

**CONTROL AND AUTHENTICITY:**

**Reflections on Personal Autonomy**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

The Department of Philosophy

of

Rhodes University

By

**Sharli Anne Paphitis**

May 2010

## ABSTRACT

Currently the most influential accounts of personal autonomy, at least in the English-speaking world, focus on providing conditions under which agents can be said to exercise self-control. Two distinct accounts of personal autonomy have emerged in this tradition: firstly, *hierarchical* models grounded in the work of Harry Frankfurt; and secondly, *systems division* models most famously articulated by Gary Watson. In this thesis I show the inadequacies of both of these models by exploring the problematic views of the self and self-control underlying each model. I will suggest that the problems faced by these models stem from the fact that they endorse a problematic fragmentation of the self. I suggest that a Nietzschean account of personal autonomy is able to avoid these problems. The Nietzschean account can largely, I show, be drawn from Nietzsche's understanding of both the 'man of *ressentiment*' and his opposite, the sovereign individual. On this picture wholeness of self – rather than fragmentation of the self – is required in order for us to be most fully autonomous. Furthermore, this wholeness of self requires the kind of integrity which is opposed to the problematic fragmentation endorsed by Frankfurt and Watson.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I extend here a warm word of thanks to all my friends and family members who have given me support and encouragement throughout my studies. Most notably I would like to thank Lindsay Kelland, Megan Van der Nest and Jonathan Hawkes for reading countless drafts of this thesis. I would also like to give special thanks to James Stapley who was there for me in the most difficult of times. I am greatly indebted to Pedro Tabensky who provided me with useful feedback and commentary on my thesis and in all circumstances went above and beyond the call of duty. This thesis would not have been possible without the financial support of the Andrew Mellon Mentors Scholarship. The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research project is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.

## CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Personal Autonomy</b>	<b>4</b>
I. Hierarchical Models and Systems Division Models of Personal Autonomy	7
II. Hierarchical Models	8
III. The Regress Problem, Identification and Wholeheartedness	10
IV. Systems Division Models	13
V. Manipulation Problems and Systems Division Model Solutions	18
VI. Rational Self-Control	20
<b>Chapter 2: Dark Corners of the Self</b>	<b>25</b>
I. The True Self	26
II. Rational Selves and Animal Selves	29
III. Externalisation and Rejection	33
IV. The Gothic Self	37
<b>Chapter 3: The Sovereign Individual</b>	<b>43</b>
I. Autonomy and Authenticity	43
II. Acknowledgment and Integrity	46
III. Self-Creation	52
IV. Narrative Integrity	56
V. Individual Style – Autonomy as the Art of Living	58
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>63</b>

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

For the works Nietzsche published or prepared for publication, all references are by paragraph number (e.g. GS 270), or section and paragraph number (e.g. GM II: 2), as appropriate. The following are the abbreviations used for the works from which quotations have been taken:

Z     *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

SE     *Schopenhauer as Educator*

WP     *The Will to Power*

TI     *Twilight of the Idols; The Anti-Christ*

GS     *The Gay Science*

BG     *Beyond Good and Evil ~ Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*

BT     *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*

GM     *On the Genealogy of Morals*

## INTRODUCTION

In this century, academic philosophy, as much as psychology, has been reluctant to pay much attention to the shadow-side of human motivation. It has not occupied itself with the agonizing question ‘can it really have been I who did that?’ or with the genuine clash of reasons for answering yes or no to it.<sup>1</sup>

Some recent debates on personal autonomy have focused on a conception of personal autonomy in which what is important about the ability to exercise self-mastery or self-governance is that in so doing an agent is thought to be free to act in ways that make her genuinely the author of her actions. Some of the most influential accounts of personal autonomy have aimed to provide explanations of both the nature of the self which is to be associated with autonomous agency, and the conditions under which that self could be said to be fully governing itself. In this thesis I will examine two explanations as seen in two prominent and plausible accounts of personal autonomy, Gary Watson’s and Harry Frankfurt’s.<sup>2</sup> While both Watson and Frankfurt provide us with what appear to be plausible accounts of autonomous individuals, I argue that Frankfurt and Watson provide us with an ultimately problematic understanding of the self which is to be associated with autonomous agency. I go on to argue that Frankfurt and Watson also provide us with a problematic understanding of self-governance. And so, I suggest that we should adopt a Nietzschean view of personal autonomy.

On Frankfurt’s and Watson’s accounts of personal autonomy, when I refer to myself as an agent I do not refer to a bundle of intricately related beliefs, desires, urges, impulses, instincts, preferences, actions and behaviours. Rather, according to Frankfurt and Watson, when I refer to myself I refer to a subset of these things, namely, the subset of these things which are guided and controlled by reason, understood as conscious rational thought. This subset constitutes, according to Frankfurt and Watson, what they call our true or real self. I will argue that we should reject the fundamental assumption about the nature of the true or real self underlying both of these accounts. What we take the true or real self to be cannot be identified with only one part of the self, namely, the rational, deliberative part of the self. Of course, it cannot be denied that our rational, deliberative and evaluative faculties play a large role in shaping and constituting our identities. But our identities are also

---

<sup>1</sup> Midgley, *Wickedness*, p119.

<sup>2</sup> Watson 1989, 2004. Frankfurt 1971, 1988, 1999, 2006

shaped by our instincts, impulses, intuitions, urges, passions and various subconscious drives. Our rational self is only partially constitutive of our identity, and so the rational self does not seem to provide us with an accurate picture of the whole of our true or real self. The self which is to be associated with what we would call a self-governing agent is a human self, it is the kind of self that we interact with on a daily basis and which is most properly understood as a person. As such, the autonomous self is a person who comes with a unique identity. But this identity is not fully described by what Frankfurt and Watson call our true or real self. In contrast to the picture of the true or real self given to us by Frankfurt and Watson, I defend the Nietzschean conception. I will argue that this latter account of personal autonomy centres on a conception of the self in which wholeness of self is stressed. The autonomous agent, for Nietzsche, is an agent who understands herself to be nothing less than the authentic expression of her whole self, that is, she takes her true or real self to be an accurate reflection of her identity as a whole person.

The self-governance associated with personal autonomy is explained by Frankfurt and Watson in terms of self-control. For Frankfurt and Watson, an agent is autonomous when she exercises self-control; that is, when she is fully governed by her rational, true or real self. According to Frankfurt and Watson, self-control is achieved, at least in part, when the rational, true or real self has exercised its authority over the whole self by externalising all the other mental elements which it has deemed to be rogue mental elements. These mental elements are to be thought of as rogue, according to Frankfurt and Watson, because they in some way conflict with the designs of the rational, true or real self. We might think here for example of an agent, call him John, who spends his life in the pursuit of maintaining a healthy weight. John, however, faces a constant obstacle: he cannot help himself when it comes to chocolate cake. John will eat a piece of chocolate cake whenever he feels a strong desire to do so, despite the fact that John's rational, true self has judged his chocolate-cake weakness to be unjustifiable. Frankfurt and Watson would argue that when John acts on this desire, his autonomy is undermined because his actions are not being guided by his rational deliberative faculty. John is, Frankfurt and Watson would claim, acting in spite of himself when pursuing his culinary fixation. Importantly, on Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts, John must exercise self-control, and thus deny the legitimacy of all such rogue elements of the psyche in order, most fully, to be autonomous.

Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts of self-control focus on externalising or rejecting certain of our mental elements because they conflict with assessments made by our rational self. I will argue that when we aim at the ideal of self-control advocated by Frankfurt and Watson, our alleged personal autonomy inevitably ends up resting on self-suppression; in following the ideal of self-control we strive constantly to reject and deny what we come to view as rogue mental elements such as unendorsed desires, preferences, instincts, and urges. The ideal autonomous agent for Frankfurt and Watson resembles in some respects the 'man of *ressentiment*' described by Nietzsche: a fractured individual lacking integrity, who is unable to realise her full potential as an autonomous agent.<sup>3</sup> On the Nietzschean account of personal autonomy what is required in order to maintain our integrity is a movement of the self towards a proper understanding of the whole of that self, rather than the fragmentation caused by the rejection and denial advocated by Frankfurt and Watson.

Let me return here to the example of John discussed above: John, according to the Nietzschean view of personal autonomy, cannot maintain a coherent understanding of his whole self unless he accepts that his cake-loving nature is a fundamental part of who he is, even if he has decided that this is an aspect of himself which he wishes to overcome. John cannot simply deny that his cake-loving nature is fundamentally a part of who he is. In order for John to have a full understanding of himself, according to the Nietzschean account I will defend, he must acknowledge the deeply ingrained aspects of himself – even if he only comes to acknowledge that these parts of *himself* must remain unsatisfied. If, as Frankfurt and Watson suggest, we do not consider those parts of ourselves which must remain unsatisfied as constitutive of our true or real selves, then we are, according to the Nietzschean view of personal autonomy, in an important sense deceived about ourselves. Thus, it is only when we truly understand ourselves as whole selves that we can maintain our integrity – that is, remain in no way deceived about ourselves. I agree with Nietzsche in thinking that, in this sense, integrity is fundamental to our personal autonomy.

---

<sup>3</sup> (GM, especially GM II).

## CHAPTER 1: PERSONAL AUTONOMY

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.<sup>4</sup>

In the quote above, Isaiah Berlin elegantly expresses the familiar human desire for freedom in the form of personal autonomy. The notion of personal autonomy, in its broadest sense, is understood as freedom through self-governance, or as the ability to exercise rule over the self. Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche explains the autonomous agent, who he sometimes calls the 'sovereign individual',<sup>5</sup> in the following terms:

The individual is something totally new and creating anew, something absolute, all his actions entirely his own. In the last resort, the individual derives the values of his actions from himself alone.<sup>6</sup>

The term personal autonomy, then, refers to that most cherished capacity of human agents to exercise control over their actions, their lives and ultimately, themselves. Typically, we believe we have the capacity for personal autonomy and behave accordingly because, despite the multiplicity of constraints which we face in our daily lives, our experience of ourselves as agents leads us to believe that our actions and lives are in some sense, and for the most part, under our own jurisdiction – that in these matters we decide for ourselves. In Berlin's terms, we experience ourselves by and large as subjects. Berlin explains further:

I am the possessor of reason and will; I conceive of ends and I desire to pursue them; but if I am prevented from attaining them I no longer feel master of the situation. I may be prevented by the laws of nature, or by accidents, or the activities of men, or the effect, often undesigned, of human institutions.<sup>7</sup>

What we typically mean when we say that we act freely and autonomously largely has to do with our ability to control or guide our actions and choices without being adversely constrained. The most obvious obstacle to our freedom or personal autonomy, then, comes in the form of external constraints. Our autonomy can be undermined by other agents, such as in cases of manipulation or coercion. For example, we typically think that people who are brainwashed or threatened are unable to act autonomously, or at least we think that their autonomy is in some way undermined. Our autonomy can also be undermined by social or environmental

---

<sup>4</sup> Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', p131.

<sup>5</sup> (GM II: 2).

<sup>6</sup> (WP 767) in Cooper, *Authenticity and Learning*, p3.

<sup>7</sup> Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', p135.

constraints: our autonomy might be restricted because of the socio-political or cultural environment in which we find ourselves. In other instances, however, our autonomy may be constrained by forces which are internal to us – by the forces which are at work within ourselves. Cases such as addiction or weakness of the will are typical examples of internal forces which undermine our autonomy.

Proponents of accounts of personal autonomy developed in the English-speaking world over the last few decades argue that there are in fact a number of elements within our own psychological make-up which threaten to undermine our autonomy. According to such accounts there are forces at work within our own psyche which motivate us to act in certain ways, but which we do not take to be authentic expressions of who we are – they are not expressions of what we might refer to as our true or real self.<sup>8</sup> Defenders of these accounts hold that when agents act on desires or impulses which are alien in this sense we describe them as not being themselves, or even as acting in spite of themselves. And in such cases, the agent's autonomy is, according to these recent accounts, significantly diminished. These recent accounts are intuitively persuasive, at least in part, because they tap into a common human experience: there are times when we experience our own motivations as being alien to us in the sense that we are motivated by them regardless of our conscious rational disapproval. Marilyn Friedman explains her experience of this phenomenon as follows:

There are times for example when I feel wholly consonant with my motivations, fully satisfied with the choices to which they may move me; at other times, my motivations feel alien and, although they do not cease to move me, nevertheless, I want to be free of them as I would want to be free of a fever, an ache, a disturbing or painful condition that causes me grief and is not, in any way, my “self”.<sup>9</sup>

Recent accounts of personal autonomy take this experience seriously and suggest in their accounts that motivations such as desires or impulses, which they claim we experience as alien to us in this sense, provide us with examples of internal psychological forces which should be considered as internal constraints to our autonomy. J. David Velleman explains that on such accounts of personal autonomy

---

<sup>8</sup> Recent accounts of personal autonomy are developed and discussed by, amongst others, Christman (2000); Dworkin (1976, 1988); Frankfurt (1971, 1988, 1999, 2006); Friedman (1986, 2003); Mele (1995); Noggle (2005); Taylor (2005); Thalberg (2000); Watson (1989); and Wolf (1989).

<sup>9</sup> Friedman, ‘Autonomy and the Split-Level Self’, p27.

the fundamental divide between the self and who we take *the other* to be is a divide which is sometimes internal to us, that is, it occurs within our own psyche:

Among the goings on in a person's body, some but not others are due to the person in the sense that they are his doing. When he distinguishes between those which are his doing and those which aren't, he appears to do so in terms of their causes, by regarding the former but not the latter as caused by himself. Yet even when he disowns them, he ends up disowning parts of his own body and mind, as if the boundary between self and other lay somewhere inside the skin.<sup>10</sup>

Questions asking precisely what it would mean to have one's autonomy undermined by the forces of one's own psyche are perhaps some of the most challenging questions which must be answered by theorists working on providing us with robust accounts of personal autonomy today. What is of central importance when attempting to answer these questions is an account of what we take the true self to be. One particularly prominent tradition within philosophy accords our rational or reflective capacities this special status. Friedman explains:

Legions of philosophers have given ontological preference, in their conceptions of human being, to what is variously called reason, rationality, conscience, the principled self, the reflective self, or the critically assessing self. It is this aspect of the self which is considered to be the "real" self, the "core" self, the "true" self, or the self with which we "identify", the self in accord with which all the rest is to be assessed, the self which rightfully rules the whole person.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, we find that on many recent accounts of personal autonomy what defines our real or true self is our rational deliberating and evaluative faculties. With this picture of the self lurking in the background of recent accounts, the question of how our autonomy can be undermined by the forces of our own psyche seems, at least *prima facie*, easy to answer. Once the boundaries of the self have been reduced to include only certain of our mental elements and processes, all other elements are considered to be outsiders. Such mental elements are seen as forces within our own psyche which are alien invaders precisely because they are not considered to constitute our true or real self.

On recent accounts, then, our mental lives resemble in their formation something like an empire. In the mental realm our rational, deliberative and evaluative faculties are considered to be the centre of power and authority, while all other mental elements and processes must obey the dictates sent forth from the central and governing

---

<sup>10</sup> Velleman, *Self to Self*, p7.

<sup>11</sup> Friedman, 'Autonomy and the Split-Level Self', p31.

agency. Uprisings in any of these outer provinces must be swiftly crushed in order for the rule of reason to maintain its grasp. As Berlin says:

The reason within me, if it is to triumph, must eliminate and suppress my 'lower' instincts, my passions and desires, which render me a slave.<sup>12</sup>

When reason maintains its rule over all aspects of the mental empire, the individual is thought to control itself, and in so doing exercise personal autonomy. Midgley thus explains that in these recent accounts of autonomy:

...the general trend has been to shrink the central character involved – the free self – making it steadily more abstract by declaring war on its outlying provinces.<sup>13</sup>

Given this view of the constitution of the mental aspects of the self, and this diminished view of the real or true self, recent accounts of personal autonomy have focused on what Midgley above calls a 'war' within the self between the true or real self and the self's 'outlying provinces'.

## **I. Hierarchical Models and Systems Division Models of Personal Autonomy**

Proponents of both hierarchical models and system division models of personal autonomy take as their starting point the basic assumption that what is characteristic of human agents is their capacity not only to have certain overarching guiding principles and values, but that they are also able to assert some form of control over the kinds of people they are and the actions they perform because of them. The sense of control gained via our having these guiding principles and values is thought to be exclusively human, because of our seemingly unique ability to engage in the process of critical reflection on our basic responses to the world (what Frankfurt calls our first order desires, and what Watson sees as our blind desires). The process of critical reflection allows us to assess those basic responses; form opinions about them and in some instances even change them. The secondary responses generated by this process are explained by Frankfurt and Watson as authentic expressions of who we are – they are constitutive of our true or real selves. And, when we use these secondary responses to assert control over our actions in the world, we can, according to the proponents of hierarchical models and systems division models, lay claim to the title of autonomous individuals. In this chapter I will examine both hierarchical models

---

<sup>12</sup> Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', p135

<sup>13</sup> Midgley, *The Ethical Primate*, p158.

and systems division models of personal autonomy, and explore two of the most common objections raised against each of these accounts respectively. I will show that proponents of these accounts can provide what appear to be plausible solutions to these objections. However, I will argue in the next chapter that even sophisticated Frankfurtian and Watsonian models of personal autonomy are subject to some serious criticisms.

## II. Hierarchical Models

Harry Frankfurt provides the groundwork for what have become known as hierarchical accounts of personal autonomy in his paper ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person’. Frankfurt draws a distinction in this paper between what he calls first and second order desires. First order desires can be understood as mental elements which are formed as an initial response to the world. For example, an agent could have a first order desire ‘I want to eat chocolate cake’. These first order desires might be in competition with other first order desires. For instance, an agent desiring to eat chocolate cake might also find herself with the conflicting desire not to eat chocolate cake. We are bombarded with first order desires almost constantly in our daily lived experience, but only some of these first order desires are translated into actions. Effective first order desires are, according to Frankfurt, those which in fact prompt an agent to action, and comprise what we might call an agent’s will. As Frankfurt explains:

To identify an agent’s will is either to identify the desire (or desires) by which he is motivated in some action he performs or to identify the desire (or desires) by which he will or would be motivated when or if he acts. An agent’s will, then, is identical with one or more of his first order desires... it is the notion of an *effective* desire – one that moves (or would move) a person all the way to action.<sup>14</sup>

When the desire to eat chocolate cake effectively prompts that agent to eat chocolate cake, according to Frankfurt, it was her will to eat chocolate cake.

Second order desires, on the other hand, are the product of critical reflection on our various first order desires and have as their content a first order desire. For example, an agent might have as a second order desire ‘I *want* to want to eat a piece of chocolate cake’ or alternatively, ‘I *do not want* to want to eat a piece of chocolate

---

<sup>14</sup> Frankfurt, ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person’, p8.

cake'. Second order desires are, according to Frankfurt, the product of that characteristically human capacity for critical self-reflection on our initial responses to the world – or our first order desires – and are meant to explain the ability of human agents to have intentions and preferences about their own will: wanting their will to be different to what it happens to be. These second order desires are called second order volitions by Frankfurt, when their content with regards to a specific first order desire, is that we want that first order desire to be our will. A second order volition, then, explains a desire of the second order that one of our first order desires be effective in moving us to act.<sup>15</sup> Second order volitions are the autonomy conferring elements of an agent, according to Frankfurt, in that when our actual will mirrors the will which is endorsed by our higher order volition, we can be said to have the will *we want* to have. And for Frankfurt, having the will we want to have makes it a free will.

Frankfurt claims:

The statement that a person enjoys freedom of the will means... that he is free to will what he wants to will, or to have the will he wants... It is in securing the conformity of his will to his second-order volitions, then, that a person exercises freedom of the will.<sup>16</sup>

And Frankfurt goes on to say that when our will mirrors our second order volitions, we are free from any autonomy undermining factors precisely because we are moved to action by something that we have endorsed for ourselves:

... since the will that moved him to action was his will because he wanted it to be, he cannot claim that his will was forced upon him or that he was a passive bystander to its constitution.<sup>17</sup>

So for Frankfurt, answering the question of when it is possible to say that I have *control* over my actions amounts to being autonomous in the sense that we are able to exercise *self-control*. Self-control is achieved on Frankfurt's account when our second order volitions endorse our will, and thus that we can be said to have the will that *we want* to have precisely because it is endorsed just by us. According to Frankfurt's initial account, then, what it means to have a free will is that our will is under control, in the sense that it is endorsed by our higher-order mental elements which have been formed in the light of rational critical reflection.

---

<sup>15</sup> Frankfurt, 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', p10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p15.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p18.

### III. The Regress Problem, Identification and Wholeheartedness

There is, however, a serious problem facing hierarchical accounts of personal autonomy, such as Frankfurt's account discussed in the previous section. Autonomy is conferred in these accounts only when a specific interchange between the first order desires and the second order volitions of the agent are facilitated by the practice of rational critical reflection. Importantly, what does the work in these accounts is the idea that our initial responses to the world are controlled by our reflections upon these responses in light of our higher order responses. Essentially, what this means is that our initial responses to the world are authenticated by other elements which exist within our own psychological make-up. The problem with this is that we can ask what it is that authenticates those elements within our psychological make-up which are responsible for authenticating the elements which we take to be our initial responses to the world. If our second-order volitions are not themselves an authentic expression of our true or real selves, they must, in turn, be subject to a similar process of authentication. What we require for personal autonomy, then, is an infinite chain of authenticating elements and processes. As Robert Noggle puts it:

No finite chain of authenticating elements can provide an account of how any element is made authentic, because no element can be the last member of the chain if every member must be authenticated by some other element.<sup>18</sup>

This problem is referred to in the literature as 'the regress problem',<sup>19</sup> for the possibility of personal autonomy seemingly requires making recourse to continually higher levels of the self within the psyche which allegedly endorse the more basic levels.

In attempting to answer the regress problem, Frankfurt has added to his original account of autonomy explanatory tools in the form of the process of 'identification' and the notion of 'wholeheartedness' – I will refer to this as the sophisticated Frankfurtian model. With the introduction of these tools, Frankfurt claims to explain how we can 'without arbitrariness terminate a potentially endless sequence of

---

<sup>18</sup> Noggle, 'Autonomy and the Paradox of Self-Creation', p93.

<sup>19</sup> This problem stems from Galen Strawson, but is also discussed by various other authors in the personal autonomy and freewill/determinism debate.

evaluations’,<sup>20</sup> and thus, he claims, explain how our second order volitions are in fact an authentic expression of our true or real selves.

According to Frankfurt, the process of identification takes place at the level of a person’s higher order volitions. In order to explain the process of identification he introduces the notion of ‘ambivalence’. Ambivalence is the term Frankfurt uses to explain what seems to be an intuitively obvious fact that inner conflicts may well arise at the level of our higher order volitions. When a person is ambivalent, he experiences a tension within his own ‘volitional complex’<sup>21</sup> – the person can be seen to have second order volitions which contradict each other and aim to promote mutually exclusive actions on the part of that person. When a person is ambivalent, in the Frankfurtian sense, there is ‘no unequivocal answer to the question of what the person really wants’:<sup>22</sup> the ambivalent person is volitionally conflicted and thus, despite having engaged in the process of critical reflection on her first order desires, such a person has no one particular point of view from which to act which could be seen as her point of view. In order for a person to know what *she* really wants, and thus to act in a manner reflecting *her* primary wants, the person must, according to Frankfurt, ‘selectively identify’ with one of her second order volitions.<sup>23</sup> In identifying with a second order volition the person thereby makes that volitional desire a constitutive part of herself: she fully internalises that volition in just such a way as to make it relevantly her own.

In identifying with a second order volition, Frankfurt claims we need not appeal to a further higher volitional order, because a person who identifies with a second order volition would find that no ‘further accurate inquiry’<sup>24</sup> on the matter would result in her arriving at a conflicted sentiment with regard to that volition – that is to say, a person who selectively identifies with a second order volition need not make an appeal to a possible higher order volition because if she did she would find the same consensus all the way up. When we have truly identified with a second order volition

---

<sup>20</sup> Frankfurt, ‘Identification and wholeheartedness’, p169.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p165.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p169.

we have no ‘endogenous desire to be volitionally different’,<sup>25</sup> and it can thus be said of us that we are wholehearted with respect to that volition. What it means to be wholehearted, then, is that at the volitional level a person has to be, herself, ‘resolutely on the side of one of the forces struggling within him and not on the side of any other’.<sup>26</sup>

What is important for Frankfurt about the process of identification is that the volitions we are wholehearted about have been sanctioned and adopted by *ourselves*, which makes them ‘intentional and legitimate’.<sup>27</sup> According to Frankfurt:

Their force is now our force. When they move us we are therefore not passive. We are active, because we are being moved *just by ourselves*.<sup>28</sup>

By including the notions of identification and wholeheartedness, Frankfurt claims that he is able to give us an account of self-control in which we are fully directed and governed by our true or real selves. We can be said to have self-control when our will is aligned with our second order volitions, and we are fully self-governing when we are wholehearted with respect to our second order volitions. When we are exercising self-control and self-governance, we can see ourselves in the all-encompassing way fundamental for a satisfactory account of personal autonomy precisely because we are governed by our true self. This, then, is what I take Frankfurt to mean when he says:

Suppose we are thoroughly wholehearted both in what we are doing and in what we want. There is no respect in which we are being violated or defeated or coerced. Neither our desires nor the conduct to which they lead are imposed upon us without our consent or against our will.<sup>29</sup>

The sophisticated understanding of autonomy based on Frankfurt’s more fully developed account seems, at least *prima facie*, to be intuitively plausible. There are, however, some serious problems which remain evident even in the sophisticated Frankfurtian hierarchical model which I will go on to examine in the next chapter. These problems are largely rooted in the fact that, according to the sophisticated Frankfurtian model, in the process of becoming autonomous, while some desires are endorsed and some volitions identified with, others are consequently externalised. Externalised desires or volitions are only considered *ours* in the same strictly literal

---

<sup>25</sup> Frankfurt, ‘The Faintest Passion’, p101.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p100.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>28</sup> Frankfurt, ‘Taking Ourselves Seriously’, p8 (emphasis added).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p15.

way that the physical manifestations of a disorder such as narcolepsy literally are our actions. We do not consider these externalised elements to be an expression of what we, ourselves, actually desire or volitionally will – we cannot view them as an expression of who we take ourselves, our true or real selves, to be. These desires and volitions are therefore external to us *because* we do not accept them as legitimate reasons for performing acts we would consider truly expressions of ourselves. For these reasons, Frankfurt claims that ‘even if an externalized desire turns out to be irresistible, its dominion is merely that of a tyrant. It has for us no legitimate authority’.<sup>30</sup> For Frankfurt, then, we must dissociate ourselves from certain unwanted or unacceptable desires and volitions in order to be wholehearted and thus autonomous in our actions.

#### **IV. Systems Division Models**

In providing an account of personal autonomy philosophers such as Gary Watson have harkened back to a Platonic understanding of the self in which a clear distinction can be drawn between brute desires (often referred to as the passions) and other evaluative or reflective desires (such desires are, roughly, the product of ‘reason’). On a broadly Platonic picture self-control amounts to an ability to act on our evaluative or reflective desires, and thus to be guided in our actions not by our brute desires, or passions, but rather by our ‘reason’ – that is our rational, critical and evaluative faculties.

On Watson’s view, what is distinctive about human subjects is their ability to make rational evaluations about themselves and their situation in the world, and to form values in light of these deliberations.<sup>31</sup> When agents have values, on Watson’s account, these values are just a reflection of who we are, or are constitutive of what we could call our true or real selves. Thus, for Watson, when our actions reflect these values, our actions are attributable to us in the deep sense of attributability which is thought to underlie freedom, or personal autonomy, precisely because these actions have been up to us in the relevant sense. Most importantly for Watson, when we are able to act in accordance with our values in the face of various obstacles or constraints

---

<sup>30</sup> Frankfurt, ‘Taking Ourselves Seriously’, p10.

<sup>31</sup> Watson, ‘Free Agency’.

(such as those desires which, if enacted, would undermine one or more of our rationally chosen values), we exercise that capacity which is the cornerstone of personal autonomy, namely, self-control. The intuition about personal autonomy which accounts such as Watson's attempt to capture in their focus on self-control is expressed most succinctly by Richard Moran when he explains:

It is the normal expectation of the person, as well as a rational demand made upon him, that the question of what he actually does desire should be dependent... on his assessment of the desire and grounds he has for it. For the person himself, then, his motivated desire is not a brute empirical phenomenon he must simply accommodate, like some other facet of reality he confronts. For this sort of desire, as a "judgment-sensitive" attitude, owes its existence (as an empirical psychological fact) to his own deliberations and overall assessment of his situation.<sup>32</sup>

Systems division models of personal autonomy, which are sometimes referred to as partitioning accounts, explain autonomy as self-control via the notion of a partition within the psyche between motivational systems (consisting of the considerations which prompt a person to action) and evaluation systems (consisting of overarching principles and value systems).

In order to explain how internal constraints to an agent's personal autonomy can arise, Watson draws on a distinction between an agent 'wanting' something and an agent 'valuing' something. Watson explains that when an agent values something he not only wants that thing, that is he does not merely desire that something but, rather, by valuing that something an agent has also judged or evaluated that thing and found it to be in some sense 'good' for him to want. So for Watson, what we want can be something that we simply desire in a brute sense. For example, when I feel hungry, I want to eat. The sense of want here is brute or 'blind' insofar as there is no evaluative element in the want. Our desire in such cases could be described as something like an urge. On the other hand, according to Watson, there are a number of things that we want in an altogether different sense: what we want can be something that we value. What we value in cases of this latter sort is *more* than simply something that is a 'brute' or 'blind' want. Rather, it is something that we have reflectively evaluated to be worth wanting. In the case of brute desires, we want something without assessing whether we value (think good) that something, while in the case of values, we want something precisely because we see it as good. Watson claims:

---

<sup>32</sup> Moran, *Authority and Estrangement*, p115

We might say that an agent's values consist in those principles and ends which he – in a cool and non-self-deceptive moment – articulates as definitive of the good, fulfilling, and defensible life...we all have more or less long-term aims and normative principles that we are willing to defend. It is such things as these that are to be identified with our values.<sup>33</sup>

What is essential to the distinction Watson draws between wanting and valuing is the process of critical reflection. Our values, unlike our wants (which are blind desires), are formed via a process of critical reflection. Watson takes critical reflection to be a rational process of the mind which helps us not only to uncover those things we take to be worthwhile, or as Watson puts it 'definitive of the good, fulfilling, and defensible life', but this rational process also helps us form our *own* set of wants, or values, *based on* our rational evaluations.<sup>34</sup> Watson's picture of motivation, then, relies on the division between some of our wants which are blind desires, and some of our other wants which are values – that is, those wants which are expressive of, or flow from, our values. While our wants which are unconsidered desires or passions provide us with possible reasons for action, our wants which are values provide us with another possible set of possible reasons for action. Watson acknowledges that his picture of is drawn from the Platonic picture of motivation, based on the reason/passion divide explained above. On this Platonic picture a desire and a value each constitute a complete source of motivation.<sup>35</sup>

Watson claims that it is in light of the possibility of there being a discrepancy between these two independent sources of motivation (desire and value) that there arises the possibility of an action being free or unfree. And, moreover, that it is possible for an action to be unfree because of the presence of a set of conflicting elements within an agent's own mental complex. Watson explains:

The problem of free action arises because what one desires may not be what one values, and what one most values may not be what one is finally moved to get.<sup>36</sup>

The question of whether or not we act freely has thus, in Watson's opinion, to do with how we might be in control over what motivates us *effectively*, that is to say what moves us all the way to action. In order to explain how exactly it could be the case that an agent's actions could be thought to be unfree because of an internal constraint

---

<sup>33</sup> Watson, 'Free Agency', p215.

<sup>34</sup> Watson claims: "... it is appropriate to speak of wants that are (or perhaps arise from) evaluations as belonging to, or originating in, the rational (that is, *judging*) part of the soul." *Ibid*, p208.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p209.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*.

(an element within his own mental complex), Watson suggests that there is a partition within the agent's mental complex between his valuation system and his motivational system.

Watson explains an agent's motivational system in the following terms:

The motivational system of an agent is that set of considerations which move him to action. We identify his motivational system by identifying what motivates him.<sup>37</sup>

And he explains an agent's valuation system as follows:

The valuational system of an agent is that set of considerations which, when combined with his factual beliefs (and probability estimates), yields judgments of the form: the thing for me to do in these circumstances, all things considered, is *a*. To ascribe free agency to a being presupposes it to be a being that makes judgments of this sort. To be this sort of being, one must assign values to alternative states of affairs, that is, rank them in terms of worth... One's evaluational system may be said to constitute one's standpoint, the point of view from which one judges the world.<sup>38</sup>

According to Watson, having a motivational system is necessary for an agent's being able to perform an intentional action, which is to be distinguished from free intentional action. Having a valuation system, according to Watson, is a necessarily constitutive part of any kind of being's mental complex if that being is to be thought of as being able to perform free actions. Thus, what the suggestion of such a partition allows Watson to draw is a distinction between when we can be said to perform free, rather than unfree actions. The assumption for our understanding of personal autonomy, then, is that we can exercise control over our actions, or self-control, when we act freely in Watson's terms.

Since there are, according to Watson, two sources or springs of motivation (namely desires and values), there arises the possibility of our being motivated simultaneously, from within our own mental complex, to follow two distinct and possibly contradictory courses of action. If either one of these contradictory motivations were to be effective in action, the other motivation would be trumped by another motivation held by that same agent. I may, for example, desire and be motivated to have chocolate cake, while at the same time value a healthy lifestyle and be motivated not to eat junk food (a category of food into which chocolate cake unfortunately falls). According to Watson, we act as free agents only when our values and principles (those motivations arising from our valuation system) are effective motivations, that is

---

<sup>37</sup> Watson, 'Free Agency', p215.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, pp215-216.

to say when they move us all the way to action. Our actions, then, are free when our motivational system mirrors our valuational systems. Watson explains:

The possibility of unfree action consists in the fact that an agent's valuational system and motivational system may not completely coincide. Those systems harmonize to the extent that what determines the agent's all things considered judgments also determines his actions... The free agent has the capacity to translate his values into action; his actions flow from his evaluational system.<sup>39</sup>

The distinction Watson draws helps us to establish that there are different degrees of freedom which agents could experience, and this account thus helps us to establish precisely why we can distinguish between coerced or compelled agents and agents who are suitably free from constraints which would diminish that agent's freedom. In cases in which an agent has been coerced, or is in some way compelled, his actions are unfree precisely because what he is motivated to do is in tension with what he has himself rationally evaluated to be the best course of action. Watson explains the way in which a kleptomaniac is unfree in the following way:

What is distinctive about such compulsive behavior, I would argue, is that the desires and emotions in question are more or less radically independent of the evaluational systems of these agents.<sup>40</sup>

What Watson makes explicit in the conditions he provides for free agency is that what it means to say that an agent performs an action freely is that an agent is moved to action by his evaluating rational self, that is, by his valuation system – as the values and principles forming part of the agent's valuation system are the product of his rational evaluations. Thus, personal autonomy, in the sense of self-control on Watson's account, requires an agent to exercise control over his actions by always acting on his values or principles. For Watson then, what makes us autonomous agents is: first, the fact that we have a point of view from which to judge the world which can be said to constitute *our* point of view; second, that our point of view is to be identified with what he calls our valuational system;<sup>41</sup> and finally, that we, in fact, do act on the dictates of our valuational system. Since what constitutes our valuational system are those wants which we have deemed good or worthwhile, we can be autonomous only when we act on those things which we have judged good or worthwhile.

---

<sup>39</sup> Watson, 'Free Agency', pp215-216.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p220.

<sup>41</sup> Watson explains: "One's evaluational system may be said to constitute one's standpoint, the point of view from which one judges the world." *Ibid*, p216.

The understanding of the true or real self which is central to Watson's view, and which can in fact be traced to the Platonic view of the self, is undoubtedly a divided self. Importantly, Watson admits that while his view commits him to a divide between reason and passion, it does not entail the rather absurd view that there can be no interaction between reason and passion. He claims that in acknowledging such a split we need not commit ourselves to wholesale dualism about the self or our motivations. There is an undeniable interaction between the passions and reason in that many of the things we evaluate to be good or worthwhile are only judged to be good or worthwhile precisely because they are our passions. Here Alfred Mele agrees with Watson claiming that 'What we judge best (or better) depends significantly on what we want and enjoy'.<sup>42</sup> Typically, we value eating regular meals in part because this is necessary for a healthy life, but in part we also value eating regular meals because we enjoy them. Watson explains:

As central as it is to human life, it is not often noted that some activities are valued only to the extent that they are objects of the appetites. This means that such activities would never be regarded as valuable constituents of one's life were it not for one's susceptibility to "blind" motivation independent of one's values.<sup>43</sup>

Despite this kind of interaction, it nevertheless remains central to accounts such as Watson's that there is a very important sense, discussed above, in which there is a split between the passions and reason. The split is central, as I have previously explained, precisely because it is in virtue of this split that the very possibility of an action being autonomous, or free, arises for Watson. Watson claims:

...the distinction I have been pressing – that between desiring and valuing – does not commit one to an inevitable split between Reason and Appetite. ... But the distinction does commit us to the possibility of such a split. If there are sources of motivation independent of the agent's values, then it is possible that sometimes he is motivated to do things he does not deem worth doing. This possibility is the basis for the principle problem of free action: a person may be obstructed by his own will.<sup>44</sup>

## **V. Manipulation Problems and Systems Division Model Solutions**

If an agent's personal autonomy consists solely in his acting on his wants which are values, what should we make of an agent whose values have been formed or unambiguously shaped by external forces? Philosophers who are fond of outlandish science-fiction scenarios offer, most commonly, cases in which malevolent hypnotists

---

<sup>42</sup> Mele, *Autonomous Agents*, p6.

<sup>43</sup> Watson, 'Free Agency', p212.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p213.

or neurosurgeons give you your values, or wholly determine the constitution of your valuational system. While Watson's account allows us to distinguish between coerced or compelled actions and free actions, when distinguishing between free actions and manipulated actions (in the sense just described) Watson's account appears impotent. Since if all that is required on accounts such as Watson's is that we act on the dictates of our valuational system, that is that we act from our rational evaluative point of view, then the absurd conclusion follows that even in cases of manipulation we are still autonomous. This, then, is the 'Problem of Manipulation',<sup>45</sup> and it points to the fact that any account such as Watson's requires further conditions which would help Watson and his followers avoid the absurdity. Various candidates for plausible further conditions which could be used to supplement accounts such as Watson's have been put forward.

Most notably, Gerald Dworkin proposes the notion of 'procedural independence' in his paper 'Autonomy and Behaviour Control'.<sup>46</sup> Dworkin introduces the notion of 'procedural independence' as something which is fundamentally important when discussing the notion of autonomy, and continues to argue for the relevance of 'procedural independence' in his book *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*. Dworkin defines the notion of 'procedural independence' by explaining what the lack of 'procedural independence' would amount to in two ways. Firstly, according to Dworkin:

An individual may identify or approve of his motivational structure because of an inability to view in a critical and rational manner his situation.<sup>47</sup>

And, secondly:

... the identification with his motivations, or the choice of the type of person he wants to be, may have been produced by manipulation, deception, withholding of relevant information, and so on. It may have been influenced in decisive ways by others in such a fashion that we are not prepared to think of it as being his own choice. I shall call this a lack of procedural independence.<sup>48</sup>

If we as agents are to be considered autonomous, then, in addition to the internal conditions involving what motivates us to act from within our own mental complex, our own internally motivating states which would confer autonomy must also be suitably free from external influences which might be considered to be autonomy

---

<sup>45</sup> See Christman, 'Introduction', p10; and Taylor, 'Introduction', p5.

<sup>46</sup> Dworkin, 'Autonomy and Behaviour Control' and *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*.

<sup>47</sup> Dworkin, 'Autonomy and Behaviour Control', p25.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p25.

undermining because they undermine procedural independence. Drawing on Dworkin's negative account, what is needed to bolster Watson's account of personal autonomy in the face of the 'manipulation problem' is a twofold 'procedural independence' condition in which: (1) an agent's evaluative system is not undermined by a faulty rational or critical ability; and (2) an agent's evaluative system has not been formed purely as stipulated by some third party, as in the cases of deception and manipulation, as well as in cases where certain relevant information is withheld. The aforementioned amendment to Watson's account is relatively simple to make, and I see no reason why Watson would, at least in principle, disagree with the addition of such a condition to his account. The ease with which such a condition could be made, without resulting in any contradictions or changes to the basic Watsonian account, suggests that while the problem of manipulation could be raised as an objection to the Watsonian account, it need not necessarily lead us to reject the framework for internal personal autonomy provided by his account.

## VI. Rational Self-Control

Plato expressed the idea of inner division in the Phaedrus myth, where the human soul's chariot is drawn by a bad black horse as well as a good white one, so that the charioteer who hears the Platonic message has a straightforward choice between good and bad, reality and illusion.

... He saw motives as divisible fairly easily into rational and irrational, serious and illusory. Accordingly, a disciplined, ascetic way of life designated to subdue the bad ones under the good ones was the only possible solution. Aristotle, as he gradually developed a more Biological approach, abandoned Plato's simple moral dualism. He saw the need for *an ideal that involved the whole person not just a detached rational faculty*.

... Here, as might be expected, Darwin follows him, suggesting that morality necessarily works to harmonise the motives that we have actually got, rather than trying to impose a quite new pattern. For Darwin, this obscure and alarming workplace, this muddle of conflict-ridden motivation emerging from evolution, *is still our home. It is the only mind that we have. It is where we must make our choices and exert our freedom... Our conflicts are real, not illusory. Our freedom must lie in becoming aware of them and in learning to arbitrate them better.*<sup>49</sup>

Recall that on both Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts personal autonomy is explained in terms of *self-control*. When we exercise self-control, on these accounts, we are fully governed by the rational, deliberative and evaluative aspects of our consciousness. According to Frankfurt, the rational self is responsible for determining which of our competing motivational desires are most truly our own – in Frankfurt's

---

<sup>49</sup> Midgley, *The Ethical Primate*, p178 (emphasis added).

terms, the rational self is responsible for ‘identifying’ with or making a ‘decisive commitment’ about which of her desires to act on and which to reject. Frankfurt calls complete and unanimous control by our alleged true self ‘wholeheartedness’, and claims that in being wholehearted we exercise our autonomy:

His wholeheartedness means exactly that there is in him no endogenous desire to be volitionally different than he is. Although he may be unable to create in himself a will other than the one he has, his will is free at least in the sense that he himself does not oppose or impede it.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, this commitment to the rational self as the true or real self is argued for by Watson when he claims that an agent’s autonomy rests in her ability to guide her actions in light of her evaluational system, which is ruled by reason.<sup>51</sup> Importantly, according to Watson this rational self is the true or real self:

One’s evaluational system may be said to constitute one’s standpoint, the point of view from which one judges the world.<sup>52</sup>

Both Frankfurt and Watson urge us to recognise the fact that we have our own particular point of view from which we judge the world, and that it is in light of our ability to act on those evaluative judgments which constitute our own point of view that we are able to exercise personal autonomy. According to this view, then, what distinguishes agents as autonomous agents is firstly, a view of the self divided into at least two unequal parts, one of which is to be seen as the true or real self; and secondly, an ability to control the inner conflicts which arise within their own mental lives according to the dictates of the true or real self.

Self-control on these accounts can thus be understood as a positive endorsement of our will by our rational evaluative true or real selves. If what is definitive of the true or real self is our rational deliberating and evaluative faculties, then all that is required of the autonomous agent is that her rational, deliberating and evaluative self is to be in control of her will. Friedman explains this move as follows:

It is also sometimes claimed that the higher level self which does the critical reasoning [or makes rational deliberations and evaluations], is the “true” self, a status which is evidently supposed to be what guarantees that critical assessment makes motivation truly self selected, and hence, the basis of autonomous choice.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Frankfurt, ‘The Faintest Passion’, pp101-102.

<sup>51</sup> Watson, ‘Free Agency’.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p216.

<sup>53</sup> Friedman, ‘Autonomy and the Split-Level Self’, p22.

At the heart of both of these accounts, then, lies an assumption about the nature of the true or real self. This assumption is largely based on what is widely considered to be a common intuition – common at least amongst philosophers such as Kant and Spinoza. More recently, Richard Moran has argued in favour of this intuition in his book *Authority and Estrangement*.<sup>54</sup> Moran explains that, firstly:

For an agent to conceive of *himself* as capable of forming an intention and implementing it (which, I take it, is necessary to conceiving of him as an agent at all) he must take his intentional action to be determined by *his reasons*...<sup>55</sup>

And, secondly:

The stance from which a person speaks with any special authority about his belief or his action is not a stance of causal explanation but the stance of *rational* agency. In belief as in intentional action, the stance of the rational agent is the stance where *reasons that justify* are at issue, and hence the stance from which one declares the *authority of reason* over one's belief and action.<sup>56</sup>

The plausible assumption at work here is that what is important about what Moran calls 'the specifically first person authority from which, in normal circumstances, a person claims to speak his mind',<sup>57</sup> or what Watson calls 'one's standpoint, the point of view from which one judges the world',<sup>58</sup> is reason. Reason here is to be understood as the deliberating and evaluative aspects of the psyche. The true or real self on their accounts is thus to be identified with the rational self.

According to Frankfurt and Watson, what makes us *most truly who we are* is our rationality in the form of our evaluative capacity, and all the other aspects of our mental lives are, despite being ours in a literal sense, nevertheless to be seen as a kind of external force which works against us. Self-control, or personal autonomy, thus amounts to our being able to tame the beast within and assert control over all those phenomena which are the product of our uncritical animal nature. It is precisely this idea of self-control advocated for the citizens in the ideal republic by Plato:

Poetry has the same effect on us when it represents sex and anger, and the other desires and feelings of pleasure and pain which normally accompany our actions. It... makes them control us when we ought, in the interests of our own welfare and happiness, to control them.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Moran, *Authority and Estrangement an Essay on Self-Knowledge*.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p127 (emphasis added).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid* (emphasis added).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p124.

<sup>58</sup> Watson, 'Free Agency', p216.

<sup>59</sup> Plato, *The Republic*; Book 10 [606], p384.

Our animal selves are most typically to be identified with the passions. Our animal nature is thought to be what underlies the passions, giving rise to mental phenomena such as instincts, urges, impulses, and cravings. Unlike in cases where mental phenomena (such as our values) motivate us, when mental phenomena which are determined by our animal or brute selves motivate us, we are thought not to be in control of ourselves. When I lash out angrily at my doctor in the grip of pain or in fear of death, I do not act in such a way because I have evaluated lashing out to be in some way a good or worthwhile action. On Frankfurt's and Watson's views, then, I can be said to no longer be in control of myself with respect to my angry outburst. As rational beings, so the story goes, one of the primary obstacles we have to overcome in our lives is our very own brute animal self. The self-control advocated by Frankfurt and Watson seems, then, to amount to something like the ability to control the brute forces of the passions with the power of reason. Like Plato, for Frankfurt and Watson, if we lack sufficient control over our passions, then they pose a very real threat to our personal autonomy in terms of self-control. As autonomous agents, on their pictures, we must strive to have our reason win out and suppress our passions in cases in which our passions come into conflict with reason. Passions, for the autonomous agent, must always be brought to subjugation under the dictatorship of our rational, evaluative self. And when the dictates of our brute animal self are in tension with the dictates of our rational, evaluative faculties, we must strive to overcome or externalise our brute animal self.

In her book, *The Ethical Primate*, Mary Midgley argues against the overly rationalist account of the self, which I have argued lies at the heart of Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts of personal autonomy, in favour of what she thinks of as a more naturalistic account of the self. According to Midgley, in order to arrive at a robust and accurate conception of the self we have to reject the 'isolated' view of the self suggested by those who, like Watson, attempt to narrow the self to an idealised rational self.

According to Midgley:

[W]e have to reject... the no less unreal vision of antiseptically isolated human essence, a purely spiritual or intellectual pilot arbitrarily set in a physical vehicle which plays no part in his or her motivation... It has... landed us with a notion of our whole nature as unintelligibly divided.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Midgley, *The Ethical Primate*, p159.

I agree with Midgley that our so-called animal nature has an important role to play in the constitution of a human self: the very tension we experience between the brute self and the rational self is, to a large extent, what defines the human condition. But none of these aspects of the self has any kind of logical priority nor do either of them have a more legitimate claim to authority. On accounts such as Frankfurt's and Watson's it is only when the battle is won by the rational self that we act autonomously, and it is precisely this verdict which I suggest in chapter 2 is false.

The struggle for personal autonomy cannot simply be defined as the struggle for power between the supposedly legitimate authority of our rational, evaluative selves and the supposedly illegitimate claims made by our animal, brute selves. If we want to achieve a theory of personal autonomy in which we take seriously the kinds of selves human selves actually are, we cannot assume that our rational evaluative faculties are the only faculties which define who we are, or which have any legitimate claim to being constitutive of what we take our true or real selves to be. Neither can we agree with Frankfurt and Watson that simply allowing one aspect of ourselves to rule amounts to self-governance – for on such an account our identity, which is comprised of our whole self, animal and rational alike, is surely in some sense undermined.

## CHAPTER 2: DARK CORNERS OF THE SELF

In the previous chapter I discussed two of the most prominent and seemingly plausible accounts of personal autonomy, in which the notion of self-control plays a central role, as put forward by Harry Frankfurt and Gary Watson.<sup>61</sup> Common to both of these accounts is the thought that there are multifarious and independent denizens comprising the self: we have rational, deliberative and evaluative faculties, brute desires, impulses, urges and instincts. Formal accounts of personal autonomy, such as Frankfurt's and Watson's, claim that what is essential for the possibility of personal autonomy is that only one of these denizens – namely, our rational, deliberative and evaluative faculty – has the authoritative power associated with what we would consider our true or real self. When the authoritative power of our real or true self shines forth in our behaviour and actions, according to these accounts, we exercise self-control – control asserted over our actions solely under the authority of our true self – and thus, personal autonomy. For Frankfurt and Watson, then, my rational true or real self must struggle against all the rogue elements within my own psyche which seek to undermine the authority and control of my rational, deliberating and evaluative faculties.

In the introduction I pointed out that accounts of personal autonomy typically aim to provide an explanation of both the nature of the self, and the conditions under which that self exercises self-governance or self-mastery. In this chapter I will argue explicitly that the accounts of the true self which underlie these formal accounts of personal autonomy are problematic. While talk of a real or true self might hold intuitive plausibility, Frankfurt's and Watson's characterisation, or delineation, of the boundaries of the true self are too narrow: a more robust account of the self reveals that the true or real self cannot be reduced to include only our rational, deliberative and evaluative faculties. Moreover, it is my argument that to strive for a state in which rational self-control is an expression of who we take ourselves most truly to be leads to a problematic and one-dimensional understanding of ourselves. When self-control is our absolute ideal our personal autonomy, I argue, rests in self-suppression. It is precisely this suppression which Nietzsche finds undesirable. I will argue in this

---

<sup>61</sup> Frankfurt 1971, 1988, 1999, 2006; Watson 1989, 2004.

chapter that the personal autonomy is not best characterised by self-suppression, or ideally achieved through a one-dimensionality of self. Rather, I claim that if we are to achieve a robust account of personal autonomy we must understand the self in more holistic terms and thus establish a basis for self-governance in which the ideal of personal autonomy is both desirable and practically achievable.

## **I. The True Self**

Given that the notion of personal autonomy is so intricately bound up with what it means to be a self-governing individual, one of the central issues involved in establishing an account of personal autonomy is what we take the boundaries of that self to be. As human selves we experience our own consciousness in a personal realm – the realm of our own subjective experience. The fact that we are aware of our own subjective experiences is what we most basically mean when referring to ourselves as self-aware beings. An important aspect of what it is to be a self-aware individual is that we are never uncertain of who our conscious experiences belong to – they belong to me, they are mine. When I talk about myself, then, what I refer to is, at least in part, the collection of conscious experiences which I take as belonging to me, that is to say, the conscious experiences which are *my own*. Typically, when I refer to myself I also refer to a number of things other than simply my conscious experiences: I refer to my actions, character traits, beliefs, values, goals, and preferences. The question of who I am, of who my self is, thus refers to a complex set of aspects, all of which I take as belonging in some sense to me. Philosophers such as Watson and Frankfurt have viewed the self as divided most fundamentally into subsets of this broad set of aspects from which, they claim, we might identify not merely a self, but a subset of that self which they would be inclined to call the *true* or *real* self.

There is a commonplace intuition that lends its support to any such theorising about a true or real self. The commonplace intuition is that we can distinguish between when an agent's actions and behaviours are a reflection of who she really is from cases in which an agent is not being herself; in which she is acting in spite of herself. Consider a mother who is generally a kind-worded and just parent. When suffering from severe pain in the grip of a deadly disease, this mother uses sharp and hurtful words to unjustly discipline her children. Knowing this particular mother's general behaviour

patterns and character, I might be inclined to say that with regards to her new behaviours she is not being herself. Certain circumstances in which we find ourselves often put pressure on us to act out of character or to act in spite of who we think we really are. Suffering in what we call the ‘grip’ of fear and pain cause almost all people to act in ways they would otherwise not want to act. A mother becomes sharp with her words and unjust in her actions, and soldiers who are compassionate fathers are led to commit acts of cruelty, while in the grip of fear. Our commonplace intuition, then, is that there are cases in which our actions and behaviours are not a true reflection of who we really or most truly are. In support of this intuition Watson claims that:

One measure of the strength of a desire is their capacity to claim one’s consciousness, direct one’s fantasies, break one’s concentration on other things. One finds it difficult to keep one’s mind on one’s work because one keeps thinking of one’s lover, or of the chocolate cake in the pantry, or of the cigarettes at the market. The objects of these desires tend to demand or dominate one’s attention, *despite oneself*.<sup>62</sup>

Just as the bouncer can force you out of the room contrary to your will, so your appetites and impulses might lead you where you do not “really” want to be.<sup>63</sup>

And Frankfurt, in a similar vein, claims that:

Sometimes we do not participate actively in what goes on in us. It takes place, somehow, but we are just bystanders to it. There are obsessional thoughts, for instance, that disturb us but that we cannot get out of our heads; there are peculiar reckless impulses that make no sense to us, and upon which we would never think of acting. There are hot surges of anarchic emotion that assault us from out of nowhere and that have no recognizable warrant from the circumstances in which they erupt.<sup>64</sup>

Both Frankfurt and Watson suggest that what is central to the notion of our true or real self is *who we take ourselves to be* when we are not subject to any autonomy undermining forces, which they take to be both external (in cases of coercion, deception, or in life-threatening circumstances) and internal (addiction, overwhelming emotion, mental disorders and indulgences). Accordingly, both Frankfurt and Watson<sup>65</sup> suggest that we are most truly ourselves when, despite the multiplicity of factors which might have influenced us, we can say that our behaviours and actions are the behaviours and actions we would want to perform from an all-things-considered point of view of who we take ourselves to be. Drawing on this

---

<sup>62</sup> Watson, *Agency and Answerability*, pp71-72 (emphasis added).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p62.

<sup>64</sup> Frankfurt, *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting it Right*, pp8-9.

<sup>65</sup> For Watson, remember, who we most truly are is determined by the things we value in “a cool and non-self-deceptive moment” (‘Free Agency’, p215). For Frankfurt, “... since the will that moved him to action was his will *because he wanted it to be*, he cannot claim that his will was forced upon him or that he was a passive bystander to its constitution.” (‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person’, p18)

commonplace intuition in their accounts of personal autonomy, both Frankfurt and Watson agree that who we most *truly* are is to be identified with our rational, deliberative and evaluative self – that is, who we take ourselves to be is based on our rational evaluations.

In the classic 1944 film adaptation of Ernest Hemmingway's *To Have and Have Not*, someone remarks to the main protagonist, played by Humphrey Bogart, 'You have to excuse her, she is not herself'. To which Bogart's character replies: 'Well, who is she then?'<sup>66</sup> I think Bogart's question here is one which lies at the very heart of my concerns with Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts of the true or real self. According to Frankfurt and Watson, when an agent is not 'being herself' she is not autonomous, and when an agent is not 'being herself' it is because she is in some way (in her actions and behaviours) being influenced by pressures which force her to act in ways which she would reject from a rational all-things-considered view of herself. So for Frankfurt and Watson, when my mother lashes out uncharacteristically, she does not do so autonomously, because under the pressures of fear and pain she is *not being herself*. I think, however, that we, like Bogart, must ask: 'Well, who is she then?' I think that this question points to a very serious problem for the commonplace intuition about the true self supported by Frankfurt and Watson. Bogart's question raises a very serious question about identity, or the unity of the self. What happens to the true self when I am overwhelmed by an allegedly illegitimate desire? How and when do I get my true self back? Who have I been while my true self has been displaced?

In her convincing paper 'Autonomy and the Split-Level Self', Friedman explains the move made Frankfurt and Watson when she says that 'Split level self theorists tell us, in varying ways, that critical reflection [rational deliberation and evaluation] is more "truly of the self" than unassessed motivation'.<sup>67</sup> Importantly, she goes on to ask what exactly such theorists mean when they claim that some element of the psyche is 'more truly of the self' than any other element of that whole psyche. I agree with her when she claims that the notion of isolating certain elements in our own psychological make-up and referring to these as the only relevant factors when describing our identity seems exceedingly arbitrary:

---

<sup>66</sup> *To Have and Have Not* (1944).

<sup>67</sup> Friedman, 'Autonomy and the Split-Level Self', p23.

...it is unclear how one part of the self could be more truly that self than any other part. And, in sheer ontological terms, it is far from clear how a part which is less than the whole of something could nevertheless be more truly that (whole) thing than the whole thing itself.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, I agree with her when she claims that it seems that the very process required for determining the elements which form the true self relies on an assessment which can only be made in light of an understanding of there being some other prior, whole self. Friedman explains:

The self who recognizes which part is its true self could only be the original whole self, and this whole self continues to remain conceptually distinct from the constituent part which is regarded as its “true” self. ...[I]t is the whole self, not the “true” self, which is doing the “identifying” with that constituent regarded as the “true” self.<sup>69</sup>

I think that Friedman’s line of questioning here is worth pursuing. I think it is worthwhile to question the fundamental assumption about the constitution of the true or real self which lies behind accounts of personal autonomy such as those put forward by Frankfurt and Watson: we must ask how any one part of the self could be considered to be a more authentic expression of that self than the whole of that self.

## II. Rational Selves and Animal Selves

In the previous chapter I suggested that by claiming that the rational self is more truly the self than any other parts of that whole self Frankfurt and Watson are clinging, wrongly I think, to a once highly influential distinction between reason and the passions. Midgley explains in her book *The Ethical Primate*:

The notion of inner freedom is an old and powerful one, but its meaning has varied, just like that of its political counterpart, according to the various kinds of inner tyrant that have been feared. Moralists from Socrates to Spinoza and Kant pointed above all to the tyranny of the passions, urging us to free ourselves from it by the use of reason. And they linked this advice closely with the need to free the spirit from the tyranny of the body.<sup>70</sup>

I agree with Midgley and think that contemporary accounts of personal autonomy still harbour an assumption about the nature of the true or real self which pays homage to the traditional distinction between our animal selves and our rational selves. On contemporary accounts, such as Frankfurt’s and Watson’s, the assumption about the nature of the true or real self is not merely descriptive – that there is a division between the rational and animal self – but the assumption carries with it a normative

---

<sup>68</sup> Friedman, ‘Autonomy and the Split-Level Self’, p28.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, pp28-29.

<sup>70</sup> Midgley, *The Ethical Primate*, pp157-158

component – that the rational self is the most authentic expression of the true or real self.

If we accept the normative component of contemporary accounts of personal autonomy, then, we are committed to a view in which the whole self is divided into two unequal parts only one of which is authentically representative of the true or real self. Since only the rational self – comprising our deliberative and evaluative processes – is to be identified with the true or real self, all other mental content and processes are considered to be of an animal or brute self (such elements of the self are often referred to as the passions). And this animal or brute self is, according to recent accounts, something to be overcome or transcended through the process of self-control. This brute or animal self is to be overcome or transcended because, unlike the rational self, the brute self is not legitimately representative of our alleged true or real self. The ideal autonomous agent suggested by these accounts, then, is the agent who strives always to live only in accordance with the dictates of her rational self which she takes to be the only legitimate expression of her true or real self.

This picture of the ideal autonomous agent is, I argue, in many ways similar to what Nietzsche sees as ‘the reduction of the beast of prey “man” to a tame and civilized animal, a domesticated animal’.<sup>71</sup> Since Nietzsche explains that the reduction of man to a ‘tame’ and ‘civilized’ animal results in ‘the degeneration and diminution of man into the perfect herd animal’, it is quite clear to me that Nietzsche rejects the picture of the ideal autonomous agent which lies at the heart of Frankfurt’s and Watson’s accounts.<sup>72</sup> It is my suggestion in this section, then, that the normative distinction between our brute or animal selves and our rational selves must be challenged.

Our rational, deliberative and evaluative faculties undoubtedly play an important part in shaping the self. But they are not the only important shaping force of our whole self. As persons, our whole self is rich with influence from a number of faculties – we are unmistakably shaped by our instincts, impulses, intuitions, urges, passions and various subconscious drives. Although my rational, evaluative and deliberative faculties play a large role in the constitution of who and what I take myself to be,

---

<sup>71</sup> (GM I: 11).

<sup>72</sup> (BG 203).

there are a number of other important faculties which are also in many ways basic to who I take myself to be. When we act or behave in ways determined by what we might call our brute or animal self, we nevertheless consider these actions or behaviours, under normal circumstances, to be our own. When I have certain bodily urges, for example, I do not typically think of these urges as not belonging to me. More importantly, certain of my actions, behaviours, character-traits and most importantly, preferences are instinctual and reactive rather than rational or calculated. That I take myself to be a kind and brave person who enjoys listening to rap music and indulging in Spanish dancing, need not require that I engage my rational, deliberative or evaluative faculties. However, by claiming that these aspects of myself are not constitutive of my real or true self, my real or true self appears in many respects incomplete. Those aspects of myself which are not necessarily rationally endorsed are fundamentally constitutive of who I am and who I take myself, most truly, to be. Our rational self is only one part of the story that we can tell about ourselves, but we misunderstand ourselves if we take this story to be complete. Clearly it is true that, under certain circumstances, we do want to say that our passions or brute selves could get in the way of being the kind of person we want to be. But the true self is more than just the rational self, it is most properly to be seen as a whole self. And being our whole self requires, of course, a kind of balancing between the competing motivational forces of our psyches, but this balance cannot be had by the tyrannical rule of only one of the forces, namely reason.

In *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche distinguishes between what he calls the master mode of evaluation and the slave mode of evaluation. Agreeing with Richard White, I take Nietzsche's distinction between the master and slave modes of evaluation to be represented not simply in two distinct kinds of persons (typified by Nietzsche's Nobles and Priests), but as representative of two distinct ways of understanding ourselves.<sup>73</sup> Using the master's mode of evaluation Nietzsche claims we value above all instinct and passion, while using the slave's mode of evaluation we glorify rational reflection and reject passion and instinct. To this extent, Nietzsche recognises the descriptive usefulness of the distinction which has been drawn between man's animal and rational nature. However, for Nietzsche, the normativity of such a

---

<sup>73</sup> White, 'The Return of the Master'.

distinction is misguided. For him, reason and passion are not properly seen as forces which are diametrically opposed, but rather, as forces which are more properly seen as intricately intertwined and of equal importance in the constitution of the individual. Thus, Nietzsche claims that as autonomous individuals we cannot commit ourselves solely to either the master or slave's mode of evaluation. To see ourselves as fully master or fully slave poses the greatest threat to the possibility of our being able to achieve what he sees as the 'highest splendour' possible for man – that is, to our sovereignty.<sup>74</sup> For Nietzsche, these two opposing understandings of ourselves must be brought together, harmonised and ultimately overcome. In so doing we become for Nietzsche 'more whole human beings' – the true authors of our own authentic self.<sup>75</sup> As sovereign individuals, according to Nietzsche:<sup>76</sup>

our ideas, our values, our yeas and nays, our ifs and buts, grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit – related and each with an affinity to each, and evidence of *one* will, *one* health, *one* soil, *one* sun.<sup>77</sup>

Like Nietzsche, Friedman questions the normative distinction between the brute self and the rational self, and suggests that it is problematic to declare only one aspect of our nature to be representative of our alleged true or real self:

What ontological importance could there be in the fact (if it is a fact) that the self happens to regard some feature of herself as her "true" self or to "identify" with it? Such identification may be merely a matter of how a person regards herself. Her view that a part of her self is her "true" self, or that her identity does reside in this part rather than that, does not necessarily bring it about that this part is her true self, or is the basis of her identity.<sup>78</sup>

Rather than identifying the true or real self with reason, and characterising it as essentially pitted against an illegitimate brute or animal self, in following Friedman and Nietzsche it is my suggestion that the self must be viewed in a more unified way. Since our very identity as agents encompasses our whole self, what we take the true or real self to be cannot be identified with anything less than the whole of that self. Here, the brute self and rational self must in some sense work coherently together within us.

---

<sup>74</sup> (GM I).

<sup>75</sup> (BG 257).

<sup>76</sup> (GM II: 2).

<sup>77</sup> (GM Preface: 2).

<sup>78</sup> Friedman, 'Autonomy and the Split-Level Self', p29.

### III. Externalisation and Rejection

Although I have taken issue with Frankfurt's and Watson's characterisation of the self, I think that Frankfurt and Watson have provided some plausible structural conditions for determining when an agent could be described as exercising autonomy. In the previous chapter, I explained that Frankfurt describes autonomy in terms of a distinction between what he calls first and second order desires, while Watson, on the other hand, explains autonomy in terms of what he sees as a partition within the psyche between motivational systems and evaluation systems. Of central importance to both of these accounts is the characteristically human capacity not only to *have* certain higher-order or overarching guiding principles and values, but to assert some form of control over the actions we perform in the world *because* of them. The sense of control gained via the higher-order or evaluating guiding principles and values is thought to be exclusively human, because of our unique ability to engage in the process of critical reflection on our initial responses to the world.<sup>79</sup> The process of critical reflection allows us to assess those basic responses, or blind desires; to form opinions about them and in some instances even change them. Such a suggestion is, I think, intuitively plausible, even if we reject, as I will suggest we should, Frankfurt's and Watson's particular accounts of self-control via externalisation. In 'How to Harden Your Heart', Amelie Rorty elegantly highlights the plausibility of this suggestion:

Sanity and decency consist in achieving a reflectively critical balance among all these deep-seated and contrary tendencies. Any normal person is in principle notionally capable of monitoring and adjusting them. But the ability to achieve a finely attuned balance among them depends on an individual's constitution and on the vicissitudes of experience.<sup>80</sup>

In this respect, the autonomous agent for Nietzsche resembles remarkably closely the autonomous agent as understood by Frankfurt and Watson. In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche claims:

Indeed, where the plant 'man' shows himself strongest one finds instincts conflict powerfully... but are controlled.<sup>81</sup>

For Frankfurt, Watson, and Nietzsche, autonomous agents form values or higher order desires on the basis of their blind, or first order, desires. But these values are not

---

<sup>79</sup> Frankfurt 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person'; Watson, 'Free Agency'.

<sup>80</sup> Rorty, 'How to harden your heart', p287.

<sup>81</sup> (WP 966).

simply formed as copies of these blind desires. The process of forming values involves the agent selecting and affirming some blind desires over others which may conflict with them.<sup>82</sup> Where Frankfurt and Watson differ from Nietzsche, however, is in their respective suggestions about what is fundamentally involved in this process by which agents come to form their values or second order desires.

For Frankfurt and Watson, once we have selected and affirmed certain of our desires, the residual desires which conflict with our endorsed desires are to be seen as rogue mental elements which have no role in the constitution of our selves. They are not constitutive of our true or real selves for Frankfurt and Watson because we have not selected and endorsed them in the process of forming our values. Frankfurt and Watson claim that for autonomous agents this process of value formation will involve our rational, true or real self winning the war against all the alleged rogue elements within our psyche through externalisation, rejection and denial. They agree that in order to be autonomous we must externalise all aspects of ourselves which are contrary to who we rationally take ourselves to be, for such aspects have no legitimate authority for us. If we are unable to externalise these rogue motives and impulses, which do not stem from our real selves, according to Frankfurt and Watson our personal autonomy is undermined. Frankfurt explains how internal pressure undermines our personal autonomy succinctly in the following passage from ‘Taking Ourselves Seriously’:<sup>83</sup>

Let us suppose that a certain motive has been rejected as unacceptable. Our attempt to immunize ourselves against it may not work. The resistance we mobilize may be insufficient. The externalized impulse or desire may succeed, by its sheer power, in defeating us and forcing its way. In that case, *the outlaw imposes itself upon us without authority, and against our will.*<sup>84</sup>

And Watson claims:

Here the opposition is not between you and another, but between you – that is, your evaluative judgment – and your other desires. Here, the “other” is your own motivation. This kind of conflict presents an issue of self-control rather than deliberation because here *insubordinate desires are to be resisted*. In these circumstances, their claims lack authority.<sup>85</sup>

According to Frankfurt, when we encounter any rogue elements within our own psyche – those which do not submit to the rule of the rational self – we must strive to

---

<sup>82</sup> Thanks to Tom Martin for useful discussions on these issues.

<sup>83</sup> Frankfurt, *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting it Right*.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, p14 (emphasis added).

<sup>85</sup> Watson, *Agency and Answerability*, p62 (emphasis added).

‘dissociate ourselves from them’, rather than attempting to incorporate them into our conception of ourselves:

That is, we dissociate ourselves from them and seek to prevent them from being at all effective. Instead of incorporating them, we externalize them... They are outlawed and disenfranchised. We refuse to recognise them as grounds for deciding what to think and what to do... even if an externalized desire turns out to be irresistible, its dominion is merely that of a tyrant. It has, for us, no legitimate authority.<sup>86</sup>

On the Frankfurtian model, an individual is not autonomous either when he is not wholehearted with respect to his volition or when he acts on a desire which he has externalised: although non-wholehearted volitions or externalised desires form part of what Frankfurt refers to as the whole self, they are not, according to Frankfurt’s account, an expression of the true self. Frankfurt claims that when such an externalised element is successfully manifested it is successful because it has in some sense ‘defeated us’ and imposed ‘itself upon us without authority, and against our will’.<sup>87</sup> In a similar vein, Watson argues that in cases where we come up against rogue desires which cannot be brought under the control of reason (or as Watson calls them, our ‘evaluative judgments’) we are to resist and reject such elements as being part of the true or real self. According to Watson:

The possibility I have in mind is rather that what one is disposed to say or judge is temporarily affected by the presence of the desire in such a way that, both before and after the “onslaught” of the desire, one judges that the desire’s object is worth pursuing (in the circumstances) whether or not one has the desire. In this case one is likely, in a cool moment, to think it a matter for regret that one had been so influenced and to think that *one should guard against* desires that have this property.<sup>88</sup>

According to Frankfurt and Watson, through dissociation and externalisation we declare that these rogue elements are external to us, and as such we declare that certain elements of ourselves are not constitutive of our true or real selves. By rejecting and resisting the allegedly rogue elements of our mental empire, according to Frankfurt and Watson, we take responsibility for determining the boundaries of our true or real self. In short, we declare that this is precisely where the boundary between self and other lies.

Frankfurt’s and Watson’s claim that maintaining a commitment to legitimate authority of the rational self holds some intuitive plausibility; however, I think that it is nevertheless problematic. Let me explain by means of an example: let’s say I give in

---

<sup>86</sup> Frankfurt, ‘Taking Ourselves Seriously’, p10.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p14.

<sup>88</sup> Watson, ‘Free Agency’, p214 (emphasis added).

to my temptation to eat a tender and well-prepared piece of steak when the option is presented to me, despite my evaluative commitment to being a vegetarian for ethical reasons. On Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts, when I give in to such a temptation, my true self (my rational, evaluating self) has been undermined, and as such, I am not only acting in spite of myself or not being myself, I am also not acting autonomously. In Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts of self-control, by engaging in the process of value formation, what they see as the creation of the true or real self, our identities are seen as divided into parts which are pitted against one another. This is, in some sense, accurate – it captures an agent's psychological picture nicely. The solution suggested to this psychological struggle, for Frankfurt and Watson, is achieved when we identify our true or real selves with only one of these parts and reject or deny the fact that any other parts of ourselves are really an expression of who we most truly are. This picture, I think, is less accurate. It is my suggestion that in attempting to resolve the internal conflict in the manner suggested by Frankfurt and Watson, agents face a great danger – the danger of self-deception and the dissolution of psychological integrity. I will explore this view further in the following section of this chapter and in the final chapter of this thesis, but will say here very briefly that the form of self-deception I am referring to is explained by Bernard Reginster as embodied by the agent who fails to acknowledge that her true self is constituted by her whole self:

*Self-deception*, it should be pointed out, is not just a case of *deception* (i.e. deception about oneself). Deception is a lack of *knowledge*, while self-deception is a lack of *acknowledgment* of what, 'deep down,' one knows, or believes, to be true. Deception cuts the agent off from reality but, unlike self-deception, it causes no split within the agent's self. What Nietzsche finds troubling about self-deception is precisely such *self-division*.<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, this form of self-deception is explained by Midgley as the failure of an agent to acknowledge all the aspects of herself which comprise her whole self as being constitutive of her true self:

I am suggesting that self-deception arises because we see motives which are in fact our own as alien to us and refuse to acknowledge them. This is not an isolated event, but is one possible outcome of a very common and pervasive inner-dialogue, in which aspects of the personality appear to exchange views as if they were separate people. We are used to this interchange between alternating moods or viewpoints. (If we were not, we should probably find it much harder to disown some of them, because it would be harder to separate them from our official selves in the first place.)<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Reginster 'Nietzsche on *Ressentiment* and Valuation', p298.

<sup>90</sup> Midgley, *Wickedness*, p119.

#### IV. The Gothic Self

If we take the claims made by Friedman, Midgley and Nietzsche, discussed in the previous section seriously, it seems rather peculiar to say, as Frankfurt and Watson do, that our autonomy is diminished when some element of our whole self successfully trumps all other elements of that same whole self. It seems even more problematic to say, as Frankfurt and Watson do, that in order to exercise our personal autonomy we should externalise, reject and dissociate ourselves from all the elements within our psyche which do not conform to the dictates of our rational, deliberative selves. It is my suggestion that this concern lies at the heart of various matters which were of great interest to a number of Victorian and Gothic authors. Authors such as Wilde, Dickens, Shelley<sup>91</sup> and Stevenson (to name but a few) explore notions which bring into question the legitimacy of considering certain aspects of ourselves, which have been rejected in accordance with overarching principles, as less truly part of ourselves. In particular, these authors began to explore this issue through the concept of what is termed the *doppelgänger* – a sinister double of an individual.<sup>92</sup> One of the most useful explorations of the *doppelgänger* concept for my purpose here, which is specifically to do with the notion of personal autonomy, is found in Stevenson's classic, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

The basic plots of various novels exploring the abovementioned themes, such as that of *Jekyll and Hyde* or *Frankenstein*, have found fame in non-literary circles as children's stories or have been used as descriptively loaded catchphrases. People often mistakenly refer to Frankenstein as the Golem who was sparked to life by lightning, and use Jekyll and Hyde as an almost Homeric epithet when referring to people with a split personality or bipolar disorder. The problem with these non-literary adoptions is that they are prone to provide reinterpretations that miss the subtle moral nuances which are of fundamental importance in the texts themselves. This is particularly telling in the case of *Jekyll and Hyde*, for the novel itself is not intended as a guide-book for diagnosing mental disorders, or as a warning about how monstrous we may well become when we give into the temptation of our sinful natures. When we

---

<sup>91</sup> See especially *Great Expectations*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (Dickens), *Frankenstein* (Shelley) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Wilde).

<sup>92</sup> For further reading see Thompson, Voller and Frank, *Gothic Writers: A Critical and Biographical Guide*.

understand the novel itself, what is most apparent, and indeed most alarming, is that the warning from Stevenson is not that we all have the potential to become Hyde when we give in to temptation. Rather, the warning is that if we, like Dr Jekyll, attempt to wholly separate ourselves from the Hyde which dwells in each of us, we are simply denying something fundamental about our very nature – about our very identity – and this can only be ultimately detrimental for ourselves. In order to understand the ways in which this warning is relevant to the notion of personal autonomy and, in particular, the problems encountered in both Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts, we will need to examine the exact manifestation of this warning in the novel itself.

From the outset of the novel, Dr Jekyll is aware of himself as a deeply divided individual. His division, I suggest, should be seen as manifesting at what Frankfurt would call the second order volitional level and within what Watson would call our evaluational system, rather than as a division occurring because of a kind of weakness of the will. Dr Jekyll can be described as having two radically different and diametrically opposed higher order or evaluative selves, both of which he seems to identify with. Jekyll claims to this effect:

...though so profound a double-dealer, I was in no sense a hypocrite, both sides of me were in dead earnest; I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame, than when I laboured in the eye of day.<sup>93</sup>

Dr Jekyll, then, is what Frankfurt would call ambivalent in that he experiences a volitional division which prevents him from having a unified identity, which Frankfurt thinks prevents us from saying that there is 'a certain truth about him at all'.<sup>94</sup> Stevenson, however, seems in my opinion to be drawing into question this assertion made by Frankfurt when he has Dr Jekyll claim:

I saw that, of the two natures that contended within the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both.<sup>95</sup>

What Stevenson does however seem to agree with Frankfurt about, with regards to the notion of ambivalence, is that such a division seems to at least hinder the ambivalent individual's ability to achieve certain of his goals or to follow a single overarching life plan at all. Dr Jekyll himself admits with regards to his internal division that: 'this

---

<sup>93</sup> Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, p76.

<sup>94</sup> Frankfurt, 'The Faintest Passion', pp99 - 100.

<sup>95</sup> Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, p77.

incoherency of my life was daily growing more unwelcome'.<sup>96</sup> In an attempt to explore the complete polarity of selves which Jekyll experiences within himself, we see Jekyll's interest turn to performing experiments which aim to utterly separate the two sides of his nature. Dr Jekyll attempts to escape his dual nature, what Frankfurt would call his ambivalence, by externalising certain aspects of himself associated with only one side of nature. In order to do so, he attempts to wholly separate one half of his nature and thereby create what he considers to be an entirely separate person, Hyde. In the manifestation of Hyde as a separate individual to Jekyll, Stevenson describes clearly the fundamental changes in the physical characteristics of the body which these two individuals share. In her book *Wickedness*, Midgley explains the significance of the physical alteration in the Jekyll/Hyde split: without an understanding of a physical change in either the person of Jekyll or Hyde we typically have difficulty in understanding how either Jekyll or Hyde could really be seen as radically different persons. Midgley explains:

The disadvantages of oscillating violently in this way are obvious, and in fact if we find people who seem to do it we tend to look for an explanation in some oscillation of their physical state. Without this extra factor, it is hard to see how the oscillator's clarity of vision can really be maintained.<sup>97</sup>

Initially, once separated, Jekyll no longer associates himself with any of the activities performed by Hyde.<sup>98</sup> He has become a wholly separate individual and there is no longer a need for him to see any of his Hyde-like qualities as in any sense part of his true or real self. This dissociation of Jekyll from Hyde exhibits precisely the kind of externalisation of desires or volitions suggested by Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts of self-control. Frankfurt explains this clearly when he says:

Some of the psychic raw material that we confront may be so objectionable to us that we cannot permit it to determine our attitudes or behaviour. We cannot help having a dark side. However, we are resolved to keep it from producing any direct effect upon the design and conduct of our lives.<sup>99</sup>

What Jekyll, however, begins to realise after his first spontaneous transformation into Hyde, is that despite his dissociation from Jekyll, Hyde remains inextricably bound to him. I think that it is plausible to say that in realising this, Jekyll catches a glimpse of his own self-deception. In his attempt to wholly separate himself from Hyde he

---

<sup>96</sup> Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, p80.

<sup>97</sup> Midgley, *Wickedness*, p118.

<sup>98</sup> "It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty". Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, p83.

<sup>99</sup> Frankfurt, 'Taking Ourselves Seriously', p10.

thought, like Frankfurt and Watson, that he could isolate some components of his whole self and declare that these aspects no longer truly belonged to him. I suggest that in practicing this kind of self-deception, Jekyll took the first step on a path that would ultimately lead to the dissolution of his psychological integrity.

Jekyll now begins to see the danger of attempting to dissociate himself altogether from his Hyde-like qualities, claiming: 'I began to spy a danger that, if this [division] were much prolonged, the balance of my nature might be permanently overthrown'.<sup>100</sup> It is in this claim made by Stevenson that we begin to realise the danger inherent in the process of dissociation – a danger alluded to by psychoanalysts in their discussions surrounding the repression of certain psychic elements by our censoring and relegating certain desires, or perhaps even other mental elements, to the realm of the unconscious.<sup>101</sup>

At a later point in Stevenson's narrative Jekyll discovers that Hyde is wanted for the murder of a high ranking official. Jekyll makes an attempt at a more total kind of suppression of the part of his nature which he previously transferred into the person of Hyde. The attempt is successful for a short period only, and eventually Jekyll admits: 'I was still cursed with my duality of purpose; and as the first edge of my penance wore off, the lower side of me... so recently chained down, began to growl for license'.<sup>102</sup> The difficulty experienced by Jekyll in trying to suppress Hyde, and the sympathy we feel for Jekyll, is rooted in the fact that we seem to understand what it is like to face the same difficulty when trying to suppress certain elements of ourselves. This difficulty is what the Victorian and Gothic authors point to in their discussions of the dual nature of the self.

It is the difficulty in overcoming this duality of self that should alert us to the problems inherent in Frankfurt's and Watson's suggested notion of self-control. The difficulty we all experience with dissociation – in either trying to suppress or rid ourselves entirely of certain desires or volitions – raises again the two important points which form the foundation of Friedman's objections to the accounts of the true

---

<sup>100</sup> Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, p83.

<sup>101</sup> See Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*.

<sup>102</sup> Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, p86.

self which underlie both Frankfurt and Watson's accounts. Firstly, it will sometimes be wholly impossible for us to suppress certain elements of our whole self with which we simply cannot identify. What this means is that, at least in some circumstances, we can be accused of undermining our own autonomy in virtue of the fact that we act in accordance with some part of ourselves which we do not consider to be our alleged true selves, but which must nevertheless be thought of as part of our whole self. Secondly, if it is indeed only with difficulty that we are able to suppress (if we are able to at all) some element of our whole self that we do not wish to consider as part of our true self, it is again unclear in what way we should consider this alleged true self to be more truly an expression of ourselves than the whole self.

It is at this point, then, that we come to understand Stevenson's warning in its entirety, and we can see that it implies something far graver than the rejection of selective identification and dissociation purely on the grounds of their difficulty to achieve. Stevenson's ultimate warning is that when we externalise certain elements of ourselves, in ways recommended by Frankfurt and Watson, the result is a certain one-dimensionality of character and, moreover, actually leads to the loss of potential to ever be an integrated and authentic self. When Stevenson explains that 'Utterton knew he was looking on the body of a self-destroyer',<sup>103</sup> he is giving us far more than a euphemism for the fact that Jekyll/Hyde had committed suicide. Rather, he is expressing the very essence of the moral of his story: that because, 'man is not truly one, but truly two...and I hazard a guess that man will ultimately be known for a mere polarity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens',<sup>104</sup> we are denying something of fundamental importance about the nature of our self when we engage in the process of dissociation.

We cannot then, if we take Stevenson's warning seriously, agree that we could achieve personal autonomy by adopting Frankfurt or Watson's models, which require that we reject or externalise parts of our whole self. The 'inner harmony'<sup>105</sup> (the harmony Frankfurt associates with being wholehearted) which would result from this could only be seen as an inner harmony committed to a constant war within the self –

---

<sup>103</sup> Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, p67.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p76.

<sup>105</sup> Frankfurt, 'Taking Ourselves Seriously', p17.

and this would be akin to a kind of *forcing* ourselves to be the kind of person that we want to be, rather than simply *being* the kind of person we want to be.<sup>106</sup> If we take the moral of the story presented in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* to heart, then we should move to an account of personal autonomy which allows for self-governance understood in terms of the whole self, and not merely as self-control understood in terms of only one part of the whole self which we consider to be more that self than its whole. For it is only when we take into account the true nature of the whole self that we can achieve the ‘integration’ and ‘harmony’ of the self properly associated with self-governance.

---

<sup>106</sup> This would give rise to the kind of inauthentic person discussed by Sartre, or the man of *Ressentiment* discussed by Nietzsche – I will discuss this in detail in the final chapter of my thesis.

## CHAPTER 3: THE SOVEREIGN INDIVIDUAL

So far I have argued against the accounts of personal autonomy advanced by Frankfurt and Watson on the grounds that they provide us with problematic understandings of both the self and self-governance. In this chapter, I will suggest that Nietzsche's account of personal autonomy, as informed by his characterisation of the sovereign individual, is able to avoid these problems. Nietzsche's sovereign individual, I suggest, is explained most clearly by Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and in his proposition of the doctrine of eternal recurrence. The strength of Nietzsche's account of the sovereign individual, I argue, is rooted in the fact that Nietzsche explains what is valuable about the sovereign individual in terms of the notions of both autonomy and authenticity. Through both Alexander Nehamas<sup>107</sup> and David Cooper's<sup>108</sup> explication of the suggestion made by Nietzsche that you must 'Be what you are!', and in my explication of the doctrine of eternal recurrence, I argue in this chapter that the Nietzschean picture of the sovereign individual provides us with a more attractive alternative to Frankfurt's and Watson's characterisation of the ideal autonomous agent. I will explore the three defining features of the sovereign individual as explained by Nietzsche in terms of: self-creation, narrative integrity and individual style. Finally, it is my suggestion that Nietzsche's sovereign individual embodies a richer conception of both agency and autonomy than the autonomous agent in accounts put forward by Frankfurt and Watson.

### I. Autonomy and Authenticity

In order to understand ourselves as human agents, as subjects or as persons, there are a great number of attributes, capacities and abilities which require thoughtful explanations. Personal autonomy and authenticity are both concepts which arise precisely in the context of providing these kinds of explanations. The notion of personal autonomy has more typically been discussed within the analytic tradition of philosophy while, on the other hand, the notion of authenticity has usually been explored within the continental tradition. While the differences between these notions

---

<sup>107</sup> Nehamas, 'How One Becomes What One Is'.

<sup>108</sup> Cooper, *Authenticity and Learning*.

could be explained by making reference to some subtle nuances, I think that it is of some importance to my project to note the similarities – particularly because of the extent to which these notions overlap in Nietzsche’s characterisation of the sovereign individual.

When referring to persons, we typically use the notion of authenticity to refer to what can be seen as an *ideal mode of existence*, one in which a person lives their life in such a way that they might be considered to have been true to themselves. What is required for authenticity, at least in part, is the form of freedom agents are thought to gain by exercising the kind of personal autonomy I discussed in the first chapter. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche suggests that in order to be true to ourselves, in order to become sovereign individuals, we must listen to our conscience which shouts, ‘You must become who you are’.<sup>109</sup> This idea of being true to oneself, which lies at the very heart of Nietzsche’s understanding of the sovereign individual, however, might seem ambiguous and thus requires some explanation – for the idea of being true to oneself can be, and indeed has been, understood in a number of ways.

According to Charles Guignon in his popular book *On Being Authentic*:

[T]he contemporary ideal of authenticity directs you to realize and be that which you already are, with the unique, definitive traits already there within you.<sup>110</sup>

According to this ideal of authenticity, we already have a defining essence buried deep within us, and it is only in being true to this essence – by giving expression to all the traits and dispositions which are already there within us – that we can exercise our authenticity. From literature to self-help books the words of Shakespeare’s Polonius ‘To thine own self be true’<sup>111</sup> have been invoked in support of this view of authenticity. Cooper thus refers to this view as the ‘Polonian View’.<sup>112</sup> He explains that on such a view what is required for authenticity is that we turn our gaze inwards on ourselves and discover who we really are. Who we most truly are, is thus assumed to already lie within us, easily identifiable through self-reflection and in a sense ready-made. The Polonian view thus understands authenticity as a project of my uncovering and expressing what is already there within me. The Polonian assumption

---

<sup>109</sup> (GS 270)

<sup>110</sup> Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, p3.

<sup>111</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet* Act 1, scene 3, 78.

<sup>112</sup> Cooper, *Authenticity and Learning*, p8.

made about the nature of the true or real self seems *prima facie* to be the very same assumption which lies at the heart of Nietzsche, Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts of personal autonomy. On Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts, when the authoritative power of our true or real self shines forth in our behaviour and actions, we exercise self-governance. For Nietzsche, the suggestion of becoming who we are seems intuitively compatible with finding who we are already there within us and simply giving that deeply buried self expression.

Frankfurt and Watson, however, claim that rather than simply uncovering a pre-existing true self lying deep within ourselves, we must play an active role in the formation or constitution of ourselves – we must be involved in some form of self-control in which we are responsible not only for self-modification, but self-creation (recall that we are responsible for creating ourselves for Frankfurt and Watson because by selectively identifying with certain aspects of ourselves we determine for ourselves the boundaries of our true or real self). Autonomy, according to Frankfurt and Watson, is not something that simply happens to agents, thus a request for active control in the form of self-creation seems relevant for the establishment of an agent as autonomous. Nietzsche finds similar fault with the Polonian view of authenticity, and to this extent his views are compatible with those put forward by Frankfurt and Watson. Nietzsche agrees that a form of self-creation is required for the project of becoming who one is. Much like Frankfurt's and Watson's autonomous persons, sovereign individuals, on Nietzsche's account, are to be thought of as actively asserting control over or governing themselves in such a way as to make their actions and lives their own. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche claims:

We, however, want to become those we are – human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves.<sup>113</sup>

So for Frankfurt and Watson, the process of self-creation amounts to the ability to exercise self-control. In the previous chapters I explained that, according to Frankfurt and Watson, our real or true self is constituted by our rational, deliberative and evaluative faculties. Since our true self is constituted by our rational self, on Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts, my true or real self must struggle against all the rogue elements within my own psyche which seek to undermine the authority and

---

<sup>113</sup> (GS 338) .

control of the rational, deliberating and evaluative faculties which constitute who I most truly am.<sup>114</sup> According to Frankfurt and Watson, in order to be true to ourselves we must reject, externalise and fight against all aspects of ourselves which do not bend to the authority of the narrowly defined true self. Only when we are successful in this war do Frankfurt and Watson think that we have achieved the kind of inner harmony and coherence which is thought to accompany self-creation. In the previous chapter, I argued that the kind of self-control advocated by Frankfurt and Watson in fact amounted to a form of self-suppression, which provides us with an undesirable picture of inner harmony which they claim is to be achieved by resistance, eviction or denial.

Where Nietzsche disagrees with Frankfurt and Watson, however, is in his understanding of what is involved in the process of self-creation. Nietzsche, who is sceptical about the very notion of a true or real self, thinks that the commitment to such a struggle is futile and can never lead to the kind of freedom or inner harmony Frankfurt and Watson ideally associate with autonomy.<sup>115</sup> For Nietzsche, there are deeply ingrained aspects of our selves which are central to our character or personality. Nietzsche agrees that the process of introspective self-reflection reveals these aspects, putting them on display for us to make our own evaluations. These aspects, however, are not understood by Nietzsche as merely historically accurate pieces of information about ourselves which we may simply choose to reject in their entirety. According to Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*:

There is no trick which enables us to turn a poor virtue into a rich and overflowing one; but we can reinterpret its poverty into a necessity so that it no longer offends us when we see it and we no longer sulk at fate on its account.<sup>116</sup>

## II. Acknowledgment and Integrity

For Nietzsche, in order to be sovereign individuals we must strive to be self-creating – authentic and autonomous. In order to understand what Nietzsche means by a self-

---

<sup>114</sup> As I have argued in the previous chapters.

<sup>115</sup> “Nietzsche is, first, consistently hostile to the metaphysics of the self encouraged by Polonian talk: to the idea of a self which persists, unchanged in its essence, through the vicissitudes of life, and hidden perhaps from view. Such a self is as mythical for Nietzsche as it had been for Hume; hence his references to the ‘false substantializing of the “I”’, and to the wrong-headed view that the self is the source of thought when, on the contrary, it is ‘through thought that the “I” is posited’. (28).” Cooper, *Authenticity and Learning*, pp13-14.

<sup>116</sup> (GS 17).

creating or sovereign individual, both Cooper and Nehamas suggest that it is most illustrative to turn to Nietzsche's suggestion that 'one must become what one is'. For Nietzsche, in order to achieve the status of a sovereign individual, we must actively be engaged in the project of becoming who and what we are. Both Nehamas and Cooper suggest that, for Nietzsche, in 'becoming what one is' one is involved in some form of active self-governance. Similarly, for Emerson, asserting our authenticity requires a kind of self-reliance in which we fully embrace who we are as individuals, and thus be who we are. Emerson, in his famous piece 'Self-Reliance', claims rather dramatically:

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and *creators*, but names and customs... Absolve yourself to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world.<sup>117</sup>

Like Emerson, for Nietzsche, the idea of self-creation is intricately linked to the idea of non-conformity to the values and ideals of society at large. By conforming to society's values and ideals, Nietzsche suggests that we deny something which is fundamental to our nature as human beings – that is, the capacity to derive our values for ourselves. For Nietzsche, what poses the biggest danger to the possibility of our becoming self-creating or sovereign individuals is not that we should subscribe to or even endorse the values and ideals advocated by society, or any other source of authority for that matter, the biggest danger is that we may find ourselves having slipped into an unreflective acceptance of these values and ideals.<sup>118</sup> Nietzsche's claim that we should be self-creating individuals can thus initially be seen as a call to reflect on our existence and the values and ideals which lie at the core of this existence. According to Nietzsche, unreflectively accepting transmitted values and ideals can lead to us making equally unreflective assessments and evaluations about aspects of our selves and thus, we may find ourselves slipping into comfortable unreflective understandings of our selves – for Nietzsche this is a most dangerous threat to our sovereignty. In *Schopenhauer as Educator* Nietzsche claims:

The man who would not belong to the mass needs only to cease being comfortable with himself; he should follow his conscience which shouts at him: 'Be yourself (*sei du selbst*); you are not really all that which you do, think, and desire now'.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Emerson, 'Self-Reliance', p261.[Sic.]

<sup>118</sup> See Cooper, *Authenticity and Learning*, p4.

<sup>119</sup> Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, 1 (Hollindale, p127).

In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche examines a psychological condition in which agents experience what he calls *ressentiment*.<sup>120</sup> The ‘man of *ressentiment*’ represents, for Nietzsche, the very antithesis of the Sovereign Individual.<sup>121</sup> We can understand Nietzsche’s account of autonomy and authenticity, then, if we can understand Nietzsche’s account of *ressentiment*. Importantly, Frankfurt’s and Watson’s suggestion to a resolution of an agent’s internal psychological struggle resembles in many ways what Nietzsche envisions as problematic in agents he sees as guilty of *ressentiment*. For Nietzsche, this danger poses one of the greatest threats to what he sees as our personal autonomy, typified in his ‘Sovereign Individual’ who is “autonomous and supramoral”.<sup>122</sup> The threat, for Nietzsche, is that we practice self-deception when we attempt to solve our internal conflicts by denying that some aspects of our whole self are really an expression of who we truly are. For Nietzsche, this means, that we might be guilty of *ressentiment*. As autonomous agents, we form values on the basis of our blind desires. But this process involves, for the autonomous agent, selecting and affirming or endorsing some desires over others which may conflict with them. For Nietzsche, genuine affirmation or endorsement of our values or overarching guiding principles requires us to acknowledge, rather than reject or deny, the desires which may conflict with the desire we endorse. This acknowledgment involves the knowledge that the satisfaction of certain desires precludes the fulfilment of other of our desires.<sup>123</sup> If we do not acknowledge these conflicting desires as our own desires which now cannot reach fulfilment we are in a very important sense deceiving ourselves about ourselves, and are thus guilty, according to Nietzsche, of *ressentiment*. And this is precisely what we would be doing if we followed Frankfurt’s and Watson’s advice.

Frankfurt’s and Watson’s solution to the internal psychological struggle within agents is explained and criticised by Amelie Rorty in terms of a practice which she refers to as ‘compartmentalization’ of the self.<sup>124</sup> Those who practice compartmentalisation, according to Rorty, separate and effectively cut off certain aspects of themselves from others. Rorty explains:

---

<sup>120</sup> (GM, especially GM II).

<sup>121</sup> (GM II: 2)

<sup>122</sup> (GM II: 2)

<sup>123</sup> Reginster supports this reading of Nietzsche in ‘Nietzsche on *Ressentiment* and Valuation’.

<sup>124</sup> Rorty, ‘How to harden your heart’.

Because a divided self tends to undo itself, we naturally, without even being aware of it, attempt to smooth over the appearance of internal conflicts. Or, equally effectively, we compartmentalize attempting to separate different aspects of our lives. Movements toward psychological integration are Janus-faced: they can move toward integrity as well as toward corruption. And although compartmentalization is often effectively soothing, it can rot the mind.<sup>125</sup>

Importantly, Rorty suggests that the practise of compartmentalisation can be an effective tool for an agent working towards integrity of the self, in which case the compartmentalisation is what she calls ‘soothing’ – by which, I take her to mean that the process is in some sense beneficial to the agent. The practice of compartmentalisation takes a sinister turn, however, when agents reject or deny various compartmentalised aspects of themselves – seeing them as wholly separate from an alleged true or real self. Nietzsche’s understanding of *ressentiment* is in many ways similar here to Rorty’s understanding of the practise of problematic compartmentalisation. It is this more sinister practice of compartmentalisation which lies at the heart of Frankfurt’s and Watson’s accounts of personal autonomy. Rorty explains the movement towards psychological integration as ‘Janus-faced’, moving either towards corruption or integrity. It is my argument that the more sinister practice of compartmentalisation endorsed by Frankfurt and Watson leads to corruption of psychological integrity. For Nietzsche, *ressentiment* is, at least in part, a psychological condition which results in a fractured and damaged individual, lacking in integrity. The ‘man of *ressentiment*’ fails to understand that the genuine endorsement of a value requires acknowledgment that in fulfilling that value he has other desires which must now remain unsatisfied, but these desires are no less his own desires. By denying that these desires are his own, he deceives himself about himself. The ‘man of *ressentiment*’ fails to acknowledge that certain of his own desires cannot be fulfilled, and in so doing fails to understand the implications the endorsement of a value has for his life and thus fails, for Nietzsche, to genuinely endorse the value at all. Reginster explains:

There is no genuine endorsement of a value, therefore, without the acknowledgment of those of our desires which conflict with its realization. To acknowledge the presence of conflicting desires and to accept the fact that they have to be left unsatisfied demands unflinching honesty with ourselves. But the required honesty is precisely what the “man of *ressentiment*” lacks.<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Rorty, ‘How to harden your heart’, p286.

<sup>126</sup> Reginster, “Nietzsche on *Ressentiment* and Valuation”,

The lack of integrity that Nietzsche associates with the ‘man of *ressentiment*’ has to do with the self-deception involved in failing to acknowledge our whole selves. Integrity requires this kind of honesty with ourselves, as Nietzsche explains, this honesty strengthens our integrity. This honesty and integrity is seen in who Nietzsche calls the noble man, a man who he claims is not guilty of *ressentiment*. Nietzsche explains that the noble man’s ‘predominance did not lie mainly in physical strength but in strength of soul – they were more whole human beings’.<sup>127</sup> In part, however, our integrity is, for Nietzsche, also a reflection of the autonomous agent’s bravery. Nietzsche says that:

While the noble man lives in trust and openness with himself..., the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naive nor honest and straightforward with himself. His soul squints.<sup>128</sup>

There is a kind of bravery seen by Nietzsche in the noble man, which he refers to as ‘strength of soul’. This noble bravery is reflected in the ‘sovereign individual’, who realises that her genuine endorsement of a value involves stifling one or more of her other *own* desires. Such an agent is brave when she owns up to this realisation because she understands that by acting on her endorsed values she is herself both the one who commands herself and the one who obeys. As Nietzsche explains:

What is called “freedom of the will” is essentially the affect of superiority with respect to something which must obey “I am free ‘it’ must obey” – this consciousness lies in every will, along with a certain straining of attention, a straight look that fixes on one thing and one thing only, an unconditional evaluation “now this is necessary and nothing else,” an inner certainty that it will be obeyed, and whatever else comes with the position of the commander. A person who wills -, commands something inside himself that obeys, or that he believes to obey. But now we notice the strangest thing about the will – about this multifarious thing that people have only one word for. On the one hand, we are, under the circumstances, both the one who commands and the one who obeys, and as the obedient one we are familiar with the feelings of compulsion, force, pressure, resistance, and motion that generally start right after the act of willing.<sup>129</sup>

With this realisation the ‘sovereign individual’ bravely exhibits the kind of ‘wholeness’ of self associated with what Nietzsche calls ‘autonomy’.<sup>130</sup> In this respect, then, I take the Nietzschean account to be better suited to the task of explaining the process of self-governance effectively employed by the autonomous agent. The autonomous agent, for Nietzsche, embraces her whole self as her true or real self, and feels the sting of this ‘wholeness’ in all of her actions which flow from

---

<sup>127</sup> (BG, 257).

<sup>128</sup> (GM I: 10).

<sup>129</sup> (BG 19).

<sup>130</sup> (BG, 257; GM II: 2).

her evaluations. In feeling this sting, she comes to terms with what Nietzsche would refer to as her ‘all-too-human’ psychological condition. It is in seeing ourselves as whole selves, and in coming to terms with our psychological condition, that we are most fully able to exercise our self-governance, or capacity for autonomous agency.

In aiming to be one’s whole-self, though such a self is likely to be fraught with some contradictions, it is my contention that it is, to some extent, these very contradictions which make up what we might consider our true or real selves. In order to achieve personal autonomy, then, our efforts are not best spent on committing ourselves to a constant war between unsynchronised factions of ourselves. Rather, in recognising that all of these factions are components of our true or real selves, our efforts are best spent in attempting to provide a single, integrated and thus polychromatic montage in which all of these factions are given representation. Even a polychromatic self is naturally subject to certain changes, but is most importantly to be viewed as a whole self, and thus a quest for self-governance can only result from an attempt to maintain the unity of that whole self. The following quote by Midgley stresses precisely this point:

... human freedom centres on being a creature able, in some degree, to act as a whole in dealing with its conflicting desires... and the conflicting desires themselves are of course not the whole story. They must belong to a being which in some way owns both of them, is aware of both, and can therefore make some attempt to reconcile them. The more clearly the being is aware of the clash, and the more it can on occasion, distance itself from any of its impulses, feeling itself to be *a whole that contains them all*, the freer it becomes. This distancing does not mean taking flight to an entity immune from the conflict. Only misguided attempts at self-control are made in that way. The endeavour must be to act *as a whole*, rather than as a peculiar, isolated component coming in to control the rest of the person. Though it is only an endeavour – though the wholeness is certainly not given ready made and can never be fully achieved, yet the integrative struggle to heal conflicts and to reach towards this wholeness is surely the core of what we mean by human freedom.<sup>131</sup>

It is, then, only through our independent reflection on and evaluation of the various aspects of ourselves that we might come to integrate these aspects into a coherent understanding of ourselves as whole selves, capable of effective self-governance. Thus, *contra* Frankfurt and Watson, Nietzsche claims that integration of the various aspects of ourselves into a coherent whole requires us to actively acknowledge all of these various aspects. For Nietzsche, then, authenticity and autonomy speak of integration through holistic self-understanding, which we have already seen him

---

<sup>131</sup> Midgley, *The Ethical Primate*, p168 (emphasis added).

explain in terms of self-creation, but as we shall see further along in this chapter, such integration is also suggested by Nietzsche in the form of ‘narrative integrity’ and ‘individual style’.

### III. Self-Creation

In his understanding of self-creation Nietzsche seems to go further than simply saying that we are required to acknowledge the conflicting aspects of ourselves which constitute our whole-selves: he claims that we need to actively affirm these aspects. A word of clarification on the sense in which Nietzsche here uses the term affirmation is required. As I have already suggested, there are parts of ourselves which we do wish to overcome, and this overcoming requires knowledge of what is to be overcome as well as the knowledge that what is to be overcome is precisely some aspect of my very own self. Here, Nietzsche’s use of the term affirmation might sound misleading – why should I affirm that aspect of myself which I wish to overcome? What I take Nietzsche to mean by this is that I must affirm those aspects, because on the one hand they are my own and on the other hand, because without those aspects I would have nothing to overcome and my ability to overcome them is the basis for my ability to exercise self-governance in the first place. Importantly, for Nietzsche, there will be times when certain aspects of ourselves, the more deeply ingrained aspects of ourselves, cannot be overcome; there are, as Frankfurt would say, recalcitrant aspects of ourselves. For Nietzsche, this is also a fundamental part of what it means to be a human being – the ‘animal’ man. In coming to terms with this Nietzsche suggests that it is of primary importance not only to affirm these aspects of ourselves – reinterpreting their value for ourselves – but also to affirm in this respect the kinds of creatures we humans are. Jung gives some support to Nietzsche’s claims here when he explains:

Painful though it is, this [unwelcome self-knowledge] is in itself a gain – for what is inferior or even worthless belongs to me as my shadow and gives me substance and mass. How can I be substantial if I fail to cast a shadow? I must have a dark side also if I am to be whole; and inasmuch as I become conscious of my shadow I also remember that I am a human being like any other.<sup>132</sup>

Nietzsche’s suggestion that self-creation requires an inner harmony grounded in the affirmation of all the aspects of ourselves is most clearly discussed in his proposition

---

<sup>132</sup> Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, in Midgley, *Wickedness*, p126.

of the doctrine of eternal recurrence.<sup>133</sup> Here Nietzsche claims most explicitly that the harmonious integration of various aspects of ourselves required for self-creation entails our affirmation of all of these aspects. According to Nehamas:

The final mark of this integration, its limiting case, is provided by the test involved in the thought of the eternal recurrence. This mark is the desire to do exactly what one has already done in this life if one were to live again.<sup>134</sup>

Although Nietzsche makes scattered references to the doctrine of eternal recurrence throughout most of his works, perhaps the most noteworthy - and indeed succinct - reference is made in section 341 of *The Gay Science*:

*The Heaviest weight.* – What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence... The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it speck of dust!’<sup>135</sup>

The doctrine of eternal recurrence is most plausibly understood as a psychological test, or a peculiar Nietzschean thought experiment, in which the primary concern for Nietzsche is how we would react to the demon’s proposition that ‘If my life were to recur, it would recur in an exactly identical fashion’.<sup>136</sup>

Nietzsche suggests in *The Gay Science* that there can only be two possible reactions to this psychological test: that we reject it as the most detestable malison or we welcome it with the greatest joy. Nietzsche writes:

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: ‘You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.’<sup>137</sup>

What is important for our reaction to the suggestion of the doctrine is the understanding that it will be all aspects of our life, our self, and indeed the entire chronological history of the world as it has been, that we will be either affirming or bemoaning. According to Nietzsche, ‘nothing that has happened to us is contingent’,<sup>138</sup> and affirming any given aspect of our lives or selves entails our

---

<sup>133</sup> I discuss the view of the doctrine of eternal recurrence seen in this section (Chapter 2 Section II) and its relationship to Nietzsche’s *Genealogy* in more detail in a paper published while conducting this research. See my ‘The Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence and its significance with respect to *On the Genealogy of Morals*’.

<sup>134</sup> Nehamas, ‘How One Becomes What One Is’, p274.

<sup>135</sup> (GS 341).

<sup>136</sup> Nehamas, ‘The Eternal Recurrence’, p127.

<sup>137</sup> (GS 341).

<sup>138</sup> See Nehamas, ‘The Eternal Recurrence’, p123.

affirming all aspects of our selves, our pasts, and indeed the whole history of the world in its entirety. If we deny even the smallest part of who we are or what has come before, we cannot affirm our present selves, for our present self is necessarily constituted by our own past and all effects of the world on it – we cannot separate who we are from our lives, nor can we separate our lives from the world in which they have been lived. What Nietzsche wants us to realise is that if we can at any point in our lives affirm who we are, even for a ‘moment’, we must necessarily affirm all aspects of ourselves, our past actions, attitudes and opinions. ‘Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends, then you have said Yes to all woe’ proclaims Zarathustra.<sup>139</sup> And considering this carefully, we understand that in order to answer positively in light of the demon’s question, to affirm the demon who presents us with the doctrine, we must will all that has gone before, even the very worst of the worst: and in realising this, Nietzsche’s ultimate man, Zarathustra, ‘finally becomes able to want to undergo again all that is cheap and detestable about the world for the sake of what is not’.<sup>140</sup> Through the doctrine of eternal recurrence, Nietzsche ‘asks us whether we merely want to drift with the tide of things or whether we would be creators’<sup>141</sup> – whether we would float along unthinkingly or whether we would engage our capacity to actively affirm all that is past, all that is present, and indeed all that is necessary. ‘Prior to [this, Nietzsche asks in the thought of the eternal return] whether we desire *the conditions* by which we might again become creators’.<sup>142</sup>

Self-creation, as I am suggesting in this chapter, is one of the defining features of the sovereign individual, and the conditions suggested by Nietzsche which are required for self-creation to flourish are the conditions in which we ‘affirm life’. The individual who answers - like Zarathustra - yes to the demon, more than simply exemplifying ‘the noble type’ of man who experiences *himself* as determining values, is, for Nietzsche, ‘affirming life to the highest degree’. Nietzsche’s great love of fate – ‘*Amor Fati*’ – is what he calls his ‘formula for greatness in a human being’, and is thus at the heart of understanding what he means by wanting us to actively affirm the doctrine of eternal recurrence: ‘that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, or

---

<sup>139</sup> (Z IV 19).

<sup>140</sup> See Nehamas, ‘The Eternal Recurrence’, p124.

<sup>141</sup> Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, p174.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, p174.

backward, not in all eternity.’<sup>143</sup> For Nietzsche, then, the conditions under which we flourish as self-creators at first might appear to almost undermine the very idea of self-creation – for the conditions for affirming life are those conditions in which we come to love our fate. It would seem then that ‘If everything recurs all decision and every effort and will to make things better is a matter of indifference... [And] if everything turns in a circle nothing is worth the trouble’.<sup>144</sup> Self-creation, however, makes little sense if we understand Nietzsche’s love of fate as mere ‘fatalism’<sup>145</sup> – as accepting that our future has already been lived and that we are simply treading an identical path over again. For Nietzsche, an acceptance of mere fatalism would amount to nothing more than to adopt a will to nihilism, or a will to nothingness - in which, rather than being self-creators involved in the practice of active evaluation, we would cease all evaluation and indeed creation, for everything has already been done for us. Of course, this is precisely the kind of will that Nietzsche was at pains to reject throughout his life.

In order to reconcile what seems at first to be a possible contradiction between the idea of self-creating individuals and the *Amor Fati* which Nietzsche suggests is the condition for the flourishing of self-creators, what is called for is the understanding of the doctrine not as fatalistic in the sense that it preaches that we *have in fact* already lived this whole life before and innumerable times before. Rather, we should see his love of fate as self-affirmation grounded in a firm belief that we are solely constituted by our past in its entirety, and as for our future - what we do will stem directly, and necessarily, from who we are. Importantly, Nietzsche would not explain his *Amor Fati* as being embodied by someone who passively accepted and was overwhelmed by his fate, but rather his *Amor Fati* is embodied in one who understands that he ‘belongs to his fate insofar as he is a creator, that is, one who is ever resolute in it’.<sup>146</sup> For the man who creates his own values, what this should mean is the acceptance of our fate in light of the fact that what is done in the past is done and what *will be done* in the future will flow inevitably from our characters. The ‘creative man’ would thus take

---

<sup>143</sup> (BG 1).

<sup>144</sup> Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, p65.

<sup>145</sup> Heidegger describes this as “that turning of need which unveils itself in the awestruck moment as an eternity, an eternity pregnant with Becoming of being as a whole: *circulus vitriosusdeus*” in *Ibid*.

<sup>146</sup> Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, p207.

control of the moment without showing ‘doubt and paralysis in the face of’<sup>147</sup> what has come and what now is, rather he would see all that is necessary as the very starting block of self-creation and active evaluation. It is this that leads Nietzsche to think that self-creation is really our ‘greatest burden’, claiming in *The Gay Science* that the thought of eternal recurrence will either weigh us down making us world-denying men of *ressentiment* or show our strength as self-creating sovereign individuals. According to Nietzsche:

If [the thought of the Eternal Recurrence of the same]... gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, ‘Do you want this again and innumerable times again?’ would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?<sup>148</sup>

What Nietzsche seems to be proposing via the doctrine of eternal return as a psychological test is thus that ‘the relative significance of our experiences and actions is not determined once and for all; it is rather a characteristic over which we have serious control’.<sup>149</sup> To answer yes to the demon, we must be able to affirm our life in its entirety, and in so doing, we affirm every good and bad aspect whatsoever, and thus, we must also affirm every aspect of ourselves that goes along with this. By facing the prospect of our life’s eternal recurrence with joy, we determine the significance of our past, and this is our first act of self-valuation from which we gain an ‘*active will to self-empowerment*’.<sup>150</sup> It is this active valuation of the self, and indeed self-creation, which characterises Nietzsche’s ‘sovereign individual’, who opposes the nihilistic ‘will to nothingness’ and instead gains a ‘commanding will’, through which he gains a sense of autonomy and mastery over himself what his future will hold.<sup>151</sup>

#### **IV. Narrative Integrity**

As we have seen, then, Nietzsche’s suggestion is that the sovereign individual expresses an inner harmony grounded in the affirmation of life - such as that which is

---

<sup>147</sup> Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, p126.

<sup>148</sup> (GS 341).

<sup>149</sup> Nehamas, ‘The Eternal Recurrence’, p131.

<sup>150</sup> White, ‘The Return of the Master: An Interpretation of Nietzsche’s “Genealogy of Morals”’, pp693-694.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

involved in affirming the demon's proposition of the eternal recurrence of the same. This affirmation and revaluation is required for the kind of self-creation compatible with Nietzsche's *Amor Fati*, and which I explained is a feature of Nietzsche's sovereign individual. The acceptance, or rather love, of fate adopted by the sovereign individual is also to be understood as a requirement for narrative integrity. Nietzsche confirms again that our life and our selves are only truly acceptable when we affirm them in their entirety in section 49 of the *Twilight of the Idols*:

Such a spirit who has become free stands amid the cosmos... joyous and trusting... in the faith... that all is redeemed and affirmed in the whole.<sup>152</sup>

As I have already explained, we can understand that what he means here is that we affirm, along with all the joy and all the positive aspects of ourselves, the suffering and contrary aspects of ourselves as well. For Nietzsche, then, our lives and indeed our selves bear striking resemblance to works of fiction or biography in that they rely on a similar kind of narrative structure. Remember, that for Nietzsche 'nothing that has happened to us is contingent'<sup>153</sup> the occurrence of any given aspect of our lives or selves necessitates all the other aspects of our lives and selves. Nehamas explains the similarity clearly as follows:

[A]bsolutely everything a character does is equally essential to it; characters and the works to which they undoubtedly must belong, are supposed to be constructed so that their every feature supports and is supported by every other one. In the limiting case of the perfect character, no change is possible without corresponding changes in every other feature in order to preserve coherence; and the net result is, necessarily, a different character – taking one part away may always result in the destruction of the whole.<sup>154</sup>

Since our lives resemble, for Nietzsche, the lives of such characters in their structure and composition, the kind of inner harmony or internal coherence with which we associate the authentic individual is a kind of narrative integrity – a coherence of a whole. Narrative integrity seen as a feature of the sovereign individual requires the individual to affirm the whole – that is to affirm his existence as a distinctive whole character existing in a particular narrative. In affirming the whole, in affirming existence and saying yes to life as well as yes to the doctrine of eternal recurrence, we must affirm along with this all the constitutive parts of the narrative and ourselves. If we are to achieve narrative integrity, and express our autonomy and authenticity, then, it seems, we could never exercise the kind of self-control advocated by Frankfurt and

---

<sup>152</sup> (TI 49).

<sup>153</sup> Nehamas, 'The Eternal Recurrence', p123.

<sup>154</sup> Nehamas, 'How One Becomes What One Is', p277.

Watson, in which we would practice the rejection, externalisation or denial of certain aspects of ourselves.

## V. Individual Style – Autonomy as the Art of Living

In his paper ‘How One Becomes What One Is’, Nehamas suggests that Nietzsche’s concern with what I have been referring to as narrative integrity is rooted in the fact that much of Nietzsche’s thinking revolves around literary models. According to Nehamas, ‘What is essential to literary characters is their organization: the quality of their actions is secondary’<sup>155</sup> – and it is this concern for the organisation of the whole which is central to Nietzsche’s characterisation of the sovereign individual in the form of an autonomous and authentic life. Nietzsche’s thinking, almost as often as centring on literary models, centres on artists and the creative endeavour of art. Nietzsche views art as not merely a form of human activity, but as the highest expression of what the human spirit is capable. Most notably in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche claims that ‘art, and *not* morality, is presented as the truly metaphysical activity of man.’<sup>156</sup>

Nietzsche frequently implores us to take the artist’s perspective on our lives. Nietzsche thinks that in shaping our lives in the way that great artists compose their works we can truly begin to understand the convergence of necessity and creation – that is, express *Amor Fati*. Nietzsche claims that:

We should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. For with them this subtle power [of arranging things and of making them beautiful] usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins; but we want to be the poets of our life – first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters.<sup>157</sup>

Nietzsche praises those who have become who they are by fashioning their lives as the great artists have done, with their own individual style. Artists who are seen by Nietzsche to own themselves through the expression of their individual style, experience on Nietzsche’s view what we might be inclined to call ‘the art of living’. Thus, I refer to the final feature of the sovereign individual on Nietzsche’s picture as ‘individual style’. The introduction of the notion of individual style introduces into

---

<sup>155</sup> Nehamas, ‘How One Becomes What One Is’, p277.

<sup>156</sup> (BT , Attempt at self-criticism: 5)

<sup>157</sup> (GS 299).

our evaluations of persons a consideration of whether a person's actions and behaviours make up a personality or an identity. This consideration, it seems to me, is relevant to our understanding of ourselves as autonomous agents. In fact, this is one of the primary considerations which inform our interactions with one another as agents capable of autonomous interaction.<sup>158</sup>

Importantly, for Nietzsche, the links between expressing our individual style and what he calls 'attained freedom of the will' are clear: in both of these things he claims that what is important is the peace of the soul which stems from *Amor Fati*. Nietzsche claims that this unity of self is found primarily in artists. Who he claims:

seem to have more sensitive noses in these matters, knowing only too well that precisely when they no longer do something 'voluntarily' but do everything of necessity, their feeling of freedom, subtlety, full power, of creative placing, disposing and forming reaches its peak – in short, that necessity and 'freedom of will' then become one in them.<sup>159</sup>

Recent accounts of personal autonomy, such as those provided by Frankfurt and Watson, have focused on providing us with the conditions under which agents are able to assert voluntary control over their actions and lives. Despite the fact that we have seen Nietzsche reject such an account of voluntariness above, even if we were to accept such an account, they would under-explain an important aspect of what makes an autonomous life valuable. What traditional accounts of autonomy try provide us with are the conditions under which we can make our lives our own, but what they do not explain is that, over and above simply making our lives our own, we also want to make our lives beautiful: we want to be engaged in the fine art of living. For Nietzsche, then, the line between autonomy and authenticity is blurred in the sovereign individual. Nietzsche's sovereign individual is not simply free from constraints, but is free to shape her life with the aesthetic qualities which in a very important sense make that life worth living. The account of Nietzsche's sovereign individual, as I have explained it in this chapter, attempts to penetrate the notion of self-governance on a much deeper level than an account of self-control: it is concerned with our directing ourselves to "use and interpret experience in [our] own way"<sup>160</sup> – to become who we are artistically. This view of authenticity thus adds an

---

<sup>158</sup> See Nehamas, 'How One Becomes What One Is', p276.

<sup>159</sup> (BG 213).

<sup>160</sup> Mill, J; *On Liberty*; 122.

almost aesthetic value to our lives which traditional accounts of personal autonomy fail to capture.

## CONCLUSION

I have tried to sketch out a notion of our freedom which will do some kind of justice to the two opposing aspects of it. One aspect is the deep complexity and dividedness of our nature. The other is the equally deep need which each of us feels to act somehow as a unity. When we try, however faintly, to act rather than merely letting forces flow through us, we are not just trying to throw off some outside tyranny. Though there may be such a tyranny, the distinctively free effort surely lies in trying to impose unity on the inner conflict, to decide – as a whole person – what to do. That unity is not given. It is a constantly ongoing project, a difficult, essentially incomplete integration which can occupy our whole lives.<sup>161</sup>

What the models of personal autonomy put forward by Frankfurt and Watson aim to do, I have argued, is to provide us with a certain ideal of personal autonomy. For Frankfurt and Watson the ideal autonomous individual exercises personal autonomy by exercising rational self-control. I have argued that Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts are in many respects plausible and capture to some extent the psychological picture of the agent accurately. However, in chapter 2 of this thesis I argued against their accounts on two fronts. Firstly, I have argued that both Frankfurt's and Watson's delineation of the boundaries of the true or real self are too narrow. In light of Friedman and Midgley's concerns, I have argued that a more accurate and plausible understanding of the true or real self, if we must indeed hold on to these terms at all, cannot be understood as anything less than the whole of the self. Secondly, I have argued against Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts of self-governance, in which agents are expected to exercise self-control through externalisation, rejection and denial. I argued that in subscribing to Frankfurt's and Watson's picture an agent faces the danger of self-deception and the possible dissolution of her psychological integrity. In this respect, I argued that the ideally autonomous agent resembles in some respects the 'man of *ressentiment*' described by Nietzsche as a fractured and damaged individual who lacks psychological integrity. Accordingly, in chapter 3 I argued in favour of a Nietzschean account of personal autonomy, in which the ideally autonomous agent resembles Nietzsche's sovereign individual, who is in all respects antithetical to the 'man of *ressentiment*'. And who thus, I suggested, provides a more suitable picture of the autonomous agent than the picture gleaned from Frankfurt's and Watson's accounts.

---

<sup>161</sup> Midgley, *The Ethical Primate*, p183.

An account of personal autonomy, as Frankfurt and Watson may argue, is meant to help us capture the phenomenological experience we have precisely when we do feel alienated from certain parts of ourselves and not others. It is Frankfurt's and Watson's suggestion that, when attempting to explain personal autonomy one way of accounting for this discomfort is to use talk of a rational true or real self in terms of those aspects of ourselves towards which we feel no discomfort.<sup>162</sup> It is quite clearly true that we may feel discomfort regarding certain parts of ourselves as expressions of who we think we most truly are, and in such cases we usually attempt to change those parts which lead to our discomfort. However, I argued that we cannot, without committing self-deception, simply dissociate ourselves from these elements and pretend that they do not have a vital role to play in the constitution of our true or real selves. If I take myself seriously, what I see is precisely that I am not perfect, that there are parts of myself which lead to a feeling of a certain sense of discomfort. But in taking myself seriously, I cannot simply deny that these parts are truly my own.

Coming to terms with this must be a key ingredient in our quest for personal autonomy, and this, as I have suggested, is something which is central to Nietzsche's account. Nietzsche's account of personal autonomy is also simply an ideal; we might never effectively come to acknowledge or accept all those parts of ourselves which render us uncomfortable, but the ideal is at least more true, in some sense, to the kinds of creatures we are. We are creatures, according to Nietzsche, whose "actions shine with different colors in turn, they are rarely unambiguous, – and it happens often enough that we perform multi-colored actions".<sup>163</sup> The picture of the self suggested in my discussion of the whole self view, supported by Friedman and Midgley, points to something similar. This holistic view of the autonomous self is more true to our experiences of ourselves as agents and to our understanding of our own identities.

---

<sup>162</sup> Here I must thank both Samantha Vice and Pedro Tabensky for useful discussion.

<sup>163</sup> (BG 6: 215).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Berlin, I. 'Two concepts of Liberty' in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).
- Bittner, R. 'Ressentiment', in Schacht, R (ed.) *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's 'Genealogy of Morals'* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994).
- Christman, J. Introduction, in Christman, J. (ed.). *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- Cooper, D. *Authenticity and Learning: Nietzsche's Educational Philosophy* (Great Britain: Routledge and Kegan Paul plc, 1991).
- Dworkin, G. *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- Dworkin, G. 'Autonomy and Behaviour Control', *Hastings Center Report*, vol. 6 (1976), pp.23-28.
- Emerson, R. 'Self-Reliance' in *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983).
- Frankfurt, H. 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 68, No. 1. (Jan. 14, 1971), pp. 5-20.
- Frankfurt, H. 'Identification and wholeheartedness', in *The Importance of what we Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- Frankfurt, H. 'The Faintest Passion', in *Necessity, Volition and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- Frankfurt, H. 'Taking Ourselves Seriously', in Satz, D. (ed.), *Taking Ourselves Seriously & Getting It Right* (California: Stanford University Press, 2006).
- Friedman, M. 'Autonomy and the Split-Level Self', in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1. (1986) pp. 19-35.
- Freud, S. *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. Trans. Riviere, J. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
- Gert, J. *Brute Rationality – Normativity and Human Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- Guignon, C. *On Being Authentic* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004).
- Heidegger, M. *Nietzsche; Volume 2: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, in Farrell Krell, D. (trans.) (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984).

- Kaufmann, W. (trans.) *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000).
- Korsgaard, C. *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- Llewelyn, J. 'Value, Authenticity and the Death of God', in Parkinson G.H.R. (ed) *An Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 1988).
- Mele, A. *Autonomous Agents: from self-control to Autonomy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- Midgley, M. *The Ethical Primate: humans, freedom, morality* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- Midgley, M. *Wickedness: A philosophical essay* (London and New York: Routledge, 1984).
- Mill, J. S. *On Liberty*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).
- Moran, R. *Authority and Estrangement on Essay on Self-Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- Nehamas, A. 'The Eternal Recurrence' in Richardson, J. and Leiter, B. (eds.) *Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) pp 120 – 138.
- Nehamas, A. 'How One Becomes What One Is' in Richardson, J, and Brian Leiter, B. (eds.) *Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Nietzsche, F. *Beyond Good and Evil ~ Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, Norman, J. (trans.) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- Nietzsche, F. *The Gay Science*, J. Nauckhoff. J. (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) pp 194 - 195.
- Nietzsche, F. *Twilight of the Idols; The Anti-Christ*, Hollingdale, J. (trans.), Radice, B and Baldick, R. ( eds.) (Great Britain: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969).
- Nietzsche, F. *The Will to Power*, Kaufmann, W. and Hollingdale, R.J (trans.) (New York: Vantage Books, 1967).
- Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, in Hollingdale (transl.) *Friedrich Nietzsche: Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- Nietzsche, F; extracts from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as they appear in R.J Hollingdale (ed.) *A Nietzsche Reader* (London: Penguin, 1977).

- Noggle, R. 'Autonomy and the Paradox of Self-Creation: Infinite Regresses, Finite Selves, and the Limits of Authenticity', in Taylor, J. (ed.) *Personal Autonomy: New Essays on Personal Autonomy and Its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- Paphitis, S. 'The Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence and its significance with respect to *On the Genealogy of Morals*', *South African Journal of Philosophy* (vol. 28, No. 2, pp189-198, 2009).
- Plato. *The Republic*, Lee, H. D. P. (Trans.) (United Kingdom: Penguin Books, 1961).
- Reginster, B. 'Nietzsche on *Ressentiment* and Valuation', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (Vol LVII, No. 2, June 1997), pp281-305.
- Rorty, A. O. 'How to harden your heart: six easy ways to become corrupt', in Rorty, A. O. (ed.) *The Many Faces of Evil: Historical Perspectives* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005).
- Schacht, R. 'Of Morals and *Menschen*', in Schacht, R (ed.) *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's 'Genealogy of Morals'* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994).
- Shakespeare, W. *Hamlet* (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 1994).
- Solomon, R. 'Nietzsche *ad hominem*: Perspectivism, Personality and *Ressentiment*', in Magnus, B. and Higgins, K. (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- Stevenson, R. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Danahay, M (ed.) (Canada: Broadview Press Ltd., 2000).
- Taylor, J. 'Introduction', in Taylor, J. (ed.) *Personal Autonomy: New Essays on Personal Autonomy and Its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- Thalberg, I. 'Hierarchical Analyses of Unfree Action' in Christman, J. (ed.). *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Thompson, D. Voller, J. and Frank, F. *Gothic Writers: A Critical and Biographical Guide* (London: Greenwood Press, 2002).
- Hawks, H (Director), *To Have and Have Not*, based on the novel by Hemingway. E. (California: Warner Brothers Burbank Studios, 1944).
- Velleman, D. J. *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (USA: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- Watson, G. 'Free Agency', in Christman, J. (ed.). *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Watson, G. *Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

White, R. 'The Return of the Master: An Interpretation of Nietzsche's "Genealogy of Morals"'; *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LVIII, No. 4, June 1998, pp 683 – 696.

Wolf, S. 'Freedom Within Reason', in Christman, J. (ed.). *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).