THE WELL-GOVERNED PERSON

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By

Lee R. Okster, B.S., M.S.

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Lee R. Okster, B.S., M.S.

Thesis Advisor: Alisa Carse, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The concept of autonomy has an air of paradox: How can a uniquely independent and autonomous person exist within the undeniable dependencies and influences of our social condition? The “problem” of autonomy, then, is to understand how the beliefs, preferences, or desires that motivate one to act can be uniquely “one’s own” given the reality of social influence. I use the intersubjective psychology literature to show that there can be a gap, or an incomplete congruence, between what a person self-consciously recognizes, identifies with, and is able to articulate as one’s own thoughts and feelings (i.e., one’s motivations) and the actual, though unarticulated, nature of one’s own subjective experience – the actual quality of one’s wishes, or the actual direction of one’s interest and attention, including one’s actual frame of mind when acting, i.e., all that actually accounts for one’s actions.

One’s actions can be the product of an unrecognized frame of mind which results from social influences that are so thoroughly engrained in one’s beliefs, desires, or preferences that one has no awareness of their influence on one’s choices. This work fully recognizes the potentially negative impact of one’s social influences on self-governance, but I provide an account of self-governance that emphasizes the positive (and essential) role that others play in the development and sustained exercise of the capacities at the heart of self-governance. Our understanding of self-governance can be deepened by recognizing, and taking fully into account, the inevitable influences we all receive, especially in early childhood. I use the intersubjective psychology literature to support my thesis that self-governance can only be properly understood within the social relationships within which it arises and through which it is sustained. This theory of self-governance emphasizes the
emotional nature of our social interactions, and thus, it analyzes the capacities necessary for self-governance from the perspective of one’s emotions, rather than the current emphasis on rational or cognitive powers which dominate the current literature.
Chapter 1: Introduction

“The ‘positive’ sense of the word ‘liberty’ derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men’s, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer – deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realizing them.”

Isaiah Berlin

The concept of autonomy has an air of paradox: How can a uniquely independent and autonomous person exist within the undeniable dependencies and influence of our social condition? This central tension in the philosophical literature has been aptly characterized as the vexed relationship between autonomy and socialization, and it is this tension that forms the primary focus of this work. The “problem” of autonomy, then, is to understand how the beliefs, preferences, or desires that motivate us to act can be uniquely “our own” given the reality of social influence. This is also a central problem addressed in the intersubjective psychology literature, where the concern is over human action that is governed by internal forces that are beyond the agent’s conscious reach. In such cases, the actions can be explained by those internal forces. If this is the case, then our actions are governed according to the intensity and “aims” of the unconscious internal forces, rather than the actions being directed by the person, according to the person’s aims and choices. If this is the case, then what guides one’s actions are motivations over which one has little or no awareness and, thus, little or no control. This crucial insight from psychology drives much of my analysis.

3 It is for this reason, among others, that I will focus my analysis of the well-governed person from a psychological perspective.
The idea of what governs our actions is what I take to be the central philosophical issue of autonomy, and therefore, I will use the term self-governance, as opposed to autonomy, to describe the conditions under which one’s beliefs, preferences, and desires can truly be said to be one’s own. The intersubjective psychology perspective suggests that there can be a gap, or an incomplete congruence, between what a person self-consciously recognizes, identifies with, and is able to articulate as her own thoughts and feelings (i.e., her motivations) and the actual, though unarticulated, nature of her own subjective experience – the actual quality of her wishes, or the actual direction of her interest and attention, including her actual frame of mind and estimate of her prospects, i.e., all that actually accounts for her actions.\(^5\)

This gap is at the heart of the “problem” of self-governance: one’s actions can be the product of an unrecognized frame of mind which results from social influences that are so thoroughly engrained in one’s beliefs, desires, or preferences that one has no awareness of their influence on one’s choices. Such motivations are controllable only in a limited sense, which then results in choices or actions that are self-governed in a similarly limited sense.\(^6\) For example, if one is “conditioned” to desire a life of complete subservience, then such a “choice” seems to be the product of social manipulation and, therefore, does not seem to be the agent’s own in a real sense.\(^7\) If such conditioning is a reality,\(^8\) then how can the fact of social influence be reconciled with the intuition that self-governance exists? How is it possible for one’s beliefs, preferences, desires, motivations, or capacities for self-governance to be truly one’s own and not simply the product of

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\(^6\) Shapiro, *Autonomy and Rigid Character*, p. 28.
\(^8\) In making the claim that a life of complete subservience is the product of “manipulation” or “conditioning,” I am banking on an intuition that I consider to be widespread, but I will show in chapter 3 that such a perspective on life is the result of early environment upbringing that prevents the subservient adult from questioning the propriety of such an attitude of subservience.
one’s past social influences?\(^9\) This work will address and analyze these central philosophical problems. In doing so, it will bring insights from intersubjective psychology to bear on the philosophical problem of self-governance and demonstrate the value of the work in intersubjective psychology to a deep understanding of, and (I believe) a solution to, these problems.

**My Solution:**

Few philosophers who analyze self-governance have taken seriously the insights from the field of psychology,\(^10\) yet the intersubjective psychology literature offers important insight into the problem of self-governance. Our social interactions while young, particularly the emotionally-based interactions between the child and her primary caregivers (what I will label “emotional recognition”),\(^11\) are a central element of the development and the sustained exercise of the capacities necessary for self-governance.\(^12\) Thus, our understanding of self-governance can be significantly deepened through an understanding of intersubjective psychology. One of the central messages that I take from the intersubjective psychology literature is that the influences on us while young do not dissipate upon reaching maturity. They stay with us, for good or ill, often in ineradicable ways, which means that they are often very difficult to alter once set in place. The intersubjective perspective, then, is a way of more richly understanding our social relations and what constitutes socialization, as it relates to self-governance.

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\(^9\) In a very real sense, *all* of our beliefs, preferences, and motivations are the “product” of social influences (to one degree or another), but to be “simply” the product of social influences is to have those beliefs, preferences, or motivations operate largely outside of one’s awareness or control, i.e., as unconscious mental forces within the agent.

\(^10\) See, e.g., Bernard Berofsky, *Liberation from Self*, p. 3: “… most philosophers who address the issue of personal autonomy ignore psychology in spite of the centrality of the notion of autonomy in certain theoretical approaches and most evidently in the domains of developmental and clinical psychology.” Elizabeth Anscombe also hints at this point when she states: “it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking.” G.E.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 124, January, 1958, p. 1.

\(^11\) The term emotional recognition is not a new term. It is used in both the intersubjective psychology literature as well as philosophy, and in each case its meaning is essentially the same. Emotional recognition is a process of interaction between child and caregiver where emotional attitudes and perspectives are central to the meaning of the interaction for the child.

\(^12\) The intersubjective psychology literature, however, does *not* say what self-governance is or what capacities are necessary for the exercise of self-governance. I cover this point in more detail shortly.
The intersubjective perspective is that we are fundamentally social animals who are bound in webs of relationship that are characterized by reciprocal mutual influence. In this sense, the psychology literature gives a richer picture of what it is to be socially embedded and gives a more realistic understanding of socialization (at least as it relates to intimate interpersonal relationships while young). The central insight of the psychology literature is that the basis of our intimate social bonds is, largely, emotional in nature. This insight frames my conceptual analysis of self-governance because the emphasis on emotion and its role in our deliberations sets boundaries on how to understand the operation of reason. It suggests that a Platonic or Kantian model of reason is flawed because reason does not tend to operate separately from emotional perspectives. Because variants of the Platonic or Kantian model of reason are prevalent in the literature on autonomy, the intersubjective perspective (as well as current work in the philosophy of emotions) suggests that this established model needs to yield to a more realistic conception of the operation of reason.

The empirical psychology literature suggests that certain forms of social interaction between child and caregiver (i.e., emotional recognition) can result in our emotional attitudes becoming part of our cognitive structure. In this and other ways, the intersubjective psychology literature helps us understand that reason and emotion are often intertwined. This is crucial to my conceptual analysis of self-governance because many of the capacities that are central to the exercise of self-governance are intimately related to the operation of reason, e.g., the capacity for critical self-reflection. Therefore, having a proper understanding of our rational (and emotional) capacities is both relevant and vital to how we view self-governance.

In taking a perspective informed by psychology, I want to expand our understanding of what it is to be “socialized,” but I also want to take away the stigma that is often associated with the term “socialization” and replace it with a way of seeing and understanding the positive role that our social
condition can play in our ability to self-govern. In this way, the developmental story of the intersubjective psychology literature provides the conditions for the possibility of self-governance, that is, the “genetic” question. Addressing this genetic question begins my analysis. The genetic question recognizes that social influence can be either positive or negative with regard to developing the capacities necessary for self-governance. This realization, however, is agreed upon by all who have written on this topic.

The intersubjective psychology story explains the development and continued exercise of the capacities necessary for self-governance. In other words, developmental psychology not only provides the basis for understanding how we come to have the capacities that are necessary for self-governance, it also provides a way of understanding the sustained exercise of those capacities in adults. This will be important to my conceptual account of self-governance, but it is not itself a conceptual account. Because of the understanding that the developmental story provides, we should care about what happens to children (who, admittedly, do not tend to be self-governing persons) in their relationships with parents and other caregivers if we are to understand the nature of self-governance. The relationships that children experience with caregivers either enhance their ability for self-governance as adults, or diminish and deform those same abilities. The essential message of the psychology literature is that we do not simply transcend our early childhood social influences through an idealized rational capacity or a concentrated act of will. The empirical evidence, however, cannot complete my analysis because it does not answer what self-governance is. This is the conceptual question that the empirical evidence will help to support.

I will conceive of self-governance as an interrelated constellation of capacities, which require a particular form of social interaction – emotional recognition – for their development and sustained exercise. I will revisit some familiar concepts associated with self-governance that already exist in
the literature, but these basic concepts will be re-conceptualized using the lens of the intersubjective perspective. I will not abandon the existing thinking with regard to self-governance, but rather, I will build on two of the basic elements of self-governance (critical self-reflection and self-awareness), while understanding them using a different focus and orientation. I will also add two further basic capacities to the concept of self-governance (flexibility with regard to one’s own emotional states, and imagination).

First, I will analyze the capacity to have a flexible and open relationship with one’s own internal emotional states. Through a process of positive emotional recognition while young, we can come to experience our emotional responses not simply as states that compel us with a limited degree of control, but rather as part of our cognitive reasoning processes. In this way, our emotions are constitutive of self-governance. Our conception of self-governance, therefore, needs to reflect this fact.

Second, I will evaluate the capacity to be aware of, and to control, one’s internal motivational states. This is, in large part, an ability to be aware of one’s emotions, but it is also the ability to regulate one’s emotional states by having them become a part of one’s cognitive structure and reasoning powers. In contrast, it is possible for one’s motivational structure to be dominated by repressed memories from early childhood. If this is the case, then one’s emotional states are not part of one’s cognitive structure, and one is likely to be subject to internal organizing principles of thinking, feeling, and behaving that are beyond one’s conscious reach and, thus, out of one’s control. This creates the antithesis of what it is to be self-governing. In such cases, it would be convenient,

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13 The implication of this statement is that it is our emotions that provide the primary impetus to our actions. I will adopt a Humean view of human motivation, placing primary emphasis on our emotions as the foundation of our motivations in acting: “Reason, being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action, and directs only the impulses received from appetite or inclination.” David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Tom Beauchamp (ed.), [Oxford: OUP], 1998, p. 163. I need not take as extreme a view as Hume provides here, but I will concur that emotions are the primary basis for our actions in general.
but not acceptable, simply to posit a capacity of reason that can transcend the influence of such unconscious motivations. Although unconscious motivations are a threat to self-governance (and often arise out of interactions with others), I will offer ways of understanding our social interactions that minimize the chance of developing significant unconscious motivating forces, and in this way enhance, rather than diminish, the development and sustained exercise of our capacities for self-governance.

Third, I will discuss the familiar concept of critical self-reflection. In much of the current literature on self-governance, the agent produces an authentic choice by rationally reflecting on a “lower-order” desire from a “higher-order” perspective, from which he or she endorses that first-order desire. One of the main questions with this model, though, is the following: What process confers self-governing authority on our rational “higher-order” critical reflections? If the authority is granted in the same way as “lower-order” desires, i.e., through a process of identification by a yet “higher-order” desire, then an infinite regress threatens; but if their authority is attained in some other way, then there is a problem that John Christman has labeled the incompleteness problem.\(^{14}\) We need to know how and why our rational critical reflections then deserve the exalted role we give them. I will take up Christman’s suggestion that to answer this question we need to look at “the sorts of factors that, as a matter of psychological fact, tend to inhibit the normal functions of individual self-reflection that are necessary for autonomy.”\(^{15}\) I will suggest that the psychology at stake is both intersubjective and emotional at its core.

The basic assumption in much of the current literature on self-governance is that the ability for critical self-reflection arises naturally as a consequence of maturation, unless others somehow intentionally intrude on this ability, e.g., through deception, manipulation, or coercion. I will show,


\(^{15}\) Christman, “Introduction,” *The Inner Citadel*, p. 11.
however, that the capacity for critical self-reflection arises out of positive emotional interactions between child and caregiver, i.e., emotional recognition, and that through this process of emotional nurturing while young, the child (and later the adult) can come to take his or her own mind as an object of reflective scrutiny. The effect that this has on self-governance is important: with a capacity for critical self-reflection comes the ability to access the operation of one’s motivations in ways that allow one to direct the course of their own thinking, feeling, and actions.

Fourth, I will analyze the capacity for imagination and its role in self-governance. If one adopts the intersubjective perspective, then imagination is what arises when the child does not need to be overly concerned about the external signals she receives from her caregivers, i.e., the nature of the emotional interactions between child and caregiver. If this is the case, then the child will become liberated from a mere reactivity to the social conditions of the present environment which allows for the possibility of developing increasingly articulated aims which extend beyond the immediate present. True planning then becomes possible. If emotional recognition is lacking, then the child must focus on the need to adapt to the caregiver, and the child’s primary focus then concerns how to respond to one’s immediate social conditions. In this case, the child, and later the adult, will become limited in her ability to gain a degree of independence from her focus on adapting to her caregivers. I will offer examples of this in chapter 5.

The voluntarist solution to these worries is inadequate because it fails to recognize the intrinsic connection between our reasoning capacities and our emotional perspectives. Our reasoning is informed, and partly constituted, by our emotional attitudes and outlook. It is not distant from our emotions nor is it free from our past social influences. There are versions of social influence and emotional engagement, however, that lead us to reason well and allow us to be self-governing in a robust sense, and this is the focus of my analysis.
The Current Literature on Autonomy:

The focal point for conceptual analyses matters in doing philosophy. The implicit philosophical orientation that one brings to bear on a philosophical problem will influence the nature of the ensuing substantive analysis. The broad theoretical orientation that underlies much of the current thinking on self-governance is a reliance on our rational faculties as an antidote to the potential effects of socialization and a corresponding diminishment of attention paid to our emotional attitudes. Thus, much of the literature focuses on various “cognitive” or “rational” capacities that need to be exercised by the autonomous agent in response to socialization, if she is to be self-governing. I call this the “voluntarist model of autonomy” because it privileges control, in the form of “proper” rational functioning, over both one’s “internal” emotional states, and one’s “external” social influences. It is this model of autonomy that will be the focus of my critique.

What must be made clear at the outset, though, is how socialization and control are related in the voluntarist perspective. Socialization, on this view, is not negative per se. The voluntarist will also want to socialize persons in the right way with regard to their capacity for self-governance, but for the voluntarist, the central capacity for self-governance is reason. Therefore, socialization becomes negative when it works against our rational capacities. This is often characterized within the voluntarist model as the disruptive or distorting effect of emotional attitudes on the operation of reason. The concern with emotion is that it is often seen as overwhelming or impeding our rational capacities, and therefore, emotion can lead one astray with regard to our ability to self-govern.

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16 Michael Stocker vividly captures this point in his discussion of emotion when he argued that “the comparison between emotions and cool rationality starts off by understanding cool rationality as rationality that is not only cool, but is also cognitively accurate.” Michael Stocker, *Valuing Emotions*, [Cambridge: CUP], 1996, p. 95. He goes on to note that “rather than investigating the comparative dangers and usefulness of emotions and rationality for, say, cognitive enterprises, [the comparison between emotions and cool rationality] starts off by thinking well of cool rationality and poorly of emotions. This colors its reasoning, suggests its examples, and leads it to find or create sustaining facts. It is no wonder that it reaches the conclusion it does, which is hardly any different than its starting point.” Stocker, *Valuing Emotions*, p. 95.
The voluntarist, though, will accept that it is possible for emotion to support self-governance, if it is “trained” in the proper way, i.e., if it is such that it does not obstruct the ability of reason to direct the course of the agent’s choices. Likewise, some voluntarists leave open the possibility that social influence can be positive with regard to our rational capacities as well, in that we can learn, through others, means-end reasoning or the proper use of inference in our choices. In this way, we need others to help us deploy our rational capacities properly by helping one develop the skills of deliberation. Socialization can be useful with regard to self-governance, even on the voluntarist view, to the extent that it allows one to develop one’s rational and emotional capacities in this way. On the voluntarist view, however, socialization is often thought of as negative. This is so because socialization is a process that is, in itself, not subject to individual control. Therefore, there is often a degree of suspicion cast on our social influences from the voluntarist perspective.

The voluntarist model holds that the core element of an autonomous agent is the proper exercise of reason, with “proper” reasoning defined in three different ways. First, to reason well is to reason in relative independence of social influence. This is why the existence of social conditioning is not considered a defeating condition for autonomy because the proper operation of reason is thought to provide the antidote to such influence. Thus, voluntarists respond to the issue of socialization by relying on a cognitive or rational faculty which, when properly exercised, operates in relative independence from social influence. The voluntarist need not disparage our social existence in all cases, and in fact, he may embrace social influence when it furthers our rational or emotional capacities; but self-governance for the voluntarist is not, as such, realized through our relationship with others.

Second, this model holds that to reason well is to reason independently of one’s emotional states, when necessary. Emotion, on this view, is often considered detrimental to the proper
operation of reason\(^\text{17}\) because emotion can involve overtaking reason and subverting its “proper”
universal ends or goals in favor of simple subjective wants or desires. But even where emotion is 
not an obstruction to the operation of reason, it can only be considered contingently or 
instrumentally useful to the voluntarist with regard to self-governance. It can never be considered 
part of what it is to be self-governing because the voluntarist model privileges our rational capacities 
over our emotional capacities in the exercise of self-governance. In all, my claim is that the 
voluntarists overestimate our power to transcend or control our emotions.

Finally, this model of autonomy holds that the proper exercise of reason requires that one be 
able to bring to conscious scrutiny relatively easily the underlying motivations, desires, and 
preferences that are relevant to one’s deliberations at any given time. This means that the inputs to 
one’s decisions at any given time should be relatively easily available to rational evaluation. To the 
extent that there are unconscious motivations, desires, or preferences operating with regard to one’s 
choices is one diminished in one’s ability to self-govern. In all, the voluntarist model of autonomy 
focuses on overcoming troublesome social influence through the proper operation of our reasoning 
capacities. Through proper operation of our rational powers, we are able to gain a perspective that 
reflects most truly our own unique beliefs, preferences, desires, and motivations.

I will offer a critique of the voluntarist model of self-governance. This model relies, 
fundamentally, on an understanding of cognition as reflected in our beliefs. On this view, our 
beliefs are usually understood to be conscious, articulable, and reflectively held judgments of the 
world at large.\(^\text{18}\) Beliefs, though, thought of as propositional attitudes (i.e., articulable and 

\(^\text{17}\) Even Kant recognized that people reason poorly in many situations because they allow their subjective emotional 
commitments to guide their reasoning, rather than relying on a “pure” form of practical reasoning that creates the 
possibility for moral choice.

\(^\text{18}\) “What gets thrown into question ... is ... the nature of cognition itself. Cognition is not to be understood only as 
conscious and articulate. There are primitive preconceptual forms of cognition.” Robert Solomon, “Emotions,
reflectively held), are but one form that cognition can take on the alternative model of reason I will advance.19 Nonetheless, the model of rationality that I will offer does not view all forms of emotional expression as necessarily supportive of autonomy. Obviously, many forms of emotional expression take the form of a “hijacking” of one’s cognitive appraisals, and can persist even in the face of “rational” scrutiny. The critical question, then, is the following: How is it possible for emotions to operate in this way and yet remain a central component of our reasoning capacities?

I will offer an alternative perspective on these philosophical issues as they relate to self-governance. I emphasize that self-governance depends on social relationships of a particular sort, not on how to overcome social influences. My account of self-governance calls into question the very existence of a detached rational power, and instead focuses on the relationship between our social interactions and our capacity to access and articulate our emotional reactions to situations. I focus on the necessary role that emotion plays in our reasoning processes and that these two elements (emotion and reason) do not necessarily operate as separate, antagonistic forces, but oftentimes as intertwined, synergistic powers that allow for the robust exercise of self-governance, in the form of what I will call the well-governed person.

Much of the literature on autonomy20 focuses on providing the necessary and sufficient conditions for what it is to count as an autonomous person.21 This literature analyzes what it is that separates one person from another with regard to autonomy (thereby creating the conditions for one

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19 “a good deal of cognition is of a radically prelinguistic (very misleadingly called “precognitive”) nature.” Solomon, “Emotions, Thoughts, and Feelings,” p. 87.
20 I use the term autonomy here because it is what dominates the current literature.
to achieve the *status* of an autonomous person, or to have achieved the status of having made an autonomous choice). Additionally, it provides the conditions that separate humans from other sentient creatures. This work does not focus on this question.

I focus instead on what it means to be a well-governed person, where to be well-governed is a condition that we strive for as a normative ideal, that can be attained in varying degrees. In this sense, there is the threshold question, and then there are the gradations that exist above the threshold, and it is these gradations above the threshold that is my focus. My project gives an account of self-governance as a virtue, or set of virtues, where the excellence of those virtues may be thought of as a character ideal relating to human self-governance. My account of self-governance is a normative account that focuses on the virtue of being a well-governed person.

My account of self-governance incorporates a view of human flourishing that involves our capacity to direct our own lives in ways that are distinctively human. This differs from other forms of human flourishing, such as the conditions that relate to one’s cardiovascular health. I also offer a model of self-governance that recognizes and accepts both the reality of social influence and the necessary role that social relationships play in self-governance. Therefore, I analyze how our social relationships play into the virtues at stake in the concept of being a well-governed person. To do this, I rely on the literature of developmental psychology. A central purpose of this dissertation is to emphasize the positive aspects of the agent’s social (i.e., intersubjective) existence as they relate to her being a well-governed person.

The value of self-governance, at least in part, is the ability to resist the effects of oppressive social influence from the larger institutional arrangements of society, by having the ability to craft responses to social norms that further our capacity to flourish. Obviously, this involves more than simply acquiescing to such norms: yet it is also more than merely crafting responses to social
influence that are one’s own (which is the emphasis of much of the current literature) since some ways of crafting uniquely individual responses to social influence are self-destructive or, at best, neutral with regard to one’s ability to flourish in the face of oppressive social contexts. Therefore, my positive view of self-governance is a substantive view, in that it requires a particular kind of content in our responses to social influence in order to count as genuine self-governance; the core of this content is largely emotional in nature (not purely cognitive).

In this effort, I pick up on a strand of thinking in the literature which suggests that self-governance is about coming to grips with what is most distinctively human in us and the source of what we regard as most important and most problematic in our lives. Self-governance is about us and what we can be like, at our best. In this sense, I present a picture of self-governance as a set of virtues, the excellence of which constitutes an ideal of what it is to be a self-governing human being. Most of us, however, fail to live up to the excellence of these virtues on a routine basis. Yet the value of an ideal remains compelling; few meet the criteria of the phronimos and perhaps fewer still have the decision-making apparatus structured around the categorical imperative, but the vision of Aristotle and Kant still provides meaningful targets toward which we can aim. While I do not specifically offer a picture of the ideally self-governing individual, it is an easy stretch to go from the virtues of self-governance that I discuss to the excellence of those virtues, which then would represent an ideal of self-governance.

My Strategy:

This dissertation’s structure reflects a progression in thinking with regard to the proper role that others play in our lives. Chapter 2 provides an analysis of the current influential trends in the philosophical literature on self-governance. In this chapter, I establish the foil of my analysis, which

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is the voluntarist model of self-governance, and I establish the three key dimensions of the voluntarist model, each of which was already described in brief. I draw on elements of John Christman’s influential work on autonomy to explain this model of self-governance, as well as work by Bernard Berofsky and Joel Feinberg.

In Chapter 2, I critique the voluntarist model of autonomy using the perspective of the relational philosophers, explaining why the voluntarist model fails to provide a plausible account of self-governance. This critique by the relational philosophers provides the first attempt to understand why our social condition and our emotional states are essential elements of self-governance. Their essential conclusion is that emotion need not be disparaged as a constitutive element of what it is to be a self-governing person. The relationalist critique characterizes the autonomous person as one who is defined by self-understandings that are largely emotional (i.e., not purely cognitive) in nature.

The relational critique focuses on the voluntarists’ (over-)reliance on reason as the core element of autonomous choice. This critique emphasizes positive aspects of our social condition, as well as the role that emotions play in our reasoning process. Therefore, this chapter provides an account of how positive social interaction and emotional attitudes can combine to create an alternative model of our deliberative and reflective capacities. I endorse this critique of the voluntarist model, and I further this critique by actually offering an alternative model of our deliberative processes. Here, I draw on the work of Robert Solomon, Cheshire Calhoun, and Robin Dillon to explain why reason is not simple cognition.

This alternative account of our reasoning capacities seeks to relinquish the grip that the “proper” exercise of reason has exerted on our understanding of self-governance and to elucidate how emotion can play a central role in the proper exercise of reason, more richly understood. The
importance of emotion leads to placing priority on relationships of care and dependency in the
development of the capacities necessary to exercise self-governance because such relationships are
defined in terms of emotional interconnection and recognition. The voluntarists would counter that
placing such emphasis on emotion is unsound because, on their view, there is often little, if any,
control over the expression of our emotional attitudes (unlike our reasoning capacities, which are
thought to be reliably under the control of the agent). The intersubjective psychology literature,
however, explains how our emotional attitudes can become part of our cognitive architecture. I will
demonstrate how and why this connection between our emotional states and our cognitive states
can occur and why it is critical to self-governance.

Chapter 3 establishes a current trend in psychological theory that explains the role that
positive forms of social interaction play in our development as persons. In the psychology literature,
these positive social interactions are recognized as fundamentally emotional in nature. Although
philosophy has taken its first tentative steps in the direction of recognizing the importance of
emotion in our social interactions, the psychology literature has progressed further and can provide a
foundation for applying these insights to the problem of self-governance. The psychological
literature begins with Freud. Therefore, I lay out the Freudian model of personal agency first. This
older, Freudian model, however, has been superseded to a considerable degree by later work in the
field. Therefore, I present the current trend in thinking in the psychology literature (found, largely,
in the intersubjective psychology literature).

In my positive account, I draw on the insights of the intersubjective psychologists to help
move philosophy toward a more realistic account of what it is to be a self-governing person. The
relational philosophers point us in a promising direction with regard to analyzing self-governance,
but their analyses leave the potential for positive social influence largely unexplored. The
psychology literature has moved even further along in this regard by creating a more complex and compelling picture of human emotional interaction and the role that emotional recognition plays in human development. I make use of this further progress to move the philosophical debate in the direction taken by the intersubjective psychologists, so as to obtain a more nuanced and richly complex account of what it is to be self-governed. The intersubjective psychology literature presents a realistic picture of how we come to have, and how we sustain, the capacities that are necessary for the exercise of self-governance; this developmental/sustaining story then has implications for how we should view a theory of personal self-governance. I explore the implications that this picture of personal development has for a theory of self-governance.

In Chapter 4, I begin to construct the elements of the positive account of self-governance that is the centerpiece of this work. In this chapter, I analyze the current recognition accounts in the literature. This “recognition” literature tends to emphasize the political ideal of self-realization, but there are close ties to their view of self-realization and the condition of self-governance. The recognition theorists take an explicitly intersubjective, or social, perspective in analyzing the nature of self-realization, and they also emphasize the role that emotion, especially in the form of emotional recognition, plays in self-realization. Unlike the relational philosophers, the philosophers who provide recognition accounts of self-realization focus on the positive aspects of our social condition, by arguing that negative elements of self-governance (such as freedom from manipulation and deception) be matched with positive practical relations to self, in the form of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem (each of which arises out of particular forms of social interaction - in the form of relationships of mutual recognition).

The recognition theorists were the first philosophers to embrace an explicitly psychological perspective when analyzing the nature of self-governance. I follow their lead, although I offer an
even more detailed and psychologically-informed understanding of how early life social interaction directly influences the adult capacities central to self-governance. The recognition accounts of self-governance are also congenial to my positive account because they (and Honneth in particular) offer a way of thinking about self-governance from the perspective of human flourishing, and I adopt this perspective as well in my positive account.

I differ from the recognition accounts of self-governance in that the recognition theorists tend to have a more explicitly political emphasis in their analyses. They explore, from a social psychological perspective, how social institutions can impede one’s capacity for self-realization. I explore the implications, from an intersubjective psychological perspective, that intimate, interpersonal relationships have for the specific capacities central to self-governance. Through this emphasis, I am able to explain why our emotional attitudes are essential features of both our rational, deliberative capacities, and how and why our emotional perspectives arise out of relationships with important others, such as caregivers. I place particular emphasis on the emotional nature of our interactions with others, which leads directly to the role that unconscious motivations can play in our decision-making. I explain that a lack of emotional recognition (or a withdrawal of recognition) can lead to the development of unconscious mental forces (through a process of repression) which then impacts our capacity to govern ourselves well. The recognition theorists focus more directly on issues in political philosophy, such as how individuals in marginalized social groups can face institutional impediments in their efforts to achieve a condition of self-realization. My focus is on the effect that intimate interpersonal relationships have on one’s ability to self-govern.

In Chapter 5, I offer an alternative account of self-governance, which I label the well-governed person. My fundamental premise is that to be a well-governed person involves the
influence of, and interaction with, others and that the nature of this influence and interaction is emotional at its core. This breaks decisively with the voluntarist model of autonomy. On my positive view, to reason well is not to be (relatively) free of social influence or to operate relatively independently of one’s own internal emotional states. Rather, there are versions of social influence and emotional engagement that can lead us to reason well and allow us to be self-governing in a robust sense of that term. My goal in this analysis is to discover a role for emotion to play in our cognitive faculties and to articulate the distinctive role that such a combination of emotion and reason can play in the exercise of self-governance.

Conceptually, our earliest social experiences, to be constructive contributors to our capacity for self-governance, must be understood through a process of emotional exchange between child and caregiver called emotional recognition. If the child exists within a relationship with her caregiver that is characterized by emotional recognition, the child will form a sense of secure attachment. With that sense of secure attachment, the child will come to trust the validity of her own emotional experiences because the caregiver will reinforce the child’s emotional reactions with positive emotional attunement. This trust in the validity of the child’s own emotional experiences provides the child with the ability to take her own mind as an object of reflection because the child will have learned to trust the nature of the interpretations that she produces in most any given situation. When this happens, the child’s emotions evolve from mere bodily states to ones that are capable of being verbally articulated. This verbal articulation of emotional states enables the integration of those emotional states into the cognitive architecture of the child. This, in turn, creates both a significant degree of self-awareness on the part of the child, as well as a significant degree of control over the expression of emotional states because those emotional states are now part of the “rational” processes of the child’s decision-making apparatus. This emotional self-awareness then creates the conditions necessary to be a well-governed person, i.e., the relaxed and
flexible ability to interpret and respond to the situations that one faces without being locked into engrainged or habitual patterns of response.

This dissertation elaborates on this argument, as well as its negative flip side (where emotion is not responded to with attuned responsiveness on the part of the caregiver) and the repercussions that arise if emotional misrecognition is the norm in the parent-child interaction.

**Conclusion**

The problem of self-governance is to understand how the beliefs, preferences, and desires that motivate one to act can truly be “one’s own” and not mere products of past or current social influences. The influential voluntarist trend in self-governance theory relies on the proper exercise of reason as the means through which past or current social influence can be overcome, or directed (if necessary). The relational philosophers have criticized this voluntarist answer to the problem of self-governance as being too narrowly cognitive in its emphasis. The relationalists contend that our emotional perspectives need not be considered disruptive to self-governance but instead can be considered as (at least partly) constitutive of our rational capacities (and self-governance in general).

I build on this relational critique by incorporating insights from the intersubjective psychology literature. My positive account of the well-governed person emphasizes ways that our social interactions with others are necessary for the development and sustained exercise of the capacities for self-governance. My account also demonstrates how our emotional attitudes can be considered as a constitutive part of our self-governing capacities. In presenting this picture of self-governance, I build on the progression of thought begun by the relational philosophers and then furthered in political philosophy by the recognition theorists. My theory of self-governance, though, takes a much more thorough psychological perspective than either the relationalists or recognition
philosophers. As such, it aims to provide a much more realistic picture of what it is to be a well-governed person.
Chapter 2: The Relational Turn in Philosophy

“In studying a philosopher, the right attitude is neither reverence nor contempt, but first a kind of hypothetical sympathy, until it is possible to know what it feels like to believe in his theories, and only then a revival of the critical attitude, which should resemble, as far as possible, that state of mind of a person abandoning opinions which he has hitherto held. Contempt interferes with the first process, and reverence with the second … This exercise of historical and psychological imagination at once enlarges the scope of our thinking, and helps us to realize how foolish many of our own cherished prejudices will seem to an age which has a different temper of mind” 25

Bertrand Russell

Introduction:

In this chapter I will outline the key dimensions of the voluntarist model of autonomy using John Christman’s influential work in the field, as well as excerpts from other philosophers, such as Bernard Berofsky and Joel Feinberg. Once this model is established, I will then critique it on two related fronts, both of which are derived from the current relational philosophers in the literature.

There are two philosophical issues at stake in this analysis and both have a fundamental connection to how autonomy is to be understood. The first involves a particular way of representing our social interconnections and the proper role that others play in the exercise of autonomy. What is emphasized by the voluntarists is the idea of choice as the cornerstone of our exercise of autonomy and that the ideal of such choice comes from a perspective that is, in general, abstracted away from the influence of others. Using the relational viewpoint, the first prong of the critique of voluntarism focuses on the valorizing of a particular view of autonomous agency defined by this perspective of isolation from the influence of others in the exercise of autonomy.

The second issue centers on a particular way of understanding the operation of reason. On the voluntarist model of autonomy, there is an, often implicit, “formal” conception of reason on

which reason operates in relative independence from one’s past social influences and current
e emotional states. The voluntarist can, and often will, accept the notion that emotions need not
produce obstacles to our reasoning processes. Emotions can be “trained” in such a way that they
either do not inhibit the operation of reason, or, in more ideal conditions, might actually be educated
in such a way that they actually “listen to” or “obey” the commands of reason.\footnote{This latter notion is clearly in Aristotle. See, e.g., \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, David Ross (trans.), [Oxford: OUP], 1998, Book
I, chapter 13.} At the same time, however, the voluntarist recognizes the tendency of our emotional responses to resist the dictates of
reason and lead reason astray by creating powerful conditions within the individual that pull against
reason’s better judgments. In a Platonic analogy, sometimes we have horses that the charioteer
cannot steer. Like these unruly horses, emotions can resist the guidance and direction of reason. It
is this tendency toward a lack of control over internal motivating influences that the voluntarist sees
as their Achilles heel, and it is thought that only through the proper operation of reason can these
wayward emotions be governed. This is what I will label a “detached” rationality, or the operation
of “detached” reason.

The voluntarist recognizes, as does everyone, that our emotional states can exhibit powerful
levels of influence and control over the outcomes of our choices. From the voluntarist perspective,
the benefit of being autonomous is that one is then able to reflectively decide whether or not to be
so influenced. This can be done either by reigning in the disobedient emotional states or by
reflectively endorsing the emotional condition at the time of choice. For example, a person could
have been powerfully motivated, even driven, by his passion for upholding the ideals of the civil
rights movement of the 1960s, but for one to maintain a degree of autonomy over such powerful
emotional influences, one must then reflectively endorse that position. For the voluntarist, though,
the stance of rational reflection on these emotional states is usually considered to be separate from
the emotions themselves, i.e., from a “rational” perspective that is ontologically distant from the emotional condition itself.

The second prong of the critique of voluntarism contends that reason can encompass our emotional reactions to situations. On this view, our emotions can be brought within the aegis of our choices, which then allows emotion to form a constitutive part of what it is to be self-governing. This understanding of emotion has implications for how one understands self-governance. The relational turn in philosophy with regard to autonomy is a turn away from the voluntarist model toward a more social view of autonomous agency, one that is informed by our inherent social existence and the role that emotions play in developing and sustaining the capacities necessary to exercise autonomy. In further motivating this critique, I will develop an alternative view of reason using the work of Robert Solomon, Cheshire Calhoun, and Robin Dillon. This alternative view of reason will place in doubt the efficacy of separating the “rational” realm from our emotional experience and will conclude by providing a view of reason that incorporates, to a considerable degree, our emotional perspectives as part of the nature and operation of our process of reasoning.

On the voluntarist model of autonomy, there are three key dimensions to our ability to exercise autonomy, and each of these involves the “proper” exercise of reason (or reasoning well) as the core characteristic of the autonomous agent. In the first key dimension, to be autonomous is to reason relatively independently of social influence because social influence is often depicted as a form of “external” constraint, as something that limits or restricts our ability for self-governance. The nature of the constraint tends to be portrayed in terms of both the “standard” cases of manipulation or coercion, as well as forms of social conditioning – either from macro-social forces (such as government, media, or economic systems), or from the effects of micro-social experiences found in our upbringing and childhood interactions with peers and others.
Second, on the voluntarist model of autonomy, the proper exercise of autonomy is characterized by employing reason independently of emotional influence, i.e., when such influence threatens to distort the operation of reason. In this way, emotions are often understood as a form of “internal” constraint. The concern, from the voluntarist perspective, is that the undue influence of our emotions can create a lack of control over the content of our choices and the direction that our choices take us in the course of our lives. The voluntarist view posits a general absence of control over our emotions with regard to our choices and because of this, there is often a need to exercise control over, or transcendence of, our internal emotional states. Our emotional condition, on this view, is (often) considered to be a distorting influence on our judgments, decisions, and choices because of the (presumed) absence of “rational” control by the agent at various times while under their influence.

Third, on the voluntarist model of autonomy, a high degree of self-awareness as to one’s own motivations, desires, and preferences is considered both possible and often necessary to be self-governing: “the motivating desires and beliefs she has at [the time of choice] must be ‘transparent’ to her. They must be relatively easily brought to consciousness and subject to reflection.”25 This concern is a response to the fear that one might have only a limited degree of control with regard to one’s motivational states: “But what if my attitude is the product of childhood conditioning – or later brainwashing, brain surgery, hypnosis, behavior modification, alcoholism, narcotics addiction, neurosis, psychosis, or worse?”26 On this model, it isn’t transparency, as such, that is necessary to exercise self-governance but the possibility of self-awareness as to one’s motivations that is critical to the self-governing agent. If one’s motivations or preferences are not subject to rational evaluation at the moment of choice, then the voluntarist would claim that one’s ability to exercise

autonomy is compromised or perhaps even eliminated. Using reason in relative independence of one’s social influences and one’s emotional states, as well as having reason operate within one’s conscious reach is to reason well on the voluntarist model, and to use reason well is what allows for the proper exercise of one’s autonomy.

**Analysis of the Three Key Dimensions of the Voluntarist Model of Autonomy**

There is a temptation in the current literature on autonomy to valorize a particular kind of agency that is often thought to define our capacities for autonomy. This view of agency is characterized by a perspective of detached isolation from others in the exercise of one’s autonomy, a retreat into what Isaiah Berlin depicted as one’s own “inner citadel,” a place from which “I have withdrawn into myself,” and where “there, and there alone, I am secure.”

There is a lingering sense that the concept of autonomy can be “suggestively captured … by the metaphor of such a citadel.” This model of autonomy matches a Western cultural ideal: “contemporary Western society values a self with tight boundaries, that is conceptualized as separable and separate from

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27 It is important to note, though, that the ideal of detached isolation from others is not intended to suggest that traditional accounts of autonomy imply that we can (or should) live in isolation from others. It is clearly recognized in the autonomy literature that we live in relation to other people. Rather, the ideal of isolation in the traditional literature is meant to portray the exercise of our capacity for autonomy, in that to achieve an autonomous existence is precisely to be in a position to choose to be in the kinds of relations to our liking and to be in those relations on one’s own terms, not terms dictated to the individual by others. To exercise this capacity for autonomous choice is often characterized by a detached or independent rationality (that then allows for individual self-determination), which on the ideal of self-sufficiency common in the traditional autonomy literature is a capacity which exists, if it does, independently of and prior to our relationships with others. It is not necessarily true of this view of persons that one is able to realize this capacity alone, i.e., in isolation from others (although most philosophers in the traditional literature are silent on this issue). The distinction at issue here is between how we come to be autonomous (the genetic question) from what it is to be autonomous (the conceptual question).

28 Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, [Oxford: OUP], 1969, p. 135. As Christman notes, however, Berlin used this phrase as a metaphor which he used to attack the notion of a detached positive liberty.

29 John Christman, 1989, “Introduction,” in *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy*, John Christman (ed.), [Oxford: Oxford University Press], p. 3. Christman, however, acknowledges later that: “There is widespread agreement on rejecting the idea that authenticity and autonomy come exclusively through retreating into an ‘inner citadel,’” but he also goes on to conclude that “What is less clear, however, is what should replace this notion.” “Introduction,” *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism*, Christman and Anderson (eds.), [Cambridge: CUP], 2005, p. 12. I will give an answer as to what can replace this notion.
others and is very much under the control of the will.”

Philosophers writing on autonomy have long realized, though, that our character, including our attitudes and values, as well as our preferences and desires, are affected by our culture, rearing, and our general historical situation. Further, the sources of such influence extend into the realm of the political and economic institutions of society, and the impact of the mass media and public opinion. What’s more, such influences, it is recognized, begin at an early age through the inevitable process of upbringing that we each experience in our youth. There is widespread acceptance of the empirical fact of social influence, whatever one’s philosophical orientation. On the voluntarist model of autonomy, however, one’s emphasis is on social interactions as a form of threat to the exercise of one’s autonomy because social influence often operates on and through our emotions. In this way, social influence is viewed as something one needs to “concede,” and the voluntarist

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31 Gerald Dworkin, The Theory and Practice of Autonomy, [Cambridge: CUP], 1988, p. 11: “our dispositions, attitudes, values, and wants are affected by the economic institutions, by the mass media, by the forces of public opinion, by social class and so forth” and that “socialization into the norms and values of the society will have taken place at a very young age.” This point is ubiquitous in the literature. See, e.g., Joel Feinberg, 1989, “Autonomy,” in The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy, John Christman (ed.), [Oxford: OUP], p. 45: “Our most significant truth about ourselves is that we are social animals. No individual person selects ‘autonomously’ his own genetic inheritance or early upbringing. No individual selects his country, his language, his social community and traditions … And yet to be human is to be a part of a community, to speak a language, to take one’s place in an already functioning group way of life.” Feinberg puts the point slightly differently elsewhere when he states “we are social animals … The human world does not and cannot consist of millions of separate sovereign ‘islands’ … each free of any need for others.” Feinberg, p. 45. Gerald Dworkin puts the point in the following way: “We know that all individuals have a history. They develop socially and psychologically in a given environment with a set of biological endowments. They mature slowly, and are, therefore, heavily influenced by parents, peers, and culture.” Gerald Dworkin, “The Concept of Autonomy,” in The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy, John Christman (ed.), [Oxford: OUP], p. 58. John Christman has the following take on this idea: “We all know that no person is self-made in the sense of being a fully formed and intact ‘will’ blossoming out of nowhere. Our values and preferences are explained by essential reference to a variety of influences that have come to bear on our development throughout our personal histories.” John Christman, “Autonomy and Personal History,” Canadian Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 21, No. 1, March 1991, p. 1.
32 This is not to claim that the voluntarist would deny that social interaction could have positive benefits, e.g., the influence of a beloved teacher or coach.
33 “Some, perhaps many, [of my motivational states] are embedded in me prior to the time I can critically form a life plan, hierarchy of values, or ego ideal. The possibility that later reflection may in fact be influenced by the very limits imposed by the world must be conceded.” Bernard Berofsky, “Autonomy Without Free Will,” in Personal Autonomy: New Essays on Personal Autonomy and Its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy, John Christman and Joel Anderson (eds.), [Cambridge: CUP], 2005, p. 69.
emphasis is on the ways that autonomy can be preserved in the face of the onslaught of social conditioning.

The fact that one would need to “concede” the effect of such “external” social influence reflects, implicitly, the voluntarist assumption that social influence can be something one passively receives and which may be beyond anyone’s (direct) control, unless countered with the proper use of reason. What the voluntarist does in response to this concern over social influence is to claim that even with the (potential) uncontrollable nature of social influence, we still have resources to control the effects of social influence through the proper exercise of reason. For the voluntarist, the process of social influence is often beyond anyone’s direct control. Social influence, on this view, tends to insinuate itself into our emotional attitudes and perspectives, which then may override or interfere with the ability of reason to operate properly: “To acknowledge the profound impact of socialization … is to raise the question of whether people have any traits, beliefs, or capabilities that can be called their own.”

This influence is thought to be countered most effectively by the use of our reasoning or cognitive capacities in the exercise of autonomy, where our reasoning is understood as being separate, when necessary, from emotional or social influence.

The most striking example of such a “proper” use of reason is found in Kant’s categorical imperative. In Kant’s moral theory, the individual is a self-legislating moral agent to the extent that he or she follows the proper logical form of one’s reasoning. On this theory, the operation of one’s reasoning must be “pure” in that it cannot contain any admixture of empirical influence. The reasoning process, for it to count as moral, must proceed logically, i.e., categorically, as opposed to hypothetically, i.e., influenced by any ulterior motive that is not purely (i.e., a priori) determined. This “formal” operation of reason is what it is to reason separately from one’s emotional commitments.

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or social influences (past or present). This process of pure rational decision-making is what allows one to separate oneself from external (or internal) forms of control and allows for one to achieve the kind of freedom that Kant privileged.

At times, this view of “external” control is expressed in the current philosophical literature in terms of “implanted” or “conditioned” responses to one’s social experience, and it is sometimes combined with such other extreme interventions as surgical alternation of the brain. This characterization of “external” social influence as “conditioning” in the current philosophical literature is telling, in that it gives a clue as to the popular perception of how we develop as persons. The assumption is that one achieves a capacity for critical self-reflection through a natural process whereby “one enters into maturity through reflection on transmitted values that had hitherto been taken for granted and must now be certified through a critical process that, should it lead to identification, will permit the agent to regard the values as genuinely her own.” What is central to the voluntarist perspective is that this “critical process” of rational reflection is then accomplished by a capacity of the person that is generally separate from one’s emotional commitments and which tends to unfold naturally, unless it is impeded in its exercise by “internal” or “external” constraint. Autonomy, therefore, is achieved (implicitly) through a natural process of cognitive maturation available to all. Later, I will argue that this is not how our rational capacities operate, and I will present an alternative picture of this maturation process and why our emotional attitudes are, in fact, critical to our capacities to reason effectively.

What is privileged, on this model, is a capacity for rational transcendence of such social

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35 Such discussions are telling because there is little, if any, talk of “conditioning” in the current psychoanalytic literature. The parent-child dyad is discussed in terms of adaptive or non-adaptive responsiveness, not in terms of conditioning. The difference being that in the current psychoanalytic literature, room for agency is maintained for the child no matter what the actions of the parent. The child always has “adaptive” responses, even to situations of trauma and abuse.

influence, where one’s rational powers operate independently of socialization (either from the macro- or micro-social level) as they reflect on, endorse, transcend, harness, use, or defy the effects of social influence.\(^{37}\) Therefore, on this view, the locus of agency is characterized as existing within a part of the self that is more resistant to “conditioning” by social forces, and this is often associated with our capacity to reason. This attitude is evoked beautifully in the following quote from Feinberg (although Feinberg does not necessarily endorse or apply the view put forth in his own account of self-governance):\(^{38}\) “The inner core self is the ‘ruling part’ with which we most intimately identify. The self outside the inner core is ‘internal’ relative to the outside world, but external relative to the ruling part. This is the self ‘meant by nature’ to be ruled. It includes the body, the passions, and particular desires, appetites and emotions. The inner core is usually identified with Reason.”\(^ {39}\)

Therefore, reason, on the voluntarist model of autonomy, is identified as the locus of agential authority because it allows the agent to exercise control over the “external” influence of socialization, whether from society at large, or from one’s own past upbringing.

As the quote from Feinberg suggests, though, reason also has the function of controlling, and overriding when necessary, the “internal” emotional attitudes that might, at critical times, overtake one’s decision-making apparatus and lead such judgments away from the optimal “rational” solution. Emotions, on this model, often work to bias our reasoning in situations where autonomous choice is at issue, and as such, they are viewed as requiring control in their influence on sound judgment. Therefore, the voluntarist model radically separates the operation of reason and emotion, and in this bifurcation, it relegates emotional dispositions to a subsidiary or instrumental role, at best, in our capacity to make autonomous choices because such “contingent” dimensions of

\(^{37}\) Again, Kant’s categorical imperative is a useful model of such reasoning.

\(^{38}\) Feinberg is not making his own claim in this quote but is characterizing a prevalent trend in the current literature.

\(^{39}\) Feinberg, “Autonomy,” p. 40. This quote is not intended to imply that Feinberg utilizes such a view of reason in his conception of autonomy.
the self are often considered to be the site of social influence. Therefore, the voluntarist model of autonomy uses reason as a mediating force for both the “external” and “internal” constraints that one can experience in one’s effort to achieve autonomy. It is this understanding of our rational agency that is invoked as a means of transcending both macro- and micro-social influences.

The “conditioned” agent is subject to “externally” imposed values, e.g., those imposed by parents or peers. In this way “a set of ‘generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals and standards are implanted in the child by his parents, their authoritative source internalized, so that they become his forever more.” This is how the voluntarist generally conceives of social influence while young, and the worry is then about the effect that such “inescapable” goals can have on one’s autonomy. The fear is that the person so inculcated will be “no more capable of subjecting these standards to rational criticism and then modifying them where necessary than the other-directed person is, for he has within him a kind of ‘psychological gyroscope’ that keeps him steadily on his course on pain of powerful guilt feelings.” Such “conditioned” responses imply psychological states that are rigid and fixed, and thus, not something the agent can remedy (at least not easily). The fear is that even if there were a remedy, such a remedy would itself be socially influenced and shaped and, thus, it would not further the autonomy of the agent.

The worry about social influence, from the voluntarists’ perspective, is that it is a force that does not seem to be under the control of the agent, either as a child (when the formative processes are probably most strong), or as an adult (when society continues to exert its influence over one’s decisions and choices). Therefore, social influence is seen as being merely contingent on the nature of one’s previous social interactions. This is so because whether or not such social influence ends up being positive or negative, it is positive or negative because of the “luck” of one’s upbringing.

whether good or bad), or the “luck” of one’s current social condition. The issue is that whether social influence tends to be positive or negative, it is not under the agent’s control, and this is a vital concern to the voluntarist. Social influence, on the voluntarist view, need not be seen as a threat to self-governance because of our ability to use reason in the proper way, but neither is it constitutive or central to the achievement of self-governance. Therefore, realizing one’s autonomy, on this view, is most often achieved independently of the influence of others not, usually, in relations with others.

This model of autonomy then tends to privilege deliberative and cognitive capacities over emotional perspectives and attitudes because it is our emotional attitudes that form the core of our attachments to other persons, and thus, can form the basis of being influenced by others. As the earlier quote from Feinberg suggests, reason has the function of controlling, and overriding when necessary, the “internal” emotional attitudes that might, at critical times, overtake one’s decision-making apparatus and lead such judgments away from their optimal “rational” solution with respect to autonomy.

Emotions, on this model, often work to bias our reasoning in situations where autonomous choice is at issue by distorting the ability of the agent to assess a situation in a calm, reflective (i.e., “rational”) manner. As such, emotions are viewed as requiring control in their influence on sound judgment. Therefore, the voluntarist model radically separates the operation of reason and emotion. The beginnings of this view can be seen in Plato where he understood the perfection of persons in the Form which inhabits each of us. The problem is that we don’t always attain this perfection, and Plato thought that this needed explaining, and the explanation that he advocated implied that it is our material self, i.e., our emotions, that are to blame for such failure to attain our perfect form: “The form of things is in its perfection, but if a thing doesn’t reach its perfect form then ultimately it

\[\text{See footnote 34.}\]
is because there is some reluctance, some recalcitrance, some resistance in its matter: the matter
refuses, so to speak, to take the form.”44 In Plato’s analysis, one needs reason to reign in the
emotions, and this, I will argue, is one of the defining characteristics of the voluntarist model of
autonomy because it is control over one’s emotions and/or an ability to transcend the social forces
that influence one’s emotional states that defines autonomy from the voluntarist perspective.

I have just examined the first and second dimensions of the voluntarist self, i.e., the
independence from both “external” and “internal” constraint. The third dimension of the
voluntarist conception of autonomy is its (often implicit) commitment to having one’s motivations,
desires, and preferences be “relatively easily brought to consciousness”45 in the exercise of self-
governance. One of the most explicit treatments of this notion is in the influential work of John
Christman. Under Christman’s model of autonomy, self-awareness (or sometimes even
transparency) is associated with a requirement for the autonomous agent to have “a settled and
accurate conception”46 of who he is. This is not transparency in the global, Kantian sense but a
more subtle condition where reason is able to direct the course of our lives but only if it has
something consciously available to direct. The intuition at stake here is that if there are aspects of
one’s decision-making structure that are beyond one’s rational, reflective awareness (due, primarily –
perhaps – to one’s early social environment or the continuing influence of societal institutions), then
the agent will be subject to forces at the time of choice of which she is unaware, and thus, that she is
unable to control. To the extent that the agent is affected by such unconscious mental forces the
agent is compromised in her ability to exercise autonomy. Therefore, the antidote to this dilemma
advocated by Christman is to require that the agent’s motivations, desires, and preferences that are
relevant to our deliberations at any given time be relatively easily brought to conscious awareness.

44 Christine Korsgaard, The Sources of Normativity, [Cambridge: CUP], 1996, p. 3.
45 See footnote 22.
This allows reason to play its directing role with regard to self-governance. On the voluntarist view of autonomy, reason cannot operate on preferences and desires that are relevant to one’s decisions if they are not consciously held at the time of choice.

The requirement for this relative transparency of our rational capacities is part of Christman’s larger project of presenting autonomy as a valued goal of human existence. In Christman’s view, the appraisals that are central to “a person’s welfare, integrity, or moral status,” will depend in large part on the capacity of the person in question to call his values and preferences his own, i.e., such appraisals depend on one’s autonomy. His project, then, is to “establish an account of self-determination or autonomy that [will] help determine just when and if the values and preferences we find ourselves with deserve the centrality that moral and political theories place on them.”

In other writings, Christman asserts that “if the concept of autonomy … is to be defended as a coherent idea as well as a value to be protected and sought, it will be suggestively captured, I think, by the metaphor of [the inner] citadel.” This assertion emphasizes the normative goal of autonomy, as well as his sympathies for the voluntarist model inherent in the idea of the person as an inner citadel.

The issue with the requirement that our motivations be relatively easily brought to consciousness is that it unnecessarily narrows the scope of our autonomous choices. The problem with this view is that unconscious motivations are ubiquitous in our everyday lives, and they can influence us in many ways. Sometimes these influences are significant enough that they impinge upon our capacity for self-governance, but many times the influence of these unconscious

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47 John Christman, “Autonomy and Personal History,” p. 1. The conditions for autonomy that Christman sets out in this work are meant to present a way that one can exercise autonomy excellently, or less well if one fails to reach the conditions set forth by Christman. In this way, autonomy is a skill that can be exhibited in varying degrees by the agent depending on how well the agent is able to attend to the formation of her occurrent preferences, as well as have her critical self-reflection be minimally rational and free of self-deception. Ibid., p. 11.

motivations is sufficiently trivial that they do not affect the self-governing nature of our choices. For example, let’s say that I go to buy a puppy, and I end up choosing a brown puppy instead of the black one that was also available and appeared to have as many positive characteristics as the brown one. Upon making my choice, I simply had a feeling that the brown puppy was more suitable to my needs. What I didn’t realize at the time of my choice, though, is that when I was one year old, I was bitten by a black dog, and the imprint of the fear from that experience actually induced me to buy the brown puppy. All of this, of course, operated out of my conscious reach, and further, this “true” motivation behind my choice was not easily brought to consciousness. But this does not mean that my choice of the brown puppy was not an instance of self-governing behavior because the effect of this past experience did not substantially hinder my choices in the present (it only narrowed it a bit). By requiring all of our motivations to be relatively easily brought to consciousness, Christman unnecessarily restricts the range of our autonomous choices.

I will agree, in large part, with the voluntarist assertion that unconscious motivations, desires, or preferences often operate to diminish or threaten our capacity to self-govern. We often fail at self-governance due to factors in our decision-making that operate beyond our conscious reach. Unlike the voluntarist, though, I will provide an explanation of how many of our unconscious motivations, desires, or preferences arise. The intersubjective psychology literature gives a compelling picture of the development of our unconscious mental life, and the basic conclusion from the psychology literature is that our unconscious motivations arise out of failures in the emotional interactions between child and caregiver. This realization reinforces the idea that we are indissolubly bound to each other in ways that affect our capacities for self-governance, but it also suggests ways that our social interactions can occur which then nurture the development of many of the capacities for self-governance. It is this positive aspect of social interaction that will provide the foundation for my model of the well-governed person.
To summarize: the logic of the voluntarist model of autonomy follows from its initial premise. If one’s presumptive concern is socialization as interference, conditioning, or intrusion, then one’s theoretical orientation will posit the locus of one’s agency in an element of the self that is less subject to such influences as a way to overcome or transcend the effect of such influence, and reason is often presented as the preferred capacity to transcend both macro-social influences, as well as micro-social early life experiences. If this is so, then reason also is a natural candidate to fulfill the role of the ruling core of the self, since it is reason that provides the necessary degree of control over the “contingent” dimensions of the self, i.e., one’s emotions, that are affected by socialization. Therefore, emotions come to be seen as either instrumentally useful to our reasoning powers (if viewed charitably) or as threats and disrupters of our rational powers (if viewed pessimistically). For reason to operate properly, though, the psyche of the agent should be free from unconscious mental forces that then interfere with reason’s proper role and function.

Relational Critiques of the Voluntarist Model of Autonomy

The relational philosophers’ critique of the voluntarist model of autonomy begins with a distinction found in Rawls. One should distinguish between the concept of autonomy and the various particular conceptions of autonomy that are found in the current literature. The relationalists make a bold challenge to the very concept of autonomy, initially claiming that “the concept of autonomy is inherently masculinist, that it is inextricably bound up with masculine character ideals, [and] assumptions about selfhood and agency that are … problematic from a feminist perspective.”

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According to the relational theorists, this challenge calls into question the very possibility of viewing autonomy outside of, and not infected by, such “masculine” character ideals, and the character ideals at stake in their critique are those of the voluntarist model of autonomy.

There are two closely related themes that are inherent in the idea of masculine character ideals that the relationalists critique. The first is a view of autonomy as highly rationalistic. From the relationalists’ perspective, the voluntarist stance toward emotional attitudes arises from an overly rationalistic perspective on autonomous agency: “individual autonomy [in the current literature] is fundamentally individualistic and rationalistic.”

Related to this is a particular understanding of emotion and its role in the exercise of autonomy. For the voluntarist, emotions are not considered to be constitutive of autonomy. The relational critique implies a different understanding both of the operation of reason, as well as the function or role that emotions play in our reasoning process. This alternative understanding of reason is never made explicit by the relationalists, and I fill this void by offering such an alternative understanding of the operation of reason and emotion.

The second theme is the valorizing of a kind of agency defined by a perspective of isolation from others in the exercise of autonomy, which is how the voluntarists view the concept of independence. The relational philosophers argue that the view of independence in much of the current literature on autonomy is premised on the idea of self-sufficiency and self-reliance (understood in a particular way) as the two most central elements of autonomous agency, and they oppose this trend because (on their view) it forsakes the idea that we are all socially interconnected in indissoluble ways. The rationalistic bias of the voluntarist model is destructive to the conception of self-governance because self-governance is not a solitary activity but is achieved and sustained in and through our relationships with others, which then requires the proper kinds of emotional bonds,

such as trust and loyalty, as the basis for our autonomous existence. As we will see in the following analysis, though, these two themes are closely interrelated and sometimes difficult to separate out from each other because one’s attitude toward reason and emotion is related to how one views our relationships with others in the exercise of autonomy.

According to the relational theorists, the voluntarists’ emphasis on rationality leads to a particularly objectionable perspective on human social interaction, because once the emphasis is placed on rational maximization, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance (inherent in the voluntarists’ model, according to the relationalists), the autonomous person’s “independence is [then] under constant threat from other (equally self-serving) individuals: hence he devises rules to protect himself from intrusion. Talk of rights, rational self-interest, expedience, and efficiency permeates his moral, social and political discourse. In short, there [is] a gradual alignment of autonomy with individualism.”52 This is where the political roots of the concept of autonomy tend to distort its meaning when applied to persons because when the Greeks applied the term autonomy to city-states, they had in mind a political sovereignty that was not hindered in its internal policies by outside forces. What happens, though, when one translates this original political usage to the realm of individuals is that “we analogously demand independence (of the right sort) from another person.”53

This is a particular strain of the voluntarist model of autonomy, and relational philosophers fear the tendency to view human autonomous agency in these terms because, from their perspective: 1) it “supports valuing substantive independence over all other values,” 2) it “promotes a very stripped-down conception of agents as atomistic bearers of rights,” 3) it “suggests that values, social practices, relationships, and communities that are based on cooperation and interdependence

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53 Bernard Berofsky, Liberation from Self, p. 9.
threaten, or at least compromise, autonomy,”⁵⁴ and 4) it tends to de-value the normative role that emotions play in depictions of autonomy. The end goal of this critique is to relinquish the grip that the “proper” use of reason (as understood by the voluntarists) has exerted on conceptions of autonomy and to place priority on relations of care and dependency and the emotional reality that underlies such relationships. The relational philosophers emphasize our interconnections, through which we come to understand and recognize our mutual interdependence, not our capacity for isolation, and it is this emphasis on interconnection and mutual interdependence that forms the foundation of the relationalists’ critique of the voluntarist model of autonomy.

In terms of independence, the relationalists are concerned with the lack of attention paid by the voluntarists to conditions of trust, loyalty, friendship, and caring that arise out of relationships of mutual dependence.⁵⁵ Therefore, their concern is with the voluntarists’ de-emphasizing the emotional attitudes of the autonomous agent, but this also then has implications for how the voluntarists view our social condition. Their concern is that this de-emphasis of emotion leads to a view of autonomy that insists on self-sufficiency and self-reliance as the defining characteristic of the exercise of independence because emotion forms the basis of the kind of bonds between persons that go beyond simple contracting with others to provide one’s food or shelter, which then tends to reinforce the view of independence as separation from others in the exercise of one’s autonomy. Emotion forms the bond of trust and loyalty, which then forms a foundation of how the relationalists view the concept of autonomy. By ignoring emotion, the relational philosophers contend that the voluntarist model robs the autonomous agent of her necessary social condition: “The term ‘relational autonomy’ … is … an … umbrella term, designating a range of related

⁵⁵ MacKenzie and Stoljar, “Introduction,” p. 6: “[the voluntarist view of the autonomous self] supports valuing substantive independence over all other values, in particular those arising from relations of interdependence, such as trust, loyalty, friendship, caring, and responsibility.”
perspectives. These perspectives are premised on a shared conviction, the conviction that persons are socially embedded. In this way, emotion and our sociality are intertwined in the relationalists’ critique of the voluntarist model of autonomy.

The charge made by the relationalists is that the character ideal of rational self-sufficient independence functions both descriptively and prescriptively to promote a particular conception of autonomy. On their view: “the descriptive premise on which the character ideal is based is the notion that human beings are capable of leading self-sufficient, isolated, independent lives.” From this descriptive premise, the relationalists argue that a further normative ideal is then set in place (that one should strive for such personal characteristics), and it is this normative ideal of rational self-sufficient independence that is the target of their theorizing. Lorraine Code caricatures this trend in the following way: “Autonomous man is – and should be – self-sufficient, independent, and self-reliant, a self-realizing individual who directs his efforts towards maximizing his personal gains.”

In the end, the relationalists do not wish to abandon the concept of autonomy but, rather, “to explore the possibilities for anti-individualistic conceptions of autonomy.” The relational theorists’ goal is to develop “models of critical reflection that are consistent with a relational conception of subjectivity.” The thrust of the relationalists’ critique of the voluntarist model of autonomy is that autonomy need not be based on the kinds of normative assumptions about the “proper” use of reason adopted by the voluntarists. From the relationalists’ perspective, what is needed is “to

58 MacKenzie and Stoljar, “Introduction,” p. 3: “the goal of human life is the realization of self-sufficiency and individuality.”
develop notions of autonomy based on richer, more psychically complex, and more diverse conceptions of agents.”

This will be the thrust of the critique of the voluntarist model, and it will form the fundamental premise of my positive account of self-governance.

**Sociality, Reason, and Emotion:**

The central issue of the critique of the voluntarist model of autonomy is how to understand ourselves properly as social creatures: the idea that “man is by nature a political animal.”

The critique of the voluntarists centers around what the relationalists have labeled the vexed relationship between autonomy and socialization, i.e. how to understand autonomy properly given the fact of social influence. For the relational critique to work, there ought to be a way to understand autonomy in a way that incorporates a positive view of our social nature.

Our social nature is reflected in the fact that we are embedded within webs of relationships, but instead of viewing this condition as a potential threat to one’s autonomy (or, more neutrally, as not being constitutive of autonomy), the relationalists offer a way of seeing the potential for positive social influence. The relational perspective contains the possibility, following Aristotle, that “[i]t makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference.”

Who we become as persons, then, in particular our capacity for rational thought and critical self-reflection, is not strictly controlled by the agent herself but necessarily arises out of the mutually interdependent interactions we have with important others, as a form of emotional recognition.

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65 While it is true that the relational philosophers do not talk in terms of emotional recognition, it is not alien to their tenor
social condition is precisely what the voluntarists are wary of in developing their theories of autonomy because it places too much emphasis on “contingent” elements of who we are, i.e., our emotions.

The relational philosophers contend, though, that it matters how we are trained in our emotional responses to situations: “the agent’s social environment is crucial to the agent’s ability to recognize and develop her important potentialities.” The relationalists further contend that part of these important potentialities is the development of “emotional receptivity and perceptiveness.” because our emotional perspectives are at the core of how we both interpret the meaning of situations, as well as assign value to those situations. Philosophers such as Plato did not have a context within which to understand this dual importance of our emotional attitudes, but we do, and

of thought, and it will become a central theme in the positive account of self-governance that I present in chapter 5. We are each vulnerable in our need to be recognized at the level of our deepest affect, i.e., our most centrally important emotional states or perspectives. It is this “being ‘understood’ in the deepest sense [and] ‘feeling felt’ by another person” at the level of our deepest affect that constitutes the act of mutual recognition that sets the stage for the mature, independent agent at the heart of autonomy. Daniel Siegel, The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are, [New York: The Guilford Press], 1999, p. 70. What I want to accomplish in this dissertation is to fuse the idea of autonomy with the idea of our emotional selves, and to explain and argue for why our emotional selves are critical to autonomy. This concept is central to my account of autonomy and will recur frequently throughout the rest of this dissertation.

MacKenzie and Stoljar, p. 17.

MacKenzie and Stoljar, p. 18. In a line of thought descended from Plato, the critique of the voluntarists emphasizes a certain kind of education that occurs (mostly) in childhood and is centrally concerned with the development of our emotional capacities. The relationalist emphasis is that the basis of our interconnection with others is primarily emotional in nature, in that emotion forms both the medium and the content of our formative interactions with others. This emphasis on emotion has been recognized since Plato:

“I maintain that the earliest sensations that a child feels in infancy are of pleasure and pain, and this is the route by which virtue and vice first enter the soul … I call ‘education’ the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and affection, pain and hatred, that well up in his soul are channeled in the right courses before he can understand the reason why. Then when he does understand, his reason and his emotions agree in telling him that he has been properly trained by inculcation of appropriate habits. Virtue is the general concord of reason and emotion. But there is one element that you could isolate in any account you give, and this is the correct formation of our feelings of pleasure and pain, which makes us hate what we ought to hate from first to last, and love what we ought to love. Call this ‘education’, and I, at any rate, think you would be giving it its proper name.” Plato, Laws II, 653a-653c, in Plato: Complete Works, John Cooper (ed.), [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co.], 1997, p. 1344.

The relationalists’ critique of the voluntarists makes explicit what is only implied in this quote, i.e., that the education at issue here is primarily affective in nature. In this sense, they pick up on a strand of thought begun by Plato but left largely unanalyzed by him (and by most other philosophers until very recently).

How emotion relates to interpretation and meaning is explored in greater detail later in the chapter.

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How emotion relates to interpretation and meaning is explored in greater detail later in the chapter.
it is provided by the theory of personality development found in the intersubjective psychology literature, which I will use as the basis of this analysis and critique of the voluntarists. What’s at stake in this analysis is Gerald Dworkin’s insight of the importance of distinguishing between ways of influencing a person’s development so that one’s critical self-reflective capacities can develop and mature versus ways of influencing a person such that those same capacities are diminished or constricted.\(^\text{69}\) It is this possibility of positive social influence that is one of the distinguishing characteristics between the relational philosophers and the voluntarists.

This emphasis on the possibility of positive social influence leads to a further emphasis on emotion\(^\text{70}\) because social influence is often achieved through our emotional attitudes. It is this emphasis on emotion that is critical to counter the voluntarist model of rationality (i.e., a rationality abstracted away from “bodily” inclinations or conditions, such as our emotions). The voluntarist model of rationality is supposed to perform two vital functions: a) to transcend the influence of our social existence, and/or b) to correct any wayward internal impulses.\(^\text{71}\) Reason cannot simply rise above or override one’s emotional attitudes or perspectives (at least not in all cases).\(^\text{72}\) What the voluntarists tend to assume, similar to Plato, is that there exists a faculty of the soul, i.e., reason, which allows the individual to chart a course whose path is dictated solely by that faculty (the


\(^{70}\) What we must come to understand, and give a plausible account of, is how a child comes to “rightly object to what is shameful, hating it while he’s still young and unable to grasp the reason, but having been educated in this way, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of his kinship with himself.” Plato, *Republic*, G.M.A. Grube (trans.), [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co.], 1992, 402a. In contrast to the voluntarists, the relational model of autonomy emphasizes the development of certain agential capacities that arise in our emotional relationships with our primary caregivers, and in doing so, it follows the dictum of intersubjective psychology that “childhood is an apprenticeship in the creation of the mind, and one’s caretakers are the masters of the guild.” Donnel, Stern, *Partners in Thought: Working with Unformulated Experience, Dissociation, and Enactment*, [New York]: Routledge, 2010, p. 154.

\(^{71}\) See Chapter 1 for a further discussion of this idea.

\(^{72}\) I recognize, clearly, that reason, at times, does seem to operate in this way, but what the intersubjective psychology literature teaches us is that reason’s control over “wayward” emotional impulses is rather limited in its scope and cannot be relied upon as a foundation of one’s view of autonomy. This is so because reason and emotion should not be thought of as separate entities. Rather, they operate in conjunction with each other, with one element of our thinking process informing the other in a mutually reinforcing way.
charioteer whose function is to rule the other parts of the soul). The relationalists contend that this view of persons is false and, further, that this has consequences for a theory of autonomy: “conceptualizing agents as emotional, embodied, desiring, creative, and feeling, as well as rational, creatures highlights the importance to autonomy of features of agents that have received little discussion in the literature, such as memory, imagination, and emotional dispositions and attitudes.”

This criticism of the voluntarist model of autonomy asserts that the operation of reason must be understood in much broader terms. Therefore, if self-governance relies on such a capacity, then we have no hope of ever achieving such a self-governing state. Norman Care has addressed this point in the following way by critiquing what he labels the “in-control agent.” Care has characterized such socially conditioned (emotional) responses as being tied down by what he labels “unmanageable internal factors.” On Care’s view, these arise within the agent as a result of two associated conditions: 1) one’s internal make-up, and 2) “problematic events” in our past interactions with important others: “the events I have been concerned with are problematic events (e.g., wrongdoings) that come to be in a person’s past not clearly as a function of his or her will (they are not deliberate wrongdoings) and not clearly as a function of the will of others (they are not coerced wrongdoings) but more nearly as a result of collisions between (1) factors internal to the person but over which his or her control is either nil or, at best, controversial, and (2) the moral personalities of others.”

This existence of a “flawed past” within the person then creates the real possibility that the individual is simply trapped with the situation of one’s personality as it has been created by others.

73 Mackenzie and Stoljar, p. 21.
74 Norman Care, Living with One’s Past: Personal Fates and Moral Pain, [Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield, Inc.], 1996, p. 70.
75 Care, Living with One’s Past, pp. 26-27.
thus wresting control over that personality away from the agent: “there are aspects of character that are so salient in one’s makeup, so fixed as a matter of practical fact, that the prospect of changing them … is tantamount to the prospect of changing one’s identity at the deepest level.”76 If one rejects the notion that a person can be tied down by such unmanageable internal factors, then one has understood persons as the kind of self-sufficient and self-reliant agents at the heart of the voluntarist model of autonomy (what Care has characterized as an in-control agent), i.e., persons who are able to transcend their pasts and rise above the vagaries of internal psychology and social influence to meet the challenges of life head on. The critique of this view is that we are not able to rise above our social condition in the way envisioned (i.e., through a solitary effort of will or intellect) because our rational capacities do not operate in this way. Our perceptual and motivational states are not inherently under one’s complete (rational) control. They are configured through implicit memory, which is formed through our interactions with others and which depends on our emotional responses to those around us.

The critique of a rationality that is abstracted away from one’s emotional perspectives (what Kant called a “pure” rationality), is a central concern of much of the current philosophical literature on the nature of emotions, particularly from Robert Solomon, Cheshire Calhoun, and Robin Dillon. I will use elements of their analyses of emotion to offer a revised way of understanding the nature of emotion and its relationship to reason. The ultimate point of this aspect of the critique of the voluntarist model is that the aim of autonomy should not be to focus on overcoming our emotional dispositions (as in the charioteer image) but to find ways to live well with them. Instead of doing

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76 Care, *Living with One’s Past*, p. 28. This is the problem of socialization that was introduced in the previous chapter.
this, philosophers have tended to rely on an idealized conception of reason that does not actually fit the reality of the human soul.\textsuperscript{77}

**Critique of Detached Rationality:**

A detached rationality is one that is thought to operate, when necessary, separately from the influence of one’s emotional attitudes and perspectives. The purpose for proposing such a rational capacity is to offset the perceived lack of control that agents generally have toward their emotional responses. The critique of this view of rationality centers on how one understands cognition. In the past, cognition has been most often understood as being conscious and capable of being articulated by the agent in propositional form. Such propositional attitudes, though, are but one form that cognition can take. There are many other forms of understanding that do not require the kind of conscious, articulable components of the traditional view of cognition.

Dillon expresses this idea under her umbrella term “experiential understanding,”\textsuperscript{78} which she defines as “experiencing something directly and feeling the truth of what is experienced.”\textsuperscript{79} The central insight of this way of thinking about cognition is that propositional attitudes no longer form the exclusive basis for making judgments about reality. What is at stake in this view is the notion that our understanding of the world need not be restricted to traditionally understood, rational, consciously held beliefs. We can garner and process relevant information about the world through other, non-reflective and tacitly felt means, and the seat of such understanding is found in our emotional capacities.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{77} For a similar perspective, see Jonathan Lear, “Ironic Soul,” p. 2.
\textsuperscript{79} Dillon, “Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political,” p. 239.
\textsuperscript{80} “… emotions [can] encode non-propositional understandings that are at odds with … explicit beliefs and judgments but in ways that do not involve gross irrationality.” Dillon, “Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political,” p. 240.
This kind of non-propositional framework for interpreting and, thus, understanding, the world shapes our conscious thinking.\(^\text{81}\) This is a critical point with respect to self-governance because if such understanding is capable of operating outside of our conscious awareness, then it can “invisibly structure explicit understanding,” i.e., it can influence how we interpret our conscious experience, but in ways that are, generally, beyond our conscious reach. Therefore, our tacit understandings of the world can exist beyond our conscious control, which makes them both durable as well as not easily subject to change.\(^\text{82}\) Because of this, our emotional responses to the world can (and often do) inform our conscious (i.e., “rational”) evaluations of reality, but the descriptive claim that emotions can obstruct our rational thought processes is certainly something to which the voluntarist would agree (and, in fact, count on in crafting their theories of personal autonomy), but the relational philosophers (joined by me later in this work) make a different claim, which is that one cannot will oneself out of such emotionally-influenced thinking. This suggests that, for the purposes of a theory of personal autonomy, relying on this understanding of rationality is untenable – for our rational and explicit understandings of the world are often mingled with these pre-reflective and non-propositional ways of understanding the world, especially at the times of choice that voluntarists stress are central to autonomy.\(^\text{83}\)

But this critique of detached rationality recognizes that even with a positive epistemic role to be played by our emotions, emotion can, as Dillon recognizes, “persist even after sound reasoning and securely anchored true belief that ought to dispel it are brought to bear on it. And an emotion

\(^{81}\) “… our ways of being in the world implicitly involve multiply layered sets of presuppositions that constitute non-propositional frameworks for interpreting the world. They shape conscious experience and can conflict with avowed beliefs and judgments.” Dillon, “Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political,” p. 240.

\(^{82}\) “… this implicit understanding is resistant to modification through reflection, criticism, or reconceptualization.” Dillon, “Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political,” p. 240.

\(^{83}\) “… judgments are not necessarily articulate or conscious and so the sorts of discriminations we make and the construals that we perform are sometimes (often) made without our awareness of, much less reflection on, our doing so.” Solomon, “Emotions, Thoughts, and Feelings,” p. 87.
need contain no false belief or judgment for it to be unreasonable in this way.”84 The question that arises from this insight is how such recalcitrant emotions are produced and why they persist despite reason’s best attempts to dispel them?

This is precisely what gives emotions a bad name in the voluntarists’ eyes. If “emotions are themselves cognitive sets, interpretive frameworks, [or] patterns of attention,”85 and if those cognitive sets are held pre-reflectively and therefore out of conscious reach, then we’ve broadened our understanding of cognition greatly; but this opens up the possibility that our conscious evaluations of situations are not entirely subject to our conscious control.86 This critique makes an even stronger claim, though. It asserts that our pre-reflective judgments form the greater part of our cognitive life and that this unarticulated, foundational structure of our cognition often is at odds with our articulated and conscious beliefs. This statement is one to which the voluntarists could agree, but the critique of the voluntarist view of reason is that such emotional influences cannot be overridden through a process of rational willing.87 If this is true, then relying on a detached rationality in one’s theory of personal autonomy is suspect.

Emotional responses in general (on the voluntarist stance) are then blamed for creating seemingly involuntary ways of interpreting the world. The voluntarists have a different understanding of the nature of emotions, which has a long pedigree in the history of philosophy. The presumption remains, since the time of Plato, that the “lower” part of the soul, which are our

86 “[Our] cognitive sets … need not form part of [our] belief system. [Our] belief system comprises a set of reflectively held, articulable judgments. [One’s] cognitive set, by contrast, is a pre-reflectively held, originally unarticulated system. [One] may or may not attain reflective, articulate awareness of this cognitive set,” which means that one’s control of these cognitive sets is diminished greatly. Calhoun, “Cognitive Emotions?” p. 244 (emphasis in original).
87 “our cognitive life is not limited to clear, fully conceptualized, articulated beliefs. Instead, beliefs constitute only a small illuminated portion of that life. The greater portion is rather a dark, cognitive set, an unarticulated framework for interpreting our world, which, if articulated, would be an enormous network of claims not all of which would be accepted by the individual as his beliefs.” Calhoun, “Cognitive Emotions?” p. 244.
emotions, is lacking any kind of unity or organization, which means that a life influenced by such internal forces often becomes a disorganized mess. The supposedly disorganized nature of our emotional perspectives sets the stage for devaluing emotions as reliable interpreters of our conscious experience, since they then seem to have a direction of fit that requires the world to comport to the way the emotion (and not necessarily the agent) interprets the world, which may not reflect how the world truly is.

The critique of this understanding of rationality offers a more nuanced and realistic conception of emotion which is centered on the idea that our emotional perspectives are not always distortions to our reasoning processes. With regard to the choices that are of concern in self-governance, we can develop and maintain a capacity for agency with respect to our emotional attitudes, which can then broaden the scope of choice involved in self-governance. If this is true, then our emotional responses can form a legitimate foundation of our self-governing choices.

**Conclusion:**

This chapter has presented an outline, and offered a critique, of the voluntarist model of autonomy. This critique has centered around the idea that each of the key dimensions of the voluntarist model utilizes reason as the core (indeed, near exclusive) capacity needed to express and exhibit one’s autonomy, and it is this characterization of reason that is at the heart of the relational critique of the voluntarist model. In their opposition to the voluntarist model, the relationalists contend that reason should not be understood as comprising only consciously held, articulable propositions, beliefs, or judgments about reality. Much of our “reasoning” occurs below the level of conscious awareness as a pre-linguistic capacity of persons. As such, reason includes non-reflective and tacitly felt means of understanding reality. Cognition, then, on the psychological approach to

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emotion presented earlier in the chapter, involves both consciously held propositional attitudes, as well as non-propositional “emotional” understandings. The latter are capable of shaping our conscious thinking by invisibly structuring explicit understanding and interpretation. However, such “experiential understanding” can resist modification through “rational” reflection and analysis.

This is one of the central complaints that the voluntarists have with regard to emotion, though, because emotion then seems to obstruct the proper or effective use of reason. The psychologically-informed approach to emotion found in Dillon and Solomon, though, argues that emotions need not act as impediments to reason, but in fact, they can act as an essential component of our reasoning processes (if properly developed through a process of interaction with others). This view of reason suggests that we rarely reason separately from emotional perspectives and, further, that emotional perspectives can help inform our reasoning in productive ways in regard to self-governance.

The voluntarist understanding of the operation of reason also implies, according to the relational philosophers, that the locus of our autonomous agency is to be found strictly within the individual and not, properly speaking, in our relations with others. In this sense, independence, on the voluntarist model, is both a capacity to transcend social influence as well as an ability to control the (potentially) wayward influence of one’s emotions. On this model, attachment to others, while possible, is not central to the proper exercise of autonomy.

In the end, the voluntarist model of autonomy, while it offers some compelling insights into our functioning as self-directing beings, is an incomplete theory of self-governance. What the voluntarist fails to acknowledge explicitly is the positive role that social influence can play in both the development and continued exercise of the capacities that are central to autonomy. There is the possibility of a thick notion of social influence on the voluntarist model, and some voluntarists have
offered ways of understanding our social existence that further our ability to self-govern, but for many voluntarists, while the possibility for positive social influence is present, it is not explored in any detail. Voluntarists can accept the idea of positive social influence with regard to the capacities central to autonomy, but accepting and embracing are two very different attitudes to bring to bear on the problem of socialization. The voluntarists largely “accept” the role that positive socialization might play, but it still remains largely undeveloped as a theme in their theories. Further, without any attempt to explore the complex nature of socialization and its potential positive influence on our capacities for self-governance, the voluntarists also miss the possibility of understanding the substantive role that emotion can play in our reasoning processes.

The next chapter explores the relationship between emotions, reason, and our social interactions in greater detail by following the progression of thought in the psychological literature since the time of Freud. This analysis will provide a basis for understanding how our emotional capacities, our reasoning, and our social influences and interactions are interrelated. In doing so, it sets the foundation for how to understand properly the capacities that will be central to my positive account of self-governance found in Chapter 5.
Chapter 3: The Intersubjective Turn in Psychology

Introduction:

In the last chapter, we saw a trend in philosophy where our social and emotional nature is placed at the forefront of the theoretical emphasis with regard to self-governance. There is a parallel trend in psychology.\(^\text{89}\) However, where the trend in philosophy has taken its first, tentative steps in the direction of recognizing the importance of our social condition and the role that emotions can play in our lives (through the theories of the relational philosophers), psychology has embraced and developed this notion in even more sophisticated detail. In this chapter, I will outline the older, Freudian psychological model and then compare it with more recent developments in the field of psychology. In the older Freudian model, there are significant shared similarities with the voluntarist view of autonomous agency. Similar to the efforts of the relational philosophers, the newer developments and insights offered by the intersubjective psychologists move beyond the older, received model (in this case that of Freud) and will, ultimately, provide a fertile foundation for re-conceptualizing some of the familiar capacities at the heart of self-governance. I will use this further progress in the field of psychology to get at the basic philosophical issue of what it means to be a well-governed person. This chapter, then, is about outlining in detail the intersubjective perspective.

The relational philosophers have begun the process of making the turn in the direction of recognizing the importance of our social condition and the role that emotions can play in self-governance, but they have only proceeded but so far in this analysis. This chapter will also explain how the relational philosophers, in the end, fail to move as far as they had expected from the voluntarist model of autonomy. The end of the chapter will examine how the relationalists tend to recapitulate many of the theories of autonomous agency that they seek to repudiate because of their

\(^{89}\) The emphasis in the psychological literature, obviously, is not on autonomy but on agency in general.
emphasis on the role that oppressive social norms play in obstructing the ability of women to achieve the status of autonomy. Given the limitations of the relatinalists’ analysis, there will still remain the task of answering the following question: How are we to use the positive insights of the intersubjective psychological perspective to aid in understanding the nature of self-governance? The beginning of the answer to this question will be found in the analysis of the recognition theories of self-realization examined in the next chapter.

**The Myth of the Isolated Mind**

As discussed in the last chapter, Plato presents a view of persons as guided solely by reason (ideally), where one’s emotions, and the propensity for desires to motivate one to pursue objects here and now, need to be reined in by the force of reason if the person is to achieve its proper Form, or essence. Plato is the beginning of the view that the mind is distinct from its natural environment, as well as the animated body, but it is not just in the philosophical community that we see this kind of account of persons. There is a parallel trend in the philosophical and psychological literature to see the person in isolation from its physical and social environment. The beginning of this view in the psychological literature is with Freud. Therefore, examining the Freudian account of persons provides a powerful tool for understanding the nature, scope, and extent of the voluntarist model of autonomy, as well as providing a means for evaluating its limitations.

**The Freudian Model**

The voluntarist model of autonomy is not solely the possession of the philosophical community. It has permeated psychoanalytic theory as well: “The assumptions of traditional psychoanalysis have been pervaded by the Cartesian doctrine of the isolated mind. This doctrine bifurcates the subjective world of the person into outer and inner regions, reifies and absolutizes the resulting separation … and pictures the mind as an objective entity that takes its place among other
objects, a ‘thinking thing’ that has an inside with contents [which then] looks out on an external world from which it is essentially estranged. This view arose originally in the psychoanalytic tradition out of Freud’s conception of the human psyche as principally an energy disposing machine, channeling drive energies emerging endogenously within the organism. On Freud’s view, the organization of our experiences is ultimately the product of internal forces, with the individual mind regarded as insulated and impersonal because it is isolated from its social context.

Freud built his theory of the human psyche around the idea of the drives, and for this reason, he called his original theoretical constructions ‘depth psychology’ because he thought he was probing to the very depths of our most intimate and fundamental mental processes and the intricacies of our biological nature. It’s not as though Freud considered our relations with others to be insignificant, it’s simply that he considered drives to be the pre-eminent psychological force in the human psyche. This pre-occupation with the drives, though, pervaded his thinking and established a set of assumptions about persons that deeply influenced his subsequent thought, and it is these assumptions that created the model of the human psyche as an isolated entity, with the influence of others being important but only to the degree that such influence imprinted itself on the operation of the individual’s drives.

Freud’s concept of the person was driven, in part, by practical considerations. It was the individual person who was the subject of the psychoanalytic session, and therefore, it was impossible

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92 Stolorow and Atwood, Contexts of Being, p. 12.
93 Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory, [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press], 1983, p. 3: “The early development of psychoanalytic theory was built around the concept of drive. Freud’s research took him into what he regarded as the “depths” of human experience, the impulses that were the manifestation of man’s biological nature … which provide[d] the goals of all mental activity.”
94 “He did not consider relations with the external world and other people unimportant, but his investigation of drives and their vicissitudes seemed more important, more pressing.” Greenberg and Mitchell, Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory, p. 3.
to bring into the analytic situation all of the other persons who could have had some influence on the patient in their lifetime. Therefore, Freud tended to deny that others’ influence was of critical importance for how the psychoanalytic session was conducted: “The unit of study of psychoanalysis [in the drive model] is the individual, viewed as a discrete entity. Man is not, in Aristotle’s terms, a ‘political animal’.”

Freud, though, went much further in his assertion of the individualized nature of the person. He claimed that it was necessary to view the adult individual absolutely divorced from his or her social circumstances because society encountered an adult that was already fully formed. As Greenberg and Mitchell have pointed out, on Freud’s view the adult individual “does not require a social organization to allow him to realize his true human potential. Society is imposed on an already complete individual for his protection, but at the cost of renunciation of many of his most important personal goals. It is thus possible and even necessary to speak of a person divorced from his interpersonal context.” Social interaction, therefore, is not only irrelevant to individual psychological development; it’s a hindrance that limits the scope of human development. The individual, therefore, becomes enclosed within itself in Freud’s model of the self and operates fully insulated from external social interaction because its sole motivating force is the internal world of the drives. On Freud’s view of the self, “[t]he origin of every human activity can be traced ultimately to the demands of drive, although a full explanation of behavior requires that we include an analysis of the forces which oppose its pressures.”

95 Greenberg and Mitchell, Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory, p. 44.
96 Greenberg and Mitchell, Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory, p. 44.
97 It is true, though, that psychoanalysis is a social interaction, but it is an artificial social interaction in that it is guided by the scientific principles outlined by Freud and his followers. Its goal is to reform the individual patient and to cure the patient of his or her neuroses, but it is not akin to the kind of social interaction that one would typically think of between persons in general.
98 Greenberg and Mitchell, Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory, p. 44.
In Freudian theory, the larger social and cultural context of the individual is underemphasized. It becomes a veneer, superimposed in some generally attenuated way upon the deeper, more ‘natural’ fundamentals of the human psyche, i.e., the drives, and it is this concept of the drive that motivates Freud’s view of the person: “Freud’s concept of ‘drive,’ perfectly consistent with the intellectual currents of his own time, was of an endogenous force of nature, pushing from within, that only secondarily comes into interaction with the external world.”

It’s not that Freud ignored interactions with others, but the importance of such interactions was understood solely in terms of its influence on the internally encased drive: “Relations with others are not ignored, but interpreted in terms of, in some sense reduced to, internal mental events vis-à-vis internally arising, drive-related processes.”

The reason that Freud’s emphasis on drives make the self a solitary and self-contained unit is because “past relations with others are contained in psychic structures; they have become absorbed into and function as forces within the individual psyche.”

The mental life of the individual, therefore, arises exclusively from within, and even if that internal life is in some way causally influenced by persons external to the individual, persons in the external social environment don’t have a necessary function to play in the operation of the individual psyche. With Freud and the rise of the drive model of mind “psychoanalysis became definitively intrapsychic, and mental life was understood to arise in each individual, monadic mind, drawn only secondarily into relations with others. Other people were what Freud called ‘accidental’ factors, attaining importance only through serendipitous linkage with drives.”

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100 Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, p. 100.
On this view, the individual self collapses in on itself and becomes a self-enclosed, insulated, self-sufficient, and independent self, which then fuels the already existing myth of our culture, that we are essentially isolated beings, where social connection is something to bear and concede, but not something to embrace or encourage. The reason for this is simple. Vulnerability is painful because it highlights our own mortality.\textsuperscript{103} This view of the self as an isolated entity has roots in Cartesian philosophy because in Descartes, certainty is found solely within the confines of one’s own rational and self-contained thought processes, not in connection with others.\textsuperscript{104} This normative model of the autonomous self as often times isolated from social connection stands in stark contrast with the one I will develop as the basis of my theory of self-governance because I will argue, similar to the psychoanalytic literature, that “cognition and affect, thinking and feeling, interpreting and relating—these are separable only in pathology.”\textsuperscript{105}

Freud is justly revered for his various accomplishments and the singular role that he played in establishing psychoanalysis as a viable profession. His insights into the human psyche were groundbreaking, but his psychological theories have been subject to continual evaluation and re-adjustment and have been superseded in many ways by a new generation of psychological theorists. One of the principal trends in psychological theory since the 1950’s has been an interest in the role that other persons play in “normal” psychological development, as well as the development of psychopathology. This trend in psychological theory goes by the name intersubjective psychology.

\textsuperscript{103} “[The] myth of our culture [is] an illusory, alienating image of our own existence that serves to shield us from a sense of ‘the unbearable embeddedness of being’ that is, from an excruciating feeling of our own human finiteness, dependency, and mortality” which then protects us from “an otherwise intolerable feeling of vulnerability to the human surround.” Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange, \textit{Worlds of Experience}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{104} “[I]n Descartes’ philosophy, certainty and security are finally found, not in relationships with other human beings but rather in the isolated workings of [one’s] own mind, envisioned as a rational, self-contained, self-sufficient entity.” Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange, \textit{Worlds of Experience}, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{105} Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange, \textit{Worlds of Experience}, p. 15.
The Intersubjective Psychological Perspective

There is a growing tendency within intersubjective psychology theory, reflected in the work of Sullivan, Winnicott, Bromberg, Chodorow and others, to “object to the focus on the person, the psyche within classical psychoanalytic theorizing, arguing that this establishes an artificial and misleading basis for viewing human experience, rending it from its relational setting.”\footnote{Greenberg and Mitchell, Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory, p. 177 (emphasis in original).} Sullivan, as one of the progenitors of interpersonal psychoanalysis, was one of the first to focus on this interconnected view of persons, arguing that “one cannot understand a personality in isolation. The only meaningful context for grasping the fundamentals of human experience is…the ‘interpersonal field.’”\footnote{Greenberg and Mitchell, Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory, p. 177 (emphasis in original).} It is the interpersonal field that defines our social existence: what, in Aristotle, would be termed “a social animal” – a (zoon politikon).

For intersubjective psychologists, such as Fairbairn, the essential striving of the child is not for pleasure, as it is in Freud, but for attachment, and this reflects (and creates) an indissoluble need of the child: “if the other is available for gratifying, pleasurable exchange, the child will enter into pleasurable activities. If the parent offers only painful, unfulfilling contacts, the child does not abandon the parent to search for more pleasurable opportunities. The child needs the parent, so he integrates his relations with him on a suffering, masochistic basis.”\footnote{Greenberg and Mitchell, Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory, p. 173 (emphasis added).} On this view, the child must adapt to the caregiver no matter how mal-adaptively the caregiver responds to the child. The child does not have the capacity to decide that this relationship is not optimal for his or her development. What the child “knows” is that it is absolutely dependent on the caregiver for its very survival. Adaptation to the caregiver, therefore, is seen as a matter of survival, of life and death, and therefore, whatever the response from the caregiver toward the child, the child must adapt to the caregiver in the best possible way, no matter what the emotional or psychological cost to the child.
Winnicott noticed that “in psychoanalytic writings and in the vast literature that has been influenced by Freud there can be found a tendency to dwell either on a person’s life as it relates to [external] objects or else on the inner life of the individual.”109 What Winnicott focused on was a transitional space, between ‘mother’ and child, which was not dominated by either one. In this space, the child can notice that he or she can make things happen but also realizes that the ‘mother’ exerts a significant amount of influence on the outcome of events. What Winnicott argued is that during the separation and individuation phase of development, a shared space between persons can be created wherein the “child can begin to recognize an area between himself and others that is not under his magical control, but which he nevertheless shapes and effects.”110 In Bromberg’s analysis this same phenomenon is described as “a space uniquely relational and still uniquely individual; a space belonging to neither person alone, and yet, belonging to both and to each.”111

This shared space is the beginning of the realization for the child of the extent to which reality can be co-constructed between persons and shared by each because each participant to this space has a degree of control and influence over what happens there. Therefore, such a shared space suggests strongly that the process of influence from caregiver to child is not a simple causal influence, where the caregiver exerts a force on the child without any possibility of reciprocal pressure being brought to bear on the relationship by the child. Significantly, even though this space is often the site of conflict and struggle between the mother and child, it is also the site where the child can look for the hope of repair and reconciliation from those periods of inevitable conflict and strife. It is the place where relationships are built and re-built continually over time.

*The Creation of Personal Meaning:*

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110 Hoechst, p. 44.
The intersubjective psychology perspective takes it as a brute fact of our existence that “interpersonal experiences directly influence how we mentally construct reality.” What one should notice about this suggestion is that we each construct our own sense of reality, which means that we each construct the meaning of a given situation for ourselves, but we don’t do so “rationally.” We co-construct the meanings of life’s events through an emotional lens. The way that we assign value to a particular circumstance is through our emotional reactions to that circumstance, and the primary way we evaluate value is through our emotional reactions to situations.

What’s more, this process of emotional co-construction of meaning is intrinsically interpersonal, in that it depends on various patterns of interaction between the caregiver and the child. The place that one’s emotional responses occupy is seen from the fact that “from the beginning of life, emotion constitutes both the process and the content of communication between infant and caregiver.” Therefore, the foundation of our evaluations and interpretations arises, necessarily, from our earliest interpersonal relationships (which are emotional at their core), and the end product of our emotional interactions is the creation of personal meaning.

Meaning is critical to understanding agency in general because meaning is the foundation of the perspective one has in evaluating or interpreting situations, and perspective is what drives us, universally, in our actions and forms the basis of how we think about situations. One way to put

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112 Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, p. 4.
113 “The appraisal of stimuli and the creation of meaning are central functions of the mind that occur with the arousal process of emotion. Incoming stimuli are appraised for their value,” Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, p. 139 (emphasis in the original).
114 “… emotion reflects the fundamental way in which the mind assigns value to external and internal events.” Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, p. 245.
115 “Different patterns of child-parent attachment are associated with differing … ways of seeing the world, and … the communication of emotion may be the primary means by which these attachment experiences shape the developing mind.” Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, p. 4.
117 “… unique personal meaning is created by the specificity of our emotional responses.” Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, p. 252.
118 Personal conversation with Patrick Kilcarr, Ph.D.
this is that our value concerns come out in our interpretations. There is more to this analysis, though, than a simple developmental story. Our emotional vulnerability to others is a pre-requisite and constitutive element of what it is to be distinctively human, in an on-going way. We have a need to fit emotionally with others throughout the course of our lives, and this creates a continuing process of dependency and mutual interdependence that we cannot escape.

Meaning, or perspective, for each individual is usually created in emotional terms through an intricate web of social interactions. Meaning is often the result of combining conceptual resources with emotional attitudes and perspectives. In such cases, emotions and concepts fuse to create meaning, what Solomon has characterized as “judgments of the body.” Therefore, in the situations of our everyday life where self-governance is an issue, we need to talk of intellect and emotion in tandem: “Cognition and affect, thinking and feeling, interpreting and relating – these are separable only in pathology.” Emotion, then, is critical to our rational deliberations. The only way that emotion can play this role, though, is by becoming part of our cognitive architecture through a process of emotional recognition with others.

This is not a new idea. Aristotle’s conception of virtue involved both the excellence of intellect as well as the excellence of emotion, and he argued that when it came to choice, the starting point for our virtuous decision-making was a combination of our reasoning and emotions directed toward some end: “choice is deliberate desire, therefore both the reasoning must be true and the desire right.” In this way, intellect and emotion are not seen as, ultimately, separate entities in virtuous choice, but fuse in a way where it’s possible for intellect and emotion to reinforce the

120 Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange, *Worlds of Experience*, p. 15.
121 “If emotions necessarily involve judgments, then obviously they require concepts, which may be seen as socially constructed ways of organizing and making sense of the world. For this reason, emotions simultaneously are made possible and limited by the conceptual and linguistic resources of society.” Alison Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” p. 135.
operation of the other. In this way, emotions play a substantive role in virtuous choice. The term Aristotle used for this intermingling of intellect and emotion is “desiderative reason or rationcinative desire.” It is this kind of intertwined operation of reason and emotion that lies at the heart of the alternative view of reason outlined in the last chapter.

What’s more, even if our interpretive or rational perspectives are sometimes overwhelmed by our emotional attitudes (such as in rage, or grief, or fear), this is not reason, by itself, to disparage the role that emotions, in general, can play in our epistemic or moral lives: “Very bright light is blinding and often causes after-images. Very loud noise is deafening and may occasion a variety of subsequent auditory distortions … But even though the visual and auditory systems can be overwhelmed, it would be unreasonable to expect epistemology to exclude all their deliverances. Rather, we need to learn when perceptual deliverances are not to be trusted. Likewise, I suggest with emotions.” Emotions need not be denigrated as sources of realistic and important interpretations of the world, nor as sources of legitimate self-governing decisions.

One of the thorny philosophical issues involved here is what does it take for one person to enter into the subjective experience of another and understand that experience independently of the subject? Jodi Halpern has characterized this issue in the following way: “What precisely is involved when one person attempts to grasp another’s subjective experience?” She goes on to wonder, insightfully, whether such a process requires an emotional orientation or attitude: “Does this necessarily require some form of emotional engagement?” The intersubjective perspective is that the basic interconnection between selves that allows one to develop as an autonomous being is primarily an emotional connection and that emotion is the necessary framework within which to understand ourselves as intersubjective beings. Therefore, emotions serve as the basis for

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understanding both our need for interconnection, as well as the process through which that interconnection occurs.

We are mutually interdependent creatures largely because we are emotional beings, and our emotions continue to evolve within an intimate framework of personal interaction with important others; at first our parents, but then through an expanding circle of friends, peers, and others (which is why there is more to the idea of intrinsic sociality than the developmental story). People are not simply things among other things that occupy our attention. We react to the social environment in fundamentally different ways than we react to inanimate objects that we encounter. The difference between how we interact with things and how we interact with persons matters a great deal when we consider the nature of self-governance. We have special needs with regard to other persons (in a way that we don’t have special needs toward the things in our environment), and our reactions to other people reflect this nuanced complexity.

There is an intuitive appeal to the notion of the person as isolated from the kinds of influences that worry philosophers who adopt a voluntarist perspective on autonomy, e.g., coercion, manipulation, and social conditioning, among others; but this view is at odds with the emerging view of persons in the intersubjective psychology literature. For example, according to Chodorow, if one adopts the view of persons as isolated from others, then this implies that we each define ourselves in terms of what we are not, i.e., by negation. This view of persons emphasizes our difference with the other. If, however, one alters this view of the autonomous person so as to see the autonomous agent in terms of differentiation, instead of difference, then this recognizes the fact that others are not simply “not-me,” they can also then be separate persons in their own right with their own subjectivity, i.e., a “you.” This allows a more relaxed perspective of relatedness that recognizes

126 I do not mean to suggest that the voluntarist theorists commit the error of viewing persons as things. Rather, the purpose of this claim is to establish the difference between how we react to things versus persons.
127 Much of this discussion is adapted from Hoechst, pp. 32-33.
that one can both be separate from and related to another at the same time: “This view suggests that no one has a separateness consisting only of ‘me’ – ‘not-me’ distinctions. Part of myself is always that which I have taken in; we are all to some degree incorporations and extensions of others.

Differentiation is not distinctness and separateness, but a particular form of being connected to others.”

Therefore, the view of independence as separation from others in the exercise of one’s autonomy, inherent in the voluntarist model, is actually a more fragile and tenuous form of agency because it arises from a perspective that emphasizes separation between one person and another. This is a more fragile form of agency because connection with others creates possibilities for resilience to life’s challenges that are more supple and powerful than those achievable on one’s own.

An essential lesson of the intersubjective psychology literature is that the fundamental need that arises in our relations with others is “to be in synchrony with another.” This synchrony, however, is an emotional synchrony. There is a need to resonate with others on an emotional level, to be recognized by another at the level of one’s deepest affect. There are other animals that are social creatures, such as bees and wolves, but the interactions of wolves and bees aren’t driven by self-concepts or self-evaluations that are emotional at their core. For example, bees and wolves do not have a capacity for a linguistic sense of being vulnerable to others, i.e., of being shamed or shunned, of having one’s identity be dependent on the opinions of others. It is this process of emotional recognition that is part of what it is to be human. This perspective is an explicit break with the older, Freudian perspective because, as Jessica Benjamin has argued, the older Freudian theory “took for granted the impossibility of achieving recognition within the dyad; it assumed that two subjects alone could never confront each other without merging.”

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merger, or the ability (or need) to connect with others emotionally without the threat of losing one’s identity in the process that lies at the heart of the relational model of autonomy.

What is distinctively human is that we crave others’ company not simply because we are safer in a group or can accomplish things in groups that are impossible on our own, but because “we want to know that another can feel our joy or anguish, and that he or she can grasp what we are thinking.” Ultimately, what we crave is “to know that we are understood,” but such understanding is most centrally emotional in nature, it’s to know “that a friend can see from our point of view and feel from our point of view, even if those would not be her own responses to similar situations.”

What we crave psychologically is to be recognized by the other, and this recognition is emotional at its core.

If the emotional connection inherent in our early relationships is handled well, i.e., if the child has a sense of being recognized by the caregiver at the level of his or her deepest affect, then the security created within the attachment of the child to the adult caregiver allows the child to have a flexible and open relationship with her own internal emotional states which then allows her to trust the validity of her own internal emotional experience and to express her dependency on others with ease and comfort. This allows the child to take her own mind as an object of scrutiny: “If the other’s behavior … shows that [their] state of mind is emotionally and cognitively responsive to what is most affectively immediate in the child’s mind … the engagement of minds constitutes an act of recognition that allows the child to accomplish the developmental achievement of taking his own state of mind as an object of reflection.”

This is the intersubjective basis for understanding both the development and the nature of our critical self-reflective capacities. As this analysis makes clear, both the development and the nature of our critical self-reflective capacity is emotional at its core.

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132 Bromberg, p. 10. As will be shown later, this is also the basis of creating the capacity for independence.
This trust in the validity of one’s own emotional experiences allows the child to hold the mind as an object of self-reflective evaluation because if the child receives positive reinforcement, or attunement, of his or her emotional responses, i.e., if the child is recognized at the level of its deepest affect, then the child gains an ever increasing ability to symbolize those emotional experiences verbally and encode them in a way that the child can then cognitively process at need. It is this cognitive processing that then allows the child (and, eventually, the adult) to critically evaluate the nature of her own internal emotional states.

Through a process of emotional recognition, the child is able to articulate its own internal emotional responses to situations, but this is accomplished, generally, in concert with and guidance of the caregiver. This capacity to articulate one’s emotions is the basis for establishing emotion as part of one’s cognitive structure. The critical dimension of affect at issue here is its “evolution from early stages where affect is experienced simply as bodily sensation, into subjective states that can gradually be verbally articulated.” Empathically attuned responsiveness on the part of caregivers fosters the gradual integration of bodily affect into symbolically encoded meanings, which then can lead to emotions (and, therefore, one’s motivations for acting) for which the individual can become (more or less) completely aware.

This kind of “effective dependency” on others, as it is called in the intersubjective

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133 Stolorow and Atwood, *Contexts of Being*, p. 31: “The child’s affective experience...becomes increasingly differentiated and cognitively elaborated through the attuned responsiveness of caregivers to his emotional states and needs.”

134 Stolorow and Atwood, *Contexts of Being*, p. 31: “the child’s conscious experience becomes progressively articulated through the validating responsiveness of the early surround.” (emphasis in original).

135 Stolorow and Atwood, *Contexts of Being*, p. 42.

136 Stolorow and Atwood, *Contexts of Being*, p. 42: “Empathically attuned ... responsiveness fosters the gradual integration of bodily affective experiences into symbolically encoded meanings, leading eventually to the crystallization of distinct feelings.”
psychology literature (i.e., a nurturing form of dependency on others), is a kind of “independence.” Being independent, in this sense, is not to define oneself in terms of separation but to realize that we are fundamentally interconnected with others: “The more secure the central self, or ego core, the less one has to define one’s self through separateness from others. Separateness becomes, then, a more rigid, defensive, rather fragile, secondary criterion of the strength of the self and of the ‘success’ of individuation.” Independence, then, is not a condition of separation from others, but a realization of our vulnerability to others.

If one has a relaxed emotional fit with others (which then leads to a robust capacity for critical self-reflection and emotional self-awareness), then this allows for a further skill, an ease in managing situations that arouse strong emotions, which I label as emotional self-regulation: “an individual’s abilities to organize emotions – a product, in part, of earlier attachment relationships – directly shapes the ability of the mind to integrate experience and to adapt to future stressors.”

With an awareness of one’s own internal emotional states comes the possibility of regulating one’s emotional responses because the extent to which one can consciously experience one’s affective life will provide the basis for experiencing affect as part of one’s “rational” or “cognitive” faculties. If one’s emotional states are accepted and nurtured by the caregiver, then there is the possibility of experiencing affect as an integral part of one’s cognitive architecture. If this happens, then affect is integrated into one’s process of reasoning, which creates the conditions whereby affect can be subject to internal regulation or control by the agent through an intertwined operation of affect and cognition.

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139 Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, p. 4.
140 Stolorow and Atwood, *Contexts of Being*, p. 42: “The extent to which a person comes to experience affects as mind … rather than solely as body thus depends on the presence of a facilitative intersubjective context.”
The Negative Side of Social Interaction:

The discussion up to this point has assumed that the kinds of emotional interactions between caregiver and child are positive in nature, but there is also the distinct possibility that such interaction is not positive. It is important to analyze the negative side of social interaction (i.e., forms of emotional misrecognition) because it is often through such forms of negative social interaction that unconscious motivational states are produced. These, as we shall see in Chapter 5, can be significant impediments to the exercise of self-governance.

When social interaction between the caregiver and child is negative, the result is often the formation of unconscious motivations. There are, principally, two forms of derailment to this process, each involving a lack of emotional recognition on the part of caregivers, and each resulting in its own unique pattern of unconscious mental processing. Affect can fail to evolve from mere bodily sensation\(^{141}\) to a more cognitively integrated conscious experience for two basic reasons: 1) there is an absence of validating responsiveness or attunement from caregivers (e.g., affect is ignored), or 2) affect is experienced as intolerable because it is met with rejection or is perceived to be injurious to the relationship with the caregiver (true repression). These are cases of affect misrecognition, and each of these failures in emotional responsiveness corresponds to a unique form of unconscious mental functioning\(^{142}\).

In the first instance, emotions are not able to become symbolically articulated by the child because there is no context given in which to understand the emotional state: “features of the child’s experience may remain unconscious...because in the absence of a validating intersubjective

\(^{141}\) This is the fear that structures the voluntarist response to affect because affect is assumed to be a mere bodily state that is devoid of intellectual content or capacity. Affect, however, on the constitutively social view, is not mere bodily state because it can evolve to a state with cognitive content of its own.

\(^{142}\) Stolorow and Atwood, *Contexts of Being*, p. 43.
context, they simply never were able to become articulated.”\textsuperscript{143} In this case, the unconscious becomes coextensive with the unsymbolized. This is not repression \textit{per se}, because it is not a defensive sequestering of highly charged psychological states, but such emotional illiteracy has implications for the influence that unconscious mental processes can impose on our agency.

The person becomes alexithymic, a condition of emotional blankness. In such persons, there seems to be little or no inner emotional awareness. It isn’t that the alexithymic is unable to feel, it’s that their feelings are lost to them because there is no mechanism for the individual to access them consciously. For such a person “feelings come to them, when they come at all, as a befuddling bundle of distress.”\textsuperscript{144} They may respond to a movie, for instance, but the most that they can say is that they feel “awful” about it, or “good.” Without a corresponding compass for evaluating the value of internal and external stimuli, the alexithymic is lost with regard to interpreting and evaluating the meaning of situations, beyond a vague notion of “goodness” or “badness.”\textsuperscript{145} The (emotional) discriminatory capacities of the alexithymic are absent or ill-formed. Therefore, their capacity to guide themselves toward specific goals is seriously compromised because ends of action appear as only vague or non-specific objectives.\textsuperscript{146} More importantly, those objectives in acting are difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate critically for the alexithymic because one’s capacity for such critical reflection depends on a flexible awareness of one’s own emotional states.

In the second instance, unconscious mental sequestering of emotional experience does reflect true repression because it arises when “affect states…[are] defensively walled off because they

\textsuperscript{143} Stolorow and Atwood, \textit{Contexts of Being}, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{145} Stocker, \textit{Valuing Emotions}, p. 105: “those who are unaware of their emotions … will … be ill-placed to see which values they hold and deploy, and how they hold and deploy these values in their judgments, decision, or wherever.”
\textsuperscript{146} Joyce McDougall, \textit{Theatres of the Mind: Illusion and Truth on the Psychoanalytic Stage}, [New York: Brunner Mazel], 1991, p. 155: “Instead of mentally elaborating their emotional states, they tend to discharge their feelings … often in inappropriate ways: through disputes, ill-considered decisions, or a series of accidents.”
failed to evoke attuned responsiveness from the early surround.”

This second form of failure of affective evolution occurs where the child perceives that aspects of its emotional experience are unwelcome or damaging to the caregiver, as in the skiing example. When caregivers invalidate the emotional experiences of the child on a consistent basis, the entire caregiver/child relationship is thrown into doubt for the child. This creates a potentially traumatic situation for the child because the child is entirely dependent on the caregiver for its safety and well-being, and the child uses the caregiver to help it identify the meaning of a situation based on the child’s emotional response to the situation. If one’s emotional experience is invalidated by the caregiver, the child is left with the crisis of trying to figure out what the experience means; but the child is then torn. He or she needs the tie to the caregiver, and if the caregiver indicates that the experience is other than the child experiences it, the child must defer to the caregiver’s interpretive stance (because of the necessity of the tie, even at the cost of giving up the ability to discern the meaning of a situation in terms that are understandable to the child). The child’s very safety depends on making this kind of deferral to the caregiver.

At the extreme, this is the fear of annihilation that Winnicott refers to when he talks of the child being on the edge of unthinkable anxiety. Therefore, if the caregiver is inept or violent in their reaction to emotional experience, the child is left with few options but repression: “When a child’s [affective] experiences are...actively rejected, the child perceives that aspects of his own experience are unwelcome or damaging to the caregiver. Whole sectors of the child’s experiential world must then be sacrificed (repressed) in order to safeguard the needed tie.”

The internal psychological goal of this response is to protect against the continuing trauma of not being emotionally recognized by the caregiver (because a failure to be responded to at the level of one’s deepest affect is

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147 Stolorow and Atwood, Contexts of Being, p. 31.
148 Stolorow and Atwood, Contexts of Being, p. 32.
experienced as disorienting and traumatic).

Under conditions of emotional recognition, emotion can “inform” the intellect of various ways of interpreting and “seeing” situations (prior to the moment of choice), but if the link between emotion and intellect is severed (through mal-adaptive emotional responses by the caregiver), then emotion tends then to be experienced by the agent as simply a bodily condition without the possibility of intervention by cognition. “If the other systematically ‘disconfirms’ a child’s state of mind at moments of intense affective arousal by behaving as though the meaning of the event to the child is either irrelevant or ‘something else,’ the child grows to mistrust the reality of his own experience.”149 If this happens, then the child becomes “impaired in his ability to cognitively process his own emotionally charged mental states, i.e., to reflect on them, to hold them as states of intrapsychic conflict, and thus to own them as ‘me.’”150 With this comes a reduced capacity to critically self-reflect on the operations of one’s own mind.

In the case of true repression, the risk associated with repeated emotional misrecognition on the part of the caregiver is a rigid inflexibility in one’s emotional attitudes, but such misrecognition has implications for the agent’s control over his own internal life. The unconscious mental processes that are characteristic of repression are not inert psychologically. They do mischief. They exert a dynamic influence on outward behavior, and this occurs without the agent being aware of their influences. In cases of repression, the unconscious mind provides a principal impetus to action by supplying motivations for acting that are, at best, only vaguely known to the agent. Because of this, one can act at any given time without knowing one’s underlying motivations for the action: “Rage at you may really be about rage at myself, fretful love may be grounded in hidden fears of inferiority, enmity may be a

150 Bromberg, Standing in the Spaces, p. 11.
defense against too close an attachment.”

This is what Robin Dillon means by “experiential understanding.” What she describes is a way of experiencing ourselves which is affective at its core but is also held below the level of conscious thinking because it arises out of our earliest interactions with others at a time when the child is incapable of articulate thinking. It is an emotionally-based way of perceiving oneself, but further, it is not just a way of seeing ourselves, it is the context or framework within which all other understandings of ourselves are made because it is the earliest form of self-understanding that develops within the child. It’s not just a way of perceiving ourselves, it is also the way in which we perceive and interpret our situation with respect to the external world. Experiential understanding is the warp through which we understand ourselves and our place within the larger social world, and this arises from our earliest (emotional) relationships with caregivers, which can either be positive and loving, or negative and hostile.

The experience of basal self-respect, as Dillon argues for it, is a powerful example of how repressed emotional interactions can then exert influence on our motivations in acting, i.e., our agency: “when damaged or insecure, basal valuing is incessant whispering below the threshold of awareness: ‘you’re not good enough, you’re nothing.” Such understandings can become an entrenched part of our self-experience because they are resistant to change by sound reasoning and

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152 Dillon, “Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political,” p. 241: “… a pre-reflective, unarticulated, emotionally-laden presuppositional framework, an implicit ‘seeing oneself as’ or ‘taking oneself to be’ that structures our explicit experiences of self.”
153 Dillon, “Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political,” p. 241: “… experiential understanding … develops first and sets the warp into which the threads of our experience are woven to create the layered understandings of self … in which we are always swaddled.”
154 Dillon, “Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political,” p. 245: “Long before we are capable of intellectually understanding self-worth, before we can examine, evaluate, and affirm or reject others’ responses to us, we experience, absorb, and ‘metabolize’ their love and acceptance, their joy in our existence and delight in what we are and do, or their indifference, disappointment, irritation, or disgust with us.”

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securely anchored true belief. This is not because the underlying emotions are irrational. It’s because such experiential understandings of self can exist within implicit memory and that they “continually reverberate throughout the self, profoundly shaping those aspects of cognition, valuation, affect, expectation, motivation, and reaction”\textsuperscript{156} that forms the basis of our interpretation of the world and ourselves.

The relational philosophers aspire to utilize the intersubjectivists’ positive view of social interaction as the basis of their theories of self-governance, but in many cases, they fail in their promise toward this end because they get bogged down with an emphasis on oppressive social influences and the effect that such oppressive influences have on women’s capacities for, and expression of, self-governance.

\textit{Critique of the Current Relational Models of Autonomy}

Although there are many insights offered by the relational philosophers in their theories of autonomy, there are also significant deficiencies in their analyses which keep them from progressing as far as they might have thought in their goal of providing a truly social account of autonomy. The professed focal point of the relationalists’ model of autonomy is to see what kind of theory of autonomy arises if one takes seriously the possibility for positive forms of social influence through relationships of care and dependency. In reality, though, many of the relational accounts of autonomy focus on the problem of oppression. From the relationalists’ perspective, the individualistic and rationalistic conceptions of autonomy prevalent in the current literature are not benign. They form the basis for the structures of domination and subordination that have characterized western society for centuries: “the persistence of such [voluntarist] views is not just a

harmless anachronistic hangover of the Enlightenment. It is complicit with structures of domination and subordination, in particular with the suppression of [those] … who are deemed incapable of achieving rational self-mastery.” The relationalists tend to emphasize the corrosive effect that the content of certain norms of femininity have on the capacity of women to develop and express autonomy.

This emphasis on the oppressive effects that some social norms can have on female agency is both accurate, as well as important, for understanding the possibility of autonomy because such norms have the capacity to reach the agent at the level of his or her values, commitments, or motivations, i.e., it reaches to the very bases of the choices made by the agent, often by means that bypass the agent’s awareness altogether. As Mill famously observed: “Society can and does execute its own mandates; and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right…it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since…it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself.” It is this penetrating ability of social influence that concerns theorists in autonomy of any stripe, whether relational or otherwise.

However, by focusing on the influence of oppressive social norms, many of the current relational philosophers could be seen as smuggling, unknowingly, a voluntarist perspective into their theories of personal autonomy. What draws our attention and serves as the focal point for our conceptual analyses matters in doing philosophy. The implicit philosophical orientation that one brings to bear on a philosophical problem will influence the nature of the substantive analysis that

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159 It is by no means true that all relational philosophers commit this error, but it is a significant enough trend to warrant attention and analysis.
ensues.\textsuperscript{160} The things that one pays attention to in developing one’s theory are what get the most attention in terms of the theory’s emphasis. The emphasis of one’s theory, therefore, is what structures one’s thinking about the issues at stake in the analysis. The relational philosophers seek to reject the voluntarist model of autonomy, but interestingly, the pattern of emphasis in many of their theories reads like a voluntarist, i.e., one who is trying to transcend the (oppressive) influence of the social environment as a primary focus of the theory. In doing so, they often create theories of autonomy that are reincarnated forms of the voluntarist model, in ‘feminist’ garb. As such, many of the relational philosophers’ analyses of autonomy tend to exonerate the very theories of agency and autonomy that they seek to repudiate.\textsuperscript{161}

\textit{Group Identity and Oppressive Social Norms}

The prevailing approach in many relational accounts of autonomy is to locate the agent's social position not within a directly interpersonal context where individuals interact with other individuals but within the context of interaction between one particular group, i.e., women, and society at large: “In relational autonomy, it is necessary to explore the agent’s social location” where that location is determined by taking “into account the impact of social and political structures, especially sexism and other forms of oppression, on the lives and opportunities of individuals.”\textsuperscript{162} The issue at stake in this analysis is familiar in philosophical work, and was characterized by Rawls in the following way: “The intuitive notion here is that [the] structure [of society] contain various social positions and that [people] born into different positions have different expectations of life


\textsuperscript{161} As John Christman has noted: “Relational theorists who decry procedural views on the grounds that they would allow voluntary slavery to masquerade as autonomy are in fact supporting a conception of autonomy which is an \textit{ideal} of individualized self-government.” John Christman, “Relational Autonomy, Liberal Individualism, and the Social Constitution of Selves.” \textit{Philosophical Studies} 117, 2004, p. 151.

determined, in part, by the political system as well as by economic and social circumstances.”

One shared facet of many of the current relational accounts of autonomy is the assumption that one’s capacity to express autonomy is (largely) the product of the broader social circumstances in which one exists. Meyers is perhaps the most explicit about this with her analysis of our intersectional identities. The idea of intersectional identity arises from the broader philosophical stance that “who one is depends on one’s social experience.”

Meyers takes this thought further, though, and argues that “people are categorized according to gender, sexual orientation, race, class, and ethnicity and that these multiple ascriptions interact” to create who we are. Given that the emphasis of the relational philosophers tends to be on oppression, this tends to present a dim view on the nature of social influence. If our capacities for autonomy are largely determined by our groups membership, and if group membership (for women) is often problematic from the standpoint of autonomy, then it seems reasonable to assume that the relationalists’ emphasis is on the negative influence of social interaction, which aligns the relationalists’ view with that of the voluntarist (instead of focusing on positive aspects of our social condition).

In much of the relational literature, this idea of social categorization is then often tied to the idea of oppression and its effect on one’s autonomy: “There are certain forms of socialization that uncontroversially militate against the development of the kinds of competencies that are required of a person exercising procedural autonomy.” The role that oppressive social forces play is more than simply to block the capacity to express one’s autonomy. It’s to insinuate themselves into one’s very character, shaping who the person is in fundamental ways: “oppression can lead to the

internalization of a sense of social worthlessness and incompetence that is translated into a lack of self-worth and self-trust … Many are inclined to accept society’s devaluing of their personal worth on at least an unconscious level and to doubt their own worth and ability to make appropriate choices."\textsuperscript{167} From the relationalists’ perspective, it is in this sense that women are, to some degree at least, \textit{constituted by} the various group identity determinants identified in the literature because women are vulnerable to internalizing the content of many (pernicious) norms produced by society at large.

McLeod and Sherwin argue that their goal is “to make explicit the role of oppression in autonomy,”\textsuperscript{168} particularly the role that oppressive norms arising from social, political, and economic institutions play in inhibiting the exercise of autonomy in women, but the reason that they take this focus is that such oppressive norms end up “affecting whole social groups rather than simply disrupting isolated individuals.”\textsuperscript{169} Such group influences are usually ignored, they argue, because the emphasis is on individuals in the traditional literature on autonomy, but what the relationalists tend to argue is that it is one’s group that is decisive in determining who one is. Therefore, group affiliation is decisive with regard to one’s exercise of autonomy because the norms that intrude on agents operate to “shape agent’s values and desires in ways that undermine their capacity for autonomous choice.”\textsuperscript{170} In this way, the relationalists’ concern matches the voluntarists’ concern because both are focused on the, negative, effect that larger social influences can have on individual autonomy. The relational philosophers’ argument, though, diverges from the voluntarists’ because the relationalists do not posit a transcendent rational capacity that solves the problem of social influence.

By focusing their attention on the effect of oppressive social norms on the capacity of

\textsuperscript{167} McLeod and Sherwin, “Relational Autonomy, Self-Trust, and Health Care for Patients Who Are Oppressed,” p. 262.
\textsuperscript{168} McLeod and Sherwin, “Relational Autonomy, Self-Trust, and Health Care for Patients Who Are Oppressed,” p. 259.
\textsuperscript{169} McLeod and Sherwin, “Relational Autonomy, Self-Trust, and Health Care for Patients Who Are Oppressed,” p. 259.
\textsuperscript{170} McLeod and Sherwin, “Relational Autonomy, Self-Trust, and Health Care for Patients Who Are Oppressed,” p. 261.
women to make autonomous choices, the relationalists restrict their analyses of autonomy to the negative influence that our social interactions can have on autonomy. This focus on the negative aspects of our social condition, though, strays from their professed concern, which is to see what implications there are for autonomy if one takes seriously the notion that our social condition forms an essential (and positive) element of our autonomous existence. It’s not as though their emphasis on oppression is misplaced or inappropriate, it’s simply that it tends to dominate their theories and obscure the possibility of looking at the nature of autonomy if social interaction is seen in a positive light. In the end, their main conclusion is that “gender socialization renders women less likely to develop autonomy competency at the level that men often achieve.”

In this focus on the negative influence of socialization, though, the relationalists make oppression yet another item within the pantheon of impediments to individual autonomy (similar to manipulation, coercion, and deception) because oppression works in the same manner as addiction, hypnosis, and the influence of cults in virtue of the fact that we cannot simply will ourselves free of its influence. Therefore, oppression simply becomes yet another obstruction to autonomy that rationalistic and individualistic models of autonomy seek to address. A prevailing strand in the current relational thought on autonomy is to focus on these problematic “external” influences and forces on female autonomy. What tends to get lost in this analysis is what a theory of autonomy

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171 Benson, “Free Agency and Self Worth,” p. 261. It is interesting to note that this is only true if one buys into the model of autonomy that incorporates at its core the traditional, masculinist modes of agency, but it is precisely this form of agency that relational philosophers profess to discard. Unfortunately, this view of agency tends to infiltrate the expectations on autonomy of even the philosophers who profess to reject the masculinist model.
would look like if one were to take seriously the idea that relations of dependency and care form the foundation of autonomous agency. It leaves undeveloped the role that certain emotional capacities might play in the exercise of autonomy.

What creeps into the relational theories is the voluntarist model of autonomy because they tend to characterize the autonomous person as one who has the internal resources necessary to withstand the “external” assault of socialization. The argument at the core of much of the current relational autonomy literature is that oppressive societal norms are able to infiltrate into the person’s psyche to such a degree that the person’s sense of self-worth is compromised, which then impacts the person’s capacity to make autonomous choices. These norms are able to do this because their force is greater than the ability of the individual to resist their influence. This fact, alone, does not recapitulate the voluntarist model, but the relational philosophers’ insistence on addressing the conditions of oppression in their accounts of autonomy, then creates an emphasis on girding against this threat. This invites in the voluntarist model of autonomy, i.e., a person who is able to withstand the force of certain external coercive conditions (usually through a rational capacity to evaluate one’s circumstances and motives). In this way, the current relational philosophers do not foreclose the prospect that they end up recapitulating the very norms of agency that they (purportedly) wish to reject.

Relational philosophers start with a (very plausible) premise that “both the autonomous and non-autonomous are conditioned by the forces of society,” but they also go on to claim (also very plausibly) that “the difference is that the autonomous person is not a passive receptacle of these forces but reflectively engages with them to participate in shaping a life for herself.”

The problem is that even writers in the current relational tradition often are not as careful as they might be in how

they frame their positions. They leave open the possibility of reinforcing and reiterating the very norms of the voluntarist self that their relational focus rejects. This danger is recognized even by relational authors: “despite feminist objections to the self-originating, self-sufficient, coldly rational, shrewdly calculating, self-interest maximizing, male paragon of autonomy…many feminist writers continue to invoke ostensibly discredited values like self-determination in unguarded writing about the needs of women.” Many relational philosophers leave open the possibility of such a discredited self, even though they earn their relational stripes in their (implicit) focus on the importance of relationships in developing or sustaining autonomy.

What the relationalists tend to neglect in their theorizing is that some forms of social interaction and influence are actually autonomy enhancing because there is only an “incompatibility between autonomy and certain forms of social determinism.” The problem is that this nod to the social conditions that enhance autonomy is left largely blank. There are allusions to the importance of mother-child relationships, “it is primarily women’s labors, especially in the early years, that contribute most significantly to the development of the skills required for autonomous agency,” but there is little, if any, flesh put on this skeletal acknowledgement of the importance of family relationships. Similarly, there are also gestures toward filling in the blank by reference to the importance of conversation and the role that others play as sounding boards for self-reflective examination of faulty norms: “Our on-going success as an autonomous agents is affected by our ability to share our ideas, our aspirations, and our beliefs in conversation with others,” but this observation is only a thin reminder that others can (and should) play an important role in our autonomous existence because little else is supplied in the way of analyzing the nature of this

discursive project. The role of others in these accounts tends to be as empty placeholders or mere occupants\(^{177}\) of the scene, rather than as essential actors with substantive functions.

**Conclusion**

The analysis in this chapter has outlined a progression of thought in the psychological literature from the intrapsychic emphasis of Freud to the intersubjective emphasis of many current theorists in the field. This isn’t necessarily a progression toward truth but a progression toward a more sophisticated and nuanced conception of human agency. In Freud, two subjects could not connect emotionally without merging. This fear of losing one’s own unique identity in the process of interaction was a driving force in Freud’s psychology. Therefore, emotional interconnection did not play a role in Freud’s psychology, except at the level of pathology.

The intersubjective perspective realizes that we are interconnected in indissoluble ways. We are truly social creatures (whether for good or for ill). The primary strivng on the part of the child, on this view, is for attachment, not for separation from others and a release from intrapsychic tension, as it is for Freud. The intersubjective perspective, though, makes an even stronger claim. It stresses that the reality of a situation, as well as its meaning, is co-constructed by the child and caregiver in a process that is inherently emotional at its core. It is emotional connection or synchrony that is of paramount importance to the child, and the way that the child is able to interpret the world arises out of this process of emotional recognition (or failure of emotional recognition).

The emphasis of this perspective is on the fact that the child needs to adapt to the caregiver,

\(^{177}\) I am indebted to Bill Blattner for these apt phrases.
no matter how poorly (or effectively) the caregiver interacts with the child. If the emotional interaction between caregiver and child is favorable, then the child can adapt in ways that create a flexible orientation toward his own internal motivational states. It will also allow the development of certain skills, such as the ability of the child to take her own mind as an object of critical self-reflection. Critical self-reflection, then, is inextricably intertwined with our emotional attitudes and perspectives, as well as our interactions with others at an early age. If the emotional interaction between caregiver and child is not favorable, then the child still adapts to the situation, but it will more likely be in ways that create rigid and inflexible patterns of thought and action.

The relational philosophers were the first to recognize this social dimension to autonomy, and they worked to develop theories that reflect our social nature. However, the emphasis of many of these philosophers on oppression leads these theorists into perspectives on autonomous agency that read like reincarnated forms of the voluntarist model of autonomy. Further work remains to be done in philosophy to redeem this basic insight of how our social condition will affect a theory of personal autonomy, and a promising beginning has been achieved by the recognition theorists because they take this insight to new levels of sophistication. Therefore, it is to political philosophy that I now turn for further attempts into how the intersubjective turn can be applied to a philosophical problem (in this case, to the problem of self-realization).
Introduction:

It’s to political philosophy that we now turn for further attempts and insight into how the intersubjective turn in psychology can be applied to a philosophical problem, in this case to the problem of self-realization. We see new strains of wisdom in relation to self-governance with the recognition theorists because they move in the direction of incorporating into their theories of self-governance the more sophisticated understanding of persons offered by the intersubjective psychologists. The recognition theorists are a more refined expression of the intersubjective turn than the relational philosophers, which is why I spend the time to analyze their theories in some detail.

The principal recognition theorists are Axel Honneth, in his *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, and Joel Anderson, in “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice” (written with Honneth). Even though Honneth does not speak in terms of autonomy or self-governance in *The Struggle for Recognition*, his picture of self-realization (his preferred notion) captures the essence of what I will understand by the well-governed person. The connection between self-realization and self-governance, though, is made much more explicitly in his work with Joel Anderson. In the next chapter, I will expand on the recognition theorists’ work by focusing much more explicitly on the process of emotional recognition in early childhood within the family and offer a theory of self-governance that is deeply informed by the intersubjective understanding of the emotional recognition that can take place at this level of social interaction.

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The recognition theorists take an explicitly intersubjective, or social, viewpoint because the process of recognition at the core of their theory of self-governance is a form of (emotional) relationship between persons. There is a need for recognition from others which is then reciprocated to form of web of mutually interdependent relationships of recognition if one is to achieve the goal of self-governance. Further, since recognition, on their account, is affective in nature, there is a deep reliance on our emotions as the central mechanism of social interaction, as well as the central element of the person that enables her to be self-governing. These are fundamental perspectives that I share with the recognition theorists, along with their reliance on intersubjective psychology as a basis of their analysis of self-governance. As such, the recognition theorists are broadly complementary to my view of the well-governed person.

My concern with the recognition theorists’ views is not their intersubjective emphasis or their stance with regard to emotion, with which I fully agree, but the fact that their intersubjective analysis does not take the insights of the intersubjective perspective far enough in terms of examining the role that early life experiences play in developing, and then sustaining, the capacities necessary for self-governance. They take a social psychological focus that emphasizes the conditions for the possibility of self-realization at the political level.

One of Honneth’s primary purposes is to interpret the nature of social struggle between dominant and marginalized groups within society, which creates a focus on how individuals within the marginalized groups can attain self-realization. Honneth sees the achievement of self-realization as a constant process of struggle, where a principal locus of this struggle is initiated by members of marginalized groups when they react with feelings of outrage and indignation at their treatment and

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180 It may be possible for the heroic individual to achieve a state of self-governance without a process of mutual recognition, but this work will focus on the conditions for the development of self-governance that are necessary for the average individual.

181 Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 97. The way that Honneth phrases this is that “through emotional relationships to other persons, children learn to see themselves as independent subjects.”
so are motivated to engage with the dominant culture to gain the recognition they deserve. His concern is that members of marginalized groups, simply in virtue of their membership in such groups, often are denied the recognition they deserve for the worth of their culture, their status as persons, and the inviolability of their physical integrity.\(^{182}\) (An example of the latter would be the differentially harsh treatment by members of law enforcement that often are inflicted on members of marginalized groups – one could think of Rodney King in this regard).

His principal concern, then, is to analyze the necessary conditions that allow individuals within these marginalized groups the psychological, legal, and social resources or circumstances to engage in the struggle for such recognition. In an analogous treatment, Anderson and Honneth stress a similar political orientation when they state that their primary aim is “to develop an account of what it would mean for a society to take seriously the obligation to reduce individuals’ autonomy-related vulnerabilities.”\(^{183}\) This situates their account of self-governance squarely within an undeniably political focus.\(^{184}\)

The recognition theorists’ look to how societal interaction can be set so as to allow for the self-realization of individuals within subaltern or oppressed social groups. In this way, their focus is similar to the relational philosophers. Unlike many of the relational theorists, though, the recognition theorists explicitly pursue positive forms of social interaction as a basis for developing the skills necessary for self-governance. Recognition, in their political sense, is about the on-going social conditions that allow for (or fail to allow for) one to realize one’s potential. My central focus will be on more intimate, private relations between persons at the domestic level of family, friends,

\(^{182}\) Anderson, “Translator’s Introduction,” p. x: “members of marginalized and subaltern groups have been systematically denied recognition for the worth of their culture or way of life, the dignity of their status as persons, and the inviolability of their physical integrity.”

\(^{183}\) Anderson and Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” p. 127.

\(^{184}\) This is understandable given that the article appears in a collection of essays designed to address the issue of autonomy’s relationship to political liberalism.
and peers. Recognition, on my view, is important not just for self-realization, but if recognition is absent or significantly curtailed in one’s early life experiences, it then becomes difficult (perhaps impossible) to become a self-governing adult.

**Analysis of the Value of Recognition to Self-Realization:**

For Honneth and Anderson, self-governance is “an acquired set of capacities to lead one’s own life,” but this general perspective is cashed out more specifically as the ability to “trust our own feelings and intuitions, to stand up for what we believe in, and to consider our projects and accomplishments worthwhile.” What this ability leads to, though, if strongly realized, is a more fundamentally basic trait of self-governing persons, which is self-realization. This condition of self-realization requires relations of mutual recognition, i.e., relations where one is granted recognition by others whom one also recognizes. This is where Honneth and Anderson earn their intersubjective stripes because for both of them the practical relations to self that they privilege are not conditions that the individual can evaluate on one’s own. They are necessarily intersubjective in nature, where the way that one feels about oneself is largely determined by how others feel toward one. This (emotionally-based) encounter with another forms the core of what they mean by recognition, as we shall see in the remainder of this chapter.

Honneth adopts Hegel’s perspective that to flourish requires the existence of proper social relationships. Therefore, for him there is a necessary nexus between social patterns of recognition and individual self-realization. The positive outcome of these social patterns of recognition is a

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185 Anderson and Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” p. 127.
186 Anderson and Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” p. 130.
187 Joel Anderson, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Axel Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflict, Joel Anderson (trans.), [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press], 1995: “one’s relationship to oneself…is not a matter of a solitary ego appraising itself, but [is] an intersubjective process, in which one’s attitude toward oneself emerges in one’s encounter with an other’s attitude toward oneself.” Almost the same quote is used in Anderson and Honneth’s article cited above.
complex web of practical relations to self (to be explored in detail shortly) in the form of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, and it is these practical relations to self that create the very possibility of a self-governing person. Therefore, self-governance, on this view, exists within the context of the social relations that support it. Therefore, we are each vulnerable in the socially interactive process necessary to be self-governing persons. This is a perspective that I share with the recognition theorists and which forms a central core of my account of self-governance.

Honneth, by relying heavily on a Hegelian notion of human flourishing (where flourishing is understood as the capacity to participate fully in the public life of a community), embraces the following line of thought that arises out of Aristotle and the medieval doctrine of natural law: It is through our social relations within the *polis* or political community that human beings can develop and realize their essential nature. Honneth, therefore, situates his account within an explicitly political, i.e., social, perspective, and this has profound implications for the nature of the recognition account of self-governance that he develops. A central focus of his account of self-governance is the effect that a lack of legal and social recognition has on marginalized groups within society.

Honneth argues that the kind of social and political participation that is constitutive of being a self-realizing member of society is only possible if individuals are sustained throughout their lives by particular relations of mutual recognition. In arguing this point, he rejects a line of thought that arose with Machiavelli that assumes there is a permanent state of hostile competition between subjects arising out of an unquenchable ambition for personal success. On this view, all subjects face each other in a state of fearful mistrust because each assumes that everyone’s interests are supremely egocentric in nature. Hobbes reinforced this point by arguing that such interpersonal

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188 Anderson and Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” p. 138. In their locution, these practical relations to self “are emergent properties of relationships of a certain sort.”

189 Anderson and Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” p. 130: “one’s autonomy is vulnerable to disruptions in one’s relationship to others.” (emphasis in original).

190 Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 7
competition and mutual mistrust forms a contractualist justification for establishing rigid state sovereignty.\(^1\) By rejecting this type of analysis of human interaction, Honneth explicitly adopts an intersubjective focus where he, again, is deeply influenced by Hegel and Hegel’s reaction to both “the individualistic presuppositions of Kant’s moral theory,”\(^2\) as well as the transformation of medieval natural law by Hegel’s contemporary modern theorists.

Hegel characterized the contemporary treatments of natural law as either ‘empirical’ or ‘formal,’ but each was marked by the same fundamental error; each treated the individual as primary by attributing to the individual supreme importance. The ‘empirical’ approach to natural law, according to Hegel, started with a view of human nature, and then proposed a model of societal organization that fit within the strictures of the assumptions of individual human nature. The atomistic premises of such theories were demonstrated by the fact that they tended to conceive of “natural” forms of human behavior as those which were performed by solitary individuals.\(^3\)

‘Formal’ approaches adopted a similar strategy, but instead of starting with a view of human nature, they started from a concept of transcendental reason, where ethical life consists of the activity of “pure” reason, i.e., reason that had been cleansed of all empirical impediments.\(^4\) Therefore, the attitudes that were conducive to community, i.e., ethical attitudes, were understood to require the suppression of basic bodily inclinations (i.e., one’s emotions), and the basis for human social interaction was conceived of as the interaction of subjects who were fundamentally isolated from each other.

The flaw in this understanding of social interaction, for Hegel, was that forms of community

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4. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 11. In Hegel’s terminology (and Kant’s), reason had to be “purified of all the empirical inclinations and needs of human nature.”
association could then only be conceptualized as the austere interaction of thousands of separate sovereign “islands,” each exercising their own autonomous choice disjunctively from others, and each capable of flourishing independently of any need for others.195 For Hegel, this was not a model of the unity of ethical life but a simple cluster of aggregated, individual souls: a “unified many.”196 Honneth’s intersubjective focus, therefore, is a modern reformulation of Hegel’s deeply social outlook.

This view is reinforced in Honneth’s and Anderson’s treatment of self-governance because what they reject is a particular normative conclusion that seemed to arise historically from a tendency of persons in the early modern period to increasingly pursue their own independent paths in life. This historical trend to pursue increasingly “independent” personal pursuits led to the conclusion that personal freedom and autonomy required the maximum amount of personal negative liberty possible within the constraints of social society.197 The consequence of this outlook seems to have been that the less that others constrain one’s actions, the greater was one’s ability to act according to preferences that were truly one’s own.

This view is plainly repudiated by both Anderson and Honneth in their recognition accounts of self-governance because this leads to the conclusion that autonomy requires that one separate oneself to the maximum extent possible in one’s autonomous choices.198 In this case, independence

197 Anderson and Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” p. 128. The way that Anderson and Honneth phrase this is that there was “an increasing tendency to draw the normative implication that personal freedom and autonomy were a matter of allowing individuals to develop their personally selected pursuits undisturbed.”
198 Anderson and Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” p. 128: “this modern conception of autonomy actually sneaks in an additional component – namely, the idea that individuals realize their autonomy by gaining independence from their consociates.” This should not be taken to mean that autonomy, on this
would be understood as self-sufficient separation from others in the exercise of one’s self-governance (which is one strain of thinking in the voluntarist model of autonomy). What Honneth and Anderson renounce is the current “drive to maximize negative liberty” which then “seems to rely on a misleading idealization of individuals as self-sufficient and self-reliant.”

*Practical Relations to Self*

Honneth incorporates and expands upon Hegel’s insights in his analysis of self-governance through his fundamental assumption that social relations, understood as relations of mutual recognition, are critical for developing and maintaining a person’s identity as well as for attaining a capacity for self-realization. For Honneth, there are three primary modes of mutual recognition: love, law and solidarity, and each of these modes of recognition is associated with a particular kind of relation of mutual recognition. Love is associated with close relationships of family and friends. Law is associated with legally institutionalized relations within society, and solidarity is the term used by Honneth to depict a network of shared values within a community in which the individual worth of political subjects can be assessed through the norms of value held by the community. Each of these types of social relationships, furthermore, provide the necessary forum from which we can develop particular sorts of ‘practical relations-to-self,’ and it is the formation of these ‘practical relations-to-self’ that allow us to come to experience ourselves as having a certain status, or value. There are three distinct species of ‘practical relations-to-self,’ since each arises specifically out of its affiliated relation of mutual recognition: the feeling of love gives rise to basic self-confidence, from the experience of legal recognition emerges self-respect, and solidarity gives rise to self-esteem.

Each of these ‘practical relations-to-self’ operate cumulatively to create the possibility of the

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individualistic conception, is *equivalent to* isolation, but should be understood to mean that *any* constraint on one’s actions decreases one’s autonomy.

individual achieving a self-realizing state.\textsuperscript{200}

It is this notion of self-realization that forms the conceptual core of Honneth’s idea of the self-governing person. Self-realization, for Honneth, is “a process of realizing, without coercion, one’s self-chosen life’s goals,”\textsuperscript{201} where the lack of coercion, or freedom to choose for oneself, is not simply understood negatively, i.e., as the absence of external constraint, but also as a positive characteristic of persons that is grounded in our various capacities for self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. These ‘practical relations-to-self’ arise from on-going patterns of social recognition. Therefore, negative characteristics of self-realization, such as the absence of untoward inner conflict in the form of psychological inhibitions or fears,\textsuperscript{202} should be matched by positive characteristics, such as trust in oneself, that is directed inward and allow the individual access to, and the exercise of, clearly articulated needs and abilities. Self-realization, then, can be seen as the possibility of sensing, interpreting, and realizing one’s needs and desires in a way that is both grounded and bounded by a robust sense of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. Relating to oneself in these particular ways, though, is best acquired and sustained intersubjectively, through a process of being granted recognition by others whom one also recognizes.\textsuperscript{203} In this way, the intersubjective ties that bind us together are reciprocal in nature.

\textit{Love and Basic Self-Confidence}

Honneth’s Hegelian foundation is clear when he emphasizes the foundational importance of

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\textsuperscript{200} Honneth, \textit{The Struggle for Recognition}, p. 173: “The only way in which individuals are constituted as persons is by learning to refer to themselves from the perspective of an approving or encouraging other, as beings with certain positive traits and abilities...[and] the scope of such traits...increases with each new form of recognition.” Honneth goes on to claim something very similar later in the work: “unless one presupposes a certain degree of self-confidence, legally guaranteed autonomy, and sureness as to the value of one’s own abilities, it is impossible to imagine successful self-realization.” Honneth, \textit{The Struggle for Recognition}, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{201} Honneth, \textit{The Struggle for Recognition}, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{202} Honneth, \textit{The Struggle for Recognition}, p. 174.
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relationships between parents and children and his further emphasis on the fact that the primary mode of these interactions is emotional in nature.\textsuperscript{204} He recognizes further that raising children is directed towards the formation of the child’s independence. This strand of thought in Honneth deserves more careful analysis because it will then provide the foundation for understanding the basic difference between Honneth’s account of self-governance and my own.

Honneth offers a striking insight as to the nature of intimate interpersonal relationships and their effect on persons in general. The claim to legal and social recognition, unlike the claim to love, exists within the context of a specific society at a distinct point in time. Because of this, the claims to recognition from legal institutions and from socially established value systems are historical (or contingent) in nature. Laws and social values (and, therefore, the forms of recognition that arise from them) change over time. The recognition that arises out of love, however, does not share this historical character because notions such as bodily integrity and the need for emotional support cut across differences in cultural and historical contexts. Such loving relationships, Honneth argues (following Hegel), are ‘primary,’ in that they represent the first stage of reciprocal recognition, and this first stage takes place independently of the historical conditions that exist within society.\textsuperscript{205} This is where Honneth’s account and mine intersect most fundamentally. In an important sense, though, Honneth does not go far enough in his analysis because he does not probe the nature of love that is central to interpersonal relations of mutual recognition, and, therefore, he does not give an adequate explanation of why emotional attitudes are so very critical to self-realization. I will expand on Honneth’s insight by providing a detailed analysis for why emotional capacities of the agent are the central component of our capacity to be a well-governed person.

\textsuperscript{204} Honneth, \textit{The Struggle for Recognition}, p. 18: “the relationship between parents and children…represents the universal reciprocal action and formative education of human beings” wherein “subjects recognize each other reciprocally as living, emotionally needy beings.”

\textsuperscript{205} Honneth, \textit{The Struggle for Recognition}, p. 176: “This mode of basic self-confidence represents the basic prerequisite for every type of self-realization.”
Legal Recognition and Self-Respect

Unlike his analysis of love, where he relied on the interpersonal psychological theories of Winnicott, Honneth employs the social psychological theories of Mead to help examine the nature of individual self-realization at the level of the larger society as a whole. It is at this level that self-respect and self-esteem develop (if social conditions are proper). For Honneth, self-respect has a strongly Kantian flavor, in that it consists in possessing a sense of the universal dignity inherent in persons. Just as basic self-confidence arose from relations of love, self-respect arises from the experience of legal recognition, which creates a universal standing to participate in the public deliberations of society through the subject’s authority to raise and defend claims discursively.\(^{206}\) This requires the ability to see ourselves as legitimate sources of reasons for acting, and this ability exists more effectively if the subject is recognized as a legitimate member of the community.\(^ {207}\) If the ideas expressed by the subject are met with scorn or worse, are ignored, then the person is either treated as an object of ridicule, or made invisible vis-à-vis the other members of society. If either of these conditions exists, the individual is diminished in his capacity to realize the dignity necessary for self-respect.

What Honneth is concerned with is an asymmetry in the distribution of rights, wherein not everyone in society is equally endowed with moral or legal rights. According to Honneth, this asymmetry in rights distribution results in a “feeling of not enjoying the status of a full-fledged partner to [social] interaction”\(^ {208}\) by those for whom the rights are withheld, as well as an associated loss in their ability to relate to themselves as a legal and moral equal with other subjects. This results

\(^{206}\) Anderson and Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” p. 132: “… self-respect [has] as its object an agent’s authority to raise and defend claims as a person with equal standing.”

\(^{207}\) Anderson and Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice,” p. 132: “… self-respect can be seen as the affectively laden self-conception that underwrites a view of oneself as the legitimate source of reasons for acting, [but] if one cannot think of oneself as a competent deliberator and legitimate co-author of decisions, it is hard to see how one can take oneself seriously in one’s own practical reasoning.”

\(^{208}\) Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition, p. 133.
in a diminished sense of self-respect that was established through the emotionally fulfilling experience of being a legally recognized equal partner in one’s interactions with others.\textsuperscript{209}

Honneth argues further, though, that this process of recognition at the legal level is reciprocal in nature, in that one must recognize and abide by his legal obligations to others as part of this process.\textsuperscript{210} For our claims to be met as legitimate, we should also recognize others’ claims as legitimate as well, and by doing this we can come to understand ourselves as legally validated persons. For Honneth, again, this process comes to a head generally through struggle. In denying other’s such minimal rights, society invites a clash, where those who are denied such rights are provoked into conflict to secure what is rightfully theirs, but a simple guarantee of rights is not sufficient to create self-respect. Self-respect arises from a pattern of recognition fashioned from a complex web of legal rights enjoyed by all persons. By securing such recognition, individuals within marginalized groups reap a psychological benefit in the form of an ability to relate to themselves as morally responsible persons. In more easily seeing themselves as persons deserving of the respect of others, they may more easily see themselves as deserving of respect from within. In this way, the self-governance of such persons is established and furthered through a process of social conflict and acceptance. Self-governance, on this view, is the product of social conflict, just as it was in the case of the infant-mother interaction.

\textit{Social Values (Solidarity) and Self-Esteem}

A good society, for Honneth, is one in which each individual has the opportunity for self-realization. For this to happen, the commonly held values of society should then match the abilities and concerns of the individuals within the society. If this were to happen, no member of society

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\textsuperscript{209} Honneth, \textit{The Struggle for Recognition}, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{210} Honneth, \textit{Ibid., The Struggle for Recognition}, p. 108: “… we can only come to understand ourselves as the bearers of rights when we know, in turn, what various normative obligations we must keep vis-à-vis others.”
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would be denied an opportunity to earn esteem for the contribution that they make to the common good. The struggle for recognition, though, is a prevalent part of any society, and from this fact there arises a further fact: It is difficult to develop and maintain a sense of self-esteem if the group to which one belongs (whether ethnic or socioeconomic) faces systematic denigration from the larger culture.  

For example, if housework (whether done by a man or a woman) is not considered to be a significant contributor to the overall good of society, then those engaged in this task as their primary activity will lack the social resources necessary to acquire a sense of personal accomplishment. This denies to those individuals a sense of their unique and valuable traits based on their contribution to society. The conditions for self-esteem, then, (for Honneth) are found within the broad struggles within society for the recognition of previously denigrated or marginalized contributors to the common good. Honneth uses the term ‘solidarity’ to denote the social or cultural climate in which the acquisition of self-esteem becomes possible. 

What Honneth is concerned with is the public belittling of one’s inherited cultural tradition, e.g., prejudice toward individuals of Hispanic origin within a dominant Anglo-American community. The dominant emotional consequence of this type of withdrawal of recognition, according to Honneth, is shame, which he characterizes as the most open of our moral feelings. By this, Honneth seems to mean that shame is not simply about having one’s body exposed, it is about a corrosion of one’s sense of self-worth.

These three forms of recognition (love, law, and solidarity) comprise the essential elements

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213 Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition, p. 137.
214 Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition, p. 137: “… the emotional content of shame consists, to begin with, in a kind of lowering of one’s own feeling of self-worth.”
necessary to achieve the self-realizing participation in society that is Honneth’s central aim, and each works cumulatively, in that the self-confidence that arises out of loving relationships must be in place prior to the development of self-respect and self-esteem. These three forms of recognition, though, each has an associated form of denigration or disrespect that works against the achievement of self-realizing participation in society. One of the fundamental strengths of Honneth’s account is the ease with which he can analyze the nature of the assaults that can impair self-governance.

*Denigation, Disrespect, and Disruptions to Self-Realization*

Disrespect is the principal threat to self-realization for Honneth because it represents a withdrawal of the kind of recognition that is the foundation of self-realization.\(^\text{215}\) This creates an assault on the very patterns of social approval that form the foundation of one’s self-governance. As such, it reveals the vulnerability each of us faces in our relations with others because disrespect indicates the degree to which our sense of our own self-worth requires the continual support of others and their views toward us.\(^\text{216}\) Without the nurturing found in recognition, we each face the possibility that our positive understanding of ourselves can receive injuries that threaten the very sense of our own identity.\(^\text{217}\) Honneth’s goal is to demonstrate just how disrespect is anchored in our affective lives, and he accomplishes this by interlocking the various forms of disrespect with their counterpart forms of recognition.\(^\text{218}\) Since recognition is fundamentally affective in nature, the withdrawal of recognition at the heart of disrespect must also be analyzed in affective terms.

*Conclusion*

\(^{215}\) Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 132: “… disrespect signals the withholding or withdrawal of recognition.”

\(^{216}\) Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 131: “… normative self image … is dependent on the possibility of being continually backed up by others.”


\(^{218}\) Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 132: “… only by proceeding from this set of divisions can one take on the question that neither Hegel nor Mead were able to answer: how is it that the experience of disrespect is anchored in the affective life of human subjects.”
There are compelling strengths to the theory of self-governance given by Anderson and Honneth. Principal among these is the explicit acknowledgement of the dependence of self-governance on the social conditions under which it is formed. The argument they employ is that the development of various practical relations to self are critical components of self-governance. These practical relations to self, though, are dependent, in turn, on patterns of mutual recognition that exist within society. Therefore, self-governance is vulnerable to the kinds of social relations within which we all exist, which leads them to the basic conclusion that self-governance is not a solo achievement. The development of self-trust, self-esteem, and self-respect relies on interpersonal relationships through which one acquires and sustains the capacity to relate to one’s inner life, and it is this comfort with one’s inner life that is a central trait of self-governing persons. Further, breaking out three forms of recognition that comprise the conceptual core of self-governance enables Honneth to analyze impairments to self-realization on three different fronts. This allows for a nuanced and complex understanding of what self-realization is by examining how it can either be strengthened or diminished (perhaps to the point of extinction).

This intersubjective focus is welcome, and I applaud it, because it opens up the possibility for recognizing the role that emotion plays in self-governance, both as the primary medium through which our social interactions occur, and as a core component of the basic skills of self-governance, such as self-trust, self-respect, and self-esteem. On this view, our emotional attitudes form an important part of what we are able to think, which dovetails with the view of emotion and deliberation that has already been examined in this work.

The recognition theorists’ main concern, however, is with the conditions for the possibility of self-realization at the level of legal and political institutions within society. Their principal concern is with what happens when recognition is withdrawn (or never develops) at the political level. My
project will be to focus more precisely on the conditions for the possibility of self-governance at the personal level. This focus will allow me to utilize more directly the insights of the intersubjective psychologists outlined in chapter 3. Recognition is used by Honneth as a basis for developing his theory of self-realization within the political realm. What I propose to do in the next chapter is to combine the idea of recognition with the insights from the intersubjective psychologists already examined to come up with a more realistic account of self-governance. This will be the culmination of this work and will provide the alternative model of self-governance promised at the outset. I will expand on the recognition theorists in building a more psychologically realistic and nuanced account of the well-governed individual. Further, I will incorporate elements of the recognition theories and make them central to my view of self-governance. These elements include their intersubjective focus, as well as their emphasis on the role that emotional capacities play in self-governance.

I will argue, similar to Honneth, that the emotional or affective foundation of basic relations to self is critical to a developed sense of self-governance. I agree, as Honneth argues, that a developed sense of basic self-confidence is critical to the development of further, more mature, forms of self-governance, but I will explore in greater detail why primary relationships between children and their parents, peers, friends, and teachers are critical for understanding the ways that individuals who are in oppressive social circumstances can still maintain a sense of robust self-governance even in the face of institutional forces to the contrary. In this way, I will provide an explanation of how one can be resilient within an oppressive social or cultural setting.
Chapter 5: The Well-Governed Person

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Introduction:

In this chapter I will take the idea of recognition, which had its home in political theory in the last chapter, and combine it with the insights from intersubjective psychology to craft a realistic model of human self-governance, i.e., what it is to be a well-governed person. The recognition theorists provide a more nuanced, up-to-date, and psychologically rich sense of what it takes simply to function as a person, which they then use to describe the conditions for self-realization. I will expand upon their lead by giving an account of self-governance as a set of virtues of persons, with the development and sustained exercise of these virtues dependent upon our social interactions with others. Achieving these virtues (or the varying degrees to which one is able to attain these virtues) then reflects the mode of human flourishing that relates to our capacity to direct our own lives. The account of the well-governed person that I will provide makes our psychological functioning, in particular our emotional attitudes and their role in clear cognition, central to my account of self-governance.

The intersubjective, i.e., developmental, psychology story is the basis for understanding the nature of the adult capacities required for self-governance (not just their childhood development). As such, it gives the conditions for the possibility of self-governance. What I will do now is to make explicit the connection between the conditions for the possibility of self-governance found in relationships of emotional recognition in childhood and the nature of self-governance itself. My
contention is that by focusing on the developmental story one will then be able to re-conceptualize certain familiar capacities for self-governance, such as critical self-reflection, as well as arrive at other capacities that are required for being a well-governed person, such as the capacity to have a flexible and open relationship with one’s own internal motivational states. This is the story of how the capacities which have their origin in childhood interactions with important others are then sustained in adult existence to form the basis of our ability to govern ourselves well.

**What Self-Governance Is and the Elements of the Well-Governed Person**

To be self-governing is the ability to process information from the world through a relaxed filter of interpretation which then allows one to direct one’s own life in ways that truly reflect one’s own beliefs, preferences, and desires. This is the conceptual condition of self-governance. Even though self-governance is reflected in our choices, in my view there is something more fundamental than choice to self-governance. This more fundamental element is the psychological factors that allow one to interpret information from the world flexibly, which then allows one to make choices that are authentically one’s own. This is why I examined the intersubjective psychology perspective so carefully earlier in this work because it will now lay the foundation for understanding how these psychological factors get played out in the capacities that characterize self-governance. Similar to Joel Feinberg, I will conceive of self-governance as a constellation of interrelated capacities (what he calls “congeries of virtues”) that are all subsumed under the overarching category of directing one’s own life in ways that truly reflect the agent’s beliefs, preferences, and desires. The ability to exercise the following capacities well is what it is to be a self-governing person.

**Flexibility and Openness:** If one thinks of our pre-theoretic intuitions about self-governance, e.g., that a person should identify with the influences that motivate him to act instead of being directed by beliefs, preferences, or desires that are simply “imposed” on one from external (or
internal) forces, then there is something more basic to self-governance than choice (which is often privileged by voluntarist models of autonomy). This more basic element is, on my view, an ability to process information from the world through a relaxed filter of interpretation. This allows for a greater ability to adapt flexibly to whatever social or physical condition the person encounters without the need to rigidly process information through a very limited or rigid filter that pre-determines the meaning of a situation.

In this sense, being a well-governed person requires having a flexible and open relationship with one’s own internal emotional states and perspectives. This is what allows one to process information from the world through a relaxed filter of interpretation. The reason this is critical to self-governance is that it reflects a person’s ability to experience affect as “mind” as opposed to simply experiencing one’s emotions as bodily states. If one is able to experience affect as part of one’s cognitive architecture, then the meaning of situations is not rigidly fixed but is open to flexible interpretation and is characterized by an openness to further meanings not already acknowledged by the agent, i.e., one is open to evidence suggesting that the meaning of a situation is other than it seems to the agent at the time. In this way, it’s not simply the capacity to choose to do x or y with regard to the options available to one in acting, as the voluntarist model often emphasizes, it’s being open to different ways of understanding our choices. This capacity for flexibility and openness with regard to one’s emotional states can also be seen in the negative. To be self-governing is not to be subject to rigid or inflexible modes of thinking or feeling with respect to our choices.

The presence of unconscious (i.e., rigid and inflexible) principles of thinking, feeling, and acting create not only motivating principles of behavior that are generally not accessible to conscious scrutiny, they also limit (at the same time) the capacity of the person to introspect on one’s own motivational states because the person will be impeded in her capacity to make her own mind and its
operation an object of self-reflection. This is not simply a childhood condition, though. It will continue in effect into adulthood. Therefore, instances of rigid inflexibility in thinking, feeling, and acting (paradigm cases of poor self-governance) cannot be overcome by a simple act of will using a “detached” rational faculty because the adult agent will not have developed the ability to take her own mind as an object of reflection. In addition, it is not likely that there is a perspective that one can attain this is even significantly separate from our early childhood influences. An example of this will help to make these points clearer.

Obstructions to Being Well-Governed: An Example

Self-governance is inhibited by engrained patterns of thinking, feeling, or acting which then guide how the agent is able to think about who she is or how she should act. Another way of thinking about this is that being a well-governed person is obstructed if one is locked into habitual forms of how one interprets or “sees” situations. If one is in the habit of responding to situations reflexively, in a rote manner without any intervening way of altering the pattern of response by conscious thought or critical evaluation, then one’s capacity for self-governance is impaired. In this impaired state, one reacts rigidly and automatically to situations without the possibility of being aware of one’s (ultimate) reasons or purposes in acting. In this way, it is to be enslaved to past organizing principles of behavior, to be stuck in a pattern of behavior or thinking that plays itself out over and over again because one cannot

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219 Not all forms of habitual or engrained thinking or feeling necessarily inhibit autonomy. If I am presented with a bear charging at me, and I habitually respond to the threat in characteristically fearful or attentive ways, this does not represent a diminishment of my autonomy. Rather, it reflects an adaptive response to a dangerous situation. What’s more, we can’t think through every situation de novo. I do not need to think whether or not the chair will begin walking before I sit down on it, nor do I need to reconsider each step that I take on a smooth walkway. We need a practical orientation to the world that allows us to respond automatically at times, but this kind of automaticity is not a detriment to our autonomy. Further, certain “engrained” ways of thinking or feeling may not be problematic with regard to autonomy. They may be paradigm cases of autonomous existence. Frankfurt’s volitional necessities come to mind in this regard. These patterns of thinking or feeling are not engrained in a passive sense, where they form a grip on us unknown to the agent. Even though they are engrained, the agent continues to recognize alternative ways of thinking or feeling (which are then rejected in a characteristically agential way). They are commitments at the deepest level of one’s identity, and as such, they represent classic cases of acting or thinking in ways that are authentically one’s own.
consciously interject oneself into the mental motivation in place.

This can be shown by expanding upon an example originally presented by Dworkin. A person might want to learn how to ski. Initially, he may suspect that this simple desire of wanting to learn how to ski is the only motivation at play, or he may, at most, recognize that he wishes to test his courage in a mildly dangerous sport. Suppose, though, that he is brought to see (correctly) that his motivation to learn to ski is tied to his envy of his brother who has always excelled at sports. This is as far as Dworkin takes the example, and it is further than most who consider the nature of “authentic” motivations are willing or able to penetrate with regard to our motivations. At this point, most would claim that they had reached the “source” of one’s “true” motivations with regard to this action and that autonomy is achieved in either wishing he were not motivated in this way or in reaffirming the desire now that it is “truly” recognized for what it is. However, there is much more that needs to be said in analyzing this situation, and this further analysis reveals why a more complete understanding of our motivations is necessary to understand the exercise of self-governance.

The envy that the brother feels comes from somewhere. It is not the end of the analysis, it is the beginning. In one plausible interpretation of this situation, the person wanting to ski is envious of his brother not just because he excelled in sports but because the brother received the lion’s share of attention and affection from their father for his athletic prowess. The, apparently simple, desire to learn to ski is soon revealed to be a matter of wanting to be able to compete on an equal basis for paternal affections that he had always felt cheated out of. This is not the end of the analysis, however, because this simply takes the analysis one level further than Dworkin took it without revealing why the agent may not be in a position to simply “wish he were not motivated in this way.”

This person not only has a desire to compete for caregiver affection on an equal basis, but he is probably unwilling or even unable to recognize this as his “true” motivation. If his past experience of
voicing, or otherwise demonstrating, his displeasure at his emotional exclusion resulted in an increase in his father’s hostility and distance from him, then he would likely have needed to suppress such emotional reactions in order to preserve whatever connection he could with his father. Because the reality of failing to be able to compete for caregiver affection would likely have been met with a sense of shame and inadequacy on this person’s part, repression would have been a likely solution to this problem. As Stolorow and Atwood have observed, “The traumatized child … may ‘conclude’ this his own unmet needs and emotional pain are expressions of disgusting and shameful defects in the self,” and this blaming one’s own reactive states for the injuries that produced them can become a self-organizing principle that “usually operates unconsciously.”

In this case, the motivation for wanting to compete for caregiver affection would continue to exist, but it would exist in subterranean form, with little possibility of conscious access on the part of the agent. Therefore, he would not be in a position simply to will himself out of his motivational state. For him to break out of this engrained pattern of thinking and feeling would require that he recognize the emotional condition of shame and helplessness that he likely felt as a child in coming to terms with this traumatic situation, and this would not be easy to achieve. Many times, our motivations are set beyond our reach for good reason, to prevent the re-occurrence of the sense of shame and failure that accompanied the original trauma. In this example, this person is rigidly locked into an engrained pattern of seeking caregiver acceptance without realizing that this is the driving force behind his actions. In this way, his options for acting (in many instances) are more reactive, and passively received, than prospectively planned or considered. What this person lacks is a flexible awareness of his own internal motivating states and without this (emotional) self-awareness, he remains stuck in principles of behavior or thinking that guide him without his conscious awareness of their influence.

Stolorow and Atwood, Contexts of Being, p. 55.
On a voluntarist perspective, this person was able to “choose” to learn to ski (probably through some process of identification with his “lower order” desires), and this is as far as the analysis goes. There are further crucial details that are missed, though, if one leaves the story at this point. What he takes the meaning of the situation to be is what determines what he takes to be the choice he has in this situation. If, however, one realizes that his “choice” to learn to ski is actually a by-product of his interpretation of the situation (wanting to compete for paternal acceptance) and, therefore, that his interpretive field impacts his choice in any given situation (i.e., he may be less impacted in situations where competition is not a central aspect of his interpretive scheme), then one can realize that our interpretative field is what informs our choices. Therefore, there is something more basic to self-governance than choice. It is how one interprets the situation at issue. This is why self-governance has much more to do with being openly and imaginatively aware of one’s own internal motivations than it does with one’s choices. The issue, from the standpoint of being a well-governed person, is to be aware of our interpretive frameworks such that we are substantially aware of our internal motivational states.

Emotional Self-Awareness and Emotional Self-Regulation: It has already been noticed in the literature that “until persons achieve awareness concerning their motivations, to that extent autonomy remains out of their reach.”\(^{221}\) This is a compelling insight, but without the clarification possible using the intersubjective perspective, it remains difficult to ascertain just what our motivations consist of. If our motivational structure is dominated by repressed emotional experience, then it seems unlikely that the person would be able to have the kind of awareness and control over his motivational states as self-governance requires. Further, once we understand our motivational states through an intersubjective lens, it becomes clear that becoming aware of one’s

motivations is, largely, a process of being aware of one’s internal emotional states. What’s more, control over our motivations (of the kind required by self-governance) is nothing more than the ability to regulate one’s emotional reactions to situations.

As one becomes more skilled at being aware of one’s own internal emotional states (i.e., being aware of his own propensities for thinking and feeling), it is likely that he would then become more skilled at being aware of, and of controlling, his motivations in acting. The mistake that the voluntarists tend to make in this regard is to take a much too narrowly cognitive construal of our basic introspective capacities. What is needed is not a more “rational” approach to understanding who we are, but a more emotionally complex approach to self-awareness. What the intersubjective perspective suggests is that the ability to experience emotional states as part of one’s cognitive structure is what allows for not only an awareness of one’s motivations but also a degree of control over those motivations. This, of course, is (largely) a product of proper emotional recognition by one’s caregivers while in early childhood that then continues into adult agency. If there is a failure of emotional recognition at this early stage, then two outcomes are likely: 1) affect fails to be integrated into one’s cognitive architecture, and 2) the mind is not experienced as an object of self-reflection. Each of these will then tend to thwart the adult in her ability to self-govern. An example of a lack of emotional self-awareness and emotional self-regulation will help to clarify these issues.

Case Study

The experience of repressed emotions is common to everyone, to one degree or another, and they arise within the crucible of childhood relations with caregivers. If the failure of recognition is prolonged or significant, then the result is the “establishment of invariant and inflexible principles of organization that remain beyond the … influence of reflective self-awareness or of subsequent
Such invariant principles of organization continue into adulthood to form a core of our motivational structure. If such principles fail to guide us in ways that would reflect true self-governance, then it is likely that they do so because the agent has a limited capacity to either validate or defend such principles consciously (largely because they are held unconsciously).

The kind of emotional disregulation at issue here is a form of self-organizational failure whose origins arise out of insecure or mal-adaptive attachment patterns, i.e., patterns of poor emotional recognition. The following case example brings this out:

“I couldn’t help myself. He made me so furious with his mistakes that I told him to go jump in a lake. Not in those friendly words, of course. I was so angry. I wasn’t going to let him get away with that kind of stuff again. Maybe for others it’s OK, but not with me. Why is everyone in this world so stupid?”

This 35 year old attorney was fired by her oldest and biggest client after this outburst at a meeting and after threatening a colleague when he missed a mailing deadline she had given to him. However, this was not the first time that she had been in thrall to her emotional condition and controlled by the dictates of her anger. She had also lost several boyfriends in the past few years for her “instability.” In these cases, the onset of the uncontrollable emotional response comes without warning or clue of impending loss of control.

There are two ways that episodes like this might be characterized by philosophers. First, such episodes are often referred to as emotional “hijackings” and are thought to be cases where rational thinking is suspended and affect clouds one’s perceptions and “better judgment” in influencing behavior. In this perspective, reason and affect are considered to be separate entities,

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222 Stolorow and Atwood, *Contexts of Being*, p. 55.
223 This example, and the discussion and analysis that follows, are derived from the following work: Daniel Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, [New York: The Guilford Press], 1999, pp. 243-69.
224 I will agree that rational thinking is suspended in this case, but I will not go further to claim that a detached rationality could be the “cure” for such emotional outbursts.
with reason operating to control or transcend the influence of one’s emotional responses. Second, one could claim that this simply represents this person’s genetic legacy, in which case this tendency toward uncontrolled rage is akin to a medical condition but for which no treatment is available. However, such cases of emotional disregulation, though, can (and should) be seen to be much more than this, if they are viewed through a more psychologically rich perspective on agency.

The situation described above cannot be understood outside of its social context, the details of which came out in counseling sessions over time with the attorney. The document that was supposed to be mailed by the attorney’s colleague was addressed to a woman executive in her late 60’s whom the attorney experienced as a mother figure. She had always wanted to please this female executive, without knowing why. What came out in counseling sessions, though, was the understanding that she felt that her actual mother had never been supportive of her or pleased with her abilities. What she felt, at moments of intense emotion in her youth, was that her mother had failed to understand what she was feeling or to be connected with her emotionally. This caused a profound sense of shame because of her unacknowledged, though deeply important, internal feelings. This continued sense of shame was an unbearable part of her relationship with her mother, and as such, the attorney’s adaptive response as a child was to repress such emotional reactions, but this kind of repressed emotional attitude then played itself out in ways that the attorney was not aware of, nor in ways that she could control.

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225 This is not to say that the attorney would have been able to clearly articulate these reasons for her actions in regard to this female executive. The whole point of this discussion is that such reasons would likely have been beyond her conscious reach, yet they still formed the central basis of her overt behavior with regard to this executive.

226 Interestingly, in a very unusual circumstance, this assertion was corroborated by the attorney’s mother, who was interviewed by the analyst at the request of the attorney. The mother indicated that this emotionally detached style of parenting was practiced on her and that she had passed on a “watered down” version of what she had encountered while growing up. The purpose of such parenting, according to the mother, was to “harden” her daughter to the turbulence of the “real world.” Siegel, The Developing Mind, p. 257.
The colleague’s mistake created a sensation in the attorney (in the present) that, yet again, she would be unable to please her “mother,” and this resulted (in the present) in the same kind of response that she experienced as a child when her state of mind of wanting to please her mother was met with stony silence (i.e., a sense of being “unseen”): she felt shame. What’s more, her mother often responded with anger at her childish attempts at emotional recognition, and this caused an additional burden of humiliation to accompany the shame. In her childhood, the attorney would not have been in the position to criticize the mother for her inability or unwillingness to connect emotionally with her because her entire existence depended on the abilities of the mother. If she were to conclude (correctly) that the mother was at fault for the failure to connect, then she would have effectively jeopardized her entire existence because she would have had to admit that the mother was not up to the task of mothering.

This is the idea of unthinkable anxiety that was discussed earlier in the chapter, where, according to Winnicott, the child’s experience if often on the precipice, eternally dependent on the quality of care from the caregiver. Without proper care, the child is left completely on its own in a world that it cannot manage. Also, this example illustrates how the child, in such cases of misrecognition, must try to adapt to the caregiver, even if only in a masochistic or self-abnegating way. As a child, the adaptive response to this situation, for the attorney, was to enter a dissociative state with regard to her strong feelings, thus relegating them to an unconsciously organized realm that she could no longer access, and about which she was completely unaware.

The attorney was now prone to entering this state of enraged humiliation at inopportune times because it had become engrained within her as a repeated pattern of neural activity, over which she had little conscious control. Her emotions in these kinds of situations quickly exceeded her (emotional) window of tolerance. The cues that set her off were rationally related to her
previous childhood experience but were now experienced inappropriately because they were now anachronistic relics of what were previously adaptive responses to intolerable conditions of malattunement. They had now become inflexible states of mind that simply displayed the old patterns of response over and over again. The attorney would have claimed that she had full critical self-reflective capacity, but in reality, her “reflective” analyses of her options for acting were restricted to a relatively limited set of pre-established (previously) adaptive emotional responses to situations from her childhood, which colored the meaning of many situations in terms of previously experienced misrecognized responses from her mother. The “meaning” of the situation was cast rigidly as a continuing desire to please and to be emotionally recognized, but this meaning was not accessible to the attorney prior to counseling.

Her client and her colleague, though, couldn’t have cared less about the “meaning” of these outbursts; they were simply judged to be inappropriate. Her outbursts were the result of feeling (in the present) the sense of being emotionally misunderstood, demeaned, and enraged that permeated her childhood. Further, any attempt by her colleagues to calm her down was experienced as a condescending attempt to soothe her, which made her even angrier. For hours afterward, she remained extremely agitated and angry at the colleague who missed the deadline. Her reactions were now rigidly and inflexibly imprinted within her.

Analysis of the Case Study:

This example illustrates how internal organizing principles, established in early childhood through interpersonal, emotional interaction with caregivers, can deeply influence adult agency, to the detriment of one’s self-governance. The reason for this is that the specific situation in the case study had come to have a specific meaning for the attorney that was most powerfully understood in relation to her specific past (emotional) experiences with her own mother, but such meaning could
not be discerned by the attorney as an adult because her critical reflective capacities had been diminished because she had not learned, as a child, that her own emotional responses were valid sources of information on how to interpret the world and herself. As suggested by the quote at the beginning of the case study, the attorney was unable to recognize any role that she herself was playing in this drama. It was always someone else’s fault. All of this occurred, though, out of conscious awareness by the attorney, so she was locked into engrained, anachronistic patterns of response that resisted current “rational” explanation or control. In this way, her capacity for self-governance was deeply compromised by her rigid and inflexible way of responding to situations, as well as her inability to access the source of that rigidity and inflexibility. In her case, affect and reason were, indeed, radically separate, but with pathological results.

This example illustrates the notion that if significant parts of our motivational structure are held in implicit memory, i.e., unconsciously, then it is difficult for those parts of our motivational structure to be integrated into our conscious structures of control and self-regulation. One is then subject to the control of unconscious motivations, as opposed to being able to control such motivations through one’s conscious agency. This is to be enslaved to past patterns of behaving. It’s to be stuck in a pattern of behavior or thinking or feeling that plays itself out over and over again because the agent can’t consciously interject herself into the process that is being played out. This was the legacy of her emotional interactions with her mother while still young. These tendencies then persisted into adulthood because our childhood experiences do not magically dissipate upon reaching maturity. This is why the capacities central to self-governance are truly inter-relational in nature. They require others to develop because many of these capacities arise out of the emotional nature of our early social experiences.

If we consider the nature of the assertions that seem to define our notion of being well-
governed, e.g., “I’m in charge here,” it’s not clear what such a statement would mean if the source of my actions is dictated by internal conditions of which I am only vaguely aware, and over which I have little or no control. If the impetus for our actions derives largely from conditions of self-organization over which we are generally unfamiliar (i.e., from emotional states that are unconscious), then it seems presumptuous to assume that we are sufficiently in charge of our own ends to claim to be self-governing. If we are oblivious to our affective reality, then we are not in a position to truly be a well-governed person. In this sense, I agree with the voluntarist that unconscious motivations are a detriment to one’s self-governance, but what I have provided is an understanding of our emotional interaction with others that explains how such unconscious motivations can arise and how such unconscious motivations can be avoided, both as a child and as an adult. Unfortunately, this power to avoid unconscious motivations does not rest with the agent alone. In this sense, we are vulnerable to others in both developing and maintaining the capacities necessary for self-governance.

**Critical Self-Reflection:** A central element of many influential accounts of autonomy is the capacity to reflect on one’s “lower-order” desires in such a way that then validates those lower-order desires, i.e., it makes such desires truly one’s own. This is the process of critical self-reflection, and it has been adopted by many whose theories of autonomy guide the field at present. The nagging worry, though, about this process is that our “higher-order” reflective capacities may themselves be the mere product of social influence, in which case the person’s motivations may be *his* but not *his own*. Gerald Dworkin addresses this issue with his requirement for “procedural independence.” According to Dworkin “spelling out the conditions of procedural independence involves distinguishing between those ways of influencing people’s reflective and critical faculties which
subvert them from those which promote and improve them.”

Without the aid of the intersubjective perspective, though, Dworkin is constrained in his analysis of the forces that subvert self-reflection to a narrow range, including hypnotic suggestion, manipulation, coercive persuasion, and subliminal influence. Notice that this list does not include any positive influences on one’s critical self-reflective capacities. One should also be struck by the list of disrupting influences because they assume that one will naturally have the necessary reflective capacities unless others intentionally intrude on one’s abilities. This is the basic voluntarist assumption, and it takes the intersubjective perspective to show why this assumption is not legitimate.

The primary disrupter to the development of one’s capacity for self-reflection comes from early childhood experience in the form of a lack of emotional recognition on the part of caregivers. Our emotionally-laden interplay with others occurs before we have the capacity to conceptualize, let alone reflectively endorse or reject, what is happening to us. Because of this, our emotional interactions with others form a core of, and can create limitations on, our conceptual capacities: “messages we cannot fully discern, comprehend, examine, and reject intellectually … can invade and deform our psyches as we absorb, digest, and assimilate them into our deepest experiential understanding.”

Critical self-reflection is a central skill of the well-governed person because it allows that person to take her own mind as an object of scrutiny. This allows for a degree of control over the operation of one’s motivations in ways that allow the agent to direct the course of one’s thinking, feelings, and actions. This can be seen best in the breach. If one is governed by principles of thinking, feeling, and acting that are unconscious, then such principles will produce rigid and

inflexible modes of thinking, feeling, and acting that are not generally subject to control by the agent herself.

The process of critical self-reflection is not the use of a “detached” rational capacity which allows the agent a perspective relatively independent of one’s emotional attitudes and past social influences. It is a process whereby one’s emotional attitudes and perspectives are incorporated into one’s cognitive functioning in a way that allows each to have a role in guiding the agent in a way that reflects what it is to self-govern at the highest level. As we saw in the intersubjective psychology discussion, this can only be attained by the proper kinds of interactions between child and caregiver. The skills that are developed as a child then allow the adult to sustain the ability to take one’s own mind as an object of self-reflective scrutiny (unless there is some trauma that is experienced by the adult, which could then diminish or restrict one’s developed capacity for self-reflection).

At the core of one’s psychological ability to govern one’s own life is the capacity for critical self-reflection. This capacity, though, is not a purely cognitive condition that one develops naturally through a “normal” process of maturation; it is a skill that one develops in social interaction with others (with proper integration of one’s emotional perspectives into one’s cognitive resources being the central element of this skill). My claim is that the way we reason is not free of social influence or distant from emotional perspectives. This descriptive claim, though, is something with which the voluntarist would agree (e.g., even Kant recognized that people often “reason” with and through their emotions, but when doing so, they are “reasoning” in a defective way). My further claim is that there are versions of social influence and emotional engagement that lead us to “reason” well (i.e., use our reasoning and emotional capacities in tandem) and allow us then to be self-governing in a robust sense. In recognizing this, my goal is to discover a role for emotion to play in our self-governance, by denying that emotion, intrinsically, is detrimental to the operation of reason.
Emotion, contrary to this negative view, is an essential part of our reasoning capacity. This distinguishes my account of self-governance from the voluntarists because I recognize a positive role for social influence and emotion to play in the exercise of self-governance. I will side with the voluntarist, though, in realizing that the presence of unconscious motivations often inhibits the exercise of self-governance.

This discussion involves an important distinction found in Aristotle between capacities that do not need the help of others to actualize and those capacities that do need such help. In Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* he contends that “of all the things that come to us by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity (this is plain in the case of the senses; for it was not by often seeing or often hearing that we got these senses, but on the contrary we had them before we used them).”\(^{229}\) In the case of our senses, we come by the activity simply by opening our eyes, or reaching out to touch something. The capacities necessary for virtue, though, present a different case. One cannot understand the nature of virtue unless one takes into account how virtues are acquired by the individual. Virtues do not come to us by nature (as does our capacity for sight). We have the potential to develop the virtues: “neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them.”\(^{230}\) Such potential, though, must be actualized with the help of others. We acquire virtues through a process of habituation. This is what makes them dispositions (*hexeis*) rather than simple capacities or potentialities (*dunameis*). In the process of acquiring the virtues “we do not decide to become virtuous and straightaway become so.”\(^{231}\) It is not through direct deliberation and choice that we become temperate or courageous. We do so through interaction with others.

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\(^{230}\) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a11-1103a32.

The potentiality, in the case of the virtues, is not a power to produce a change (as it is in other cases), but rather, the capacity of a thing to be in a different and more completed state. What is clear in Aristotle is that the process of habituation that is central to the development of the virtues is an interactive process, one that necessarily involves another, i.e., one who is able to observe and correct the exercise of the virtue in question. Habituation is largely a process of learning the proper kinds of emotional response to situations. In Aristotle, this is not something that one can teach oneself.

The voluntarist model, though, assumes that there can be a natural unfolding of the (rational) capacities necessary for self-governance, unless others interfere with this natural process. The implication is that we have the capacities necessary for self-governance at birth, and these capacities will continue to develop as long as others do not create significant obstacles to the exercise of those capacities. In this sense, the capacities for self-governance on the voluntarist model are similar to our capacities for sight and hearing, in that they do not require the intercession of others for their development.

In the model of self-governance that I have presented, there is a co-creation of the capacities necessary for the exercise of self-governance because the capacities that are required for self-governance arise, to a considerable degree, from the process of emotional recognition achieved in our earliest interactions with others. In this sense, we are not seedlings in regard to self-governance. If this were the case, then we could simply rely on the natural unfolding of our innate potentiality, as long as others simply provided sufficient water to help us along the way. My argument is that we need others to create the conditions under which we can develop and sustain the capacities necessary for self-governance. We cannot rely on a mere unfolding of natural tendencies to reach our goal of

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being a well-governed person.

**Imagination and Independence:** There is a further way that an ability to process information from the world in a relaxed and flexible way plays itself out in relation to self-governance, and it occurs in the realm of imagination. From the developmental story it is easy to envision that imagination arises when the child does not need to be overly concerned about the external signals it receives from its caregivers, i.e., the nature of the emotional interaction between child and caregiver. With proper emotional recognition, the child is freed up to concern herself with matters beyond the immediate present. If the child is in a situation where emotional recognition is lacking, then she will remain focused, with much of her attention, on the need to adapt to the caregiver. The immediate present becomes her central concern because she will need to focus on the cues she receives from her social environment, i.e., the caregiver-child dyad. Her need to adapt to the cues she receives becomes her ultimate reality.

Humans have an enormously greater flexibility in our adaptation to the social environment than most other animals (many of whom never liberate themselves from their instinctive reactions to the present situation), but this flexibility comes with a price. If the social environment is generally hostile or simply contrary to one’s own interpretation of situations, then our adaptations become our central focus. If the child needs to concern himself predominantly with his adaptation to the caregiver, then he will not focus beyond his relatively passive and reactive stance toward his immediate present. In this case, the child will be on constant alert as to how the caregiver will interpret the world, and the child will remain tied to external “authority” for his interpretive stance. Since these tendencies will then persist into adulthood, they will restrict the possibility of self-governance in the adult agent because the adult that the child becomes will then tend to be helplessly reactive to its immediate environment instead of being one who actively pursues his own
aims and projects within that environment. It is the pursuit of one’s own aims and projects that lies at the heart of self-governance, and imagination is one critical way in which one is able to achieve this goal.

With a social environment where emotional recognition is the primary mode of interaction, the child gains a degree of independence from the immediate present. With such independence comes the possibility of active engagement with a world that is much wider than the one that presents itself to the child at any given time. If the child’s social environment is such that it can be relieved of the burden of focusing on its adaptations to those around it, then the child will become liberated from such a passive and immediate reactivity to the present environment. If this happens, then the child will now have the possibility of increasingly articulated aims which extend beyond the present environment: “He is liberated from a passive and immediate reactiveness to the present environment by the appearance of increasingly articulated aims which extend beyond the present environment.”

True planning is now possible, and it involves imagining possibilities for action beyond the immediate present. A child, and later the adult the child becomes, who lacks such an imaginative capacity is locked into a concern over current circumstances. He will find it more difficult to break this mold and develop the outlook needed to plan creatively for the future: “Choice, decision, fully deliberate and volitional action, and self-direction in general are not conceivable in the absence of imagination.”

A relaxed and flexible interpretive stance with regard to information from the world allows for one to be able to take the point of view that how things are at present is merely conditional. It is to liberate the imagination and allow for one to see that how things are right now is only a special

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235 Shapiro, *Autonomy and Rigid Character*, p. 36.
case of what is possible (special only because it already exists). Other things beyond immediate concerns become possible to consider and anticipate, which then expands the range of things that are possible for the agent to consider as alternatives in how to react to situations. This increases the agent’s ability to self-govern. The way things are at the present time is not, then, how things must be. They are transformed into the status of how things happen to be at present but need not be in the future. This widening of one’s perspective enlarges the scope of one’s self-governing world. The opposite of this is to be locked into a rigid and inflexible perspective of how things are and how things need to be which limits the alternative possibilities open to the agent and narrows the scope of one’s capacity to envision how things might be (instead of how they are): “It is exactly in the nature of rigidity to be undeviating from an established course, yet incapable of initiating a new one.”

This element of our self-governing capacities is similar to Hobbes’ emphasis on the passion of curiosity. For Hobbes, curiosity is a force that drives human beings in their pursuit and quest for knowledge, what he calls the “care of knowing causes.” This kind of driving force is what allows for intellectual progress to be made, and it enables us as a species to go further in our intellectual pursuits than would otherwise be possible. What Hobbes was concerned with is where we would be if we lacked the ability to be curious about the world around us. If this were the case, then we would then lack “a lust of the mind that by a perseverance of delight in the continual and indefatigable generation of knowledge exceedeth the short vehemence of any carnal pleasure.”

Without curiosity, we would be in darkness regarding the world around us because we would have no impetus to search for why things are the way they are. This would then result in a cramped and

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236 See Shapiro, Autonomy and Rigid Character, p. 65.
237 Shapiro, p. 78.
239 Hobbes, Leviathan, p. 31.
240 Conversation with Tom Beauchamp, November 4, 2010.
confined view of the world because we would rarely have the audacity to look beyond what is immediately apparent. This is similar to our capacity to imagine because imagination allows us not to be tied to the way things are at present. Curiosity looks at the world and wonders why it is the way it is, and then fully expects to get an answer that then allows us to know the world better. Imagination has a similar open perspective, and with it comes the hope of always being in a position to know oneself and the world around one better.

If one thinks of the central problem of oppression identified by the relational philosophers, then this perspective on self-governance provides a way of understanding how one could resist the influence of such oppressive norms. The flexible awareness of one’s emotional states that is characteristic of being a well-governed person creates a degree of resilience to the pressure of social influence from broader social institutions because such flexibility makes one less likely to be susceptible to “external” pressures, such as oppressive social norms, because one will be less likely to look to external conditions to define one’s own reality. One will be able to look inward to guide one’s decisions in any given situation. The trust in one’s own internal states that is generated when self-governance is viewed intersubjectively invites active engagement with social influence because there is an ability to sift through such “external” influences in a way that reflects a mature and confident self-awareness. One is less likely to be deceived or manipulated (or, in general, to be gullible) if one is sturdy at the core of one’s own identity, and one is more likely to be sturdy at the core of one’s own identity if one has a (more or less) explicit and flexible awareness of one’s own internal motivational states.

A final word is in order here to clarify a basic point of this analysis. It isn’t enough simply to

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242 I am indebted to one of my students, Michael McGillen, for pointing out this fact.
say that we have a need to adapt to others in our social environment and that if one finds oneself in a social environment that is not emotionally nurturing, then one will adapt in ways that thwart one’s capacity for self-governance. Nor is it enough to say that if one finds oneself in an emotionally nurturing social environment then one will adapt to others in ways that increase one’s capacities for self-governance. The reason that neither of these is enough is that there is still another possibility, which is that the child, on its own, may still be able to develop (and sustain) the capacities necessary for self-governance. This would allow for a neutral stance with regard to the development of the capacities necessary for self-governance and the role of others in that development.

This neutral stance suggests that while it may be easier to achieve certain tasks with others’ help, it is still possible to achieve those same tasks on one’s own. For example, it may be easier to learn how to ski with the assistance of others, but it is still possible not only to learn to ski on one’s own but to master the art of skiing in isolation from others. Similarly, it may be possible for the child, even in hostile social environments, to develop the capacities necessary for self-governance in the face of opposition from those around her. This is the implicit assumption of much of the voluntarist literature. From the perspective, persons are viewed as having certain innate or natural tendencies, such as a tendency toward rationality, which then develops as long as no one else actively crushes the development of that capacity. This is the seedling view examined earlier, where the development of certain capacities (like sight) do not need the active intervention of others.

This assumption, though, is difficult to accept if one adopts the perspective of intersubjective psychology. My claim, using this perspective, is that for the average person one needs a process of interaction with others (what Aristotle would have called a process of habituation) in the form of emotional recognition to achieve the capacities central to self-governance. Unless one is the heroic sage, it is not possible to develop these capacities on one’s
own because they are not a simple unfolding of innate capacities found within each of us. I am claiming that there is a specific kind of sociality that we need (in the form of emotional recognition) to achieve the capacities necessary for self-governance. It’s not that we come by the capacities for self-governance more readily with the help of others. It’s that without the help of others, those capacities will develop (if at all) to only a very limited extent. The person may be able to get by in the world, but she will not likely achieve the level of competence at self-governing to be considered a well-governed person.

**Conclusion**

Taking an intersubjective perspective allows one to see that self-governance is a flexible awareness and relaxed attitude toward one’s motivational states (i.e., one’s emotions, preferences, desires, values, commitments, etc.) that then allows one a relatively wide range of interpretive options with regard to the meaning of the situations that one encounters. This then allows for a degree of awareness of and control over how one responds (emotionally) to those situations. Therefore, a robust exercise of self-governance requires that one not be locked within an engrained pattern of perceiving or interpreting situations, which then enslaves one to past patterns of interpretation and behavior. It’s to have a flexible awareness of alternative ways of interpreting or understanding one’s situation, or a flexible capacity to respond to alternative reasons for acting in a given situation. This reflects an ability to interpret situations without being locked into particular interpretive outcomes which would then play themselves out in behavior over and over again without the agent being able to intercede in the process. In this sense, self-governance is an openness with respect to processing information from internal and external sources. It’s a capacity to reflect on a wide range of internal states without dissonance or undue resistance, not through an idealized rational capacity but through a complex pragmatic orientation toward oneself that allows
one access to, and control over, one’s emotional attitudes and perspectives.

On a voluntarist model, self-governance is (often) seen as a capacity for rational self-reflection on one’s preferences, desires, or values (with a particular conception of what it is to be rational), which then privileges the notion of choice and our deliberative capacities: “voluntarist conceptions of the self anchor sovereignty in the notion of choice.”243 Within this model of self-governance, the process of critical self-reflection is a purely cognitive process that is “detached” from the “contingent” elements of the self, such as one’s emotions, and centers on the idea of choice. As I have argued, though, “choice” is often undertaken within the “interpretive field” of the agent, i.e., how the agent comes to interpret the meaning of a situation. Therefore, it is the interpretive field that is more fundamentally important to self-governance than choice. Further, the rational will does not free us from the emotional reality of our interpretations. The will does not, on this view, ride above the fray of social influence. What we need for self-governance, instead of a capacity for “rational” willing, is emotional self-awareness and emotional self-regulation in order to execute the “choices” that are authentically our own through a process of flexible interpretation of situations.

Therefore, if one comes at one’s theory of self-governance from the perspective of emotional recognition, then this alters the way that one will then view being a well-governed person: “the ideal of recognition … anchors sovereignty in knowledge: that is, in the prospect of arriving at clear understanding of who you are.”244 On this view, critical self-reflection is understood in intersubjective and emotional terms, which then results in viewing self-governance as a flexible awareness and relaxed attitude toward one’s emotions, preferences, desires, and values. This view of self-governance argues that there is something more basic and prior to choice that should be accounted for in one’s theory, the idea of flexible awareness of one’s emotional states which then


244 Markell, Bound by Recognition, p. 12.
allows for a flexible interpretation of situations. This kind of flexible awareness of one’s emotions allows the agent to access and reflect on the motivational states that are implicated in any given choice and helps ensure that our choices are not simply repetitious incarnations of previously developed engrained patterns of feeling or thinking.

The strategy of viewing self-governance either from the perspective of the voluntarist model, or from the perspective of recognition, then, reflects fundamentally different ways of representing the agent’s relationship to his or her past and future. The voluntarist ideal seeks a sense of control over one’s future by creating the capacities to break decisively from one’s past social inheritance by an ever-expanding cascade of “present” choices.\[245\] The strategy of viewing self-governance from the perspective of emotional recognition takes into consideration, specifically, the weight of one’s past social inheritance, but it does so in very carefully crafted ways: “in this picture, history takes the form of identity, and identity is understood specifically as an antecedently given set of facts about who we are, and indeed as a set of facts which both precedes and governs our action, telling us what acting ‘authentically’ means for us.”\[246\]

I agree that various executive functions, such as planning and developing strategies for one’s life, are an important component of being a well-governed person, but there are other things that should be considered first, such as one’s capacity to be emotionally self-aware and to regulate one’s emotional reactions to situations. This doesn’t have to do with the (rational) will. It has to do with a capacity for introspection that is emotional at its core, both in its development and in its object and execution. Many persons self-reflect, but it is often done from a cramped and confined

\[245\] Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, p. 12: “… for the strategy of choice and the strategy of recognition represent different ways of establishing links among an agent’s past, present, and future … The idea of the unencumbered self … enables agents to assume a posture of confident mastery in the face of the future by granting them the power to break deliberately with the legacy of the past: to slough off its weight, repeatedly, in an ongoing sequence of present choices.”

\[246\] Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, p. 12.
perspective that does not enlarge the agent’s world but constricts and constrains the agent’s outlook along well-worn paths \textit{without the possibility of altering that particular perspective}, because the self-reflection comes out of “favored” positions without the agent realizing what is happening. This is the peril of unconscious mental processing in one’s capacity for self-governance.
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