free, creative labour could plausibly "fit the bill" of a modern self-realizing activity without having to rely on overly dubious claims about the human essence. The conditions for its performance were sufficiently tight to yield a thicker set of recommendations than were to be had from the Millian conception.

Insofar as people had to work, and that work was a public, social activity, it was relevant to bring Marxist self-realization into the sphere of political concern. Insofar as it was reasonable to suppose that people prefer fulfilling, satisfying work over the dull,

monotonous forms of labour that have typically prevailed, this perfectionism was not deemed to be an unacceptable limitation of people's autonomy – particularly as it specifically promoted autonomy in a sphere where it usually struggled to flourish.

With the revisions introduced in Chapter 4, Marxist self-realization looks to be a good basis from which to build the general conception. Chapter 5 continued the process of critical revision by considering the suitability of Marx's idea of communism as the system recommended by the political theory of self-realization. Against Marx, we concluded that: {a} a modern conception should not abandon all notion of the self's embeddedness in social customs and traditions (again, fitting in with Chapter 1's idea of the partially situated self);

{b} the idea of "role-play" should not be abandoned (which provides grounds for pursuing the possibility entertained in Chapter 2's conclusion);

{c} the notion of "politics" cannot be dispensed with when we think about "the good society" and that it remains apposite to think of self-realization as a political matter.

But this was not to say that the revised Marxist approach was the best we could do in presenting the most plausible modern theory of self-realization. More could and should be said – and the other two conceptions might assist in the further development of the theory. Now, one may already have in mind some links between the three which could form the basis of a unified general conception. But we need more than similarities and interlinked themes to justify using all three in one theory. To do this, we need to go again to the heart of any conception of self-realization. That is – obviously – its view of the self.

### **iii The Multi-Faceted Self**

To a greater or lesser extent, all three conceptions displayed a feature shared by many other political theories which articulate a particular conception of the self. This is a tendency to reduce what is deemed to be essential to the self's identity and flourishing to just one characteristic.<sup>1</sup> I am not saying that they all treat the self as *composed* of only the one attribute. In the Millian conception, for example, we caught glimpses of the "partially socially situated self", the concept introduced in Chapter 1 {iv} above, referring to a self composed of individualistic and socially derived features.

But the three conceptions tend to *emphasize* one characteristic or activity, deeming it to be *the* central, defining attribute whose development and/or expression *alone* would warrant the name of "self-realization". The Aristotelian conception prioritized certain activities derived from the *ergon*, built them into the role of "citizenship" and called this "the good life". The Millian conception was more flexible in its idea of experiments-in-living, but a preference for certain activities (i.e. the "higher", intellectualized pursuits) suggested a similar narrow approach to the "essential ingredients" of the self. The greater substance of the Marxist theory seemed to be purchased at the cost of a more definite narrowing of the self's essence to the "self as worker" (even though the definition of "work" we utilized was considerably wider than the orthodox Marxist version).

The obvious problem with all of this, which we can call the "one-track" approach to the self, is that of justifying the reduction to a single central feature. Is it really plausible to

suggest that what is essential to, or definitive of, the self can be boiled down in this way? If we agree that the self is a complex of characteristics (if, for example, we accept Chapter 1's argument for the partially socially situated self, which by definition denies that the self has only one dimension to its existence) one wonders what reason we could have for prioritizing just one of them. The *ergon* argument attempted to do this and was rejected for (among other things) its arbitrary fixation on the "peculiar" attribute – but could we not query other one-track theories for similar reasons?

Instead of searching for new justifications of the one-track approach, let us consider an alternative way of conceptualizing the self. This seeks to reduce (though it does not, as we shall see, properly resolve) the problem of justifying claims about the self's singular essence by incorporating the fact of the self's complexity far more meaningfully into the account of its realization. What I call the "multi-faceted" conception recognizes that there could be any number of aspects or characteristics in the self's existence which should be considered essential ingredients of its realization. Given this, a one-track theory is thus likely to be misleadingly simplistic, because it will lack a sufficiently rich characterization of the realized self. Unless "one-track" theories admit their piecemeal nature and abandon their implicit ambitions to provide a full account of self-realization, they should be abandoned in favour of theories operating with a multi-faceted conception of the self.

We will be able to appreciate more fully what it means to attribute "multiple facets" to the self when we look at the general conception itself. But first, there are some remarks to be made about the consequences this idea has for the general political theory of self-realization. Obviously, because I am recommending that it move beyond a one-track basis, the theory is probably going to be more complex than those discussed so far. Accepting that the central features of the self are irreducibly pluralistic, its conception of self-realization will be multi-layered. Thus the recommendations for political prescriptions to facilitate its achievement will also be multi-layered.

Of course, this means that the general political theory will lose the relative simplicity of the one-track types – but their straightforwardness is obtained at the price of faithfulness to the real complexity of self-realization. Cumbersome though theorization of the multi-faceted self may be, this is not a good reason to resist the rejection of the one-track approach. But it would be too quick to state that we have solved the problem originally presented by the latter. For when we describe a multi-faceted conception, are we not still going to have to be discriminating with respect to which facets should be included, which *ones* count as "essential" – in which case we may end up making the same sort of arbitrary selection as the one-track approach?

We know that the fundamental problem concerning the requirements of modern thought and the abstract identification of what counts as self-realizing has been that, because the former presupposes the centrality of individual choice, the self can always choose to reject anything proposed in the latter without necessarily being thought of as any less self-realized. The idea of the multi-faceted self might be superior to the one-track conception if it is true that people's conceptions of their self-realization are generally complex. But that gives us no more warrant for saying *what* the multiple facets are in

abstraction from people's choices than we had for identifying the singular essence.

But I do not believe that this finally forces us to admit that we can do no better than to say "self-realization is simply what the agent in question says it is". We can still argue that "self-realization" carries with it certain definitional requirements that prevents this easy equation (not all chosen pursuits will merit the term "self-realizing", even if the choosers think they do). The multi-faceted conception, though, makes it easier to reconcile this insistence with the part we still want choice to play in formulating "self-realization".

Let us conceptualize a self whose realization can be divided into two distinct facets: A and B. Now we can link these two by saying that they are both, in some way, concerned with the development and expression of powers and potentials – the formal understanding of "self-realization" which has prefaced this inquiry. But we can suppose that they describe the self in different contexts, involving different kinds of activity and generating varying self-perceptions. So by "facet" we should understand something like this context/activity/self-perception triad (two examples of different facets would place the self, firstly, in public – as performer of a social role – and, secondly, in private – "doing one's own thing" and "being one's own person").

Whereas a one-track conception prioritizing A could not call the person who rejected realization in A self-realizing, the multi-faceted conception still *might* if their life-plan was rooted in B. If so, then obviously this conception increases the likelihood of one's chosen pursuit being acknowledged as self-realizing: it covers more options. But it can also allow the agent to choose which facet(s) will constitute her own individual self-realization. That is to say: the multi-faceted conception does not have to *insist* that full development has to be pursued in *every* facet before a life can count as self-realizing, but only that all of these facets are equally likely to figure in self-realization.

This is a crucial point and we need to think about what happens to the "all-round development" requirement as a result. The basic idea is that a multi-faceted self, operating in different contexts with different characteristic activities and self-perceptions, does not necessarily experience equally strong identifying commitments in each facet. This means we have no warrant for thinking that its self-realization has to be a project spread evenly through all the facets. It is up to the individual's own commitments as to how the self-realized life is shaped among them.

But the *conception* of the multi-faceted self does not have to face the problem of selecting which facets are significant enough for self-realization. All of them are, potentially, but it is up to individuals to decide among them, not an abstract theory. The conception should include all the contexts of the self in which it is pertinent to think of a possibility for self-realization. It should then explain what "self-realization" would actually mean in that facet.

Before illustrating my example of such a conception, we should consider a couple of problems with this idea. Firstly, because the multi-faceted conception should be able to accommodate any legitimate type of self-realization, there is the danger of making the whole theory far too unwieldy. We would be trying to pack it with facet after facet to account for the possible range of self-realizing pursuits. So we should insist again that

one's choices meet certain definitional requirements to merit the "self-realizing label" – the "developmental-expressive" stipulation – which means that the (only) facets we need to consider are those in which it is meaningful to think of such choices being possible.

Further, it is not obvious that we cannot neatly categorize most types of self-realizing into three or four facets alone, so as to yield a conception which is not *too* complex. But this is less of a worry for our purposes, anyway, because we want a multi-faceted conception for a *political* theory – and it is hardly clear that politics can or should have anything to do with all possible aspects of the multi-faceted self's realization. So the general political theory we are seeking may operate with an account of the human self which, if still multi-faceted, nevertheless concentrates only on those facets whose flourishing might be politically promoted. It need not pretend, therefore, to provide an exhaustive account of self-realization, acknowledging instead that it is only concerned with part of it.

Even if we limit the conception to what is politically relevant, it is still unlikely that we will end up with a one-track theory – as we shall shortly see. But if we are saying that it is up to the individual to pick and choose the form of her self-realization from among the facets and, say, she ends up picking just one and ignoring the others, what warrant have we for linking all the facets in a *unified* theory about self-realization? Are they not just different ways of conceiving "self-realization" – different conceptions, in effect – that may or may not go together in an individual's life-plan?

I believe we ought to accept that there may be no irresistibly compelling response to questions such as this on the status and structure of the theory. Precisely because it wants to accommodate the variation of individual choice, so that different people may utilize it in different ways, there are still going to be limits on what the theory can say in abstraction without plainly contradicting some possible choices. I shall offer one reason for maintaining the multi-faceted approach to self-realization as a theory about a unified character ideal. But the fact that not everyone will find it compelling illustrates the likely limits and vagaries a theory such as this is necessarily going to have.

The reason can be explained via a different way of looking at the problem. Suppose Amy wishes to pursue self-realization in just one facet – she wants to spend her life helping the poor. What about the other facets of self-realization, which do not matter to her? Why doesn't the multi-faceted approach force us to think that it is not her whole self that is being realized, but only a fragment – the claim we rejected above? Even though we accept that "full development" in the sense of "doing everything one can" is impossible,<sup>2</sup> this still does not look sufficiently exhaustive of Amy's dispositions, potentials and powers to call it self-realizing (despite the fact that she feels strongly about this commitment and she has freely chosen it).

The label would be warranted, I suggest, if Amy's commitments to helping the poor were so deep that she had no really strong identifying commitments in other facets – which is entirely possible, of course. But if she was wilfully repressing these facets, then this would not be self-realizing.<sup>3</sup> What we have to accept is that the general theory will not itself be able to identify what is and is not self-realizing in such cases. The nature of one's

commitments is ultimately a matter of self-interpretation. What the theory does is provide a conceptual structure in which such interpretations can be framed. This offers guidelines from which an individual's interpretation of what is self-realizing might be challenged, too.

But it is just unrealistic to expect it to be able to provide precise identifications of what is self-realizing in every instance. Amy's project *might* be self-realizing if her commitments genuinely do not spread into other facets – and the multi-faceted general conception allows for this. But she could be wrong in thinking this; she may indeed have repressed other commitments and potentials and deluded herself that these facets do not matter. The multi-faceted conception would challenge this self-interpretation – but we cannot reasonably expect it to distinguish correctly between these two types of possibility all the time.

However, I believe that it is not unreasonable to assume that, *in general*, projects of self-realization are in some way multi-faceted. We can venture this claim by assuming that, if the modern self is indeed a complex, multi-faceted subject, its self-realization is more likely to be a complex, multi-faceted project. Now, this point probably has greater intuitive appeal rather than any compelling logical force hastening us to such a conclusion – though as this chapter proceeds we shall hopefully find reason to judge it more acceptable still.

But it is anyway a harmless idea if the political practice we obtain from this link does not damage the prospects for genuine one-track self-realizing projects. Further, if the “typical” form of self-realization is some combination of projects among different facets, it is also reasonable to assume that a successful self-realizing life-plan will need to ensure that this is a harmonious, coherent combination. If it did not, there is a danger that the life-plan will be composed of frustratingly contradictory commitments.

In Chapter 1 {iv}, it will be recalled, we examined the problem of promoting a character-ideal without taking into account aspects of the personality not covered by the ideal. I suggested that even when one wanted to promote a limited ideal such as “good citizenship” (“limited” in the sense of not exhausting one's life-plan), inattention to other facets of the self's activity may inadvertently lead to an untenably disjointed life-plan.

This is the idea I wish to develop when thinking about the political theory of the multi-faceted self's realization. We should treat the facets of self-realization in one, unified conception, to try to avoid the danger of the recommendations generated from one facet pulling away from those of another. Even if Amy, our potential self-realizer, wishes to pursue a one-track approach, her conception of self-realization has to be sensitive to possible compatibility-problems with other facets of her life. The multi-faceted approach facilitates this, along with the conceptualization of the more diverse life-plans.

What moves the multi-faceted conception into the realm of political theory is the extent to which even one facet involves political activity. Chapter 1's example, “good citizenship”, obviously did. But political concern for this entailed *some* form of political concern for the other aspects of character, to ensure its promotion allowed it to be harmoniously integrated into people's life-plans. Now, the multi-faceted general conception I wish to propose treats this specific project as one of self-realization, bringing

perfectionist political activity into play in facets other than that pertaining to citizenship. By illustrating it, I hope it will become clear why it is worth grouping the various dimensions of self-realization together in a single *political* theory.

The general conception of self-realization features three facets which admit of a role for politics in their realization, labelled: {a} the individualistic; {b} the social (non-political); {c} the political. A full explanation of these will be provided in a moment, but first, let us see how the material from the three author-studies inform these. For the characterization and corresponding prescriptions of the three facets will be inspired by Mill, Marx and Aristotle's conceptions (as modified in our discussions), respectively. This correspondence will be rather rough (there are, for example, overlaps between them). But it is worth remarking at this stage that, by conceding that we need different ways of fully capturing the dimensions of the self, it is perfectly appropriate to bring together apparently very different (from a one-track point of view) traditions of thought about the self. This theoretical manoeuvre justifies, for example, using selected pre-modern ideas in modern thinking if there is a facet which they can still help to describe.

So the project before us is as follows: we have a tri-faceted conception of the modern, partially-socially located self and we are seeking, firstly, descriptions of what "self-realization" entails in each of the three facets and, secondly, an indication of the policy directions such promotion might take. The general political theory proposes two ways in which a character-ideal may be "promoted":

{i} the "weak" way, in which the self-realization of the individualistic (non-socially determined) aspect of the self may be facilitated by non-coercive political and social encouragement. So a political decision can be taken to support, non-neutrally, this possibility and it is then a matter for debate as to how and in what ways the individual is to be encouraged thus. We will see examples of this in facet {a}.

{ii} The "strong way", concerned with that part of the self whose identity is derived from social sources, which is more rigorously interventionist than the weak way. Here, it is taken to be a matter of political responsibility as to whether the social determinants of identity can be altered in order to produce different types of character than the ones currently being shaped in society. It is then a matter of debate as to which character ideal should be pursued. Facet {c} in particular will illustrate this.

The general political theory is not necessarily an "all-or-nothing" affair. It *might* be perfectly possible to accept the political recommendations from one of the facets and decline to follow those of another (I am not *insisting* that the requirements of a harmonious life-plan *always* entails following the recommendations from all facets). The theory aims to present a plausible conception of self-realization, explain the various ways in which politics might promote it ... and then leave it to individuals as to what part of the latter, if any, should be followed. Our discussion of good citizenship, however, can lead us into at least one conceivable overarching political goal behind the theory – but I shall leave this until section {vii}.

But for now, let us imagine the kind of formative political community outlined at the end of Chapter 5, deciding what ideals might be pursued and what practices it might be

best to institute in their society. The general political theory of self-realization is the rigorous presentation of one of the options they could consider. Whether they decide to adopt it will depend in part on how attractive the following is deemed to be.

#### **iv Individualistic Self-Realization**

This Millian facet is meant to refer to those personal projects which one undertakes separately either from the performance of a social role or as a bearer of some inherited, embedded identity. In Mill's conception, these often appeared to be certain forms of leisure pursuit: painting, creative writing, philosophizing, for example, which develop those talents with which a particular self happens to be blessed. But there is room for wide interpretation of the kind of pursuit which falls under this heading.

We should remember that one of our conditions is that self-realization has to be a freely chosen project. Fundamental to Mill's conception was an assumption that people tended naturally to choose self-realizing activities once they became competently autonomous. Obviously, this made it easier to bias political recommendations away from the simple facilitation of autonomy to the promotion of self-realization. This helped to justify Mill's idea that the state can promote its own conception of the good quite permissibly, as long as it allows people to follow alternative conceptions if they so choose. State encouragement of self-realization is still closer to encouraging people to "do their own thing" than to the imposition of an alien ideal. But there can be subtle but important differences between the Millian approach and one which promotes autonomy alone.

Development of the skills of autonomy obviously remains the initial stage of Millian perfectionism. Not only does self-realization have to be genuinely self-chosen, but the precise shape it assumes is also self-determined. We saw how the skills of autonomous life-planning are learned primarily in education, where the mind's rational discriminative faculties are encouraged (see Chapter 3 {v} {a}). Provision of an environment which continued to involve the individual in decision-making was required after education, with radical implications for mass participatory democracy in the long run (Chapter 3 {vii}).

But "all-round" self-realizing autonomy is also promoted: firstly, through a rounded, variegated curriculum which stimulates multiple faculties; secondly, through the "variety-of-situations" stipulation. This can be interpreted as an encouragement of a "multi-faceted" life by helping the self to move in various contexts, thereby stimulating different faculties to break the frustrating monotony of a singularly situated existence (Chapter 3 {v} {b}). We can readily surmise from Mill's own commitments that, where necessary, the state has a role to play if its intervention is necessary to secure this kind of pluralism in life.

This briefly summarizes the extent of the Millian political recommendations (though only a fear of throwing as-yet uneducated people precipitously into participatory democratic processes prevented Mill from being more immediately radical). But the question we should consider is, if we drop the assumption that self-realization generally follows automatically from autonomous action, do the recommendations to encourage self-realization actually compromise autonomy?

The obvious response to this is to stress again that "encouragement" is non-coercive:

Mill is not forcing people to be self-realizing. This does not automatically make it acceptable for a state to promote self-realization if the primary value remains “autonomy” – particularly if there is something to the claim that people have to *learn* autonomy and are highly impressionable whilst still learning. A character ideal, one might fear, could be insidiously imposed during this formative phase. We noted how, in an extraordinarily paradoxical twist, Mill failed to appreciate this when giving a large role to social advice on the conduct of the good life whilst at the same time deploring the despotism of public opinion (Chapter 3 {v}).

Though this critique of Mill should indeed make us wary of practices which inadvertently restrict one’s options when only encouragement was intended, some of the implications we drew from the idea of the partially-situated self in Chapter 1 can be used to justify “Millian encouragement”, rather than simple facilitation of autonomy. For, even in the “individualistic” facet, social influences can still determine the way people view their own projects (we should not pretend that the conceptually distinct facets are hermetically sealed off from each other in practice). Despite the fact that we are assuming a modern self underpins our project (i.e. one that can conceptualize itself as having a non-engulfed, partially distinct relationship to society), we should not thereby attribute *complete* independence from society to the self in this facet. Its social context is always likely to inform its self-perception and its concept of what is possible in the sphere of purely personal projects.

Given that this “conditioning” of autonomy is probably impossible to avoid, there need be no significant difference in extent between perfectionist encouragement of particular individual projects and the social biasing of such projects that would anyway take place. So, if one wished to pursue something like the Millian political promotion of self-realization, one would: {a} have to accept the pro-perfectionist argument of Chapter 1 that it is better to bring this social influence under greater political promotion than leave it to chance, as anti-perfectionists do, in effect; {b} decide that self-realization is the ideal that should be encouraged.

Further consideration to {b} will be given in {vii}, below. For now, we should stress that the recommended extent of perfectionist activity as far as this facet of self-realization goes should still be fairly limited. The thesis about social influence on individualistic projects does not mean we should move *very far* from the simple promotion of autonomy. The general theory advises the prompting of people to choose in certain ways, rather than leaving them to the haphazard, chance promptings that still exist even when autonomous faculties alone are stimulated. But, because people should be free to choose other forms of life-plan, perfectionist encouragement of individualistic self-realization should not act in ways which are intolerant of the very possibility of non-self-realizing projects.

Hence the centrality of “experiments-in-living” to this facet, the process in which people have the opportunity to try out various kinds of project in order to find the one that suits them best. These experiments, it must be remembered, are not themselves life-plans – they are trials for them.<sup>4</sup> We saw that, in Mill’s conception, people were encouraged in certain ways to opt for self-realizing plans as experiments (bolstered by their assumed

natural disposition to self-realize). But I think it is fair to say that the political implications of pursuing self-realization in facet {a} – promoting experiments – are not so very different from those required by the simple pursuit of autonomy. They show subtle variations from, rather than stark contrasts with, the latter. This said, I will restrict the remaining comments to a couple of practical problems that implementers of the general theory face with experiments-in-living.

An important proviso to the idea of experiments, which liberalism's critics have often accused autonomy theorists of neglecting, is that it is not enough to ensure their *formal* possibility (e.g. by only providing legal protection for it). If we decide that self-realization is something whose opportunity should equally be available to all, then we have a case for redistributing resources to make experiments a *substantive* possibility for all.

Obviously, there are limits to, and problems with, this blunt redistributive recommendation. We first need to remember the points from Chapter 5 {viii} above: our political community will almost certainly recognize that there are more urgent demands on resources than the requirement of equal opportunities for experiments. These rightfully take priority. Further, a commitment to "self-realization" cannot sort out the conflicts over resources that are likely to result from trying to provide equal opportunities for self-realization. Is it not almost certain that people's individualistic projects will vary in their cost? If A's project requires 100 resource units and B's only 25, the provision of "equal opportunities for full self-realization" would lead to a highly inegalitarian distribution. A society whose non-self-realizationist norms exhibit a commitment to "equality" in any of its most familiar forms (of "opportunity", "resources", and "welfare") may find this politically unacceptable.<sup>5</sup>

It is plain that the prior demands on resources could limit the extent of inegalitarianism by cutting the scope to subsidize expensive self-realizing projects. Another way of avoiding the problem is to keep rigidly to a distinction between the cost of an experiment and the cost of the resultant project. The point of "experiments-in-living" is that one has to discover what form one's self-realization will eventually take; *ipso facto* one does not know how much one's self-realization will ultimately "cost". So we should not need to think at this stage about differences in the cost of the projects chosen, but only what is required to facilitate equal opportunities to experiment.

This clearly does not mean we allocate the same amount of resources to each experimenter, because their own initial position may unequally bias their opportunities (a rich aristocrat is obviously going to have more scope for experimenting than the poor miner). But the point is that, to this extent, the political theory of self-realization does not require something radically different from a more conventionally egalitarian redistributive policy to equalize opportunities to "do one's own thing".<sup>6</sup> Here, then, the theory links in with another, separate issue in political thinking. In working out how to promote self-realization in this facet, this distinct issue would have to be confronted – and one which we must here leave aside.

If the general political theory can link into this separate debate on egalitarianism to deal with the facilitation of experiments-in-living, this is not as yet to say it can simply ignore

the fact that people's choices in the experiments' aftermath could still vary in cost. Certainly, if "self-realization" is to be at all meaningful, people need the resources to carry out their project as well as to determine by experiment what that project should be. How might the general theory respond to the cost-difference problem?

Ultimately, it is up to the political community in question to settle such problems, but the following considerations might be borne in mind, which may keep the general theory close to the egalitarian approach. First, we argued in Chapter 5 (iv) that some degree of material scarcity should, for practical and theoretical reasons, be preserved in our concept of the self-realizing society. There will be limits on the extent to which all life-plans could be fully subsidized and, given a premise of favouring equal self-realization, this militates further against the disproportionate subsidy of the fewer, more expensive projects.

More pertinently, it may not always make sense to talk of the relative "costs" of a project, since they may not all be commensurable. If there are such difficulties in costing projects, the pragmatic response might be simply to distribute any surplus resources on a numerically egalitarian basis anyway (e.g. "100 units per person, once their initial life-situations have been equalized").

Finally, the material limits on the forms of self-realizing projects that may be chosen might be supplemented by the kind of "conceptual" limits imparted through the social and cultural practices, identified above, which could adjust how people perceive the possibilities of self-realization. For example, an all-round education might prompt people to adopt artistic projects (painting or poetry, say), which will be less expensive than a project involving greater accumulation of consumer goods (the collection of Rolls-Royces, say) – a more likely choice in a less intellectualized, more materialistic social context. A Millian-inspired conception, therefore, will naturally support the former.

In sum: "Encouragement and Egalitarianism" seems to be an apt slogan to encapsulate the likely policy directions in the promotion of the general conception's individualistic facet.

## **v The Social (Non-Political) Facet**

Drawn largely from the Marxist conception, this facet refers to those aspects of the self's existence which are more essentially located in a social context than the previous one. Two themes will be discussed here: {a} labour; {b} projects derived from the embedded self's commitments.

Taking {a} first, we concluded that labour-based self-realization, as we came to understand it, could give us a detailed set of requisite political practices. These could apply to everyone insofar as it is likely that everyone will have to do some work and that the types of work which meet these tight requirements is likely to be a satisfying and therefore freely adoptable form of activity. Chapter 5 {vi} proposed, against the orthodox Marxist view, that this activity could be performed within role-based relationships, whilst at Chapters 4 {xiv} and 5 {vii} we argued, against the productivist bias in the same view, that non-material-productive activities ("caring" work was the example used) should not be excluded from this type of self-realization.

The political import of all this can be summed up as the attempt to promote practices whereby people can play suitably self-realizing work roles, meeting the extensive criteria mapped out in the previous chapters. This might invoke some notion of experimenting among social roles to find those which are satisfying. It can also require attempts to render existing roles more amenable to self-realization. A whole host of policies could be formulated to further these rather sweeping aims. Instead of delving speculatively into the possibilities, I shall comment instead on the aims and limits of the political practices which pertain to this facet.

First, as stressed in the defence of role-play at Chapter 5 {vi}, the role(s) in question cannot be engulfing if they are to be self-realizing. Indeed, this qualification fits exactly with the idea of the multi-faceted self: one facet *only*, say, being a role into which one moves in specific contexts. Note that this insistence on non-engulfment does not contradict the proviso of section {iii} above that self-realization could be pursued in one facet only. It insists instead that, in cases like this, one should have the theoretical ability to conceptualize oneself apart from the single role (which obviously assumes another facet, or perspective, to the self from which the role can be viewed). This is the major contrast between the modern and pre-modern approaches as far as the notion of role is concerned.

Second: by stressing that this part of self-realization can be achieved by the performance of a certain role (only) in society, it gives a clear meaning to the idea that “the self-realization of each is dependent upon the self-realization of all”. We need others to support our self-realizing lives as we contribute support to each others’ lives by performing satisfying roles in relations of mutual dependence (see Chapter 5 {vi} again). The crucial difference between this and the Aristotelian conception, in which a class of menials performed this “necessary labour” is that self-realization can be gained through *any* work as long as it is freely done and developmental.

Third: the above generates a solidaristic community (see Chapter 5 {iv}). A central part of what it means to be self-realized is that one experiences the good of participating in a community of self-realizers jointly exercising control over their conditions of existence. To guarantee this, roles must be based on mutual respect and equality (as subservience violates autonomy), which has the further effect of generating the appropriate self-perception for self-realization. This incorporates non-working roles in self-realizing society; Mill’s arguments on marriage at Chapter 3 {v} can be invoked to indicate the requisite practices, in line with those being suggested for the workplace. The quality of human relationships in all contexts is highlighted as an integral issue in self-realization.

Fourth: because “work” is a social activity, it is much more obviously a matter for political concern, especially with the emphasis on joint control and co-ordination. This facet of self-realization clearly requires industrial as well as political participatory democracy along with the insistence on other developmental activities in work. As the non-productivist points in our study of Marx entail, this facet’s concerns extend to self-realizing roles in caring work. To illustrate possible consequences of this, consider the example of a woman who is “wife and mother”. At the very least, practices to increase the

likelihood of this being self-realizing would include: establishment of full legal parity with her partner; provision of creches to make it easier for her to become employed (relieving the extent to which this role overly restricts the chance to pursue other projects); and perhaps education in society as a whole to increase the prospects for self-esteem from such work.

Fifth: although Chapter 4 argued against an uninhibited rush to automation, we can see from the above that this facet would not lose its relevance if automation did actually supplant much manual labour. By including “caring” work, it incorporates activities which can only remain, ultimately, in human hands and yet which will always be central to people’s lives. This might also reduce the extent to which this aspect of self-realization requires “full employment” in the familiar (employment-society) sense, along with comprehensive training for the skills we expect self-realizing labour to involve.

Sixth: talk of “training” for roles is reminiscent of Aristotle’s disciplinary ethical education for the role-based self. It would not be nonsensical to include specific kinds of “role-training” in this facet’s recommendations (since we would almost certainly want to contrast the self-realizing policy with the more limited “job training” in capitalist societies that are only concerned to fit people into narrow, less self-realizing functions). However, I shall not pursue any speculative development of this idea; my development of the “Aristotelian training” idea comes in the next facet.

One can also interpret the general conception as requiring a multiplicity of satisfying roles in a life-plan – i.e. both “employed” and “caring” roles. Whatever, despite the qualification above, full employment (increasingly thought of as a utopian aim in Western democracies) is an obvious but important possible policy goal from this facet.

Part {ii} of this facet refers to the idea salvaged in Chapter 5 from the unrealistic claims of the “self-creating subject” – the persistence of inherited identities and traditional commitments. Now, as already suggested, for the modern multi-faceted self these are going to be fragmentary inheritances only – certainly not the engulfing self-perceptions of the pre-modern era. As such, it is rather difficult to theorize political prescriptions for the treatment of haphazard fragments. An especially difficult problem is: if a modern political community is seeking the promotion of this multi-faceted self-realization, how should it treat minority groupings in its midst which stick rigidly to much more engulfing – and, from the wider community’s perspective, non-developmental – traditional identities? Let us consider how the general political theory might approach this.

It seems reasonable to say that no “fragments” which stifle development in other facets should be preserved, according to the general conception. An example of this would be a religious dogma that actively discriminated against women. Its practice could not, therefore, be described as self-realizing either for the women or the men, who are denied part of the communal dimension of self-realization summarized above (they obtain misleading self-perceptions of innate superiority – see Chapter 3 {v} again for Mill’s argument to this effect). But traditional institutions or customs that did not frustrate other facets of self-realization do not, it seems, deserve to wither away on self-realizationist grounds. If they stand condemned according to the type of non-self-realizationist moral

norms theorized in Chapter 5 {viii} they should be attacked, even if people identify strongly with them. An example of this might be a community's commitment to fox-hunting, which involves no subordinate relationships between humans and which certain people may feel very strongly about, yet is still deemed by many to be morally repugnant.<sup>8</sup>

For modern subjects no longer living wholly according to traditions, the latter often take the form of little more than ritual festivals and customs – May Day festivals in a village, for example, in which people perform the rituals of their forebears, expressing a continuing identity with them, as it were. Most such practices are harmless enough, nowadays and may seem rather trivial, particularly to urban dwellers for whom there may be no such traditions on hand.<sup>9</sup> But insofar as they remain important to people, a self-realizationist theory seems committed to supporting them.

What role might politics play here – beyond ensuring that such traditions are not needlessly repressed? Initiatives could be undertaken to preserve such traditions as were deemed valuable enough if it was obvious that they were not self-sustaining in civil society. We remarked in Chapter 4 that modernity was characterized by a host of effects that broke the engulfing hold of traditions upon people, commenting that this seems to have been a positive development. But the *continued* onslaught of these phenomena on traditional commitments ceases to be a good thing at a certain point according to this facet of self-realization. It deprives people of a valid portion of their identity, a source of meaning and belonging in life, which may be difficult to replace.

In short, this development could cause the feeling of isolation, alienation and nihilism which, as we have noted before, typifies modernity in the eyes of many. Yet the onset of modernity often seems irresistible, brushing aside long-standing tradition with ephemeral fashion.<sup>10</sup> My suggestion is that self-realizationist political practice could help to resist it where appropriate.

One form of fragmentary traditional identity in modernity, of course, is nationality (which is to be contrasted with nationalism<sup>11</sup>), currently perceived by popular opinion in Western Europe to be under threat from the prospect of a single European super-state. Now if this identity does not threaten other aspects of self-realization (e.g. if “being a Ruritanian” does not mean “repressing women and slavishly obeying your lords and masters”), it has to be said that a commitment to self-realization would resist phenomena which stifle it. A good example of this would be the initiatives undertaken to sustain and promote the Welsh language and its concomitant traditional identities, when the culture, left to itself, was so obviously dying.

An acutely familiar dilemma centres on the question of the much more fully traditionalist culture in an otherwise modern society of multi-faceted selves: should multi-faceted self-realization be promoted amongst them, against their traditions, or should the latter receive the same kind of assistance suggested in the above? It would not be simply an instance of evading the issue by stating that the abstract general political theory of self-realization cannot hope to provide a resolution. These are concrete political questions, ultimately to be decided in political debate in the communities themselves. So I will restrict myself here to one illustration of this general problem, suggesting *possible* self-

realizationist responses – and this will take the problem on into the final facet of self-realization.

Now, if the traditionalist self is not “multi-faceted”, in the sense that the traditional identity permeates the self far more than the type of self which is the subject of this theory, it might be an identity that does not repress powers and potentials (for there are no other facets to be stifled by the flourishing of whatever traditional commitments the self lives by). This would be akin to the example above of Amy’s deep desire to aid the poor reducing the facets of her self-realization. In this respect, the tradition is not fundamentally impugned by a commitment to self-realization.

So we should think about cultures that repress certain faculties and/or classes of people (again, a tradition that represses women, and preaches a doctrine of unreflective obedience, can serve as an example). One point to bear in mind might be that such a culture is only “in” modern society in a spatial sense; in every other sense it is separate. It may fairly be deemed pre-modern if its beliefs resist the postulates of autonomy, equal respect between all individuals (among the attributes of a “modern” theory as I defined it). Within it people are “sunk” in engulfing identities and codes of conduct.

One might want to argue that such a culture is too pre-modern to be brought under the purview of our proposed self-realizationist policies and thus should be left utterly alone. This would be a coherent response – but one that more fervent perfectionists would deem to be a “cop-out”. Their complaint would be particularly pertinent if these cultures were not so hermetically sealed, but were already exposed to the “forces of modernity” that had broken others’ pre-modern traditions.

The policy-issue I want to consider is the question of education: what should the children from such cultures be taught? As is well-known, children from such backgrounds are often more readily exposed to “identity-fragmenting” influences. These cause them to question and rebel against a cultural background they gradually come to experience as stifling, wishing instead to undertake “experiments-in-living”, in precisely the kind of way Mill envisaged (see Chapter 3 {v}). Assuming that the adults of this community want to preserve their culture against such influences, should the political promotion of self-realization override their wishes, by giving their children the kind of education described in {iii}, in order to pursue experiments-in-living?

The (inevitably) controversial answer to this has to be: yes. This is precisely what the perfectionist general political theory recommends. Now, our first two facets of self-realization are not meant to be about imposing exogenous character ideals upon people, but encouraging potentials to emerge, in a self-realizing form. To try to maintain the hold of tradition on people who are evolving, through socialization in a modern culture, into appropriate subjects for the general conception would be stultifyingly repressive. The crucial factor is the accuracy of the assumption that the children are already developing multi-faceted identities, leaving traditions behind.<sup>12</sup> This will be a matter for heated debate, again undecidable by an abstract theory (one assumes that the autonomy skills from the first facet will foster the requisite skills of *self*-interpretation).

This is not to say that a political society wanting to promote self-realization *in general*

must therefore take this approach. It may decide that, in special cases, exceptions should be made, e.g. to respect the wishes of select groups. Again, it is a matter for political debate within the society itself as to how extensively and to whom this perfectionist policy is to be applied. The “equal respect” principle, which has played an important part in our argument, is sometimes invoked to restrain such a policy, by saying that the wishes of a certain group (i.e. the traditionalist parents) cannot be overridden by the wishes of another, because this is to violate that respect.<sup>13</sup>

However, given the way we couched this example, this would be a disingenuous response on the part of the fundamentalist parents, whose actions, by frustrating real potentials and life-choices for their children, are denying *them* the same “equal respect”. The principle itself seems to demand intervention here – and so a perfectionist policy that does not violate people’s autonomy is not thereby ruled out.

Development of this faculty of autonomy was the purpose behind {iii}’s education proposals. This gains heightened relevance when we consider that, in political debates like the one we have just been considering, interested parties have to come together as equals. Ideally, they should be equally able to argue through such issues and come to a decision in a way which reflects genuine control over their lives. This leads us into the third facet of self-realization in the general conception, one designed (amongst other things) to provide for this possibility.

## **vi Self-Realization in Politics**

The “political” facet of self-realization is probably the most controversial of the three. It draws inspiration from the Aristotelian conception in the following way. Whereas the first two facets basically sought to encourage the shaping of latent potentials in the self into certain forms, this facet involves a rather more overt *imposition* of a character ideal. Thus, it is closer to the “disciplining” of the self, which the Aristotelian conception used to condition people to the excellent performance of their *ergon*.

Contrary to common opinion, this approach to self-realization can remain appropriate in modern thought. We have argued that the modern self’s characteristics and commitments, being partially socially determined, are shaped by social influences not of its choosing. If we grant that we cannot hermetically seal off the self from society, some sort of shaping must be considered inevitable. What is not inevitable is the particular form this shaping takes.

Chapter 1’s defence of perfectionism consisted in the claim that a political decision can be taken to influence the social phenomena that shape the self, to promote a different form of character. The concept of the multi-faceted self reinforces the insistence that this idea is not necessarily totalitarian, for this facet sits alongside, rather than subsumes, the other two. It remains perfectly compatible with the diversity of individual projects from the first facet and consolidates the work-based community of the second. It also aspires to a situation in which people could identify with it as freely as any other socially acquired identity.

I conceive of this facet as being the promotion of the role of citizenship. Thus, the aim

is to design social practices which would result in people coming to *identify* themselves as citizens, with concomitant rights and responsibilities. Put slightly differently, promotion of this facet involves seeking ways in which people come to see part of their self-realization as being the excellent performance of the role of citizen. If it is indeed possible and appropriate to aspire to this project in modernity, one can see the value of including Aristotle's pre-modern ideas in our reflections. To elaborate, let us think about what "self-realization-as-citizenship" entails and how it might be promoted.

In Chapter 5 we borrowed the "ideal speech community" concept for our thought-experiment about the beginnings of a new political community, selecting principles and practices by which to organize their polity. We envisaged a group of equals rationally debating and discussing a menu of political options. This is an "ideal" because, fairly obviously, nobody can presume that a political community begins on such an egalitarian footing, nor – what is most important for our purposes – that people are ready-equipped to enter into this debate. The skills and attitudes for democratic dialogue are not attributes that we can happily expect to flourish just so long as we grant autonomy (as distinct from the way Mill assumed that self-realizing projects would flow from the achievement of autonomy). These are much more obviously things that have to be taught.

We might have a problem if we want to argue that people could democratically adopt policies designed to promote democratic skills since this presumes they already possess such skills – unless we think of this as an attempt to *reproduce* the requirements for a flourishing democratic society. We will concentrate on the latter, then, as the aim of self-realization-as-citizenship. Not only will this help to achieve the good of personal development through political participation (a prominent feature in the three conceptions), but it will also facilitate the achievement of the self-realizing community whose outline was sketched in Chapter 5. I also believe that it provides the basis for a more effective means by which to encourage the pursuit of non-self-realizationist moral goals. However, this is a more ambitious and controversial ambition. I shall explain the other aims before tentatively presenting this one.

An initial question to address is: why should we pursue the goods of individual development and democratic community through an Aristotelian-style approach to self-realization? Now, it is a distinctive feature of a typical modern political system that most of its subjects tend to treat politics as an ephemeral activity in their lives, all but irrelevant in their ideals of the good life (as we noted back in Chapter 1, these ideals in modernity have tended to become "privatized"). For the "ordinary" citizen in contemporary liberal democratic states, for example, public activities such as politics are often consequently experienced as alienating and disillusioning. This is despite the fact that political decisions fundamentally affect how any plan of the good life is conducted (indeed, whether anyone is able to plan their own lives at all).

An Aristotelian approach would attempt to re-integrate politics as a project of the self, promoting a new self-perception of the person as *zoon politikon*. It recognizes that this "political identification" has to be inculcated through a particular set of educational practices. This contrasts with those proponents of radical democracy who are content to

argue that such apathy about politics in modernity is due only to the current lack of opportunities for real democratic control, as if provision of more democratic forums alone would dissipate political alienation. Their idea *might* encourage a more political disposition, but it is unlikely to be enough – because, as we have stressed, we should not assume that the “political disposition” is buried in the modern self, just waiting for a suitable outlet.

Hence the need to go further, to shape or “discipline” a facet of the self to accommodate the role of a democratic citizen. Given that people cannot escape politics in modern society (as Chapter 5 argued against communism), this would seem to be necessary for a fully integrated self-realizing life. The stress on control over one’s life and one’s environment, brought about particularly forcefully in the Marxist conception, can be incorporated into the general conception to show why politics is so important to a self-realizing life. Political participation is the means by which people exercise such control. This case for politics in self-realization holds even if we were not impressed by the arguments about the contribution politics makes to the development of the individual’s other, personal skills.

In the first facet, we emphasized the acquisition of skills for individual autonomy through education. Here, we supplement this proposed curriculum to include “democratic education” – and this is the point at which we can pick up the suggestion from Chapter 2’s conclusion about the potential utility of the concept of virtue-ethics. Specifically, democratic education involves practices to facilitate the adoption of what can be called “democratic virtues”. These are the dispositions that enable one to be a competent democratic citizen. They would include tolerance, respect for others’ opinions, respect for the democratic process and legitimate authority, plus the skills of reasoned, informed argument.

Democratic virtues are best secured by introduction to the processes of democratic debate in the curriculum: directly (for example, via student debating forums, with some degree of decision-making power<sup>14</sup>); and indirectly (courses which encourage skills of rational reflection and construction of argument, along with acquaintance of basic political knowledge to stress the importance of *informed* decision-making). This incorporates, but goes beyond, the more familiar idea of “civic education”, which stresses *passive* respect for a particular society’s laws and customs (because people come to recognize that they can *change* the latter).<sup>15</sup>

The acquisition of democratic virtues and the introduction to democratic deliberation prepares people for the forms of participation that we have already argued will confront them in self-realizing society. As a critical part of this process, it is hoped that an *identity* of citizenship will be fostered. This could come through the recognition of these virtues and practices as integral to the political norms Chapter 5 attributed to political society. As in the Millian conception in particular (see Chapter 3 {vi}), these virtues can be valued in themselves, rather than narcissistically (and self-defeatingly) pursued only for self-realization’s sake. People are bound to a co-operative political society by respecting them, in joint dialogue about political problems and goals and also in joint implementation of the

decisions taken, equitably sharing the benefits and burdens of living in the society.

This last point is especially relevant for our purposes. "Citizenship" also includes an idea of social responsibility – and more could be done to foster this as a project of the self than we generally find in our society. For example, amongst schoolchildren a link between themselves and community could be nurtured by a more frequent undertaking of "charitable work" than is now the case (and it might move away from the concept of "charity" itself, which has supererogatory undertones, when this communitarian approach to citizenship should require that social assistance be seen more as a duty, albeit one freely embraced as a project of the self). A form of national community service may perform a similar, or supplementary, role later on in life (the modern equivalent of the Aristotelian approach to the function of military service).

Multi-cultural education is an obvious way of teaching ideals of mutual respect and co-operation in practice. But here, unsurprisingly, is one of the other potential areas of cultural clash discussed previously. Even the relatively minimal requirements of democratic citizenship could conceivably conflict with the beliefs of some communities. Again, the uncompromising theoretical response of this conception would be to say these should be overridden if their children are to be fully integrated members of the modern society.<sup>16</sup>

Once more, we cannot expect a theory to deal with the adequacy of any scheme of education and its responses to such problems in abstraction; we can only sketch the direction of its likely responses. But there is one further development of this conception I would like to suggest, which a more homogeneous society may wish to pursue.

Although this facet aims to discipline the self to behave according to certain standards, it is entirely compatible with (and, by securing a stable, tolerant society, probably a necessary precondition of) a society containing heterogeneous conceptions of the good life. Its standards strike the compromise between pluralism and the requirements of *social* life which allows people to live and work together and yet still have diverse ideas about the good. We would be rightfully suspicious of any attempt to curb pluralism beyond what is needed to live in a society. We must be careful not to discipline the self too much.

But it is conceivable that a community may democratically decide to foster commitment to a thicker set of social values (perhaps something akin to the Hegelian notion of *Sittlichkeit*<sup>17</sup>), with clearer identification of what is right and wrong, how one should help the poor and needy, than might be had from a democratic system geared to respect greater moral heterogeneity. Thus we could extend this facet to include an idea of training the self to respect moral norms in a curriculum subject to democratic political control.

This more ambitious and controversial idea takes seriously the Aristotelian idea that ethics is a political question. I would venture that it seems to be the only plausible way of re-establishing in modernity the classical equation of self-realization and morality. No one should underestimate the problems this could pose in possibly stifling other, valid autonomous conceptions of the good. These could be enough to make a political community shy away from using this facet of self-realization thus. However, in the next

section I will consider one argument as to why this idea deserves further exploration.

Anyway, perhaps no one should expect too much of educationalists' attempts to make people become more competent democratic citizens. Some will always be more able and more inclined to be politically competent, and we do not need to rehearse familiar Schumpeterian arguments about the difficulties with being a "competently active" citizen in the modern state.<sup>16</sup> But the recommendation that we should at least attempt to cultivate citizenship skills is surely preferable to benign neglect. We can try to enable more people to take part in the democratic dialogue of decision-making. Treating this as part of the problem of "self-realization", I have argued, increases the likelihood that a willing embrace of political activity in one's life-plan will be achieved.

### **vii An Argument for the General Conception**

As insisted at the start, modern political theory should not aspire to providing "proof" of the rectitude and superiority of one political ideal over others. It cannot undertake such a task because the ultimate judges in such matters have to be the people for whom the ideal is intended. So this study cannot prove that the general conception of self-realization is the one they should adopt. It cannot even prove conclusively that the general conception is the "best" way that "self-realization" can be understood.

But, by showing how it *might* be construed as a political ideal, the thesis offers an example of political theory examining one of the candidates for the great debate people can have over which ideals to adopt. By considering incoherences, flaws, implausible or misleading assumptions in the three conceptions of self-realization, for example, it hopes to narrow the field of interpretations of the concept if the criticisms are accepted. The general conception is the product of an attempt to overcome objections to the previous attempts to describe "self-realization". The effort to explain the coherence of the general conception thus plays an important part in preparing this ideal for possible acceptance.

There is one more way in which political theory can contribute towards the process of choosing an ideal. It can also set out and examine the arguments for and against an ideal, even if it is not competent to use them to pre-empt people's choices. This section, then, considers one such argument for the adoption of the general conception, which its supporters might plead on its behalf before the democratic political community.

Earlier in this chapter, we developed a discussion from Chapter 1 to express a worry about the idea of the multi-faceted self's realization: that the flourishing of one facet could harm the prospects of flourishing in another. A perfectionist policy which concentrated on the promotion of the ideals of competent democratic citizenship ends up ignoring the fact that people also have individual, non-political pursuits as part of their intended life-plan. If one promotes policies that aim to encourage people to be altruistic performers of social duties whilst paying no attention to the desires of people to do other things as *well*, they may feel resentful and frustrated as the effects of the policies leave other desires unfulfilled (and note that this point does not depend upon a claim that people are wholly selfish).

A perfectionist policy could become sensitive to the other facets of the self's flourishing without having to offer substantive policy proposals concerning them. It can remain "one-

track” (concentrating exclusively on the promotion of a citizenship ideal) and simply recognize that it is not dealing with the self’s entire life-plan. This approach would acknowledge that citizenship does not exhaust the good life, offering at most the “negative” proposal of ensuring that it leaves time, resources and does not otherwise frustrate the opportunities to do other things in tandem with being a good citizen.

The general conception of self-realization could be put forward as an alternative, superior way of securing the ideal of good democratic citizenship. To see how this argument could work, let us remind ourselves of the character of the third facet. Its political prescriptions aim for what many other theories of political morality have also set out to achieve: encouraging people to see themselves as socially involved individuals who respect and support each other as equal members of a political community. The one-track approach suggested in the previous paragraph aspires to this. It could readily embrace the idea that to perceive oneself as integrated in a community and to adopt a communal ethics as expressive of one’s own commitments as one’s own is the most desirable form of self-identification.

If the point of *any* perfectionist policy promoting good citizenship is to make the securing of the *modern* (i.e. multi-faceted) individual to social and political norms more effective, it is most likely to succeed if it does not swamp or repress the other facets of the self – as argued above. The one-track approach may fall short of its goal in failing to treat “good citizenship” as a project of self-realization. By this, I mean not only fostering attitudes by which people perform citizenship duties as personal projects, but also in a situation where their other life-projects are positively stimulated, rather than neglected or repressed. If the citizenship ideal is promoted in an environment that encourages all-round flourishing, it stands more chance of willing acceptance.

This is the *initial* stage of the argument for the general conception. It very much depends upon whether one accepts the case for perfectionism laid out in Chapter 1, where I argued that harmony and stability of commitments within partially socially situated selves cannot be taken for granted. By pursuing the policy recommendations from all three facets, one stands a greater chance of achieving harmony within life-projects. We give this project the label of “self-realization” because we want the commitments to citizenship, non-political projects in society and our own individual pursuits *together* to be experienced as developmental and expressive of our identity. Perhaps there are other ways of couching the ideal of a fully integrated, flourishing personality, but “self-realization”’s ability to cast the complete ideal in terms of a deeply personal, developmental-expressive aspect can be offered as a strong point in its favour.

Now to extend the case that supporters of the general conception could put forward. Above, it was suggested that the attempt to inculcate what we can call the “morality of democratic citizenship” – the basic rights, duties and attitudes of equal respect to be encapsulated in democratic virtues – could be widened to include other, thicker moral commitments if a democratic community so chose. Ideas about the rectitude of rendering positive assistance to the poor and otherwise needy in the world, which are not ordinarily attributed to the idea of democratic citizenship, are what I have in mind here.

The familiar problem in modernity with regards to the promotion of such a morality lies in the gap between “ethical push” and “ethical pull” – respectively, the demands that morality and duty make on us against the inner desire of individuals to neglect these and pursue our own projects alone.<sup>19</sup> Because we have abandoned the pre-modern identification of the self with “the moral order”, a modern conception of self-realization cannot guarantee avoidance of the push/pull phenomenon. But if we accept that it is desirable for people to embrace some thicker conception of morality, this means that, by promoting its acceptance, we are in danger of abandoning the ideal of the harmoniously ordered character. We might be leaving it to a wrenching “push” and “pull”.

The general conception, then, could incorporate this thicker morality into the “political facet”, seeking the acceptance of the morality as a project of the self alongside those generated from the self’s other facets. It does not pretend that the projects which “pulled” could be fully *replaced* by those towards which we formerly had to be pushed. A crucial advantage of this theory is that, by attempting to reconcile “push” and “pull” without repressing personal commitments, it promises to be more successful in getting people to embrace a thicker morality than one-track schemes that share this aim.

The potential versatility of the general political theory of self-realization, therefore, lies in the fact that one can use it even when self-realization is not the ideal one is immediately concerned to promote. Promoting citizenship, or re-connecting the self to “the moral law” may be all that one is worried about. But thinking of such projects as problems of self-realization in the way I have presented is, so the theory argues, the most promising way of guaranteeing success in them. *Whatever* one’s ultimate goal, it could make a lot of sense to encourage positively various commitments of the multi-faceted self instead of neglecting them – and “self-realization” is an attractive way of conceptualizing the whole process.

Returning to the topic of promoting self-realization, one can see that the advocacy of training the self according to the virtues of democratic citizenship and a thicker set of moral commitments further reduces the extent to which the life-plan is vulnerable to narcissism and self-defeasibility. However, as stated, the pursuit of the thicker morality does seem to depend on the existence of a relatively homogeneous society if any form of moral training is not to compromise seriously autonomy. The specific practices by which such training is suitably pursued can only be discerned by examining the existing conditions of the society in question.

Abstract blueprints are unlikely to do justice to the peculiarities of belief and practice which could fundamentally affect any policy like this. Further, if we continue to insist that people are not compelled to follow the state’s ideal of the good – if they are still to be free to resist the influences which encourage self-realization – it might be reasonable still to harbour doubts about the the comprehensive acceptance of a thicker communal morality. People are malleable and prone to social conditioning; this obvious truth led us to the acceptance of perfectionism in the first place. But they are not infinitely plastic and there will always be some resistance to any such political project.

The general political theory should acknowledge, therefore, that the result of its implementation will probably be more fragmentary and incomplete than it would like. But

that still does not amount to an argument that no such project should be attempted.

There may be little more the theory can do than offer the kind of tentative policy directions seen above. But, given its potential versatility, it appears to present a more adequate conceptual structure with which to tackle a range of moral and political questions that concern very many people, direct supporters of self-realization or not.

### viii “Self-Realization” in Politics and Political Theory

Given the tenor of some of the comments in the preceding section, we should perhaps begin our summary of this study’s conclusions by pointing out the limits to talk of self-realization in modern political theory.

First of all, the primary respect for autonomous choice which we insist our theory should pay curbs the extent to which we can describe in detail what “self-realization” entails for any one person. The variations in social circumstance might also lead to variations in the forms of self-realization (with different local traditions contributing to varied types of the ideal). The theory is, then, going to be pretty generalized, if not loose in its description of the self-realized life. This is unsatisfactory if we hoped to replicate the type of comprehensive presentation of the good life found in Aristotle, but is nothing more than we should expect from a theory properly faithful to the condition of modernity.

Respect for autonomy also reduces the sphere of what counts as legitimate political promotion of the ideal. As we can see from the general conception, much of this sphere is concerned with “encouragement” to self-realize. Particularly given our arguments about the partial social location of the self, there is good reason to hope that such a policy will be effective. But people still must have the freedom to do otherwise should they so wish. In such an event, the general political theory becomes impotent when all encouragement-policies fail and self-realization is still not widespread. Its own commitment to autonomy as part of what it means to be self-realized means it would be contradictory for the theory to advocate policies that would stifle autonomy in support of “self-realization”.

Even if we assume that people freely choose the promotion of self-realization, our theorization of this process must disclaim any aspiration to comprehensive detail because of the vagaries and variations of specific context. The means by which self-realization can be encouraged will obviously be dependent upon local conditions. Socially relative beliefs and practices may need either to be instituted or excised – and these would be policy recommendations which obviously could not be explicitly identified in a generalized theory (at best, they would fall into general categories of possible policy approaches).

Unlike emancipation politics, which typically insists upon a universal, unqualified acceptance of its principles of right, a theory like this will perhaps *appear* to be rather tentative. But the point is that it is a theory designed to inspire policy approaches when applied creatively to a certain context, rather than one that insists upon its own comprehensive, invariant acceptance regardless (an example of this would be a typical account of human rights, which ignores pleadings from particular quarters for exemption from or qualification of its strictures<sup>20</sup>).

Another sense in which self-realizationist political theory is “limited” is that self-

realization should only be pursued within the framework of a prior set of principles. This identifies prior demands on citizens and resources, which self-realizing projects are worthy and how to distribute remaining resources with respect to them. There is a sense in which emancipation politics can be distinguished from and prioritized over projects of life politics like self-realization. "Self-realization" is a "secondary ideal" and, as such, the general political theory can only form a part of the political morality of any society.

The theory is also heavily reliant on other non-self-realizationist theoretical concerns to address some of its own, internal questions. A major case in point was introduced above, where the issue of how best to allocate resources for experiments-in-living was seen not to be one readily resolvable in self-realizationist terms alone. The general political theory, then, not only has to link in with some account of emancipation politics to yield the principles of right which are not available within a modern conception of self-realization. It is also dependent upon a non-self-realizationist political morality to tackle problems that arise even when the principles of right have been enforced.

Finally, the general political theory cannot say what value should be given to self-realization in abstraction from a society's own preferences. We have seen that the theory can offer arguments why self-realization might be deemed attractive, but different societies may be impressed by these to different degrees, thereby varying in the extent to which they wish to promote self-realization.

The general theory cannot, for example, show that people have a right to self-realization because (if we take a right to be a socio-cultural convention to protect what is deemed worthy of protection and/or development), only a society's own account of what is valuable enough for rights-protection can settle this issue in its own context.<sup>21</sup> At most, it can only explain how a political system would work to order its priorities and practices if it did put forward self-realization as something for which we have a right.

Here, too, the theory inevitably has to link in with non-self-realizationist political moralities to ascertain, for example, the relationship that this right might have to other rights that a political system respects. Again, only a contextually relative study can tackle this, not an abstract general theory.

But hopefully we have seen clearly how, despite these reservations, something quite considerable *can* still be said about the role in political theory of the concept of self-realization. In the first instance, we used this character-ideal's role in politics to illustrate the thesis that perfectionism can be plausibly advocated by a modern political theory in a desirable manner. We sought, via discussion of self-realization, to restore concern with pursuit of the good life to politics without violating respect for autonomy. The general conception does exactly this, with consequences for policy interestingly and relevantly different from the "simple pursuit of autonomy".

We have seen that "self-realization", which started off in Chapter 1 as a rather skimpily characterized concept open to various interpretations and uses (or abuses), can be given a relatively rich meaning without either collapsing into a simple theory of autonomy or relying on unconvincing claims about the "human essence" or the "real self" at the heart of all individual personalities. This thesis has not denied that the multi-faceted self, which

underpins the general conception, is contestable. We observed in Chapter 1 {ii}, for example, that people such as religious fundamentalists would resist this concept, doubtless dismissing it in the same way that we dismissed “real-self” conceptions.

Although the initial pre-modern/modern distinction drawn in Chapter 1 {ii} was modified, we have operated all along with a specific conception of what modernity entails for the conception of the self and the good life, based upon autonomy. If we grant the assumptions built into this conception, a strong case can be put forward for the account of the multi-faceted self and its realization. This does justice to the individualistic and socially derived elements of the modern individual’s identity and good, in a way that traditional real-self theories do not.

The general conception of self-realization offered a multi-layered political theory that was sensitive to the different dimensions of the self’s flourishing, rejecting the one-track approach (which over-simplified this complex phenomenon). Bringing these different dimensions together under one theory carried with it the theoretical advantage that apparently very different concerns (pertaining to both the public and private aspects of one’s life) are addressed in a way which hopefully does not lead to incompatible policy recommendations – an obvious danger if these concerns are dealt with separately.

The general conception was able to avoid the type of criticism typically levelled at other variants of the concept, particularly Elster’s self-defeasibility claim and the attendant concerns introduced in Chapter 1 {v}. Our version of self-realization, even within the boundaries of principles of right, is not a purely egoistic project of self-gratification. Indeed, part of it is concerned to develop other-regarding sympathies and a positive acceptance of principles of right as expressive of one’s own commitments. It is far more sensitive to the need for community and a certain quality of human relationship than we might have supposed at the outset, a crucial resource in the resistance to the potential for nihilism by placing the individual’s life-activity in a context more extensive and lasting than “one’s own personal inclination”. Thus, the possibility of a self-defeating state-of-mind being generated by self-realization’s pursuit was seen to be an eminently avoidable result.

The viability of a political theory of self-realization was eventually justified against the Elster objection because we saw it as perfectly valid for “self-realization” to be used as a criterion in picking policies and institutional forms. In no way did this commit us to the belief that the whole point of having any of these policies and institutions was to promote self-realization. The various concerns (such as those of good citizenship, acting morally, working on communal projects) built into the conception involved goals that could and should be pursued as ends in themselves. This view of self-realization certainly did not assume that people were so bereft of aims and purposes that “my self-realization” was their only possible motivation for action (the assumption needed for the self-defeasibility objection to undermine the very point of the general political theory).

Despite all of this, it is obviously not impossible to argue that the general political theory of self-realization *still* veers too closely towards less urgent matters on humanity’s political agenda (i.e. “self-concerns” rather than concerns for others). Here, I have put it

forward as *one* ideal of the good life and in some times and some places in the modern world it could be entirely inappropriate or undesirable as a political concern. Perhaps, then, we should not dismiss entirely the overall qualm about good-life thinking expressed in Chapter 1 {i}.

The general conception of self-realization gives us a view of the good-life that seeks to reduce the alienation of the self in the modern world, to give an outlet for the deepest, most satisfying commitments of the modern free spirit. That is: it addresses much of what typically concerns the modern self as they search for what would count as a good life. But along with this, the general conception makes sure that those social and moral problems which go far beyond issues of pure self-enjoyment are also given the attention they demand – indeed, providing perhaps the best hope they have of resolution in modernity: treating them as *problems of the self* too, of what the modern self identifies with and feels moved by.

However one visualizes “humanity’s political agenda”, this theory promises to have much to contribute, promoting flourishing individuals happier with themselves and their environment, in a far healthier democratic system due to more actively competent citizens who are better disposed to take on the requirements of living and acting morally with and for others. All kinds of “urgent matters” are at the heart of its concerns.

But does this present us with a case of “trying to kill too many birds with one stone” instead? Are these multiple concerns not better theorized and acted upon separately, rather than in one overarching conceptual approach? We have to admit that the kind of self-realization which emerges from this study encompasses many more concerns than are typically dealt with in other interpretations of the concept.

Yet if the argument for the general conception is right – that failings such as the weakness of citizenship activity in democracies and the resistance to the pull of morality are best treated together with the frustrations of individual non-development as deficiencies of the modern self – then there seems no better way to approach *all* of these problems. In failing to grasp this link between the problems, the simpler, more narrowly focussed approaches may fail to grasp the true nature and extent of the specific problem they set out to solve.

Perhaps it is because we have employed only narrow approaches in grappling with such concerns that the problems of modern life still loom so large. Maybe we require this new multi-layered self-realizationist theory to come to terms with them. Certainly, some new approach is needed, for these matters pose tasks that can no longer be botched or shirked if we want to live a genuinely *good* life in the modern world.

## NOTES

### Chapter 1

1. In defining anti-perfectionism, I follow Raz (1986) p. 110, who says it refers to the principle that “implementation and promotion of ideals of the good life, though worthy in themselves, are not a legitimate matter for governmental action.” “Perfectionism” I take simply to be the denial of this.
2. See Giddens (1991) pp. 210–15 for this and the concept of “life politics” which follows.
3. This point, which is developed during the course of the chapter, is based upon the idea that what counts as “unjust” and “inegalitarian” (the concerns of emancipation) cannot be properly derived in abstraction from a specific conception of human flourishing (the concern of life politics).
4. The pre-modern/modern distinction deliberately simplifies the progression of intellectual thought through the ages and is qualified as we proceed. It is intended as an expository device to tease out certain themes in political theory.
5. The well-known contemporary formulation of the right/good distinction is made by Rawls (1972) p. 398 and section 68.
6. This view is well summarized by Donagan (1970) p. 327; for Aquinas: “human good is that which all men seek by virtue of their nature as rational animals”.
7. See Kant’s “What is Enlightenment?” in Reiss (ed.) (1990).
8. Kant (ibid.) notes that courage is needed if Enlightenment is to be successful.
9. It is worth noting that there are at least two contrasting views of the individual’s reaction to the liberation of modernity. Tocqueville (1951) book II part ii chapter 2 pp. 104–6 (grouping some of the phenomena of the modern revolution under the label “democracy”) notes that this new individualism inculcates a “deliberate and peaceful sentiment which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and friends,” thus leaving “the wider society to itself. Taylor (1975) pp. 8–9 describes a much more confident reaction on the part of the individual: “the winning through to a self-defining identity was accompanied by a sense of exhilaration and power.” As the thesis proceeds, it will become more evident that the more pessimistic Tocquevillian perspective is closer to its concerns.

10. We should acknowledge at this point the possibility of arguing that, without any “external” good worth choosing, we have no reason to choose. I discuss this point further in section {v}, when the problem of nihilism in attempted self-realization is introduced.
11. More accurately (though this point is, perhaps disingenuously, neglected by some of the critics), it is a free-market capitalist society which is the main object of attack – only one form of “liberal society” (a “welfare state” also qualifies as such, theorized as it was in British Liberalism; it is unclear how far this should be considered an object of the critique too). A tradition of left-wing thought making this complaint has been joined recently by more conservative “communitarian” critics, e.g. MacIntyre (1981), Sandel ed. (1984) introduction pp. 1–11 (they are listed and considered together in Macedo (1990) chapter 1).
12. The “real-self” type of theory is discussed in the next section.
13. Obviously, a version of this approach is discussed in the analysis of Mill in Chapter 3. Many modern theories continue to search for the “objective human nature” to ground such a theory; psychology has been an important source of material here. For a summary, see Plant (1991) pp. 54–71.
14. See Macedo (1990) p. 67 for a concrete example of this, manifested in a U.S. Supreme Court case concerning a dispute over the teaching of evolution versus creationism in natural science. Justice William Brennan’s verdict that views on “private” matters (e.g. religion) should be kept out of public matters such as the content of universal education; Justice Antonin Scalia’s dissenting opinion argued that the public/private divide was itself a biased secular-humanist conception (the case was *Edwards v. Aguillard* {1987}).
15. See Rawls (1972) pp. 396–8 for his argument on the derivation of the thin theory of the good” that generates the account of the “primary goods” which he thinks are required in all thicker conceptions of the good. To that extent, then, the latter share “a certain structure”.
16. For representative statements of this view from the three positions, see Lukes (1991) especially p. 179; Taylor (1985b) and, for a version that combines a feminist and communitarian position, Hardwig (1990).
17. I use the term “philosophical” liberalism as it is largely (though not wholly) the creation of professional philosophers, articulated in philosophical works and in some abstraction from concrete political movements and traditions.
18. Dworkin (1985) p. 191.
19. This distinction follows that in Rawls (1972) pp. 5–6.

20. See Berlin's "Two Concepts of Liberty", in Berlin (1969) pp. 141–4.
21. Sandel (1984) p. 9.
22. See Stroud (1977) ch. 6 for a critical examination of Hume's conception of the self: his "encumbered self" (the "bundle-of-perceptions" conception) suffers from being unable to account for a particular subject experiencing the perceptions persisting through time. The "Humean" idea expounded here is not committed to this specific error.
23. Frankfurt (1971) p. 10.
24. Another way to enlighten this account is to utilize Taylor's terminology: the second-order chooser is a "strong evaluator"; without making this discriminative choice, he is only a "weak evaluator". See Taylor (1985a).
25. This is quite apart from the psychological unfathomability of such deep-seated motivations. Obviously, our desires do not neatly order themselves in a Frankfurtian way and their origins become more obscure the further back we try to trace them.
26. Archard (1987) p. 9.
27. Notably, Sandel, who does not want to conceptualize the self totally in terms of its social context, also affirms a version of this concept; see Sandel (1982) pp. 20–1.
28. This point directs itself to Rawls's account of primary goods, both in the apparently universalized form of Rawls (1972) and the "political conception" of Rawls (1985) where "[w]e look ... to our public political culture itself ... as the shared fund of implicitly recognized basic ideas and principles." (p. 228) The earlier observation on disputes in world-views between fundamentalists and liberal-humanists clearly encapsulates the doubts that there could be an "overlapping consensus" on enough principles, even in a constitutional democratic political culture, fully to ground the basic structure of society.
29. Again, the contestability of the concept of the Rawlsian person as articulated in Rawls (1985) (e.g. at p. 245) in a theory purporting to be anti-perfectionist can be invoked to clinch this point.
30. Actual limitations on the "reach" of state activity cannot be theorized in abstraction, of course. But I believe that a theory should incorporate this point regardless: even if a state does not want to pursue perfectionist policies, it will find itself constrained so to act, in effect. If the state does not act to exclude ideals, negligently allowing "non-political" social influences to affect the way people live, but wants to act with "neutral political

concern” evenhandedly supporting conceptions of the good life in society, its own limitations will force it to choose between them at some point (e.g. when allocating resources). A perfectionist view can give it a value-based reason for making such choices. Arguably, neutral concern and fairness could be respected by drawing lots to see whether, say, the struggling Sioux tribe or the struggling Amish community are given the resources they need to survive. But the perfectionist criterion might actually seem more justifiable than this method when deciding whether the struggling Sioux tribe or the cash-starved community of roving skate-board street performers should survive: value-judgments can and perhaps should be made in some such instances. (The distinction between “exclusion of ideals” and “neutral political concern” is made by Raz (1986) p. 135).

31. Elster (1986) p. 100.

32. “Self-realization” is described as a psychological benefit here because in Elster’s discussion the emphasis is on the production of certain states of mind from certain motives. This should not obscure the fact that we are also talking of self-realization as a certain state of *being*.

33. Chan and Miller (1991) p. 100.

34. Lasch (1978) esp. chapters 2–4; p. 235 equates a concern such as this with a “dying culture”.

35. This point is periodically illustrated by the suicides and attempted suicides of rich and famous celebrities, able to gratify themselves limitlessly yet unable to find a point to this any longer.

36. Elster (1986) pp. 121–2.

37. A theory of justice, for example, that seeks splendid isolation from heterogeneous conceptions of the good might believe itself capable of fully describing the political morality of society in a “self-contained” conceptual structure.

## Chapter 2

1. Williams (1985) p. 161.

2. N.E. 1094a1–2.

3. N.E. 1094a22.

4. N.E. 1094b15.

5. Phys. 199b16–7.
6. Barker (1959) p. 219.
7. See N.E. 1097b7–22 for the notion of “self-sufficiency”.
8. See e.g. N.E. 1174b32–4; the idea of flourishing being an objective state, conceptually independent of one’s subjective reaction to self, is contestable but crucial for both pre-modern and modern self-realizationist theories. One can find pleasure in non-self-realized states (whether or not as a result of being *deluded* into thinking one is self-realized), or vice versa. Throughout, we are primarily focussing on objective states, avoiding over-reach in the study by venturing too far into the psychology of pleasure.
9. Ackrill (1980) p. 19.
10. N.E. 1097b29–32.
11. N.E. 1098a7–8.
12. N.E. 1098a16–7.
13. See N.E. 1102a26–1103a3.
14. Adkins (1991) p. 78 stresses that “soul” should not be confused with its common Christian-metaphysical understanding, as a separable “ghost in the machine”, but as the purposive mental dimension of existence.
15. E.E. 1214b6–11.
16. N.E. 1111b5–1113b1. “Choice implies a rational principle”, says Aristotle (1112a15): it is the decision to do A rather than B through “deliberation”. As this is the rational formulation of means to a given end (1112b12), we deliberate when we choose how to pursue the good life, once we are possessed of the *wish* to pursue it (1113b2–4).
17. N.E. 1106a15–17.
18. See Rabinow ed. (1984) p. 363.
19. Foucault’s definitions of the “technologies” can be found in Foucault (1988) p. 22. In Rabinow ed. (1988) p. 348, Foucault argues that the ancient Greeks did not actually proceed from “technologies of the self” because their life-concern was tied in with “taking

care of the *polis*". This is true of Aristotle, as we shall see (care of the self and the *polis* being equated at Pol. 1337a27–31). But, as this chapter's argument unfolds, we can speak of technologies of the *self* here because Aristotle conceptualizes the latter in a way that ties its fate into that of the *polis*, but *without* losing the category of "the self" altogether (otherwise, we cannot really make consistent sense of his claim that one is rightly concerned with oneself for its own sake (1166a15).

20. N.E. 1107b1–1108b10 presents the catalogue of Aristotelian virtues.

21. See N.E. 1098a18 for the concept of "complete virtue".

22. N.E. 1166b11–13.

23. N.E. 1166a14–20.

24. N.E. 1098b7.

25. Pol. 1254b21–3.

26. See N.E. 1149a11 for Aristotle's concept of the "barbarian"; the argument for the slave's *ergon* is given at Pol. 1260a12–5.

27. This view of women is given at Pol. 1260a13 ff; the admission of exceptions (significant for the argument of the final section) is at 1259b2.

28. G.A. 728a, 766a.

29. Pol. 1260a20–31.

30. Pol. 1278a11–12.

31. In practice, these people were typically immigrants, a status which might also be thought liable to deprive them of citizenship. But Aristotle's argument does not hold that non-citizen workers *must* therefore be immigrants (this, too, is significant for the final section).

32. Pol. 1253b35.

33. Pol. 1337b33–5

34. Pol. 1253a2.

35. See N.E. 1177b13–20.
36. H.A. 488a7–8.
37. The constituents of the *polis* are described at Pol. 1252b32; the functional explanation of changes in these constituents is given at 1253a19–20.
38. Pol. 1324a5.
39. This is pointed out by Keyt (1991) pp. 118 ff.
40. Arguably, the concept of a “role” is itself too modern to capture fully the kind of self-perception being described here, particularly with its “dramatic” connotations of “playing a role” implying a contingent and perhaps inconstant identification of self and role. That is not what is entailed here. But if these connotations are stripped from it, then the concept seems to encapsulate the requisite self-perception quite well. This analysis is heavily inspired by MacIntyre (1981), of course, though I have tried to emphasize more the self-realizing role as one of “citizenship”, rather than of “being a good human being” in a way that has major political implications (which anyway seems to be the gist of MacIntyre’s argument). This strengthens the links between self-realization and politics and also seems to be very faithful to Aristotle’s own thought (the following two notes, for example, support the interpretation well).
41. Pol. 1310a35.
42. Mulgan (1984), in an article which otherwise stresses the unfamiliarity (to modern minds) of the Greek ideal of freedom as a status, suggests that a modern liberal would feel “immediately at home in ... fifth and fourth century Athens” (p. 7). My argument indicates that the modern liberal would not possess the requisite self-perception to feel “at home” in the pre-modern world.
43. Casey (1990) p. 77.
44. See. Pol. 1252a1–6 for the argument that every community exists for the pursuit of some good.
45. N.E. 1104a7–9.
46. This is a highly condensed summary of an extensive analysis in MacIntyre (1988) ch. 8.
47. N.E. 1142a9–10.

48. See N.E. 1103b1.
49. N.E. 1179b25.
50. See. Pol. book 7 especially section 17 for the elaboration of the training for the young.
51. This is important, because the discussion of caring for the self in the section on education should not obscure Foucault's own observation that "[the] concern with oneself is not just obligatory for young people concerned with their education; it is a way of living for everybody throughout their lives ..." – Foucault (1988) p. 31.
52. Pol. 1334b25–9.
53. Pol. 1339a1–4.
54. See. Pol. 1335b; some examples of this can be found in Foucault (1987) pp. 122–3 and chapter 3.
55. As we have seen (at 1112 a30, for example), it is when there are no rules to guide us that deliberation comes into play (cf. n. 16).
56. Foucault (1988) p. 18 acknowledges that the technologies constantly interact, though this does not mean we should abandon the distinction between self-activity and externally imposed conditioning that the power/self technology dichotomy encapsulates.
57. Pol. 1340a7, 19–23.
58. Pol. 1341a6–9.
59. Depew (1991) esp. pp. 367–74 offers an analysis of Aristotle's arguments on music which stresses more heavily its use as a scene for the exercise of reflective virtues. Clearly, though, Aristotle *is* reluctant to accord it major significance in the self-realized life.
60. N.E. 1169b10.
61. E.E. 1236a14–5.
62. N.E. 1164a12.
63. N.E. 1156b12.

64. N.E. 1156b7–8.
65. Hence “the friendship of such men lasts as long as they remain good” – N.E. 1156b9.
66. Price (1989) p. 130.
67. *ibid.*
68. See N.E. 1156b25 and 1158a10–15 for these points.
69. Pol. 1329a3–17.
70. *ibid.*: we can deduce the necessity for seeing citizens as middle-aged since the “natural division of labour” allocates strength to the young, who therefore bear arms, and the wisdom which is necessary for citizenship to the older men (but not so old that they have given up the active life altogether – 1329a33).
71. N.E. 1171a16–20., though compare Pol. 1278b20–1, where Aristotle attributes to men a desire to live together “even when they do not require one another’s help”, in the light of n. 72.
72. E.E. 1242b22–3.
73. See Pol. 1332b20–7.
74. Pol. 1333a1.
75. See e.g. Pol. 1253b23–5 on the household; the idea, clearly, is that some property enables one to escape the need to work from day-to-day for a master in order to survive.
76. Pol. 1326b20.
77. See Pol. 1317b40–1318a12 for the detail on the basic structure of democracy.
78. See Pol. 1295b35, where the “best” men for political activity are identified as being in the middle class, neither too rich nor too poor and thus possessed of suitably moderated dispositions (i.e. living according to the Doctrine of the Mean in matters concerning their interests). Extremes of material condition are obviously held to affect one’s political wisdom. Plato’s critique of democracy is at Plato (1974) p. 282–3 (488b–e).

79. See Pol. 1294a30.

80. Pol. 1319b4. Aristotle spends much time on the variations in the possible composition of the democratic citizenry (e.g. 1318a11). Another reason for biasing the overall Aristotelian recommendation towards democracy comes much earlier in the *Politics*: “in most constitutional states the citizens rule and are ruled by turns, for the idea of a constitutional state implies that the nature of the citizens are equal” (1259b5). In the ideally best polis I am describing, class and wealth distinctions need not hold and this qualification can be respected on good Aristotelian grounds (given the absence of extremes of wealth and poverty – see n. 78).

81. Pol. 1319b1–4.

82. Pol. 1337a12–7.

83. See Pol. 1320a33–6 for the argument that some redistribution of wealth is desirable in a democracy: this might enable people to avoid a situation in which they are unleisured and have to work, which rules them out of citizenship in the ideal political system, but which (he thinks) is characteristic of the best democracy (1318b10).

84. See Nussbaum (1988) pp. 352–3 for discussion of this, in particular the point that life in the *polis* is not *meant* to be a guarantee against misfortune.

85. See Met. book XII part viii.

86. See Depew (1991) pp. 348–61.

87. *ibid.* p. 358.

88. Rorty (1980) p. 377.

89. See N.E. 1097a35–b6, where he argues that only *eudaimonia* is ever desired for its own sake; he acknowledges that other things (such as honourable action) can sometimes be desired for themselves but they are *ultimately* desired for *eudaimonia*. This can turn the latter into a complex of “ends” desired for themselves when they are chosen.

90. See 1108a20: more generally, using the Doctrine of the Mean to identify the virtues and the opposing vices, exaggerates this self-concern because it concentrates on moderating personal behaviour only.

91. As discussed in Chapter 1 {ii}.

92. See Adkins (1991) sections 2–5.
93. “Metaphysical biology” refers to the pseudo-scientific factual beliefs that grounded the theory. This argument does not deny that the the Aristotelian world-view was readily presented as a “biological” argument, but rather than take it at face value, it uncovers the culturally relative prejudices that underpin the theory, which are not as far under the surface as might be thought. See Adkins (1991) p. 92.
94. *ibid* p. 88. Other “cultural prejudices” smuggled in include the attitude towards immigrants, who must be excluded at all costs (Pol. 1326b20–5): given that *they* are typically assumed to be the “labourers”, it could be xenophobic prejudice rather than “metaphysical biology” which, deep down, excludes them from citizenship (given that the reason for exclusion, lack of wealth, can be remedied – see n. 83 for this point; n. 27 and n. 31. for the foreign workers’ example).
95. Pol. 1276b35 distinguishes the “good man” from the “good citizen”.
96. 1277a1–4 makes the puzzling claim that this distinction would hold for the best constitution.
97. Adkins p. 90 sets out the tensions and contradictions in Aristotle’s thought over this, which he explains away as a set of customary prejudices masquerading as biology.
98. Pol. 1334a11.
99. Adkins. p. 90.
100. See Chapter 1 {ii} and {iii}; this applies whether we see his view of self-realization-as-role-play as metaphysical biology or social prejudice.

### Chapter 3

1. See S.A. pp. 304–7 for Mill’s concept of the age of transition.
2. A. pp. 259–60.
3. See O.L. pp. 120–1 for the argument on contesting truths in order to prevent them being held dogmatically. Grasping a truth by arguing over it is the correct way for autonomous beings to believe in it, according to Mill. O.L. p. 111 describes the passage into what I have called the post-transitional era, when by definition debate declines.
4. See B. pp. 95–8 for the critique of Bentham.

5. See A. esp. p. 137 on the detail of his breakdown.
6. Humboldt (1969) p. 17.
7. O.L. p. 127.
8. A. p. 141 elaborates this point.
9. O.L. p. 81.
10. See Smith (1980) pp. 238–52. This covers topics in the science of “ethology”, proposed by Mill in S.L. book VI v but never developed.
11. S.L. p. 840.
12. *ibid.*: “[h]is character is formed by his circumstances ... but his own particular desire to mould it ... is one of those circumstances ...”; see Smith (1984) for discussion of some consequences, which are also developed in this chapter.
13. O.L. p. 78.
14. O.L. p. 126.
15. O.L. p. 128.
16. O.L. p. 129.
17. Smith (1984) p. 204.
18. Smith (1980) calls this a “telescoping” of the desires for freedom and self-alteration; p. 251 summarizes what Smith identifies as the various possible interpretations of “liberty” in Mill’s work.
19. This is suggested at U. p. 10, when through weakness of will, Mill suggests people choose non-developmental lifestyles even though they know them to be less good.
20. Humboldt (1969) p. 16.
21. One has to appreciate the extent of one’s own commitments and potentials before truly appreciating what constitutes one’s self-realization; this problem of describing the self-realized state is addressed again in Chapter 6 {iii}.

22. Gray (1989) pp. 224–5.
23. O.L. pp. 125–6.
24. O.L. p. 126.
25. Gray (1989) p. 225.
26. See O.L. p. 135.
27. “Experiments in living” (I have replaced “of” with “in” in my formulation) is a concept suggested at O.L. p. 124. It refers primarily to individual lifestyles, but it is also used for collective, even society-wide projects.
28. The logical possibility of breaking free of such determining factors is entertained at S.L. pp. 839–40, though only in O.L.’s discussion of the strong-hearted individualist do we realize how little is the opportunity to intervene so extensively in one’s own character actually grasped, in Mill’s eyes (e.g. at O.L. p. 133).
29. See O.L. p. 126 for the reference to a “plan of life”.
30. Gray (1989) p. 225.
31. MacIntyre (1981) p. 204.
32. Gray (1989) p. 226.
33. O.L. pp. 134–5. Given Mill’s otherwise damning comments on the masses of “ordinary” people, though, it is difficult to share his belief that they will respond to the elite’s experiments-in-living by initiating lifestyles of their own, rather than simply copy them.
34. A sober critique that suggests this familiar attack is not without foundation, particularly when one compares the suppositions of Mill’s thought with those of his contemporaries on the continent, is Hawthorne (1987) p. 87 and especially p. 88.
35. C. p. 156
36. See Humboldt (1969) ch. 6 for discussion of “Bildung.” Mill’s own arguments for the quantity of subjects is given in a letter of 7.1.1852, (L.L. p. 80) (“quality” is obviously not neglected though, as Mill notes, e.g. at N.N. p. 199). He stresses that education is not

about “cramming” but acquainting the mind with a broad array of subjects so that the mind can use multiple faculties: see vol. I 337–8, and C.L. 378.

37. See P.P.E. pp. 947–50.

38. Along with references in n. 36 for details of the curriculum (particularly L.L. p. 80), see O.L. p. 176 for an indication that “religion” and “politics” are included (since he discusses how they should be examined).

39. The discussion of the purpose of examinations at O.L. p. 176 is concerned with this issue.

40. C.R.G. pp. 222–3; note how education is here designed to “induce” the desire to be free, which bears comparison with the claim that the desire for self-alteration is externally induced too, at n. 12.

41. Civ. p. 138.

42. This is not to reject entirely the economic benefits of a “good education”; indeed, it increases equality of opportunity in the market-place (see End. p. 628), but self-realizationist benefit is undoubtedly the one which most interests Mill.

43. P.P.E. 5 book XI vii (p. 947) stresses that education is designed to equip people to “find the way to cultivation”, not tell them what cultivation is.

44. Humboldt (1969) p. 17; Mill invokes it at O.L. 125 and discusses it at pp. 141–2.

45. End. pp. 624–5.

46. O.L. p. 179 discusses the role of the state in diffusing opportunities and educational resources for experiments locally. Parallel to the argument for supporting different types of school, this could involve active assistance for organizations in civil society that might flounder without it.

47. See O.L. p. 179.

48. The consequentialist arguments against the desirability of state intervention are summarized at O.L. pp. 178–81.

49. O.L. p. 144.

50. C. p. 158.

51. This idea corresponds to the idea of non-rigid “rules of thumb” invoked for the application of utilitarianism (U. p. 26): due to “the complicated nature of human affairs ... rules of conduct cannot be so framed as to require no exceptions ... “
52. U. p. 14, in discussion of the “cultivated mind” – the intended product of Millian education – states that it will desire satisfaction “in the objects of nature, the achievements of art, the imaginations of poetry” ... hence the stress on aestheticism here.
53. S.W. p. 290.
54. S.W. chapter 2 concentrates on this description of the typical woman’s lot in life.
55. S.W. pp. 335–6 presents this argument for an egalitarian, jointly developmental relationship between the sexes.
56. Cf. I {ii} for the definition of modernity; the argument here also takes its cue from P.P.E. Book IV vii 3 pp. 765–6, where the sexual subordination that grounds an inequalitarian set of rights is deemed to be “the greatest hindrance to moral, social and even intellectual improvement” – and Mill is talking about men as well as women at this point.
57. See e.g. Okin (1979) pp. 228–9 for a succinct statement of this criticism.
58. Mill explains the “Greatest Happiness Principle” at U. p. 7.
59. U. p. 9.
60. U. p. 14.
61. See U. p. 36.
62. U. p. 10.
63. U. p. 36, famously criticized as a fallacy of composition: it does not follow from the idea that a single person’s happiness is a good for him that the general happiness (individual happiness aggregated) is a good for the group.
64. U. p. 33.
65. U. p. 32.
66. U. p. 34.

67. Later, in his discussion of socialism, we see Mill expressing similar qualms.

68. Mill accepts that reason alone is not enough to ground societies; he accepts, in places, the argument for a civil religion (see n. 66; religion's role in securing us to what might be rationally prescribed is also analyzed in U.R., e.g. p. 407). Clearly, this may well play a part in the new truths of a post-transitional age, but it is a moot point how stable such a civil religion would be in a value-pluralist society, where all truths are, as a matter of course, continuing subjects of dispute. Faith struggles for plausibility and acceptance when it is constantly scrutinized – as the experience of modernity shows.

69. Mill hardly intends his civil religion to be enforceable on pain of death, of course! (as in, e.g. Rousseau (1973) p. 307). Apart from anything else, he believes that moral beings (taught a sense of morality, we presume) will feel the “inner sanction” of the utility principle and it would not have to be imposed (U. p. 32). Given that neither one's own good (O.L. p. 78) nor the “right” of society to have its good promoted (O.L. p. 158) justify state enforcement of morality, Mill must rely on this inner sanction alone if he is to keep his libertarian and utilitarian commitments compatible.

70. U. p. 37.

71. People should not be educated into performing the general good only, of course. Mill faulted Bentham for his complete non-consideration of “self-education” (B. p. 98) but Mill's division of morality into self-concern and regulation of outward actions (for the general good) is less stark than it looks at first. He emphasizes the imperfection of the other-directed moral behaviour when the self has not been properly cultivated to embrace it. This seems to support my interpretation here.

72. See n. 3.

73. See O.L. p. 77 and C.R.G. especially p. 241, where the “infirmities” which Mill believes would disqualify people from living successfully under representative government are those we have seen he thinks are obstacles to self-realization, potentially removable by education.

74. C.R.G. p. 303.

75. P.P.E. p. 763.

76. P.P.E. pp. 970–1.

77. C.R.G. pp. 207–8.

78. P.P.E. p. 763.

79. C.R.G. pp. 232–3.

80. Self- and social reflection come together given the two-part definition of morality seen at n. 71; matters both of social organization and personal conduct are up for discussion, according to O.L. chapter 2.

81. See C.R.G. pp. 233–4 for an argument to this effect, referring to the individual's need to confront the interests and opinions of others in participatory political activity.

82. This is clear from Mill's claim, at C.R.G. p. 234, that both public and private aspects of life suffer if people lack a communitarian, public spirit in their motives.

83. This argument is given in C.R.G. chapter 5 (summarized p. 258). The transitional nature of the proposed arrangements is signalled at the start of the chapter (p. 246), where the "idea" of representative government is distinguished from the historical variations it exhibits. Its precise structure and allocation of functions is thus an "open question" (p. 247–8).

84. See, again, O.L. p. 179 for the importance of local government to Mill as a bulwark against the potentially despotic centre.

85. P.P.E. pp. 763–4.

86. This point follows Smith (1984) p. 209.

87. P.P.E. p. 769.

88. See O.L. p. 184.

89. P.P.E. p. 768.

90. See P.P.E. p. 785, where retail and wholesale co-operatives are described as "the best preparation for a wider application of the principle"; these can develop within capitalism itself, but "the wider application", when production as well as distribution is socially organized, is post-capitalist.

91. P.P.E. p. 210.

92. *ibid.* p. 209.

93. See e.g. C.S. p. 736: “what is incumbent on us is a calm comparison between two different systems of society ... “; his own fears do not overshadow the central recognition of the need to experiment to be sure of the merits, or otherwise, of a social system.

94. n. 27 included in the notion of experiments-in-living the testing of social forms, as well as individual modes of life, so we can use this concept here too in describing Mill’s politics.

95. P.P.E. pp. 213–4.

#### Chapter 4

1. Marx feared that such blueprints, conceived in abstraction from the exigencies of concrete situations, cannot therefore perfectly embody the concrete aspirations of the revolutionary class. They constrain the revolutionary imagination and impart organizational forms which are more than likely to fail since they are artificially grafted onto the situation. Lukes (1991) p. 209 characterizes Marxism as “a kind of anti-Utopian utopianism”, a doctrine that foresees the emergence of a fully emancipated society without spelling out the detail.

2. Surprisingly, several critics have argued that “alienation” virtually disappears after the critical commentary offered on it in G.I. p. 48. e.g. Althusser (1982) especially pt. iii. This ignores the centrality of the concept in Marx’s description of capitalism, e.g. at C. I p. 990. Here, I use the vision of the “humanist” young Marx to inform the analysis of the materialist mature Marx; I hold that the *description* of self-realization is not fundamentally affected by the conceptual transformation between the two.

3. ThF. no. 6; p. 7.

4. This point, in a critique of the absence of human actors in the making of history, can be drawn from Thompson (1978). Geras (1983) sets out to retrieve the concept of human nature itself from Althusserian anti-humanism.

5. See Geras (1983) p. 97 for a summary of his thesis.

6. see e.g. C. I p. 618.

7. C. III p. 182.

8. *ibid.*

9. T.S.V. p. 401.
10. Gr. p. 488.
11. See Taylor (1975) pp. 14–18 for an elaboration of “expressivism”.
12. E.P.M. pp. 275–7.
13. *ibid.* pp. 332–3.
14. See Arthur (1986) pp. 59–60 for a detailed presentation of this Hegelian-inspired claim.
15. See e.g. E.P.M. pp. 278–9: “man’s relation to himself becomes for him objective and actual through his relation to the other”.
16. E.P.M. pp. 333–46 sets out to criticize Hegel’s idealism in the bare Hegelian conceptual view that Marx consciously adopts and revises.
17. e.g. E.P.M. p. 301, where the shaping of the objective natural world by man is what will embody his own individuality.
18. “Species being” is a slightly obscure concept, that does not survive the passage into historical materialism. At E.P.M. p. 337, it is presented as applicable to man because he is a being “in and for himself”: consciously, purposively ordering his activity.
19. E.P.M. p. 277.
20. See e.g. G.I. p. 47.
21. See Cohen (1978) pp. 120–1 for exposition of the concept of “primitive communism”.
22. G.I. p. 47.
23. G.I. p. 66.
24. See Cohen (1988) pp. 187–9 for discussion of “engulfment” and the “freedom of detachment”.
25. *ibid.* p. 190, where Cohen notes that Marx and Engels both urged the necessity of the rupture of these pre-capitalist class relations even though they were not *experienced* as

alien and oppressive. See Elster p. 76 for discussion of differences between objective alienation (which is not necessarily consciously felt by people) and subjective alienation. He thinks both ideas emerge in Marx's work. Here, I will take it that capitalist alienation is such that it incorporates both.

26. C. I p. 616.

27. *ibid.* p. 482.

28. G.I. p. 47.

29. G.I. p. 394.

30. Elster (1985) pp. 78–82 analyzes the concept of reification: “the tendency of needs and capacities to become fixed, isolated and independent within the individual” – when they confront one as alien “powers” or demands, in Marx's own terminology.

31. See P.P. p. 159 for the concept of relations of production's first appearance. The overall conceptual transformation is discussed by Rattansi (1982) pts. ii–v.

32. C. I p. 375.

33. Gr. p. 611.

34. E.P.M. p. 307.

35. C. I p. 990.

36. This pithy summary of the Marxist position is from Braverman (1975) p. 193.

37. As elaborated by Frederick W. Taylor himself: Taylor (1947).

38. C.G.P. p. 87.

39. C. I chapter 1 iv pp. 163–77 discusses the concept of fetishism.

40. See Cohen (1978) appendix pp. 326–44 for this argument.

41. M.C.P. p. 487.

42. Gr. p. 158.

43. C.J.M. p. 225.
44. E.P.M. pp. 227–8.
45. Elster (1986) p. 106.
46. E.P.M. pp. 301–2.
47. As required by the expressivist principle, of course; see section {iii}.
48. See Elster (1985) pp. 68–74 for a closer look at the various statements on needs in Marx; see particularly p. 72.
49. C. III pp. 958–9. Note that, in this translation, “necessity” expands because of the expansion of “wants”, supporting the argument of the previous section.
50. Gr. p. 708.
51. Gr. p. 693.
52. Gr. p. 701.
53. Gr. p. 706.
54. i.e. manual labour (as in actually working upon nature with one’s hands) is superseded; man works indirectly upon it through the workings of the machines he has constructed.
55. Gr. p. 706.
56. Gorz (1982) pp. 230–1.
57. This can be backed up by criticism of Marx’s own disparaging comments on Asian society, for example; see Sayer (1991) pp. 14–17 for citations to this effect which in retrospect show him “as a true Victorian” in the assumption that colonialism nevertheless represented progress for such societies.
58. M.C.P. p. 488.
59. Keane (1988) p. 71.
60. See C.G.P. p. 87, 92 on the non-sale of labour-power in socialism.

61. This is urged by Illich (1975) p. 28, who complains of the deformity our imagination has suffered in industrial society.
62. See, for example p. 139 of Braverman (1974) where the victims of de-skilling are grouped under the all-encompassing name of “working humanity”. There is also a striking absence of any account of worker resistance to capitalist practice in his work; the sufferings caused by capitalist production are apparently accepted passively by workers.
63. Piore (1986) is one who theorizes a post-Fordist situation which requires “flexible specialization” on the part of workers, due in large part to the accelerating technological innovations that manufacturers adopt to remain competitive.
64. Hayes and Nutman (1981) pp. 38–43.
65. *ibid.* pp. 60–1.
66. *Gr.* pp. 711–2.
67. Cohen (1978) p. 324.
68. Obstetrical metaphors for the emergence of socialism abound; see e.g. reference to the “birth pangs” of the new society emerging from capitalism at C. I p. 92.
69. M.C.P. p. 491.
70. Recent critical summaries of this conceptual neglect include Sayer (1991) pp. 84–6. Hearn (1991) p. 235 lists six different possible interpretations of the “reproduction” of labour-power, but notes that the physical reproduction and support of workers is an issue which is, in effect, collapsed by Marx into a question of reproducing the capitalist-worker relation of production.
71. Eagleton (1990) p. 221.
72. As M.C.P. p. 491 holds.
73. Beechey (1982) presents a detailed argument based upon the idea of women as a “reserve army of labour”, available for cheaper labour when required and generally functioning, by their part-time presence in the labour market, to depress wages.
74. The emphasis on care has largely developed recently due to Carol Gilligan’s work (Gilligan (1982)); the basic idea behind this approach is that, due to distinctive forms of

development and socialization caused by the sexual-social division of labour, women have acquired a different sense of interests and morality. Located primarily in the private realm, looking after husbands and children, this sense is shaped by the activity of “caring”.

75. By family I do not intend to limit it to its biological-procreative sense, but simply a group of people living together immediately, day-to-day (“household” might be another term for the kind of community I have in mind here).

76. See n. 24.

77. Gorz (1989) pp. 140–1.

78. The more complex and numerous are the demands made upon society, the more extensive becomes the bureaucracy which, significantly, may reduce the effectiveness of, and satisfaction from, caring activities.

79. C. III p. 954.

80. G.I. p. 81.

81. Mellor (1992) p. 218 ff. thinks that Marxism can be “Greened” by removing the emphasis on the domination of nature. This chapter, hopefully, has indicated how the idea of orthodox Marxist self-realization must be quite substantially altered to accommodate this. It would require a very different form of communism from that conceived of by Marx.

## Chapter 5

1. See C.W.F. p. 143, with its reference to “united co-operative societies” regulating production “under a common plan”, to be preferred to the “anarchy” of market production.

2. The assumption of abundance is what enables communism to be theorized as the realm where distribution can meet needs, with the “circumstances of morality” (scarcity, which necessitates principles to allocate limited resources) having disappeared (see Lukes (1991) p. 185); see C.G.P. p. 89.

3. M.C.P. p. 487.

4. See Chapter 1 n. 11.

5. M.C.P. p. 487.

6. Cohen (1988) pp. 137–41.
7. *ibid.* p. 40. Cohen acknowledges the criticism by Alan Carling of his failure to cite gender in this list of ingredients for identity. The previous chapter's discussion of the feminist critique shows that this is a familiar Marxist failing, which our revision of the conception is designed to resolve.
8. See Chapter 3 {v}.
9. Arendt (1958) p. 114.
10. Such as Lenin at his most utopian (pre-October, of course): see Lenin (1968) pp. 334–5, where joint regulation of production produces freely co-operating workers; “the whole of society” becomes “a single office and a single factory” cleansed of “the infamies and abominations of capitalist exploitation”.
11. Berman (1982) p. 114.
12. Arendt (1958) p. 116.
13. See Chapter 1 {v} on narcissism-nihilism to understand the point of this remedy; cf. Chapter 1 n. 9 on Tocqueville's view of modern individualism as a state of “isolated limbo”.
14. Further testimony to the resilience of national identities can also be shown by the failure of decades of communist rule in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia to eradicate, or even noticeably weaken, such ties despite concerted efforts to do so.
15. Berman (1982) p. 114.
16. This view is readily imputed to Marx, of course, given his famous injunction: “Workers of the World, Unite!” and the argument concerning the destruction of other forms of community.
17. For this argument, see Ignatieff (1984) Chapter 1, especially pp. 28–9.
18. Gilbert (1990) p. 272.
19. *ibid.*
20. See, again, Lenin (1968) pp. 334–5 to note the absence of such groups in contrast

with class-based communities.

21. Friendly competition creates a strong bond amongst people without relying on a notion of comprehensive antipathy to their opponents. My point here is that we cannot (as yet) see any grounds for people coming together in anything like this in communism (a “single” office, according to Lenin’s crude metaphor; competition has been eliminated from production).

22. E.P.M. p. 313.

23. Geras (1990) p. 15.

24. cf. n. 2; see Kymlicka (1990) ch. 5 for an elaboration of this problem.

25. Due to the finite nature of Earth’s resources, apart from anything else. This has led to a reconceptualization of “growth”, making it less energy- and material-intensive and “moralizing” it, including reference to egalitarianism and the improvement in the quality of life. A brief summary of this approach is in World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), especially pp. 49–60.

26. C. I pp. 513–4.

27. See Mill P.P.E. book IV vii 7 for a version of this point, one of those that made Mill hesitate about “Socialism”’s desirability, fearing its removal of competition will remove productive dynamism and induce “idleness”.

28. I assume that regular co-operation, rather than infrequent, incidental assistance, is needed to form lasting communal bonds.

29. Hayes and Nutman (1981) p. 43.

30. Cohen (1988) p. 141.

31. One can appreciate, through one’s role, just what one’s relationship to the community *means* (in terms of the contribution one makes to it). This relates one to far more people than in full “face-to-face” relationships: people can only genuinely “know” and appreciate a limited number of people in this way (as “true friends”, which seems to be the relationship required by the rejection of role-play).

32. Given the Manifesto celebration of capitalism’s establishment of large-scale industry at the expense of localized production, it is highly implausible to argue that socialism (which, after all, is defined as being more productive than capitalism) could consistently

decentralize production. Because of economies of scale, for example, this does not seem to be more productively optimal – yet this is what genuine face-to-face communities would surely require.

33. Cohen (1988) p. 142.

34. Durkheim (1984) p. xxx.

35. C.G.P. p. 89.

36. Exactly what it is that has explanatory primacy in Marx remains contentious; this interpretation follows that of Cohen (1978) chapter 6.

37. Preface p. 263; see Cohen (1978) chapter 6 ii for analysis of this passage's claim.

38. See Cohen (1978) p. 147 for justification and discussion of this point.

39. See Chapter 4 {ii}.

40. See Weber (1991) pp. 228–44 on this view. Sayer (1991) p. 144 suggests that the famous iron cage translation of Weber's phrase "ein stahlhartes Gehäuse" is misleading; he suggests a better metaphorical translation would be a "shell": burdensome but impossible to live without (for Weber believes this condition to be inescapable).

41. The representative Frankfurt School school work on this theory is Adorno and Horkheimer (1979).

42. Gorz (1982) pp. 14–5.

43. "Economic rationality" is Gorz's own term to describe the "logic of capitalism"; see Gorz (1989) pp. 109–16.

44. Illich (1975) chapter 2 presents this view at length.

45. *ibid.* p. 28.

46. Something like Taylorism could well be necessitated when "maximized development" does not refer to human powers, or simply assumes the productivist equation of the liberation of productive capacity with human liberation.

47. e.g. the Communards had "no ideals to realize": C.W.F. pp. 335–6.

48. See Chapter 1 {ii} for the modern split between self-realization and morality.
49. *ibid.* for the concepts being reintroduced here.
50. Habermas (1976), especially p. 108 for the concept of “communicatively shared” interests.
51. This contrasts with the “frustrated participatory democracy” example Elster cited (see Chapter 1 n. 36), in which the point of his academic publishing committee, not dependent upon market competition for survival, evolved into self-realization for its own sake, thereby frustrating the working of the venture.
52. This concession comes in Habermas (1986) p. 176: “[w]hen only particular interests are at stake, conflicts of action cannot be settled, even in ideal cases, through argumentation, but only through bargaining and compromise.”
53. Trotsky (1971) p. 221.

## Chapter 6

1. The prioritization of “autonomy” itself (which we have characterized as a non-neutral idea all along) is a good example of this. For a critique of the consequences this has for autonomy-promoting rights-based theories see Freeden (1990) esp. pt. I.
2. As was argued in the study of the Millian conception: Chapter 3 {iv}.
3. An example of this would be a nun who had deliberately “renounced the self” (see Matthew 16<sup>24</sup>) because she felt it was expected of her, when she had other strong commitments and potentials that are not given an outlet. Note she is not forced to do so; this is her judgment on how to lead her life and thus we have no warrant for saying this is not an autonomous choice. It is noteworthy that this self-renunciation is cast in the familiar real-self/positive libertarian conceptual form in the New Testament (e.g. Galatians 5<sup>1</sup>: “[s]tand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free”), so orthodox Christian belief is not as far removed from self-realizationist theory as some think (e.g. Foucault (1988) p. 22 which contrasts it with self-concerned ethics). I thank Michael Holyoake for guidance on this point.
4. See Chapter 3 {v}, particularly the point against MacIntyre at n. 31.
5. These distinctions between theories of equality are introduced (and subsequently elaborated) by Dworkin (1981) pp. 185–91.

6. This possibility assumes that egalitarian norms form the basic ethical commitments in society and that self-realization is pursuable within their boundaries – hence its unacceptability in cases where it becomes significantly inegalitarian with respect to demands on resources. See Chapter 5 {ix} on the relationship between self-realization and other norms.

7. I assume in this argument that they are “minorities” because if they were in a majority we may have no reason to refer to theirs as a “modern” society, given the definition of “modern” in Chapter 1 {ii}. The self in such a context has not broken free of that context in self-definition.

8. Though in media debates, from a rather idiosyncratic traditionalist-conservative perspective (not so far distant from the “communitarians” as the latter might wish), Roger Scruton has recently defended fox-hunting as part of those traditions that sustain the individual’s identity. He sees the latter as rooted in “being in society” (see Scruton (1980) p. 42); a pre-modern self-realizationist defence of blood-sports, then!

9. This is not to deny all possibility of “traditional” activity in the urban world; often, many are imported from without into this setting (e.g. the Notting Hill Carnival).

10. Cf. Marx M.C.P. p. 487: “all that is solid melts into the air”; one of the most frequently quoted phrases in the study of modern fashion.

11. Which I take to be a political doctrine based upon the (usually xenophobic) promotion of a nation’s interests against others; here, I am referring to an identifying attachment with no particular political import.

12. There are, and have been, many examples of this in post-war British schools, when children from ethnic minorities become exposed to a different cultural context, involving the development of a more detached relationship to their culture. This often creates conflicts within, as well as between, the cultures; a familiar instance of internal strife is the rebellion of young Hindu women against the system of arranged marriages. The suggested policy approach here takes their side, developing the facets of their selves beyond the traditional context. But the recurrent clashes between advocates of a more secular humanist education and the various kinds of traditional fundamentalism in British schools today show how difficult this political question is. See also n. 16.

13. See Chapter 1 {iv}, where we first encountered this argument.

14. These ideas are expounded at length, with respect to specific examples, in Gutmann (1987), especially chapters 2–4. A recently publicized British example of partially democratic education comes from Norham High School, Meadow Well, Tyneside. Here,

vandalism to school property declined dramatically at the same time as pupils were given some democratic responsibility over spending on such property. If this correlation is indeed a causal link, this would support the arguments concerning self-realization via a democratic, expressive control over one's environment in order to overcome alienation from that environment. The Headmaster, Leslie Walton, is due to deliver a report on this experience to the 1992 Headmasters' Conference (though it has to be said that the shift of power in education from local authorities to the individual Governing Bodies makes it less likely that this experiment will be more widely adopted). Denver and Hands (1990) supply the survey evidence to show that people who study A-Level politics have a significantly greater grasp of political issues, e.g. the distinction between parties, proving thereby that "political education" would not be wasted if one wished to promote more competent democratic citizens.

15. This concept can be found in Galston (1989); see especially p. 94 where he characterizes it as inculcating the virtues necessary for successful *representative* democracy as opposed to Gutmann's idea of more fully participatory democracy.

16. See Gutmann (1989) for a defence of schools' rights to teach what she calls "democratic humanism" against the claims of fundamentalist parents to teach only those things of which the latter approve (e.g. creationism as against the theory of evolution).

17. See Wood (1990) chapter 11 for analysis of the concept of *Sittlichkeit*.

18. These are summarized in Held (1987) chapter 5.

19. Nozick (1981) p. 401 ff. introduces the idea of "ethical *push* and *pull*".

20. The concept of "human rights" implies that such rights should be applied to people *qua* humans. Some societies, noticeably Third World dictatorships (e.g. China in pursuit of the "Four Modernizations") have claimed that these can be waived due to local exigencies (e.g. the need to sacrifice political democracy for pursuit of economic growth). The record of such regimes (e.g. the Tiananmen Square massacre) makes such a response less acceptable than it once was in some (post-colonial, cultural-relativist) circles.

21. This denies the possibility of "natural rights" – an objectively identifiable set of principles. Rights emerge from specific cultural contexts and horizons of value. But this does not contradict n. 20 (not least because the regimes that stood convicted there do not often deny human rights, whilst their subjects certainly do not). It is not a relativist position since, even if one's conception of human rights is based upon a specific cultural belief, one wishes other cultures to share it to promote intersubjective agreement here. So when I try to convince you that "X is a human right" I am only, but nevertheless justifiably, saying "I believe that we should all value what X protects as a right enough to

recognize that it deserves protection by the convention of a right.” This is the form that arguing for a right to self-realization could take. But though it may take little argument to convince people that “life”, “an education” “means of subsistence” are attributes or demands valuable enough to be protected or promoted by the concept of a right, it may be much more difficult to do this for self-realization. The general theory must leave this matter to concrete arguments over value, rather than arbitrarily try to pre-empt them.

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