Connecting Autonomy, Equality, Freedom, and Liberty

By Lantz Fleming Miller

…foragers are better able and more likely to exhibit extreme, consistent, uncompromised individualism and egalitarianism than people of Western societies.

--Peter M. Gardner

Where there is no property, there is no injustice.

--John Locke

… to be free means to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed.

--Hannah Arendt

*This article is geared toward readers who are skeptical about whether any kind of equality beyond formal equality can be advanced or ensured, much less be morally compelled. Readers who already concur that such equality can be advanced and should be ensured may want to select particular sections, although I believe they be interested in the unusual connection among equality, freedom, and autonomy for which this article argues. I especially hope that skeptics will consider this article’s argument: If you value autonomy and freedom, then you should value equality of a sort that stretches beyond formal equality and to something like equalityA laid out in Miller 2023. Specifically: Given that our species evolved in a social context that valued and strove to ensure equality, this social mechanism became an intrinsic part of our evolved being much as language or the arts did. Furthermore, ethnography and archaeology have pointed to individual autonomy’s being commonly linked to equality in those types of societies in which our species evolved. The exact nature of this individual autonomy, and its link to equality, is not as clear as the strong value of and emphasis on equality among foragers. But a good argument can be made showing that if one values autonomy, one should value equalityA in the anthropological sense provided in Chapter Three in Miller 2023 (although the reverse may not always hold). That is, the argument is conditional or hypothetical, saying that given certain assumptions, a certain result should follow. Again, as throughout Miller 2022, we are considering the nature of these important and highly valued concepts from a naturalistic, descriptive perspective, not dictating an a priori normative system but helping to concretize, upon developing a normative framework, just what these basic concepts consist in. Importantly, this article goes into fine detail on issues brought up in Miller (2022) pertaining to these central concept*

*After discussing autonomy, I approach the even more problematic concept of freedom from a naturalistic perspective. First, an initial note on Kant’s outlook here, as it will play a great part in this this article’s arguments.*

1.1. A Preliminary Note on Kant’s View

Kant is one of the most influential pioneers in exploring the connection between autonomy and freedom. His falling short in fully justifying the connection exemplifies the subtle challenge in distinguishing and connecting these two concepts. But, I believe, perhaps ironically (given Kant’s emphasis on the *a priori*) a naturalistic understanding could help meet such a challenge. Hence, setting this article’s philosophical context, I begin with a summary of Kant’s effort concerning autonomy and Freedom.

Kant is one of the earliest authors, if not the first, to lay out explicitly the connection between autonomy and freedom and assert the connection as necessary for morality. The way he made this connection may not be acceptable to many moral philosophers. After all, his ties in neatly with his conception of normative ethics and ethical action as founded upon practical reason, an idea some moralists criticize. But it is useful to consider briefly Kant’s connection between autonomy and freedom as a starting point for discussing how and whether these two connect to equality.

Kant did contend that practical reasoning first had to specify the principles of morality before anthropology can enter and help lay out particularities of how those principles apply. While the approach to anthropology’s role as I am laying out in this book may be viewed as veering from Kant’s, I do not believe it rules out Kant’s nor many other normative positions.[[1]](#footnote-1) As Miller (2023) points out, Kant gave relatively minor consideration to equality. But his connection between autonomy and freedom does bear tellingly on recent anthropological findings concerning these concepts. Anthropological inquiry can at least partly corroborate this Kantian concept-connection, point to how or why equality relates to both, and open up the way for viewing all three concepts in the contemporary philosophical and political theory that may have little to share with Kant. By the end of this article, I hope to show that, in an important way, not only does freedom require autonomy, as Kant thought, but autonomy requires equality. This latter position is probably the most central and difficult in this book, and I cannot hope to answer all objections but make a solid start. I also aim to show that freedom requires autonomy.

With this brief note abut Kant’s position on autonomy and freedom, readers should refer to Miller 2023 (pp. 171 – 172), for general remarks about these concepts, such as autonomy as self-legislating and self-governing, which are critical in this discussion.

1.2. Autonomy: Self-Legislating/Self-Governing

1.2.1. Zeroing in on Autonomy

Before proceeding further, I must clarify how I use these terms in the discussion to follow. Autonomy is the capacity to be self-governing agent, that is, to set one’s standards for what one wants to do and achieve in life (which may include developing relationships with others). What “one wants to do” is assumed to be a matter of authenticity of one’s goals and plans, that is those that one does believe in rather than only pretends to believe in (Taylor 1991). Thus, both competency and authenticity conditions are captured here. I acknowledge that autonomy can be considered in many other, more specific ways, but this article cannot go into all the (admittedly important) nuances current in autonomy theory. A major assumption of this article, rather, is that autonomy is a widely held value (although certainly many authors demur, such as Conly 2013). A main argument of this article is that *if* one values autonomy, then one should value equality as described in Miller 2023. This argument is not trying to establish that one should value autonomy tout court. I hope, though, that authors who criticize autonomy tout court will see that there is an understanding or context of autonomy that is compatible with demurring perspectives (say Marxian) despite ramifications of the common liberal, atomistic view of autonomy. More specifically, then, I believe that the ethnological and archaeological background I provide on autonomy should make it more amenable for current critics of the concept.

For those who already value the general concept (as morally and politically good), I hope eventually to show how valuing autonomy, in the sense given here, entails valuing both equality as well as freedom. Freedom, by contrast with autonomy, concerns not so much the capacity one has to set one’s life goals and plans independently of coercive or other overpowering influences, but the capacity to act on those goals and plans. In this broad construal, both positive and negative freedom are included, in that negative freedom impinges on the capacity and positive freedom enhances its realization. In brief, autonomy concerns a capacity or condition that brings one up to the point of acting, whereas freedom concerns a capacity to act.

1.2.2. Contemporary Nuances of Autonomy

Deeper-delving nuances of autonomy and their uses thereof have developed over the past few decades, particularly within the work of Christman (2009, 2020) In this essay, nuances of “autonomy” still fall within the concept of an individual’s self-governing. Because of autonomy’s cplexity, many nuances have come into play in effecting good use of the concept. An autonomous person is one who can determine life efforts oneself; without undesired interference from others. This section introduces such nuances: *Basic* nuance looks simply to self-governing as the autonomous foundation. More involved nuances include that of relational, absolute, personal, political, prescriptive, descriptive, and ideal autonomy. Miller (2023, pp; 173-175) covers these more precisely, as the reader may discover.

One route to debating the relation among autonomy, equality and freedom would be to review, as Christman calls the “voluminous discussions of the concept of autonomy in recent years,” (2009: 11).[[2]](#footnote-2) However, in keeping with the article’s goal to find naturalistic bases for concepts and use these as premises of philosophical argument, as is done with equality and inequality in Miller 2023. Like t book’s Chapters Three and Four, herein I turn to empirical investigations of autonomy to help ground philosophical inquiry to come. In the process, both empirical and philosophical works warrant reference as the discussion needs.

To start, in context of the current discussion of autonomy and its nuances I need to clarify which nuances of the term I am working with as I proceed to archaeological and anthropological investigations of it in various cultures. Especially in examining how small-scale forager societies incorporate the concept in their cultures, I will initially be concerned with personal autonomy rather than political. As for the distinction between basic and ideal autonomy, I prefer saying this anthropological approach examines how autonomy is actually practiced in these societies, although this practice, while incorporating a basic autonomy, at the same strives time to realize a cultural ideal of autonomy. I intend to make this contrast between basic and ideal autonomy more apparent as I proceed.

The issue of relational autonomy—the philosophical view that holds that individuals are not atomistic but necessarily exist in relation to other individuals—actually emerges in ethnographic studies as a descriptive fact rather than a prescriptive philosophical position. Thus, the societies *described* generally see autonomy (*prescriptively*) as a state that individuals qua individuals deserve while operating within the context of their societies. Their societies—their fellow group-members—uphold what could be called a “right” to autonomy; but this is a right that the community strives to realize for each member. In short, I am initially assuming relational autonomy as an empirical fact about these societies. I also hope to make this particular handling of relational autonomy clearer as the examination unfolds.

In this preamble about the approach to autonomy taken herein, I add that any possibility for absolute autonomy appears to be unlikely for nondivine beings. To speak of an agent’s governing itself without the least reference to others of its kind would be to isolate that agent as a type. But to describe that agent as a type would, by its being a type, necessitate reference to others of its type. Furthermore, if this type were created by some outside force, it would be delimited by the parameters of that creation. The only exception would be a singular entity, such as an omnipotent divinity, that need not be delimited as a type nor be created by another being delimiting that type. All human agents, the subjects of this inquiry, are not of this singular nature. They cannot enjoy absolute autonomy; they must be somehow delimited, and social sciences show that they are partly or largely delimited and defined by their societies, that is by other agents of their kind. Thus, some degree of relational autonomy is necessary in human autonomy. The degree to which human autonomy is understood to be relational is one great challenge for all readers concerned with this concept.

What follows is a detailed description and critical analysis of empirical (anthropological) research into the concept of autonomy, especially the apparently prominent role it plays in forager societies. The primary work subject to this examination and analysis is that of Gardner (1966, 1991), who has done some of the most prominent empirical research in autonomy. I go into great detail in this critical examination, which will require some reader patience, as it will be central in the philosophical analysis to follow on the relation between freedom, autonomy, and equality.

1.2.3. Autonomy in Foraging Economies

For cultural practices of autonomy among nomadic foraging economies, readers should refer to Miller 2023, pp. 175 – 177 This background is crucial for following what Gardner’s detailed work about foragers reveals about forager autonomy. This work also reflects back on how autonomy may manifest in contemporary societies.

Among anthropologists the concept of autonomy as a common belief and practice among foragers is less robust and less widely acknowledged than is equality. Part of this difference in acceptance between the two concepts may be due to the fact that the value of autonomy in a culture is harder to confirm than that of equality, which can be observed as a set of practices (as described in Miller 2023 Chapter Three), which are widely shared among foraging peoples. The value of autonomy, by contrast, may have to be ascribed to a group through oral communication, so that an ethnographer must deduce that the concept referred to can accurately be captured by the English “autonomy” (or equivalent word in cognate languages such as French or Spanish). Gardner (1990) attempts to adduce some observable practices that seem to represent a group’s valuing of autonomy, but it remains unclear if this set of practices provides a good indication that a group does indeed value autonomy, and these practices have proven to be less widely exhibited among foragers than the practices of equality. There remains, then, some “fudge-factor” in establishing empirically that a group values and encourages autonomy.

Kelly’s (2007) survey of the wide spectrum of foraging cultural characteristics emphasizes that many foragers not only put a high value on equality and develop practices to ensure it, but many also value autonomy and develop practices ensuring it. Many investigators in the field have studied autonomy as foraging cultures practice it (Lee 1979, Cashdan 1980, Myers 1986, Gardner 1991). Gardner (1991) reviews and assesses the literature theorizing just why foragers so often promote individual autonomy. His stated aim is fashioning these theories “into working instruments of science.” (547) I do not intend to assess how well he fashions a scientific instrument from these attempted theories but look into the cultural beliefs and practices that led researchers to ask why foragers value and encourage autonomy.[[3]](#footnote-3) These attempts to determine just why they so highly value autonomy reveal the many different ways autonomy is manifested in foraging cultures and how tightly intertwined it is within their daily practices. This section will dedicate a good amount of discussion to Gardner’s 1991 article as it is one of the more thorough attempts in anthropology to bring out a rigorous and scientific theory of autonomy, even if much of its material, such as that on egalitarianism, has been superceded by subsequent studies (such as Boehm 1999) and it raises as many questions about autonomy as it answers.

Gardner’s anthropological/ethnographic “theories of autonomy” offer one way, if somewhat arbitrary, to get a grip on autonomy in the anthropological sense. Gardener divides twelve theories into two groups, the first four theories being those concerning general facts about the forager subsistence economy, the subsequent eight look more to specific foraging groups (1991, p. 544). I summarize these twelve theories as follows:

I. General theories

1. The *adaptive child-training* theory, which he takes from Whiting and Child (1953) and other investigators, looks to how subsistence by foraging requires a great degree of independent initiative; the foraging quest begins anew each day, contrasted with cultivation which is a long-ongoing project and hence demands obedience and responsibility to the control hierarchy. Children are thus reared with an emphasis on “self-reliance, independence, and individual achievement” (Gardner, p. 543).

2. Lee and Devore’s (1968) theory of nomadic food quest looks to how the variable dispersal of food requires foragers’ constant movement among areas, leading to small flexible bands with significant movement of individuals among populations. A strong personal independence is requisite to accomplish this freedom of movement.

3. Leacock and Lee’s (1982) *foraging mode-of-production* theory, though much like the previous, focuses on production rather than supply. Among foragers worldwide, means of production are collective with generalized resource- and production-access within and between bands, all giving rise to a powerful anti-authoritarianism and a concomitant centrality of the individual.

4. *The resource-depletion* theory of Foley (1988) focuses on an apparent change in resources during the post-Pleistocene, to a strong reliance on plant-foods, leading to the small bands and the kind of flexibility and individual independence these encouraged. (This theory, it should be noted, sees a greater social complexity in earlier forager societies, with the more recent ones, including those few remaining today, being more simplified and tending toward individual autonomy.)

II. Theories looking to specific groups

5. Cashdan’s (1980) *storage* theory looks to the closely interrelated //Gana San, who are inegalitarian, and the neighboring egalitarian San, finding that the former’s storage of food leads to the lifting of constraints that encourage sharing, hence allowing (male) authority, and eroding individual initiatives. This theory sounds much like parts of this article’s discussion of the onset of inequality, except Cashdan’s emphasis is on individual loss of autonomy.

6. Steward’s early (1936, 1955) *collective-hunting* theory focuses on the Athapaskan practices of large migratory game such as musk ox and caribou, effecting shifts in populations of hunters over the year, with much intermingling and endogamy and a resulting strong individual independence.

7. Turnbull (1968) was an exponent of an *avoidance-of-social-disruption* ecological theory as seen in two forager societies. The flux noted in the collective-hunting theory is due instead to the adaptiveness of ameliorating conflicts. That is, constant flux of population members among groups serves to lessen social disruptions, and this flux then encourages individual autonomy.

8. The *marketing* theory has a long history stretching back to Kroeber (1928). It holds that the cultural simplicity and individual autonomy is a rather recent development allowable by contacts with marketing economies. They are thus a specialized subpart of these markets, supplying such goods as forest products, which require nomadicism and nurture autonomy. This theory may account for many contemporary foragers who are commercial in this way, but would have more difficulty accounting for pre-commercial societies which archaeological finders indicate were egalitarian with individual autonomy.

9. The *population/displacement* theory first appeared with Hickerson’s (1960) account of the Chippewa’s disrupted history in the 17th Century. It seems that expanding food-producers fragmented small bands, which attempted to form loose composite groups with each other. These composite groups, though, lacked much organization (which apparently could be taken for individual autonomy). By contrast, groups such as the Australians and Californians went millennia with little disruption and developed strong moiety organization and territoriality. Disruption and displacement seem important in breaking down strong moieties.

10. Balikci’s (1968) *composite* theory looks to the Vunta Kutchin for offering many reasons for their autonomy, including the breakdown of moiety and leadership traditions as well as of political organization, along with new tendencies for individual acquisitiveness.

11. Several authors discuss a *subordination-dependence* theory, including Gardner (1966), which looks to the stresses of intercultural contact and its social conflicts, leading to a type of atomism that is deemed individual autonomy. Looking at 28 forager societies, Gardner characterizes this process as leading to “nonauthoritarian parental roles, expectation of self-reliance, avoidance of overt aggression, gender and age egalitarianism, social control achieved by self-control, retreat from conflict, and supernatural sanctions, and individualized or memorate- level knowledge” (1991, p. 546, summing Gardner 1966, p. 400-410).

12. Gardner (1991) describes the *domination-escape* theory as not “a formal theory…but certainly bears mention” (546) looks to power imbalances between neighboring forager societies, and how those that tend to be dominated elude domination by avoidance and reorganizing their society in adaptive ways that include flexible group membership and concomitant emphasis on self-reliance and the individual, as well as egalitarianism and possibly non-violence.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Based not only on these theories but upon the cultural characteristics that the theories are striving to pinpoint and explain, Gardner derives the following extensive list. I include the list in its entirety for the sake of subsequent discussion

… certain cultural features show up again and again: pressure on children for self-reliance, independence, and individual achievement; individual decision making in matters having to do with family, power, property, ritual, etc.; extreme egalitarianism, including extreme gender egalitarianism; techniques for prestige avoidance and social leveling; absence of leaders; what Meillassoux and Woodburn call instantaneous or immediate economic transactions; individual mobility and a corresponding openness and turnover in band membership; resolution of conflict through fission and mobility rather than by violence or appeal to authorities; bilateral social structure; a general tendency toward informal arrangements and individually generated ad hoc structures; and relatively high levels of interpersonal variability in concepts, beliefs, and manner of expression. (1991, pp. 547-549)

A few matters concerning autonomy come through via this list of twelve. One is that, in its very extensiveness, it is difficult to pinpoint autonomy, or just what it is. If this list were considered as a definition (and Gardner does not assert it as such), it would not be a clear succinct definition. Comparatively, egalitarianism in the anthropological sense (which is included as one part of this “definition” of autonomy) would be much more succinctly captured. Second, a large part, at least half, of this list is abstractions, such as “independence” and “relatively high levels of interpersonal variability in concepts,” which are not very amenable to such measure. The few concrete, empirically measurable traits, such as “a general tendency toward and individually generated ad hoc structures,” require further interpretation before an empirical measure could be established. By contrast, the characteristics of equality in the anthropological sense are readily amenable to empirical observation (see Miller 2023 Chapter Three, § 3.4.).

Third, a vast majority of nomadic forager societies appear to exhibit most or all of the explicitly stated traits of equality. However, as for autonomy, it is not evident that even one forager society exhibits all the traits in the list above. Instead, one forager society may exhibit a proper subset *S1* of the traits, another society a different subset *S2*, and so on, in a kind of mix-and-match. So how is one to determine which degree of expression of these traits actually constitutes a bona fide autonomy-favoring society? Speaking of societies’ manifesting “the individual-autonomy syndrome” (Gardner 1991, p. 555)), Gardner derives one summary phrase that could capture what lies behind every item in this list, and that is the primacy of individual decision-making. Succinct as this summary may be, it still does not lend itself to ready empirical observation. It remains obscure how the investigator is to tease apart the factors that somehow arose authentically and divisibly within the agent itself, without any outside social influences, and what were too heavily influenced by social forces. That is, it is unclear how we extricate the agent from the agent’s society.

To give autonomy more empirical bite, Gardner sifts out five traits seemingly widespread among foragers and examines these in 37 such societies across the globe:: 1) mobile individuals, 2) bilateral social structure, 3) emphasis on nuclear family and individual decision-making, 4) egalitarian in age and gender roles, thus respect due to all and no leaders, that is, social leveling, and 5) immediate-return exchanges, so that no debt to other groups is piled up, especially in terms of marriage agreements. While many of these traits still are endangered by vagueness or too-great breadth, they are at least amenable to sufficient observations from ethnographies to warrant an analysis.

Gardner then narrows these down to three broad traits for expediency of analysis: bilateral (abbreviated “B”), egalitarian (abbreviated “E”), and individualistic (abbreviated “I”).[[5]](#footnote-5) After an extensive mathematical analysis of the 37 societies in these terms, he finds that only 8 of 37, or 22%, exhibit the full set of traits—B, E, and I—qualifying for the full “individual-autonomy syndrome.” As he admits and as many writers in the commentary following the article observe, including his severest critic Alain Testart (1991), this result is strikingly low. It is worth considering the distribution of the other combinations of the three traits B, E, and I according to Gardner’s form of analysis (See Table 5.1):

Table 5.1 Tabulations of the different forager groups, analyzed by Gardner (1991) according to their exhibiting B, E, or I (but not exhibiting all three traits)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Combination of B, E, I | Total number of groups with this combination | Percentage of the total 37 |
| B and E only | 4 | 11% |
| B and I only | 2 | 5% |
| E and I only | 1 | 3% |
| B only | 4 | 11% |
| E only | 5 | 15% |
| I only | 0 | 0 |
| Neither B, E, nor I | 13 | 36% |

Another way to look at this data would be according to how many groups in total exhibited B, or E or I, as in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2. Total groups exhibiting trait B, E, or I; derived from Gardner 1991, Fig. 4, p. 556.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Trait | Total groups exhibiting this trait, out of 37 | Percentage of total of 37 |
| B | 18 | 49% |
| E | 18 | 49% |
| I | 11 | 30% |

These data give rise to a number of observations and questions about Gardner’s method for tabulation.

1.2.4. Concerns About Gardner’s Method and Data Tabulation

1.2.4.1. Empirical Observability of Autonomy and Independence.

One observation is that the three traits measured, according to the..ir definitions in footnote 54, render themselves fairly well empirically observable. The traits that fall under “bilateralism” or “egalitarian” are appropriate and usual for those labels. Bilateral structure is often understood as consisting in the types of matrimonial localism subsumed in the definition. Similarly, “egalitarianism” commonly consists in the defining practices listed. However, as for “individualism,” there are further concerns. One is that in Gardner’s 1991 article, the label is often taken as a synonym of “autonomy.” If so, presence of autonomy is being measured in part according to presence of autonomy, thereby exhibiting some circularity. Another concern is just why “individualism” is here taken to be measured by independent nuclear family and bridal gifts only at marriage. One can imagine why these are important cultural traits for an individualistic/autonomous society: Independent nuclear families can foster the sort of independence that gives centrality to the individual; and bridal gifts other than at marriage can bias marriage choices away from individual decision. However, just how the “independence” of the nuclear family manifests so as to differentiate the culture from more communal societies (such as that of most societies since agriculture’s onset) is unclear. Are the nuclear families of sedentary agricultural societies not sufficiently independent to foster individualism? If so, the question is begged as to just what in nuclear families qualifies to foster individual autonomy.

1.2.4.2. The Instrumental Inconsistency in Type of Traits Chosen

Another concern is about a certain kind of arbitrariness in the types of the traits of the three chosen. It is apparent that Gardner had to narrow down the original large list of trait-types and find a workable number that still seemed to point to autonomy or individualism. However, I ask, are B, E, and I: (1) mere correlations of autonomy, (2) propellants or drivers of autonomy, (3) among the manifestations of autonomy, (4) in what autonomy consists (that is, at least partly, or wholly, constitutive of it) or (5) a particular combination of any of these four?

These categories of traits deserve a more formal consideration before assessing how B, E, and I are used in Gardner’s analysis. I attempt a more formal analysis here to see if one can disambiguate the five possible explanations raised in the previous paragraph.

Consider *U* as the unknown trait that one is aiming to characterize by empirical traits *T1*, *T2*, etc. An example of *U* would be autonomy, and examples of *T1* may be egalitarianism. Then:

1. A trait *Ti* would *correlate* with *U* if when *Ti* is present, then so is *U*, and vice versa, but is not clear that *Ti* causes *U* or vice versa. An example of a correlate outside of the anthropological situation at hand would be a *Ti* of the presence of a certain virus and the *U* of catching a flu. When the virus is present in the body in high numbers, one has the flu; and when one has the flu, the virus is present in high numbers, but it remains unclear whether the virus causes the flu.[[6]](#footnote-6)

2. A *Ti* *propels* *U* if, when *Ti* is absent, then *U* is absent; and *U* is present only if *Ti* is present. Propelling then includes a positive correlation along with these absence conditions. Propelling is much like an Aristotelean proximate cause that may not be a sufficient cause, and it is usually derived inductively. Thus in the previous example, if the virus is absent, the flu is absent, and if one has no flu, one lacks the virus in those high numbers. Thereby, one establishes that the virus must be present to have the flue. It may not be an ultimate or even sufficient cause of the flu, but one can reasonably induce it is a proximate cause.

3. *U* *consists o*f *T1*, … *Tn* only if, if of any *Ti* of *T1*, …, *Tn* is absent, then *U* is absent. In the flu example, one may say that the flu consists in the traits of the presence of virus in high numbers; a recent level of immune-system stress such as staying outdoors in winter without a coat; and symptoms such as sneezing and achy joints.

4. A *Ti* *signals* that *U* is present only if, when the *Ti* is present, then so is *U*, although this *Ti* may not be ∈*T1*, …, *Tn*. In the flu example, a patient may have a sense of bodily relaxation and inner warmth, or “pre-cold euphoria,” before getting the flu, but intuitively signaling the onset of flu, although this signal may not be a part of the set of traits in which flu consists. Finally:

5. A *Ti* is a *manifestation* of *U* (or U *manifests* a *Ti*), if when *Ti* is present, then *U* is, and this *Ti* is ∈*T1*, …, *Tn*. An example of a manifestation of the flu may be the symptoms of sneezing and achy joints.

It appears that Gardner is not saying that individual-autonomy syndrome (IAS) consists only in B, E, and I, but is offering these as a good bet that IAS is present in a culture, that is, these traits are manifestations of the syndrome. It is possible that B,E, and I are correlatives of autonomy; and even that autonomy consists in B, E, and I, possibly along with something else. It does not seem that, as a group, B, E, and I propel autonomy, but I return to this later, as well as to whether any of B, E, and I propel IAS. Also, it does not appear that Gardner is saying that they merely signal IAS; that is, they are more a part of IAS than a mere signal allows.

Now having looked at the group of B, E, and I in terms of these five ways of connecting them to IAS, I look to each member of this group. B, or bilateral structure, seems to be a way to ensure autonomy if it (B) is in place, that is, it propels autonomy. However, it may also be considered a signal that autonomy is in place, thus propelling or causing (as a proximate cause) IAS without the syndrome’s consisting in bilateral structure. If it is a signal of autonomy, it would not be a manifestation thereof. However, in either case, we then must have a means of identifying the autonomy that is ensured or manifested or signaled. Thus, the still obscure identity of autonomy itself remains a problem. In sum, it appears that Gardner intends I as propelling IAS and it is either a signal or manifestation thereof.

E, or egalitarianism, has been defined in the anthropological literature by a large set of traits, as Miller 2023 Chapter Three discusses, with some agreement that these traits are indicative of egalitarianism (in the anthropological sense). One problem in the context of Gardner’s analysis is the degree to which these traits must be present to qualify the society as egalitarian. As Kelly (2007) emphasizes and as Miller 2023 Chapter Three discusses, egalitarianism manifests along a spectrum. A culture may view itself, and fairly qualify, as egalitarian if it exhibits a preponderance or sizable portion of stated practices and beliefs. A large number of nomadic forager societies still reasonably qualify as egalitarian even if they are weak on certain points. However, when one tries to designate a culture as E (egalitarian) or not within Gardner’s autonomy schema, some societies that may reasonably be considered egalitarian may not pass such an all-or-nothing criterion.

Before I analyze E according to this section’s five diagnostic criteria of autonomy traits, I must acknowledge that Gardner’s paper appeared before the first edition of Kelley’s work on egalitarainism’s spectrum which tempered the all-or-nothing tendency. Gardener does acknowledge that “calling for all these traits may be overly restrictive, so … a society has been considered egalitarian if all but one of the criteria on which data are available are satisfied.” (1991: 555) But this approach still is all-for-nothing and does not catch the sliding scale of the spectrum.

E may be encapsulated primarily negatively, in terms of lack of hierarchy, class, and absolute or hereditary authority or hereditary property. With these negative criteria, one should ask how we reach from here to the idea of autonomy, which appears to be a positive, or constructive, concept?[[7]](#footnote-7) It would seem that this positive would not consist in these negatives, as that would leave an indefinite amount of possibilities as to what the positive thing may be.[[8]](#footnote-8) Autonomy may then be signaled by these traits: When these negatives are present, we can be ensured that autonomy is present. However, it would seem that, in light of the fact that anthropological analyses of forager equality do imply or specify these negatives, E *itself* should at least partly consist in these (negative) traits, along with some other positive or constructive traits, so they are not mere signals of equality. In an important way, these traits are partly constitutive of egalitarianism. These would then be manifestations of equality, not mere signals. But it remains open whether these negative manifestations of equality would suffice to affirm that a society is egalitarian. Moreover, in the larger picture of autonomy and its relation to E, there remains the question of whether E as determined by negative traits is indeed a manifestation of autonomy. That question depends upon how we can definitively and positively (constructively) identify autonomy. That is, as with B, we need an exogenous identify of autonomy before we can be confident that E as negatively defined is a manifestation of autonomy. In sum, Gardner seems to be saying that E is a manifestation of IAS without propelling it,[[9]](#footnote-9) whereas B propels IAS and is either a signal or manifestation of it.

As for I, or individualism, Gardner provides the two criteria, “independent nuclear families (or, alternatively, independent polygynous or polyandrous families) and bridal gifts only at marriage (or, alternatively, token bride-price or bride service)” (1991, p. 555). These are criteria for individualism because they “offer people relative independence of other kin.” (p. 555) By his wording here, it sounds like he is saying that I, insofar as it offers such independence, propels IAS. It would be hard to contend that these two traits of I partly constitute IAS, or that IAS partly consists in these practices of I. They are not independence itself but allow or help ensure it. And yet they may signal IAS: When these are present, we may have a strong confidence that IAS is present.

Now, considering all three B, E, and I in terms of their contribution to IAS, each of them has a different role to play in our determining whether IAS is present, as shown in Table 5.3..

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1.  Correlation with IAS | 2.  Propellant of IAS | 3.  Manifestation of IAS | 4.  IAS consists in | 5.  Signal of IAS |
| B |  | V | possibly |  | possibly |
| E |  |  | v | (partly) |  |
| I |  | v |  |  | v |

Table 5.3. The cultural traits B, E, and I in helping us determine whether IAS is present (noted by a check-mark) in a culture: a comparison of the ways it may be present or partly or possibly so.

The issue here is not solely that each of these elements plays a different type of role in indicating whether IAS is present in a society. There seems to be nothing prima facie problematic in having indicators of an unknown indicate that unknown in different ways. Rather, the concern is that these different kinds of elements to watch for in diagnosing or determining if IAS is present underscores the question of just why these three elements were chosen as indicators of autonomy. That is, the different natures of these elements portend an arbitrariness in their selection as indicators. Thus, by the reading I have attempted, bilateralism and individualism are contributing causes of autonomy, whereas autonomy (at least partly) consists in egalitarianism. I admit that it has taken me several paragraphs to bring out what may seem a small point. But the point is important because it evidences a lacuna in Gardner’s case for autonomy. A reader needs to know precisely why these varied elemental traits of a society do indeed indicate that the society highly values autonomy.

Another way to view this problem of just why these three elements are indicative is to note that bilateralism and egalitarianism involve observable relations and practices between group members. Egalitarianism can be observed directly, when foragers bring in a day’s catch of meat and share it with the group. It can be seen when a non-generous or braggart headman is fired from office by the community. In contrast, individualism and autonomy have much do to with how one as an agent relates to oneself. These two traits are not as amenable to observation as are bilateralism and egalitarianism. Bilateralism and egalitarianism are practices, and may also be beliefs. However, individualism and autonomy are not so much practices in themselves, although practices—such as no bridal price or intergroup mobility, may encourage or discourage these. Rather, individualism and autonomy reflect beliefs about how group members individually should be allowed to behave and to motivate their behavior. Beliefs are hard to observe, although they may sometimes be induced from behavior. The most direct way of verifying them is by asking subjects verbally, although such reports must in turn be analyzed.

The problem for autonomy then, again, beyond the sheer linguistic problem of whether speakers of language *X* are referring to what we understand is “autonomy,” is how do we know in general that a set of beliefs and perhaps practices that allow it indeed constitute autonomy? Egalitarian actions can largely be empirically assessed whatever the agents may say they believe. But without such empirically observable counterweight/leverage for autonomy, we have little beyond subjects’ beliefs about whether they strive for autonomy and try to ensure it. We are then susceptible to whatever criteria a group considers self-governing to mean and thereby susceptible to a complete cultural relativism.

Hence, we may ask group *X*1, say some foragers in a tropical mountain range, and they assert they are self-governed because almost every band member knows almost all of the skills involved in staying alive; and so, as no bosses stand over them, they are their own boss and can ably do about whatever is needed to stay alive and go where they wish. But then we may ask group *X2*, say members of the Western industrial society the United States, and they say they are self-governed because they have a job, car, house, and many kinds of domestic objects. The two bases for individual autonomy are quite divergent if not mutually exclusive. The former looks to generalist skills, to mobility as comprising a lack of physical encumbrance, and to self-sufficiency allowing survival under any circumstance such as if lost in the forest. The latter looks to specialist skills, mobility via physical encumbrance, material encumbrance in general, and survivorship dependent wholly on others’ output. (Beliefs about individualism would have similar parallels between these two groups.) We are left with the question, “Which of these two indeed constitute autonomy?” If we leave the matter to cultural relativity, we will see an indefinite variety of cultures types avowing autonomy.[[10]](#footnote-10) We then still need an exogenous way to determine autonomy.

1.2.4. 3. Egalitarianism as an Elemental Trait of Autonomy

A final remark I want to make about Gardner’s method for tabulating groups that evidence autonomy is his particular use of egalitarianism as an elemental trait of autonomy. An important matter I have already brought up in this article is the discrepancy between his results concerning forager egalitarianism and the anthropological findings assumed for tisarticle’s argument for evolutionarily ingrained human egalitarianism. That is, if as 2023 Chapter Three contends, equality has a genetic basis, and during the periods in which hominids evolved into humans and humans then were foragers, most or all foragers would have been egalitarian. However, Table 5.2 indicates that only 49%, or far from most, of foragers were found to be egalitarian in Gardener’s survey of ethnographic evidence. Either Gardner’s result is too low, or this article’s assumption based on more recent ethnographic studies is too high.

I find that Gardner’s result of 49% is too low for two reasons. One is that, as discussed in the section above, the criteria may be too narrow but also are primarily negative. Positive practices that Boehm (1999) emphasizes, such as intragroup sharing of forage coupled with the call for generosity and even-temperedness, elimination of upstarts, and reverse hierarchy, could operate more effectively to identify egalitarian societies than relatively harder-to-pinpoint negatives. Furthermore, as Kelly (2007) emphasizes in his extensive survey of cultures and ethnographies, in a broad perspective foragers exhibit different degrees of a range or spectrum of egalitarian traits. One culture may be weak on sharing, strong on eliminating upstarts, average on fostering even-temperedness in the headman, but strong on gender parity. Another would have different egalitarian strengths and weaknesses. In light of this spectrum and degrees of exhibiting traits, which seems to be a more ethnographically informed approach to gauging equality, a number higher than 49% is likely.

Gardner’s all-or-nothing approach, along with allowing only one trait’s shortcoming before disqualifying a culture from exhibiting equality, is too strict for its purported end. And yet, looking at equality in cultures in the less strict way should not undermine the overall picture of equality among foragers but instead show them as a whole as approximating, to greater or lesser degrees, an overall and converging pattern of egalitarianism. As one looks to settled and agrarian societies, one starts to see abrupt drop-offs in both positive and negative egalitarian traits, as Flannery and Marcus (2012) describe and as this article discusses. So, the second reason to question Gardner’s low number is that more recent work since his seminal investigation has provided good support for why a solid majority of nomadic foragers were, or are, egalitarian.

I am not saying it is incorrect or misleading to include egalitarianism as an elemental trait of autonomy. Rather, the formulation of egalitarianism and the criteria for determining its presence in a society are too narrow to capture what is more likely the range for such societies and thus is not sufficiently sensitive to the actual distribution of autonomy among foragers.

1.2.4.4 Conclusion of Section1.2.

In sum, I have offered three analytical observations about Gardner’s data and methodology assessing forager cultures for their degree of autonomy: (1) While, of his three significant cultural traits indicating autonomy (B, E, and I, B and I) readily lend themselves to empirical or material observation, I and autonomy itself are relatively abstract. It would be fine if all of B, E, and I were material and the abstract “autonomy” were grounded by being defined by these; but with an abstract term in autonomy’s (quasi) definition, “autonomy” remains ungrounded. Moreover, as “independence” is often considered a synonym of “autonomy,” it is circular to include I as a trait of autonomy. (2) The three traits have inconsistent instrumental or explanatory roles in pinpointing autonomy. Furthermore, why there should be this inconsistency needs explaining. (3) The trait E, egalitarianism, as used here is too narrowly defined and excludes many societies that by more recent studies would be considered egalitarian, thereby under-reporting the number of societies that would value and foster autonomy.

These drawbacks, along with the rich, often critical commentary following the 1991 Gardner study, exemplifies how one of the more thorough and rigorous scientific inquiries into the phenomena of personal autonomy leaves the matter unsettled. However, Gardner’s study itself is rich in materials that can be usefully salvaged for gaining a more objective and perspicacious view on autonomy than we may have from less empirically grounded characterizations of it. At the least, with these materials we can have a means to assess and amplify upon these characterizations.

1.3. Are Autonomy and Equality Mutually Implicative?

A compelling point that Gardner makes in this study is that egalitarianism is required for autonomy. That is, for human beings,

autonomous → equalA

but not necessarily,

equalA → autonomous.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Even if Gardner’s trait E is too narrow a definition of egalitarian and a greater percentage of nomadic forager societies are egalitarian than his study provided, the relation would remain.

By this analysis, one could maintain that if you uphold or value autonomy, you should uphold or value equality (although not necessarily vice versa). Thus, if Gardner’s analysis had proven to be indisputable and if the resulting numbers had shown that a large number of foraging societies are autonomous and also exhibit equality, there would be a good case that people who practice autonomy should, to be consistent, value equalityA. Thus, for many contemporary political theories assuming or assigning a high value for autonomy, they should also assign equality a high value in this sense (equalityA) that is much stronger than formal equality. Political libertarianism, for example, although known for devaluing most conceptions of equality beyond formal equality or equality of opportunity, would be logically required to revise its notions of equality. One point of this article—to connect logically equalityA and autonomy (Miller 2023 Chapter Four) —which point was given at the end of, would be achieved.

However, matters are not so easy. For one, Gardner’s analytical methodology is problematic in some key areas; and if the resulting data are even close, then too few cultures have been autonomous to indicate reliably that (as with egalitarianism) autonomy is deeply entrenched in the sort of beings that humans are, much less genetically ingrained. Another critical problem with such an argument as in the previous paragraph is that it *still* depends on one’s notion of autonomy. One may concede Gardner’s method and data but maintain that his notion of autonomy is off. The political libertarian may say that Gardner is simply talking about a different kind of autonomy than, say, classical liberals are; and so the whole relation (autonomous → equal) does not apply.

What we face, then, after the involved discussion of autonomy in Section 5.3. so far, is still a workable, common-ground, exogenous understanding of autonomy itself, before it can be linked to other normative concepts such as equalityA. If that understanding then shows that autonomy cannot be fully realized in a society without equality (in the anthropological sense), then there would be a strong case for the relation autonomous → equalA ,and more broadly, autonomy → equality

1.4. Autonomy Itself Specifically for Human Beings

To get an initial grip on autonomy, it is useful first to look at two extreme social situations. As mentioned earlier, autonomous in the sociopolitical sense means self-governing. Does this fact mean that anyone living in a society in which there is a government is not truly self-governing, because that government is doing some of what would otherwise be a person’s self-governing? If so, the citizens of all societies that are not anarchies or nomadic foragers would not be truly autonomous. This view would seem extremist to many people. At the opposite end from anarchy, there are people in manacles locked in solitary confinement for life without parole. To a great number of people, this person would have very little, if any, autonomy. (It would be even more extreme if there were substances or wires that could control the prisoner’s thoughts.)

In between these extremes are most societies with governments. This fact seems to imply that autonomy comes in degrees: Governments partly displace what would be an individual’s autonomy, but not so much as the individual in solitary loses. But some governmental systems seem to displace more self-governing from their citizens than others. Governments that have extensive rules about where citizens may sit on a bus, especially according to skin color, and where most every citizen is followed by agents or video systems would not only limit the citizen’s freedom but would detract from how they govern their own lives. So between the two extremes must be degrees of autonomy. Freedom, as Kant observed, may indeed be essential for self-governing, although it does not necessarily entail it. (One may choose not to be autonomous.) And some degree of freedom must be needed for some degree of autonomy.

One may protest that some people may accept every governmental rule so fully as to assert that they coincide identically with their own personal rule, so they live in a condition on a par with the anarchist society. Even some martyrs may take the same position about their solitary confinement. I acknowledge that these unusual situations are potential cases of full autonomy, but for the most part governments of all kinds subtract to some degree from individual autonomy.

One may also contend that not only governments intrude upon autonomy, but social customs do as well, as do other powerful forces such as corporations. I do not believe it is necessary to investigate here whether these forces do indeed subtract from autonomy. At best, these arguments exemplify it is virtually impossible to achieve the absolute autonomy that seems possible in true anarchy. But I do not find they undercut the fact that governments themselves require compromises in individual autonomy. At best, these contentions may indicate that autonomy is gauged not merely from a single linear spectrum, that of governmental imposition, but has multidimensional spectra, each in degrees.

Another important angle in illuminating the nature of autonomy, besides the fact it comes in degrees, derives from the fact that autonomy must be considered in the social context that defines human life. A brief comparative study of other species’ possible autonomy can provide an informative perspective on human autonomy. Mammals in general are intelligent enough we can grant that they experience varying levels of autonomy. (Some people may consider that autonomy requires interest and that most mammal species are not intelligent or sophisticated enough to have interests sufficient to constitute autonomy, but I beg such readers some leniency in granting degrees of autonomy for nonhuman animals.) A lone, top predator such as a cougar is relatively self-governing within its range, as long as it does not stray too far into another cougar’s territory. A bull elephant, by contrast, is from a social species and may experience some restriction in autonomy imposed on it by largely female herds, which may fend it off even it wants to join; or if it is an adolescent male, it may be pushed from the female-dominated herd (Sukumar 2003). Boehm (1999) observes that most simians and all apes, are social species and inegalitarian, with strict rank order both within sexes and between sexes. These rankings impose a marked amount of limitations on individual’s governing their own lives.

Overall, it appears that nonsocial predators have little intraspecific intrusion upon their autonomy, whereas it is in the social mammals where autonomy not only starts to be a constant issue in an individual’s life, but also one steadily under threat intraspecifically, within that very society that so strongly defines the individual. Egalitarian squirrel monkeys, which Boehm cites as rare egalitarian simians, is one of the few social mammal species in which individual autonomy is under little threat.

Even if one cannot concede that autonomy does not wholly apply to nonhuman animals, these analogies from the animal world can provide new angles on autonomy in the human social world. We should ask whether a human living years on end on a desert island would, like the lone top predator, be fully autonomous. Let’s grant that this person has access to all basic survival needs to be in good health. There are at least two very different answers: 1) The person can be said to be fully autonomous if living without others is satisfactory, or at least neutral, for this person; 2) If the person’s interests, goals, ambitions, desires call for the presence of others, something significant is missing that prevents this person from being wholly self-governing, no matter how good the health. Most people would probably find themselves responding with answer 2. For discussion, say the two answers represent different persons, Persons 1 and 2. Person 1 may find walks in nature, ocean dips, building makeshift shelters and eating fresh-caught fish all that one needs in life and then may very well be fully autonomous. Person 2, though, even if enjoying these activities to some extent, would find that they do not supply enough possibilities to direct one’s life sufficiently. Governing a life, then, like governing a state, would require certain resources. It is fitting that many observers have included the capacity to fulfill goals as critical in determining whether an individual is autonomous (Taylor 1991; Christman 2009 includes the essentially of the social-historical self for autonomy). One could say that the goals of Person 1 can be fulfilled by what there is on the island, but the goals of Person 2 cannot.

A contrasting view would say that the island actually supplies enough for Persons 1 and 2 both to be equally autonomous. Self-governing in this view simply refers to capacity to work with what you have in your environment, whatever your environment. These two people have the skills to survive and be healthy; if one of them wants more, what is sought is not capacity to govern one’s life, but something else. Another way to state this outlook is that the situation does not impose upon one’s life; these two persons can guide their lives as they see fit given the materials they have. The difference between the two is merely temperamental or even moral character: Person 1 adjusts to the island better than Person 2. Parallel to theories stating there is negative and positive freedom (Gould 2014), this outlook would be one of negative autonomy, holding that autonomy can be assessed primarily negatively. Access to basic necessities may be needed to qualify for autonomy—one cannot govern oneself if morbidly starving—but given these, autonomy is largely a matter of what the individual *does*, which assessment cannot be made if external impositions are weighing down.

I believe this outlook on what autonomy consist in falls short. Certainly, a person needs basics to survive and maximize one’s self-governing, but Person 2 still has a complaint which, as I hope to show, is valid. It is too hasty to say that the difference between Persons 1 and 2 is merely a matter of temperament or moral character and not of whether one experiences full autonomy or not. Certainly, Person 1’s adaption to the island is likely a matter of temperament, but this fact is not to uphold Person 1’s adaptation as a moral standard. It is a trope in the narrative arts, all the way from Odysseus’ lone island exile to Robinson Crusoe’s and Gilligan’s islands, that those marooned on desert isles long to return or at least find other people. And this drive to return or have more people around represents a pervasive norm for humans across cultures. In this manner, Person 2 is standard: having been acculturated and thereby needing to be within that culture—or even some culture tout court—to be fully operant as a human being. Person 1 may be said to be *lucky* to be able to adjust, but it would be misleading to declare Person 2 has a shortfall of moral character, or is somehow of *unlucky* temperament for the situation.

To the outlook I called “negative autonomy” above, there is the complement, which is positive autonomy. Negative autonomy considers whether there are impositions—implicatively, those of a conscious agent—upon an individual subtracting from that person’s capacity to self-govern. It seems also to imply that that capacity is a given, perhaps innate or perhaps acculturated, and an individual may choose to exercise it or not. Positive autonomy focuses upon the capacity to self-govern, acknowledging that persons, human agents, live within a society that subsumes a culture, a set of beliefs, values, and practices. (Again, see Christman 2009.) Positive autonomy looks primarily to how well a culture in its practices, beliefs, and values builds up the potential for an individual’s developing the capacity for autonomy. Negative autonomy looks primarily to whether there are external impositions upon an individual to subtract from the person’s autonomy. I find that we should look to both positive and negative perspectives on autonomy to get a complete picture of whether it is in place in a society and the degree to which individuals exercise it.

The question remains of how to determine not only whether autonomy—whatever the degree—is valued in a particular society, but also whether the concept and practice that are valued indeed manifest autonomy, and among which practices that alleged autonomy is manifested. In other words, what is the characteristic quality in “positive autonomy” or “negative autonomy” that is, respectively, positive or negative?

Another comparative study help point to ways to determine which practices and values in a society reflect a plausible manifestation of autonomy, this comparative study being one of human cultures, not of different species. This comparison, much like the earlier one generalizing about species traits, similarly must look to generalizations about human cultures—more controversial and challenging than those of animals—to make any headway in my inquiry.

Western industrialized culture, by which I refer to that of dominant cultures of the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Australia, widely set a high value on individual autonomy. A quite different set of cultures, those of foragers, have according to many ethnographers asserted a high value on individual autonomy. The curious fact in comparing these two sets of cultures is the drastic difference between them in social and economic characteristics. The former intertwines its pursuit or practice of autonomy with its high level of technologies. Machines are often perceived as providing the means for individuals to gain greater independence and self-governing. The latter set, by contrast, has markedly fewer technologies, and these are only incidental to, not inherent in, their valuing of autonomy.

In between these two sets are other types of cultures, many of which appear to ascribe a lower value to personal independence and self-governing. Many Buddhist cultures tend to de-emphasize the individual’s personal worldly pursuits (Nyanatiloka 1980). Communitarian outlooks downplay the role of the individual in society, as do communist societies in their more ideological manner (Taylor 1991, Christman 2009). Is it possible that (1) one type of society is more closely approximating what we call individual autonomy than the other is? Or (2) the two extreme forms of society—the highly grasping technological on the one hand, and the unambitious, egalitarian with minimal technologies—are both manifesting the same crosscultural human phenomenon they both dub “self-governing”? After all, some human phenomena, such as being well-nourished, hold up well cross-culturally without one’s having no choice but to relativize the concept of “well-nourishment” among individual cultures. One may object to this comparison, saying that nutrition is wholly gene-determined and autonomy is not. But as my discussion has implied so far, we are still at the too-early stage to determine whether or not autonomy is, like egalitarianism, also prompted by the human genetic profile.

I attempt to answer these two questions by looking to two telling manifestations of cultural beliefs, practices, and values: (a) childrearing practices, which reflect certain values and how these are manifest in a society; and (b) how the supposed valuing of autonomy fits in with other values, to see if the supposed valuing is indeed consistent with those other values. Although in setting out in this comparative inquiry we still have to start with an intuitive sense of what autonomy may consist in, the hope is that in examining how this concept, this supposed valuing, is manifest in cultures we can start to develop a more rigorous (although not yet formal) characterization of it.

1.5. Childrearing Practices

Broadly, ethnographers, sometimes shocked, have observed how strikingly permissive many foraging societies are in their childrearing practices—along with marked powerful intimacy. By comparison, industrialized Western societies tend to be disciplinarily strict (although not always incorporating corporal punishment, especially recently), while more distant on the intimacy scale. As Diamond (2012) well sums up this contrast that emerges from ethnographic studies:

… individual autonomy, even of children, is a more cherished ideal in hunter-gatherer bands than in state societies, where the state considers that it has an interest in its children, does not want children to get hurt by doing as they please, and forbids parents to let a child harm itself… [as in the warning] ‘Federal law requires children under five years of age or weighing under 80 pounds to be transported in a federally approved car seat.’ Hunter-gatherers would consider that warning to be none of the business of anyone other than the children and perhaps its parents but certainly not of a distant bureaucrat…. Small-scale societies appear not to be as convinced as are we [Western] moderns of the idea that parents are responsible for a child’s development and that they can influence how a child turns out. (196-197)

The permissiveness among many foraging bands in their child-rearing would not only sometimes be considered criminal negligence but might strike many Westerners as uncaring or even unloving. In fact, such foragers do not exhibit any more uncaringness than Western parents, but place their caring into other channels than those of industrialized societies. One prominent channel of care is in ensuring that children have maximal independence and are their own person.

The permissiveness exposes children to extreme dangers in relation to artifacts, while other practices reveal extreme moment-to-moment protection from natural dangers. Everett (2008) describes how the Piraha of Amazonian Brazil allow children, as young as two, to play with and even suck sharp knives. Children may do just about anything an adult may as long as they can lift it. This approach to parenting yields tough, hardy children who do not act as if the world owes them a thing. And yet as Hill and Hurtado (1999) observed of the Aché, a foraging society also living in neotropical rainforest, chock with deadly insects, snakes, and mammals, parents strove to keep small children under very close surveillance. Children up to age three never ventured further than a meter from a parent.

Adult response times to infant crying and tendencies in corporal punishment provide further context for evaluating social values of loving and independence. Diamond (2012) offers a succinct summary of comparative study of infant crying:

…observers of children in hunting-gathering societies commonly report that if an infant begins crying, the parents’ practice is to respond immediately. For example, if an Efe Pygmy infant starts to fuss, the mother or some other care-giver tries to comfort the infant within 10 seconds. If a !Kung infant cries, 88% of crying bouts receive a response… within 3 seconds…. [T]he total time that !Kung infants spend crying each hour is half that measured for Dutch infants. Many other studies show that one-year-old infants whose crying is ignored end up spending more time crying than do infants whose crying receives a response. (191-192).

This last-stated fact is important for the following reason: In many Western societies, it is often considered unhealthy and harming independence to attend to a child’s crying too quickly; and certainly these parents do believe they are doing their loving best for the child. And yet doing so not only does not encourage emotional independence, it seems to increase emotional dependence as the child seeks ever more to be succored. It would also be hard to reconcile the idea that forager tendencies to permissiveness reflect uncaringness with the forager tendency to attend rapidly to babies’ crying—which is most plausibly attributed to strong concern for care and love. This care of attentiveness does, in fact, seem to foster an earlier-developing emotional independence. It would be unfair and unjustified (from information presented so far) to assert that either type of society is less loving than the other; however, it appears that the foragers’ childcare-practices more effectively foster independence.

Other broad childcare distinctions between foragers as opposed to contemporary industrial society include:

(1) *minimal use of corporal punishment* among foragers, whereas corporal punishment has been central to molding Western character for millennia;[[12]](#footnote-12)

(2) *nursing on demand by the child*, among foragers, meaning the encouragement of self-regulation, as contrasted to Western industrialized societies’ feeding according to strict schedules, which impose societies’ own needs and schedule upon the infant;

(3) *a high level of infant/adult physical contact* among foragers, such as by holding or in slings or papooses, with the effect of strengthening emotional confidence early on, as opposed to minimized infant/adult contact in Western industrialized societies;

(4) a *de-emphasis on mothers in caregiving* is common in foraging societies, where fathers and extended-family members (“the whole village”) do much more of this work than do fathers and extended family in industrialized societies, with the effect of introducing the child to a wider comfortable range of life possibilities, skills, and choices;

(5) a *blending of play and education* in an environment that fosters sharing and cooperation instead of competitive games, so children are encouraged to develop individual survival skills while being self-sufficient at their particular skill level, contrasted to industrialized societies that foster child competition and specialization and a concomitant minimized self-sufficiency; and

(6) *decreased partitioning of children by age groups* in forager societies, if partly because forager groups are typically too small for such partitioning to be practical, but the end effect is to decrease barriers among people and introduce children to a wider range of skills for self-sufficiency. By contrast, industrialized societies’ partitioning age-groups not only heightens intergroup enmity but decreases chances for intergroup learning experiences. (See Konnor, Diamond 2012.)[[13]](#footnote-13)

With these considerations about childrearing practices, we can now look at the two questions posed in the preceding section: whether both kinds of society are exhibiting the same cross-cultural level of individual independence and self-reliance which one could reasonably call self-governing, or is one society encouraging, fostering, and valuing a markedly greater level of independence and self-reliance.

The permissiveness and the six other childrearing practices discussed point toward foraging societies’ encouraging self-reliance and independence as group members mature into adulthood more than industrialized societies do. This result is surprising in light of a common assumption that industrial societies manifest a unique step toward individualism since *Homo sapiens* came into existence and a common suspicion that all previous kinds of culture were oppressively communitarian and discouraging individual development. Such communitarianism may hold for certain other kinds of pre-industrial cultures than foragers. But at the level of sociopolitical and economic structure of concern here, such lumping of foragers with other pre-industrial cultures is incorrect. Some industrial societies, such as those of Western Europe or New Zealand, may represent a notable degree of increased individual independence and self-reliance than that attained by pre-industrial cultures other than foragers; but this degree remains lower than the level attained by foragers.

One may protest that the seven childrearing practices evinced here do not represent all possible types of childrearing practices, and in other kinds of childrearing practices industrialized societies may come out more strongly fostering independence and self-reliance. Overall education, for example, from K through 12 and higher, has been long assumed to be a method to heighten independent thinking and self-reliance. The problem with this objection, though, is that it is not clear that such education may help to maximize the independence and self-reliance of persons within industrial societies relative to the typical levels there without such education. That maximal level would still be constrained by the overall lesser levels of these qualities in industrial cultures compared with those of foraging societies. These constraints are engendered by the childrearing practices in those countries. Consider the likelihood that they begin exerting their constraining force as early as the fetal stage and operate through earliest childhood. Furthermore, since experiences and practices of childhood are known often to be the most formative and indelible, the education coming later in life would have tremendous formative forces to overcome, The burden now for this objection would be to show that formal education does indeed so fully counteract the social forces working through early childhood as to render society members generally as much as or more independent and self-reliant than foragers.

Another objection is that the predominance of secondary values (other than that for life in and of itself; see Miller 2013) prevalent in industrial societies can operate as inducements to overcome children restraints on independence. Thus, the high values placed on wealth, gaining power over others, prestige, competitiveness, specialization, and ease and convenience can inspire growing society members to overcome the constraints placed on them by childrearing practices. Once they attain great wealth, prestige, or power, they can indeed realize a great independence and self-reliance, plausibly greater than that of foraging society members.

I have three responses to this objection. One is that it assumes the very point of this subsection: that childrearing practices in industrial societies do indeed tend not toward rendering their members independent and self-reliant. Those constraints created by those practices are what the objection says must be overcome, thus only seconding the point of this section. Second, those other stated values which are to motivate industrial-society members are not those that most or even a majority of the society members can fulfill. Only a few can attain such wealth as to live greatly independently. (Independent of what? of Others? Those very others are the ones who allow the wealth-accumulation, say the rise of stock values, to happen). Only a few can have significant power over others (more than, say, power over their children). Similarly can only a few benefit from competiveness or prestige to any significant degree in the relevant respect, and it is difficult to see how fulfilling the values of ease and convenience can add much to most people’s independence and self-reliance (other than to make the paucity of these qualities less onerous).

The third response is that these other cultural values besides independence and self-reliance, if prevalent in a society, do not by their mere existence there show that independence and self-reliance are indeed so valued as they often are in foraging societies. In fact, the relative value placed on wealth, power, and prestige may be so strong as to diminish the practical value placed on independence and self-reliance. This issue of the value of these last two within the context of other social values, as a way to determine the degree to which a society actually places, in practice (not merely by word), forms the subject of the next subsection, which, as promised, offers another way of answering the two questions of this section.

1.6. Autonomy in the Context of Social Axiology

The term “value,” like many in philosophy, such as “autonomy” and “equality,” is elusive and often ambiguous. Here I use the term in two basic senses. The most basic sense is relative: a concept, quality, or object-set is valued more than another when an individual or group acts in such a way as to place it in greater personal or social centrality—as the focus of greater attention or resource and energy exertion.[[14]](#footnote-14) That greater value may influence the society’s practices and infrastructures. Thus, a greater value placed in, say, competitiveness over health may be reflected in the society’s building and guarding institutions and infrastructures, such as many massive stadiums compared with the availability of nutritious foods or national health-care programs.

The corollary to the practice-evidenced valuing is belief-oriented valuing, when a group’s or individual’s beliefs place the concept or object-set in greater centrality of their energy exertion and attention. Often, there is some tension and juggling between practice- and belief-evidenced valuing. Thus, a group’s beliefs may highly value meat over a low-nutrient and tasteless but common root, and they may be willing to expend a great amount of energy seeking this meat, except because of the animal’s seasonal scarcity may often have to dedicate more time and energy to seeking the root.

The second sense of the term is one used for convenience: A quality *x*, such as specialization or power over others, which is valued may be called a “value.” In most cases context should make it evident which sense of the term is being used.

The relational characteristic of value is crucial in this subsection, in that social values are not only interconnected but commonly exist within a prioritization or hierarchy of values. (This prioritization is not necessarily static but subject to fluctuations during an individual’s or group’s existence.) Thus, with the example group just given, they may value the root as well as the meat, but by belief and often by practice they prioritize the value of the meat over that for the root. Simply, they more highly value the meat. This conflict among values for priority within a network of values proves to be pivotal in determining not merely the degree to which a group values something but also in helping to understand just what is that thing they claim as a value, in terms of how it figures within the context of other values and their priorities. There are then two levels of value conflict that come into play: that between values, or inter-value conflict; or intra-value conflict, the conflict between a belief’s prioritization of a value and how the value is prioritized in practice.

What are some prominent social values? One, of course, the subject of this book, is the practice of equality in the anthropological sense, often accompanied by the belief in egalitarianism.[[15]](#footnote-15) Another, already discussed, is individual autonomy. Personal freedom, which will be discussed later, is valued by many societies. The qualities of well-being, love, life itself, and group harmony constitute other common values, as do wealth accumulation, power (over other persons), specialization, property, prestige, competitiveness, and ease and convenience. I cannot here go into how an individual or society precisely prioritizes these values (see Miller 2014 for more discussion), but certainly no two individuals within a society give identical weight to these values, nor do any two societies give identical weight when their value prioritizations are viewed on average across either society. Thus, one may best consider a society’s tendencies to prioritize values in a certain hierarchy. Some societies may then tend to value equality and autonomy highly while not valuing, or even disvaluing (in the sense of forbidding as a value), wealth accumulation; while individuals within the society, at a given time-slice, may hold these values in different priority.

It is, then, an empirical issue of which values that societies tend to maintain, within some discernable margin, and which values that individuals within that society evidence in their beliefs and practices. That is, values are social realities, and as such there is the potential to gauge them with at least relative formal precision. However, empirically determining what these values are in a formally precise, mathematical way poses a tremendous challenge that would take lengthy endeavor in the anthropological and other human sciences to begin to hone with due rigor. Available anthropological and archaeological work can offer some rough estimates of some societies’ value prioritizations; but with a great amount of surmise and intuition. As Chomsky (1955/1975) suggested that speaker intuitions are the best informants for a linguist determining its grammar (but see Wasow and Arnold 2005), similarly may members of industrial societies be at least rudimentary informants for their society’s values structure.

It is practically a truism that contemporary industrial cultures place a high value on wealth accumulation. This value should even be considered as defining such cultures because it is wealth accumulation that constitutes the industry, so that industry entails wealth accumulation. This value is also apparent among communist societies, such as the late Soviet Union and current China. Wealth may not have always been directly capitalized in such societies, and certainly not all individual society members were encouraged to manifest this value by zealous wealth accumulation; but a degree of wealth was needed to operate the industrial processes.

Another highly prized value among industrialized cultures is personal (individual) prestige. Exceptional personal wealth in itself offers one means to achieve prestige, but there are other means that do not require individual wealth or for which wealth is only peripheral. Thus, a serious composer may receive much acclaim without becoming wealthy, a charity worker be highly esteemed, or even a duteous politician be praised for solid policy that offers no financial recompense. However, in a generally prestige-oriented society, wealth and prestige are often interlinked, as achieved prestige (and sometimes non-achieved prestige, as in the case of celebrated heirs who do nothing of merit) is usually rewarded with some degree of financial compensation.

These industrialized cultures place a somewhat less explicit value upon power over others. Too much individual power, in non-autocratic societies, may be frowned upon and even weeded out, but a moderate to high amount can receive a great deal of respect, often in the form of “leadership” or “management.” Most important, wealth accumulation itself usually entails varying degrees of power over others, as Nielson (1985) points out. Both attaining and maintaining wealth may entail power over others. Acquiring wealth may involve exerting power over others by paying them substantially lower wages than one receives oneself for work that is equivalently contributory to *and necessary* for the wealth accumulation. Once one has significant wealth, partly through its prestige and partly because of what it enables one to do in society, one may exert new forms of power over others, as by manipulating information to reshape their opinions.

A prominent value intrinsic in industrial cultures is competitiveness. It permeates so deeply in these cultures that it may commonly be assumed not to be a cultural value but the natural state of our species. However, as ethnographies summed in Boehm (1999) evidence, discussed in my earlier essays, competitiveness was not always found among human societies. The value is tightly linked with wealth accumulation, prestige, and power over others. The first two of these three qualities are relational. To have wealth is to have items that peers lack or that they have not accumulated and is relative to the level of goods in the society. If everyone on Earth had (and maintained at a constant purchasing value) one million dollars, it is stretching the term, or muddling it to incoherence, to say that everyone is wealthy.[[16]](#footnote-16)

This way of considering wealth may be so surprising to some that it is worth discussing a little further. If one person *P* were to turn out to have one billion while all others had a million, then *P* would rightly be said to be wealthy. This point is not obvious—because we have a cultural stereotype that reads a million dollars as a sign of wealth[[17]](#footnote-17)—so let’s look at it from another angle: In a foraging society of the sort I discussed earlier in which everyone shared goods, one may as plausibly say they all have a tacit million dollars as say they have a tacit ten million dollars. After all, they all have what they need, stay in basically good health, and enjoy a plenitude of life and experiences with no evidently greater pains than we in industrial cultures may expect for ourselves. (For such a reason anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1966) titled one of his still controversial works about foragers “The Original Affluent Societ*y*.”) There is simply no exact monetary value to translate our dollars-equivalents to foragers’ experiences of life; thus calling each one a thousand dollars wealthy or a hundred million wealthy is rendered virtually meaningless.) Hence, given that wealth itself implies an amount of goods higher than the typical level, and that wealth accumulation is highly valued, competitiveness is sine qua non in those societies and, understandably, highly valued in itself. In such societies competitiveness is so pervasive it is difficult to adduce tasks that are not done competitively.

A more covert value is that of specialization. It is covert in the sense that society members may not consciously uphold it as a value as they might the other values. But it turns out to be at least as important as the others, and perhaps key, in understanding individual autonomy. Specialization is a social quality or characteristic which is crucial for many of these other values to be realized. A society with only a small degree of specialization, such as nomadic pastoralists or horticulturists, can allow those individuals who seek wealth only a modest accumulation.

In the earliest forms of foraging economies, foods were highly perishable, so groups had to move with some regular frequency from one area to the next when the latter became depleted. This need for frequent moves helped to shape the type, amount, and distribution of material goods. Thus, housing—shelter—was rudimentary so that shelters could be assembled and reassembled readily, often in a matter of hours (Davis et al 1995). Transporting across the long and often difficult distances between camps put a limit on the amount of material goods, which were then kept to minimal clothing, tools, and perhaps musical instruments or statuettes. Tools, too, were minimal, not because the group members lacked imagination or engineering skills—they were, in fact, quite adept (Lee and Daly 1999)—but out of practicality: just enough for hunting, making clothing, cooking, gathering plant foods. The point here is that, there being very few different kinds of tasks and different tasks in such a group, and children being exposed to these tasks early and reared learning them, and the society being small and open enough that people could be steadily observing and participating in many tasks, most people were able to do at least a passable job on most tasks (Lee and Daly 1999).

A person often had a task or set of tasks at which he or she excelled. One person might be a top hunter, the best at sending a spear home; another may make the group’s most durable and attractive weavings. But still that person would be competent in most or all of the other tasks. Despite the stereotype of “man the hunter,” in a high percentage of nomadic foragers, women could hunt, men could identify edible roots and fruits, and both sexes of the village could participate in childrearing.

Such skill generalization did not always “simply happen” as an adaptive trait but was often accompanied by the culture’s valuing it overtly: Thus, as anthropologists have repeatedly observed, inter-group social mobility was crucial among nomadic foragers. (Whallon 2006) (One function it served was as a way of defusing tensions and violence, as a person involved in a dispute with someone had the option to leave the group for another.) This mobility was made all the more fluid and easy—if not simply possible—by generalization instead of specialization. A person or family could join a neighboring group and contribute a loosely equivalent panoply of skills. Ideally, the new person would be especially adept at one of these skills for which the new group was lacking an expert. But having two top hunters, say, would not be a problem in itself for a society in which prestige was discouraged. And if the individual did not readily find a new group or got lost, he or she should have most of the skills needed to survive. This quality of generalization and devaluing of specialization[[18]](#footnote-18) could lend an individual a strong sense of personal independence.

By contrast, in industrial societies, where wealth accumulation, prestige, and power-over are highly valued, a comparable lever of generalization is not just frowned upon for stretching oneself impossibly thin, but required for such a society Even polymaths, which, prodigious in their admirable pursuits, may nonetheless be highly limited relative to the amount of extant skill- and task-types. No one could build a space shuttle in the backyard, from scratch, fashioning every bolt and microchip; much less build an ocean liner there, or Empire State Building, and be president and run a bakery shop and be full-time salesperson. Among the billions living in industrial societies (and developing countries are often little different in this respect), it is reasonable to say there are tens of millions of kinds of tasks that require a large amount of time to master. To learn one skill, one must squeeze out one’s hopes of learning tens of millions of other kinds. Each individual is thus highly dependent upon all the billions of others, toward the opposite end of the scale of individual independence that foragers inculcated and nurtured. In industrialized societies each person has little idea what most of the others are doing, even within the same firm. As for an abrupt need to survive indefinitely outside of the group, most individuals, with some rare exceptions, would have few recourses for survival.

Considering that valuing of wealth, prestige, power-over, competitiveness, and specialization work together in industrial and most agrarian-era societies, it should be evident from the discussion how the first four of these five valued qualities work together, but not just how any or all of these four benefit from specialization to the extent that it is valued by these societies. I have described how nomadic foragers tended toward generalization and away from specialization. But why, when some peoples began settling down; cultivating land, and valuing wealth, power, competitiveness, and prestige, should they also value specialization, which so limits people? For one matter, there is simply the historical fact that in sedentary agrarian societies, group members started becoming specialized: artisans, farmers, merchants, soldiers, priests, bureaucrats, rulers. Among these categories were further categories, as among artisans there were masons, sculptors, potters, weavers, metalworkers. The first class among these were rulers; most everyone else in early sedentary agrarian societies farmed and made needed items. The rulers gained their position (as sometimes happened in sedentary forager and agrarian societies) through wealth, prestige, or competitiveness. Absolute tyrants were rare and could not last long, as no matter how strong-armed they tried to be the people could rise up; so they made some attempts at appeasement, such as potlatches (Flannery and Marcus 2012).

However, at this point in the process, at least two forces worked to push the people from farmer/generalists to more specific divisions of labor: (1) The ruler and his family (these rulers being primarily male) tended not to cease accumulating wealth at the first power-enabling point but to keep accumulating, often by exacting tributes; (2) Increasing pressures from other groups settling and claiming territory and resources such as waterways tended to favor those groups that fortified their settlements. These two forces synergized, in that as chiefs were pressured by their ruling position to seek more wealth and power, they had to gain greater territory and bring smaller outlying settlements into their control (Flannery and Marcus 2012). Fortifying settlements in turn required chiefs to seek more wealth and power. There may be said to have been a third or ‘meta’ force driving both of these forces, and that is the one described earlier for what gave sedentary agrarianism an edge over nomadic foraging: women, as a new, third type of specialist, were able to have more children (although everyone died younger), and the population began exploding, at least relative to foragers’.

These forces then induced the need for further specialties beyond these first roles of ruler, farmer, and child-maker: professional soldiers and artisans who could maintain the fortification of the central town and make weapons and other tools. The division between (protected) town and outlying (vulnerable) districts such as farms became more pronounced with increasing types of specialization. In time, there came to be intermediary levels in chiefdom’s territorial organization, as towns intermediary between the central town and the farming villages either grew up or were captured, and even these intermediaries in time developed different levels in the territorial hierarchy. (See Flannery and Marcus 2012, especially Part III, for further elaboration.) Along with these dividing levels of territorial hierarchy were different degrees of specialization, with the central town exhibiting the most. As these central towns became what we would consider cities in size, specialties included bureaucrats (such as tax collectors), sculptors and architects, priests, merchants, and later, scribes and money-lenders.

As was the case with the move from nomadic foraging to sedentary agriculture, it is not evident, and is not very plausible, that someone in the group proposed that everyone move from generalism to specialization. In the former case, those groups that did, however unreflectively, settle down and cultivate so happened to have experienced relatively massive increases in population—despite drastically shortened longevity—and ended up pushing foragers to geographical fringes. In the latter case, those sedentary groups that did fortify, stratify, prevail in aggressions and resist attacks—all of which required specialization—so happened to survive through decades and centuries and even thrive and flourish. It is unlikely that group members of early sedentary agrarian societies prognosticated the eventual potential of specialization and remarked, “We should make each member know only one or two skills very well and most skills not at all, so that one person is just a musician, another a warrior, another a child-maker, and so one day after many centuries there will rich traditions of music and philosophy and great specialized talents will take their specialties to heights currently unimaginable and impossible without specialization.”

Throughout agrarian prehistory and history, throughout the globe, just as peoples began settling and cultivating, so did they begin, by various and erratic routes, valuing wealth, prestige, power-over, competitiveness, and specialization. Now, merely because it turned out that agrarian, increasingly urban societies took such routes, is it *necessary* that human societies adopt such values as they make the shift from nomadic forager to urban cultivator? Or, rather, has the transition just been a contingent fact of history? I believe that the evidence points toward it being, if not entirely necessary, then highly likely to occur, on two grounds: (1) All over the world, during various epochs, where peoples did make such a cultural transition, their cultures came to exhibit such values, and probability would point to that shift in values as being an intrinsic concomitant to the transition. (2) If humans are indeed genetically geared toward egalitarianism, in societies where this quality is suppressed, other values would have to arise to trump it sufficiently to allow the new cultural milieu to survive. That is, the genetic tendency, which developed while pre-humans were evolving into *Homo sapiens* and likely ushered in that evolution, and which had kept upstart, alpha-type behavior at bay, would need some means to overwhelm that tendency. Thus, that alpha-type behavior could return. Specialization is a means by which rulers could more tightly nail themselves into their positions and have society-wide concurring beliefs adding its blow on the nail. From yet another angle, it is evident that the rise of specialization, like the rise of sedentary agrarianism, reflects a retrogression of the species back to its distant prehumen, simian alpha-dominated state.

These five values, which receive a high position in sedentary agrarian societies such as our own and little if any position among nomadic foragers, point toward the individual’s more and more dependent, less and less independent, position as societies moved toward more complicated social structures. Wealth, power-over, prestige, and competitiveness all work to ensure than only a few will come out at what the society deems the “top.” Specialization ensures that every group member is so infinitesimally dependent upon the massed other members’ specialties that it is nigh impossible to be a self, or even be alive, without this conglomerate interdependency. Self-governing a social-delimited self, then, rather than self-governing, is the typifying social operation of such a culture. If nomadic foragers’ values encouraged individuals to be fluid between and outside of groups, sedentary agrarians’ values such as ours render the individual member veritably non-existent without it.

1.6.1. How Childrearing Practices and Social Axiology Illuminate Autonomy

How can childrearing practices and the relative priorities of cultural values help illuminate what autonomy consists in, for which Section 5.4.1 set out to lay the foundation? The question was presented above in two parts, in terms of the comparative inquiry of the two cultural “extremes,” both of which supposedly value individual autonomy—forager cultures and industrialized cultures. The question was whether they both value, within reasonable parity, the same cross-cultural human social phenomenon (“autonomy”), or whether one culture’s practices and beliefs significantly more closely approach this phenomenon than the other. The challenge and purpose here is to nail down what autonomy consists in or how it manifests, while having to rely upon an initial rudimentary common understanding of autonomy. I believe that few people would dispute that individual autonomy somehow involves self-governing. The problem is that “self-governing” is vague: There is a sense in which every human being, even a slave, is to some degree self-governing. What we need to find out is at what point self-governing starts to approximate the level that these two types of cultures explicitly value or aspire to value. How does self-governing manifest beyond this point? Is either culture type getting what the society’s members say they value, or are other prioritized values interfering?

The childrearing practices of industrialized cultures, broadly considered, which heavily stress autonomy, render a great challenge in realizing their ambition for autonomy: The cultures tend also to delimit strongly their children’s behavior and exploration into the world. If these children are simultaneously being inculcated with the concept of individual autonomy, that autonomy would have to play out in a markedly delimited personal space. Thus, the process would run along the lines of: “Pursue your autonomy as you wish but keep it within these strictures we have attempted to narrow in on you from childhood.” By contrast, these children’s forager counterparts are reared with few strictures, albeit to their potential peril. However, that extreme restraint from imposition on the growing children can only reflect (to whatever degree an outsider may want to disapprove) a high value placed on self-governing [[19]](#footnote-19).Thus, by minimizing the strictures placed upon children, foragers raise the threshold for what could be counted as social conditions for autonomy, and the converse for industrialized cultures. In looking to question (1) above, the two types of culture, do not share the same cross-cultural human phenomenon to its fullest extent: That is, both may be experiencing autonomy to some degree; but what one—the industrial—would allow as autonomous, the other would say it is not extensive enough to count as autonomy.

One may draw an illustrative analogy to a continuous spectrum of sugar-water concentrations. One group finds that at concentration *C1* the sugar-water is sweet; another finds that it is sweet at concentration *C2*—although both groups are experiencing the same taste phenomenon at *C1* and *C2*, the latter calls nothing below C2 sweet. Similarly on the continuous spectrum of degree of self-governing, one allows that from degree *D1* and higher the self-governing can be deemed autonomy, but the other group allows that only from *D2* and higher can the individual be experiencing autonomy. At *D1* and *D2*, the phenomena are different although along the single spectrum of degree (concentration).

Is there any further way to reach beyond an apparently purely social relativity and determine better whether one of these degrees *D1* or *D2* of self-governing reflects a more plausible claim to individual autonomy? The comparative inquiry into the matrix of values within each type of culture can help here.

1.6.2. How Axiological Context May Help Illuminate Autonomy

As described above, Western industrialized cultures generally place a high value on, among other values, wealth accumulation, competitiveness, prestige, power-over, and specialization. By contrast, nomadic forager cultures disvalue these qualities (with perhaps only a slight value on non-exclusive specialization, whereby each member may have an expertise but generally be capable of most tasks in the culture). Note that in the former type of culture, necessarily only some members come out the winner in competition, as not everyone wins a race; only some will have power-over, as there must be some individuals over whom the powerful exert power; only a few will have wealth; only some, because of practicality, will garner prestige or renown for their prestige; and all will be heavily delimited by strict specialties, and no human being can be professionally competent in all the millions of kinds of tasks in industrialized cultures. If self-governing requires that a person be able to navigate through life competently and with minimal social handicaps, and if poverty in these societies is, as is commonly acknowledged by social and political observers, a hindrance on the impoverished, then at least a large fraction of members of such societies will not be self-governing, despite the cultural value of such quality. This fact does not mean that such a culture does not really value autonomy, but only that the end result of its combined values is that not everyone achieves autonomy, whatever exactly that is.

However, poverty is not the only hindrance to sustaining self-governorship. I put this problem into another perspective: “Poverty” in such cultures is understood to be a condition in which one is hindered from achieving one’s individual goals as should be achievable within the society’s value. While governmental economic agencies arbitrarily set poverty levels, they set it as at least approximations of the minimal level of economic capacity needed for minimal self-governing. However, considering that few members will attain a notable level of, for example, power over others, through industrial or political means, it is appropriate to inquire whether so-called poverty lines indeed reflect sufficiently the social conditions needed to achieve self-governorship. Thus, not only are the lower classes hindered by their economic (and other) conditions, but members above this line are hindered by the overall social conditions as well: by others’ power over them, by the lack of sufficient prestige and wealth.

One may object that pointing to the social structures built from the foundations of these values cannot account for any member’s failing to achieve autonomy. It is presumably up to those persons to work within the system—the society’s social, economic, and political mechanisms—to achieve autonomy. The few who have power over the rest, for example, cannot be said to be a hindrance, even if they define certain delimitations that would not exist otherwise. After all, some social delimitations are always needed and are always there, even in nomadic foraging societies. Furthermore, those with power-over need those over whom they have power and, at least in democracies, cannot stray too far from what is humanly tolerable, or the masses will not accede. However, in response to this objection, this very attitude itself is paternalistic, asserting that at base those with power-over know the best interests of those over whom they exert power. Paternalism itself, as a method by which to direct the wills of others, runs counter to self-governing. (But see Conly 2013.)

There is then good reason to doubt that a great many members of such industrial society are in a good position to achieve self-governorship. Those with power over them, or wealth, or great prestige impose, however intentionally, significant delimitations upon their potential self-governing. It may seem then that only those in the top percentages of wealth, prestige, and power are in a position for true self-governing. However, it is not evident that they are. If those with little or no power, wealth, or prestige have their options and actions—their self-governing—heavily delimited by those with power over them, in turn those with power and wealth have their options constrained by what the masses will take. That is, instead of this social structure’s realizing a notable independence for its individual members, it generates a greater interdependence among its members, including for those who rank in the upper extreme percentages of wealth, power, and prestige.

Specialization is a manifestation of this knotted over-interdependence (KO). The miniscule upper sub-percentile are specialists, as are the masses whom they depend upon. They could no more be competent in a significantly greater amount of the many millions of tasks than could one from the lower percentiles. It is apparent that the likelihood that anyone will happen upon the choice of option that really does fulfill their life, aspirations, and capacities (beyond relationships and other factors; see below) is inversely proportional that the profuseness of the amount of tasks. Pure probability against this massive number of tasks means that most people will not happen upon what sort of work will fulfill their potential. At most, an individual may have the opportunity to try a handful or two of tasks during a lifetime, rarely happening upon the fitting one.

By contrast, a nomadic forager culture may have a dozen task types, permitting most members to try out or become at least competent in these tasks while finding the one that best exercises one’s capacities. One then has a better chance of developing that expertise that does use one’s capacities, crucial to being a self-governing member. One is also then better disposed to function outside the social system, if needed (as happens when individuals seek other groups, as for marriage)—another mark of individual independence. Highly complicated industrial societies, in their enormity preclude the likelihood the individual will find a place within it, or “actualize potentiality,” in Gewirth’s (1998: 8)) terminology. At the same time, whatever specialized task that the agent has ended up in contributes its fractional part to the whole economy. In the valuing of specialization, the individual’s filling some slot, so that the whole functions, ends up affecting personal worth than it does, dubiously, the individual’s need to find an emotional and intellectual fit to the task, as some social observers have noted (Marx 1963, Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, Gewirth 1998).

Certainly, in terms of life satisfaction or fulfillment, more is important than one’s predominant social-economic task, whether that be foraging or compiling sales statistics in a soft-drink’s international corporate office. Personal relationships, extracurricular social activities, hobbies, and religious faith may contribute to overall fulfillment (cite) However, the valuing (as in industrial cultures) or disvaluing (as among foragers) of specialization under discussion here refers to daily economic tasks and their contribution to or subtraction of autonomy. To this extent, it appears that specialization tends to subtract from self-governing.

Returning now to this section’s goal and challenge, I first recap them. The goal is to clench a more complete understanding of what autonomy as a human social phenomenon consist in, although having to build upon the vague common notion that it has to do with self-governing. A major problem here is whether both types of cultures discussed value, within reasonable parity, the same cross-cultural human social phenomenon, or whether one culture type’s practices and beliefs significantly more closely approach this phenomenon than the other. At what point does self-governing start to approximate the level that these two types of culture explicitly value or aspire to value? In this context I first examined childrearing practices but found that they were ambiguous as to whether the degrees of self-governing experienced in either type of culture differ or whether they each have a different threshold or tolerance level for self-governing so that what one would allow is autonomy would not, in the other’s reckoning, merit the label. I then turned to the overall matrix of values in either culture type in hopes this would help crystallize an answer to this challenge and thereby reach the goal. I believe that the results of this second examination should help the inquiry in the following way:

Culture type *C1* purportedly values self-governing and individual independence while disvaluing those qualities *Q1, …, Qn*, and actively, often cognizantly, discouraging their appearance in society, as qualities that would diminish self-governing and individual independence. Culture type *C2* purportedly values self-governing and individual independence while highly valuing those qualities *Q1, …, Q1* (wealth, power-over, competitiveness, prestige, specialization) that lead to intricate KO of individuals, not their independence; thus, their being governed by others at the expense of governing themselves. If the members of cultures *C2* do call their condition “autonomy,” then it is evident that they deem a level of social phenomenon “autonomous” that members of culture types *C1* could not deem autonomy. This comparison of the respective matrices of cultural value matrices indicates that one culture type, *C1*, is requiring, on what appears to be a scaling of social phenomenon experienced similarly among both culture types, a higher degree of the experience of the phenomenon in order to qualify as autonomy, compared with the degree the other culture type *C2* allows as the threshold for autonomy. (Another reading of the comparative study could maintain that culture types *C1* actually realize in practice their value of autonomy, while culture types *C2* uphold a value but rarely, if ever, experience it in practice. For now I refrain from wholly endorsing this potentially divisive reading.)

This finding helps to disambiguate the result the examination of childrearing practices—which practices, though, in light of the finding about cultural-value matrices, can corroborate the finding that culture types *C1* do indeed not only highly value autonomy but *C1* members experience a higher degree of it in practice than do members of culture types C2. Children in culture types *C1* are raised highly permissively in order to develop them into highly independent, self-governing adults, whereas children in *C2* cultures are raised more strictly so that adults may fit into highly restrictive, markedly interdependent adulthood. Members of either culture type apparently do experience the social phenomena of self-governing and individual independence along the same scale, simply having different scaler thresholds at which they would declare the phenomenon “autonomy” (if what they experience along this scale is indeed autonomy at all).

1.7. Clearer as to What Autonomy Consists In

With the results of this comparative study it should be possible to offer a more perspicacious understanding of what autonomy consists in. Autonomy as a social phenomenon cannot be determined as isolable from the broader social context, particularly that of other values and how they manifest. One does have to build the explication of autonomy upon the common notion that it somehow involves self-governing. But self-governing demands a degree of individual independence. In order to realize individuals’ independence, humans, given the kind of social beings they are, require that other social values allow independence to develop. Other matrices of social values, such as those in C2 cultures, in fact prevent the development of individual independence and, especially through the values of power-over and specialization, lead to profound KO. One may thereby have an empirically informed understanding of what individual autonomy consists:

**Def**. *Individual autonomy* consists in a social valuing of individual independence—specifically a valuing of self-governing—high enough that other social values allow its development by adulthood and do not debilitate it by increasing individuals’ interdependence within the society.

Autonomy, being socially defined, requires that social definition be a part of its own definition. Understanding what it consists in demands this social context.

Some readers may object that this definition of autonomy runs entirely against our commonsense notions of society and particularly of modern industrial society. We generally believe and can avouch that our contemporary society only *increases* autonomy compared with what humans have experienced. Furthermore, the rich smorgasbord of choices, of life options, only increases the possibility for greater autonomy, hardly diminishing it as the argument implies. The masses in ancient Rome and the cities of Medieval Europe lived greatly foreshortened, diseased, oppressed, and mostly miserable lives. The medicines, household appliances, personal electronic devices, and transport systems bestow on individuals a remarkable freedom to explore the world, enrich connections to other people, stimulate imaginations, and thereby heighten autonomy. In short, the analysis herein counters all established notions of autonomy: Complexity of society only aids, hardly hampers, autonomy.

I would be hard put to deny that the masses in ancient Rome, urban and rural Dark Ages Europe, and other highly oppressive loci in the past were worse off in most ways than the masses in modern Western Europe or Canada. Certainly contemporary industrial-society life options are much more abundant than in most civilizations past. But the objection misses the point on several counts:

1) The common notion is that autonomy somehow involves positive self-governing, and self-governing requires individual independence. The point is that autonomy requires personal independence. Complex contemporary societies powerfully demand individual interdependence: the more complex the society, the more intricately knotted the interdependence. Whatever value one may hold on intricate KO (I return to this matter shortly), it counters individual independence and thus autonomy. It would be an interesting argument to say that the more intricately knotted the interdependence, the greater the individual’s independence; but I do not see how to make that argument cogent.

2) The objection railroads over the point that, after some minimal number in the amount of task types that a society multiplies, the greater those life options, the much more detailed the task,[[20]](#footnote-20) and the less likely a person could find a fulfilling specialty. While Marxian analysis have contended that the alienation of labor because of capital ownership has made tasks meaningless (see Marx 1963), the argument here is that it is the extreme isolating detail of the tasks, and thereby their alienation from the rest of the individual’s life as an eating, reproducing, organic, mortal being, that leads to the tasks’ generation of anomie. Most important, though, is that the sheer enormity of choices renders it impossible for every individual to try enough tasks to see which best fits. Probability would hold that the individual will just have to grab for whatever one can.

3) Complexity alone does not mean amenability with the value of autonomy. Consider highly complex contemporary societies such as North Korea or the so-called Islamic state “DAESH.”

4) The objection misses the point that the comparison in my study is not between contemporary urban/agrarian cultures and ancient ones but rather between contemporary urban/agrarian (industrial) cultures and nomadic foraging ones Although many members of the former kind of cultures may believe that, due to myriad transport types and medicines, they experience greater autonomy than ever before in human existence, their notion may not conform with facts about what autonomy consists in. One may consider the possibility that owning and driving a car about town and country may not be providing autonomy but a genre of sensation.

Another objection is that the argument in this article puts the prospect of interdependency into a negative light. By contrast, social interdependence has been lauded by some schools of social and political philosophy, including some communitarian and feminist outlooks (MacIntyre 1984, Veltman and Piper 2014). Social interdependence has been described as an intrinsic, if not necessary, fact of human society. I find this objection significant because it brings up the issue of the argument’s methodology and stance on interdependence. My point here is not to laud or decry interdependence but to examine how it weighs in overall human social ontology (that is, as that ontology has arisen beginning with early human society among nomadic foragers). This social ontology reveals that this degree of social interdependence seen in contemporary industrial societies is indeed not intrinsic or necessary to human society but is only contingent upon a type (or types) of culture. The further point, then, is to show that, given this intricate interdependence of society members, individuals from the least prestigious and wealthy to the most have a steep uphill climb to reach a modicum of self-governorship, whatever value the culture may believe that it gives to autonomy. In this context, then, I lead up to the article’s major point about autonomy: If one does indeed highly value autonomy, one should consistently not highly value those qualities that, when culturally valued, tend toward KO and away from individual independence. In short, if one values autonomy, one should value equality in the anthropological sense described in Miller2023 The next section presents this argument.

1.8. Autonomy in the Condition of EqualityA

The argument, following upon the previous section, is this: If one truly values individual autonomy, then one must value those social conditions in which society members can indeed enjoy autonomy.[[21]](#footnote-21) Social conditions in which wealth accumulation, prestige, power-over and related qualities are highly valued undermine autonomy (and these values, given significantly great priority over other values, may preclude autonomy). Thus, if one highly values autonomy, one will disvalue wealth accumulation, prestige, power over others, as well as competitiveness and specialization.

Furthermore, the corollary is that valuing autonomy would not only disvalue those qualities undermining it but would value those social qualities that foster it. EqualityA in the sense understood here operates to disvalue those qualities undermining autonomy and thereby to allow autonomy to manifest. I have not shown in this article that equalityA directly fosters autonomy, but the evidence given so far indicates that it indirectly supports it by vigilantly weeding out those social qualities that undermine it. EqualityA then at least permits autonomy, and it appears that without equalityA, autonomy will have no chance to grow and blossom. Thus, because equalityA indirectly supports autonomy and without it autonomy is undermined, those who value autonomy would value equalityA.

An objection is that this connection between valuing autonomy and valuing equalityA is only contingent—upon the way human societies so happened to have developed—but not upon necessary truths about equalityA and autonomy. Thus, one can conceive of populations of divine rational beings who were autonomous but not equal. Perhaps they dwelled in different realms, such that divine being type *DB1* lived in realm *R1*, *DB2* lived in *R2*, and so on; and each of these realms had different amounts of advantageous presence before the Supreme Being or other social condition that had absolute value. And yet within each realm the divine being could live in complete self-governorship and individual autonomy.

In response, I am not in a position to judge whether such beings are conceivable. I also cannot establish here, within the delimitations of the subject matter, whether what is conceivable is realizable, and whether what is conceivable delimits the extent of *a priori* truths or whether what is realizable does thusly delimit, nor even what exactly distinguishes the conceivable from the realizable. From the beginning of this book I have set out the goal to be that of examining and clarifying certain key concepts of political philosophy from the perspective of the kinds of being that humans are. This approach then does seemingly diverge from the Kantian of aiming to establish key concepts in moral philosophy *a priori*, for all rational beings, and then turning to “anthropology” to fit the *a priori* notions to the kind of beings humans are.

I have already spoken to the matter of to what degree my approach differs from this Kantian one (§1.1.). The Kantian approach, and all approaches, I have contended, depend upon some delineation of what kind of beings humans are even when setting out to derive allegedly *a priori* principles. In this book, I am elaborating such delineation of what kind of beings humans are by turning early on in the process to anthropology and related sciences, all for clarifying the terms and their underlying concepts, and then setting out to build a philosophical case that cannot be derived empirically. This approach is then distinctly human-based (not, more broadly, all-rational-beings-based), without being reductionist in the end. For those readers who insist that all principles of philosophy, including political, be derived solely from *a priori* principles, this approach will be objectionable from the start. This present objection arises only with such a philosophical approach as that of this book’s sort; it is thereby irrelevant to the present approach. Other readers, who do not except accept this book’s methodology should accept that this objection does not apply to the book’s argument.

Other possible objections have been dealt with earlier, while developing the points leading up to this one. For now I let rest the case that those who value autonomy should by logical implication, based on empirical facts, value equalityA, equality in the anthropological sense.

2. Equality and Freedom

2.1. The Concept of Freedom

The discussion to follow in this section uses the terms “freedom” and “liberty” in different, defined ways instead of as thoroughly interchangeable synonyms as is common in political philosophy. Freedom is herein understood to be a social condition in which people may (or may not) live. Liberty is considered as a political determination, that is, the goal of a certain kind of policy that seeks to guarantee citizens’ freedom. Thus, freedom is a social end that liberty as a political means attempts to establish. While this definitional distinction is not universally used, for this essay it is helpful to distinguish the two aspects of what may be a single concept, or at least two closely related concepts.[[22]](#footnote-22) This terminology then has something in common with Williams’ (2001) distinction between “primitive freedom” and “liberty,” as when he sets forth primitive freedom as a basic (social or individual) condition and liberty requires a political claim to a value.

Primitive freedom is not itself that political value. We can see this by considering an idea which arises as soon as we have the conditions of the political, that is to say, an authority, together with appeals to that authority. This is the idea of a *claim in liberty*. (12; emphasis in original)

My usage is thus not unprecedented. As there are some differences between what I am setting forth about freedom and liberty in the next few paragraphs and what Williams (2001)sets forth, I can only avouch for what I provide about these terms and do not append to them Williams’ (very insightful) argument.

There is further justification for my usage, indicating it is not arbitrary but has some empirical foundation, and that is Pitkin’s (1988) scrupulous philological inquiry into the difference between the two English terms “freedom” and “liberty.” Pitkin acknowledges that, whereas German and French alike have only one related term in their vocabulary—*Freiheit* and *liberté*, respectively—English has retained the two related terms, and careful empirical examination reveals they are not entirely interchangeable terms. She marshals etymological, historical, and current-usage evidence to back the proposition that philosophers would secure greater precision and clarity in their discussions were they to respect and abide by these two terms’ distinctiveness. The fact that French and German have only their single term does not entail that English’s two are wholly conflatable (nor does it mean that the German and French terms themselves do not have shades that correspond to the two English terms’ differences that she sets forth). In fact, the two terms have separate linguistic origins, “freedom,” like “*Freiheit,*” being Germanic and “liberty” Latin. After extensive etymological analysis, though, Pitkin finds the words’ sources provide a sufficiently clear distinction in meaning to account for the division between them that did arise historically. As with much English vocabulary after the Norman conquest of 1066, many Latin-derived words came to be associated with the ruling classes, the Germanic with the lower classes. “Freedom” and “liberty” were subject to this division to a great degree. As she traces it, this division of meaning (not so much in class-distinctive usage) persists in today’s common usages of the words.

T seems that in the first centuries following the conquest, freedom was for the conquered natives a relatively blunt, tangible, and total condition that one either had or lacked, almost an aspect of what one was, whether an external physical condition of unobstructed space and movement, or a legal status of not being subject to another, or a psychic state manifested in spontaneity. For the conquering elite, by contrast, liberty was more formal and legal, a matter of degree and detail, a collection of specific rights and privileges granted or withheld., even if truly appropriate only to those of high birth and correspondingly noble character. (Pitkin 1988, pp. 538-539)

Pitkin’s investigation into current common usage looks into how the “liber-” family of words across many grammatical categories matches with those of the “free-” family, and there are remarkable differences. For example, “’freely’ and ‘liberally’ hardly overlap in meaning at all,” (540) a difference reflecting the history of the “free-” and “liber-” word families. As another example, “there is no equivalent in the ‘liber-’ family to a free person in the sense of psychic freedom, inner autonomy, ego strength, authenticity.” (542) After going through a large number of words from these two word families and how their meanings often do not match up or lack equivalents between the two families, Pitkin draws some strong conclusions.

1) “freedom is more likely to be holistic, to be more a total condition or state of being, while liberty is more likely to be plural and piecemeal.” (542)

2) “freedom is more likely than liberty to be psychic, inner, and integral to the self.” (542)

3) “freedom includes unobstructed space and movement, even of inanimate objects; liberty does not.” (542)

4) “one might venture the hypothesis that (freedom) will seem more complex, mysterious, and ‘deeper,’ while liberty will seem to reside securely in the rational surface of things.” (542-543)

In sum:

Liberty seems to concern something more rational, formal, and limited than freedom; it concerns rules and exceptions within a system of rules. It concerns neither objects, incapable of rule-governed conduct, nor the depths of the psyche from which spontaneity springs. (543)

Pitkin’s distinction can then be seen to correspond markedly with the distinction I am making between them in this article, freedom being a social condition or state of being, and liberty a formalism, usually political, to help ensure that people experience freedom. Despite her well-argued proposal about these terms, they are still used interchangeably in much of the philosophical literature. However, persuasive though her argument may be, my purpose in this section is not to corroborate or censure her argument or even to convince all readers of its validity but merely to set forth and clarify my terminology and indicate it is not whimsical and can be substantiated.

Another terminology set, this one more common in the literature, distinguishes freedom-to from freedom-for (Berlin 1958, Gould 2014). While Williams (2001) finds this distinction blurry if unnecessary, I find these two terms helpful because the distinction offers a start in trying to break down or analyze the concept of freedom. Otherwise, without some kind of analysis, freedom appears to be a peculiarly elusive concept in its very nature.[[23]](#footnote-23) Consider that freedom seems to be a phenomenon partly concerned with eluding confines or delimitations. Definition, of course (by definition!), is a delimitation. In its elusiveness, “freedom” as a concept falls in with that of “nothing,” the concepts behind which terms seem to wriggle right out of language’s hands, never to be grabbed and held. Either term, as Keats observed about an urn’s artwork, “doth tease us out of thought, as doth eternity.”

Consider, for example, freedom to be not only relative (according to different social conditions) but also absolute. What would absolute freedom be? To have no body and to dart anywhere in the universe, elude gravity and take on any form or no form at all, to be of any substance, to change the very essence of the being that is changing, to go anywhere in time? The myth of Proteus may seem to be one of absolute freedom. The problem with Proteus and absolute freedom is that it is hard to say just what is the thing that is free. If the thing can change its very form, its essence and substance, it is hard to say that thing *T1* before such change has anything in common with thing *T2* after such change, and thus what is the thing that is enjoying the freedom. Although this metaphysical discussion could go further, one way to resolve it is to acknowledge that there is justification for saying there is at least a persisting thing that enjoys freedom, and as a persisting thing has some degree of persisting form and essence; its form and essence impose some delimitation upon what it can do. Freedom, it appears, then comes into the picture when we can say whether the set of activities that the thing is actually capable of doing coincides with the set of the activities it in fact does in the course of its existence. Thus, from this analysis come two facets of its actions: those which it is capable of doing, and those which it in fact does during its existence. As for the former, the question is a matter of (say a list) of all it can do. As for the latter, the question is a matter of whether, in actual circumstances, it carries out these acts, either via pure matter-of-circumstance of which opportunities present themselves, or of what directly hinders it.[[24]](#footnote-24) If during its existence it encountered no interference with or hindrance to its activities, it was free from any such hindrance. Thus, we could say it experienced complete freedom from hindrance. However, if it did experience some hindrances, it was not free from them. On the other hand, if it experienced no such hindrance, we could say that it was left free to do any of the activities from its list of capabilities.[[25]](#footnote-25) Thus, when we start to look at the basis of what freedom must consist in, not only does absolute freedom not register as constitutive of freedom, but also freedom-from and freedom-to are necessary aspects of it.

I do not mean to imply that *human* freedom must coincide with the list of a human’s complete possible activities. A complete list of human activities would include such activities as first-degree homicide and the elimination of the human species. As Kant well-argued, some activities would negate or nullify the very possibility of activities. To eliminate the human species would be to nullify all human activity. It is reasonable to ask whether such an act does indeed merit a place on the list of potential human activities for that list to qualify as one of freedom (freedom-to). That is, perhaps the list of activities necessary to qualify as those constituting human freedom may be a subset of all possible human actions.

2.2. Kant and Freedom

Kant (1993) famously argued that we need to include that entire list of potential human activities as ones we should have the choice of doing in order for us to qualify as truly human (rational) beings. Certainly, a rational (human) being would opt not to undertake such acts as first-degree homicide or eliminating the human species. But if we do not have the option to choose against such acts, we are not truly masters of a rational faculty and we do not freely will our acts.

I do not mean entirely to endorse this Kantian solution to this quandary of freedom. For one reason, Kant is trying to resolve the metaphysical problem of free will in establishing a rational basis for practical reasoning. For another, in the *Grounding* he interchanges “freedom” with “freedom of the will,” or confounds the two, so that in most places where he mentions “freedom” he is referring to freedom of will. In this essay I am not concerned with resolving the metaphysical issue of free will. However, whether the issue were ever resolved in a libertarian, compatibilist, or determinist manner, Kant’s concern with free will pertains to the discussion of freedom in this section, in the following way:

In many ways, Kant sees individual agents and their wills as microcosms of the political realm. The individual agent must act as though sovereign legislator of the maxims upon which one acts. The state is a “kingdom” of such individual sovereigns acting together in freedom. The will, which Kant sees as necessarily deemed free if the agent is to act as a rational, moral agent, is a microcosm of the sovereign state, which, being itself as a “kingdom” of such wills, must act in freedom if it is to be composed of agents who themselves act as free rational agents. It is hard to say if Kant in his many works on the subject ever explicitly exhorts the state officially to sanction such freedom through policy, but he does endorse democracy as a possible, practicable political solution for optimizing citizens’ functioning as free rational agents (1991, 1993). Freedom as sanctioned at level of state policy would be an instance of what I am calling “liberty.” Freedom in this terminology would be social condition in which agents operate, whatever the state policy on the matter; so freedom could vary in degrees according to the stricture of the state (if there is even a state or equivalent policymaker, as in a chiefdom). If there is no state or equivalent political or social policy limiting freedom, agents probably experience a relatively full degree of freedom. This understanding of freedom is then descriptive. Kant’s freedom, by contrast, assuming a metaphysical understanding about the free will, is concerned with how we must consider the will in formulating deliberate actions if we are to function as fully rational moral agents: Kant’s freedom thereby has a prescriptive element.

In my terminology, liberty can also come in degrees. Policy or social custom may limit freedom or give it greater rein. Table 5.4. sums up this discussion of the parallels and contrasts between Kant’s characterization of freedom (and free will) and that in this section.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Individual level | Group level |
| Analogy with Kant | In PT and KT, freedom is needed for autonomy | In PT and KT, freedom of the group is a function of the freedom of the individuals. |
| Disanalogy with Kant | In KT, freedom is a free will and is all-or-nothing.  In PT, freedom is experienced by individuals as a social condition, and can vary from state to state | In KT, the sovereign state is a “kingdom” of individual rational agents legislating to the moral law, whereby it is all-or-nothing.  In PT, the state sanctions freedom, which can thereby vary |

Table 5.4. Summary of differences between Kant’s terminological understanding of “freedom” (or KT for “Kant’s terminology”) and that of the present terminology (PT) in this chapter.

I have gone into some detail about the role Kant gives to freedom in the metaphysics of morals because he offers as well a conceptual connection between freedom and autonomy. I acknowledge that not everyone concurs that his connection is definitive, if only because the connection seems to depend upon his metaphysical notion of free will. However, I hope to use this connection as a springboard and show that whatever one’s metaphysical take on free will (deterministic, libertarian), degree of freedom does rely upon degree of autonomy and vice versa, and degree of liberty and of autonomy are likewise interrelated. By the end of this article I hope to establish, parallel to the discussion about autonomy in earlier sections, that if one values freedom, one must value equalityA. (or if one fully values freedom, one does value equalityA.

2.3. Positive and Negative Freedom

As I mentioned, the concepts of freedom-to and freedom-from seem to correspond strongly to that of positive freedom and negative freedom, respectively. These latter two concepts have seen plenty currency, spurred largely perhaps by Berlin (1958); bringing them in here, in the context of freedom and liberty, can help position liberty and freedom (freedom-to/from) in the sociopolitical context. As I have contended, freedom in and of itself, from the most basic characterization of it, for animate or inanimate objects, comprises both freedom-to and freedom-from. However, some concepts of liberty, such as Nozick’s (1975) and possibly Mill’s (1952), emphasize negative freedom, which corresponds to freedom-from. That is, freedom-to and freedom-from constitute two necessary qualities of freedom most generally considered, for any kind of object, whether animate or inanimate. In the philosophical literature, “positive freedom” and “negative freedom” have been concepts applied to exclusively to animate beings, specifically those who are considered to act as agents. Insofar as “negative freedom” has referred to freedom from (external) hindrances, it corresponds to freedom-from. Specifically, it is apparently a proper subset of freedom-from that applies to agents. By default, positive freedom would correspond to freedom-to, as a proper subset. The analogy of the two set of terms is not complete, however, and this incompleteness points to a potential paradox.

As I have contended, for all objects in general freedom consists in freedom-to and freedom-from, and that should include human agents. However, there has been substantial objection as to whether positive freedom is necessarily definitional of human freedom, although all seem to concur that negative freedom is necessary to freedom. The worry has been that if one merely accedes positive freedom is necessary to freedom and attempts to define it, then one sets out on an inexorable fall into totalitarianism and thereby negating freedom (Nozick 1975). The double-headed paradox is that: either positive freedom for human agents means no freedom for human agents or, more broadly, while freedom-from applies to all objects, freedom-to applies only to inanimate objects but not to agents.

I believe this looming problem can be solved, as I detailed in footnote 73: Acknowledging positive freedom does not mean that the entire sequence of entailments must thence follow to totalitarianism. The alleged sequence is that admitting positive freedom requires (1) a self divided into conflicted selves (conflicted desires), thence to (2) some selves’ being more rational than others, thence to (3) some agents’ being more rational than others, thence to (4) these agents having jurisdiction over others, thence (5) totalitarianism and the absence of freedom. The most important alleged step here is that from (2) to (3) and (5). There is no sound reasoning as to why admitting that one’s own desires include more and less rational ones entails there is a sound way to determine whether some agents *in toto* are more rational than others and, most important, those agents have any ethical incumbency to guide the “less rational.” That is, there is lack of justification for why agents’ giving priority to their rational desires must entail that allegedly more rational agents should guide the entire lives of the allegedly less rational (instead of seeing their entire set of desires, whether rational or no, conflicting or no, as a non-analyzable, indivisible whole).

It seems false that we should not recognize such a thing as positive freedom because it may undermine the whole concept of freedom, which is thus seen as composed exclusively of negative freedom. The fear may be that, if one does acknowledge that positive freedom is part of freedom, then there may be, in practical applications, a need to encroach on some citizens’ negative freedom in order to ensure others’ positive freedom. For example, if positive freedom is understood as the freedom to self-actualization and, given certain types of societies (such as industrial ones), individuals need recourse to certain resources, encroachment on others via taxes may be required. However, fearing such a potential end-result cannot justify one’s denying the need of the concept of positive freedom for that of freedom in order to circumvent the unwanted result.

By this outlook opposing positive freedom, to be free, an agent at least must be free from hindrances imposed by others, particularly by governments. Whatever the agent is then free to do is, of course, left to the agent, not to the observer and prescriber of liberty, as if merely describing such freedom-to would constitute a hindrance in itself. Mill (1952) and others do allow that whatever freedom-to for human beings may turn out to consist in, it cannot restrict others’ freedom-to. That is, we are to be free-from interference from others’ freedom-to. But as I have emphasized, freedom-to, like freedom *in general*, as a whole, cannot be absolute; it is delimited by the type of thing experiencing the freedom. It is therefore not apparent that describing the freedom-to to some extent, so long as it is accurate and faithful to this type of being, need impinge upon the freedom-from of that being or any other. Thence some recent efforts at describing this freedom-to broadly for human beings: Whatever their accuracy and faithfulness to the kind of beings humans are, these efforts cannot be faulted solely for the attempt to describe freedom-to.

Gould (1988, 2004, 2014) and others (Berlin 1958) have attempted to adumbrate positive freedom, or freedom-to for human agents, *according to the type of beings humans are, although not necessarily essentialist or assuming humans have a* fixed *nature*. According to Gould (1988), for example, the two traditional theories of freedom—that of “the liberal individualist conception of free choice and the absence of constraint or the essentialist conception of action in accordance with one’s nature” (45), which “supports notions of race, social class, or gender superiority of the dominant groups” (44), are both inadequate. Instead, she looks beyond human nature more broadly to what kind of beings humans are as agents (my wording): “what marks off human actions from mere bodily motions or causally determined responses is that they are consciously oriented to some end.” (45). People are agents with goals and life-plans, in an ongoing, revising “process of self-development.” Now, what constitutes self-development may vary from person to person; nowhere within this range can one impinge on others’ freedom. But this freedom of self-development is integral to human action and to any complete theory of freedom. Gould calls this freedom-to “equal positive freedom,” and in her reckoning, this freedom-to, when fully recognized under the policy of liberty, as I interpret it, calls on a sociopolitical response that extends beyond the delimitations of negative liberty.

Those who support only negative liberty may object that such positive liberty encroaches on the limits of others’ liberty. However, there is some disingenuousness in insisting that all human liberty cannot impose delimitations on one’s liberties, because negative liberty already does so. The objector may fairly protest that the delimitations of, for example, equal positive freedom define *too strongly* a delimitation of one’s freedoms, but not the mere fact that such positive liberty imposes a delimitation tout court. What the negative-liberty-only side misses is that what is pushing outward from the center—the agent’s will—toward the delimitations imposed by other agents is what is sometimes called the “will,” that is freedom-to.

As I discussed above, for all objects, to have freedom-from and vice versa, there must be freedom-to. What seems to concern is Gould and other commentators is that, when one takes into account what specific kind of being is a human, that freedom-to takes on a more expansive freedom than that for, say, a shooting proton, humans being constituted of goals, life plans, and “self-development.” What is crucial here, and what I return to soon, is that there is some condition, freedom, which must consist in both positive and negative freedom, and there is sociopolitical policy which recognizes and possibly protects freedom, which policy is liberty, and policy for liberty may recognize one or both of these aspects of freedom.

It should be apparent that freedom for humans, as well as for simpler entities, can be analyzed at least to freedom-to and freedom-from. A further analysis, such as that of MacCallum (1967), looks to freedom as a triadic relation among the agent, constraints upon the agent and what the agent may become. I find this analysis at least compatible with Gould (1988, 2014)—as Gould examines just what kind of thing counts as an agent—and consistent with the analysis I have provided. While MacCallum, though, is specifying the free (or unfree) object as agent and speaks to how we must consider what counts as an agent and what counts as an intention and an obstruction, I am generalizing to all acting objects, not just agents.[[26]](#footnote-26) The lesson from the triadic analysis is that we must know what kind of being whose freedom we are assessing before we can assess whether that being is free.[[27]](#footnote-27)

To sum this section, my main points are that we need to distinguish between freedom as a state of being, particularly a social condition that humans experience, and liberty as a sociopolitical policy. Both freedom-to and freedom-from are essential parts of freedom, even though liberty may emphasize one or the other. Further, what kind of being whose freedom we are concerned with is important in defining in what freedom-to and freedom-from consist, meaning that we should recognize the triadic relation between the being, its freedom-to, and its freedom-from for a full understanding of its freedom.

3. From Autonomy to Freedom

3.1. Kant’s and Dworkin’s Attempts

Chapter Six of Miller 2022 (pp. 177-186), details how these two theorists handle the connection from the given concept of autonomy to that of freedom. Readers should consult those sections. I should note here a few more pointers to consider concerning Dworkin’s outlook on this issue.

Dworkin describes adjustments necessary for realizing the same goals of equality and liberty seen in the desert-island auction. The challenge here is that ownership and “a comprehensive auction can scarcely even be described.” (163) So a new “Theory of Improvement” (162) is needed to adumbrate “what counts as an egalitarian improvement” (163) and “defensible egalitarian distributions” (169) Adjusting the goal of equality of resources to the “real real” world is of course the ultimate challenge. This move requires what he dubs “the principle of victimization” (175) to retain equality of resources in this context of prior ownership and political intricacies. This principle, one most likely, I imagine, to provoke criticism,

denies that liberty is violated when no one is victimized [and yet] denies that equality can be improved when someone is victimized…. So the principle reconciles liberty and equality in the real world of practical and imperfect politics. Liberty, it insists, demands nothing but the freedom of genuine equality, and equality cannot be served by any outrage to liberty? (175-177)

Again, I neither defend nor criticize this effort of unification but only summarize it. Dworkin tests his formulation by seeing how it would hold up in three example situations.

The first is that of a policy limiting the amounts a citizen can spend on a political candidate. As this case only prevents the loss of freedom for everyone by precluding the unfair suasion of elections, it retains liberty and equality of resources. More difficult is the policy to abolish private medicine, as this seems a case not merely of financial constraints, as in the first case, but of health and the quality of this life itself. Dworkin sees this matter could lead to a defensible distribution if services are improved sufficiently in national health services to the point of matching whatever in private medicine, if anything, could be attained, preserving both freedom and equality of resources. A third case involves a court ruling on whether statutes can regulate hours and wages employers can impose upon employees, which seemingly could victimize immigrant workers able and willing to fulfill demanding conditions. Summarizing his long argument, Dworkin finds that such a statute “was not wrong if it was part of a more general program advancing its conception of equality without victimizing any persons or actions of the community.” (179)

3.2. The Naturalistic View on Equality and Liberty

First I note a point only tacit in my previous work’s discussions. EqualityA, or equality in the anthropological sense, can be considered as inclusive of many—although possibly not all—interpretations of equality. Chapter Two of Miller2023 listed nine egalitarian traits which anthropologists have observed as common to nomadic foraging societies (even if not every foraging society exhibits all nine traits or each trait to the same extent). For reader convenience I recapitulate these:

1. Headmen are impeachable advisors, with little power over others; their role is not inherited and the group can dismiss them.

2. They must exhibit generosity, even-temperament, and self-control

3. Group practices weed out upstarts and free-riders.

4. Group practices as a whole exhibit generosity, sharing foods and most goods.

5. Group practices sanction against wealth accumulation (thus anything inherited).

6. Social constraints preclude building prestige.

7. Group sharing encourages cooperation and discourages competition.

8. There is a strong cultural valuing of personal autonomy.

9. There is a strong tendency toward gender parity.

A case can be made for Traits 4, 5, and 7, perhaps along with ramifications of other traits, ensuring a cultural practice of equality that accomplishes for these groups Dworkin’s own equality of resources. The practices that generate these traits ensure that at least all adult members, and most children as well, actually do receive an equal share of resources. Trait 7 helps prevent any member from building up too many resources, which one should in fact, by 4, share. Certainly, some group members have small sets of personal possessions, such as spear points or fruit-collecting baskets. But the resources gathered by these items in turn are largely shared. Such personal items are minimal but still may be shared for particular uses and then returned. Gender parity generally means in practice that women also enjoy a level of resources commensurate with men and their socio-economic roles, while on average differing from those of men, are held in equivalent esteem.[[28]](#footnote-28)

However, Dworkin’s equality of resources diverges slightly from that of nomadic forager culture. Dworkin’s approach may lead to some members’ being wealthier than others, as some may need more than moderate resources for their achievements. Despite this divergence, nomadic forger equality of resources includes Dworkin’s.

Traits 1, 3, 5, 6, and 7 ensure equality of opportunity. With no adult group members having power over others, and with upstarts who attempt to gain such power thwarted, each member should have roughly equivalent chance to pursue life goals worthwhile to that person.[[29]](#footnote-29) Noncompetitive social practices coupled with cooperation mean that even if some members prove to have innate stronger capacities in some arenas, these will not diminish others with lesser capacities to inferior social and physical conditions; and mutual cooperation may help compensate for capacity-gaps between members. Traits 6 and 7 discouraging wealth and prestige should act as further caps on opportunity differentiation.

Equality of welfare, as commentators on equality have observed, is a great challenge because of the subjective nature of welfare and how given attainments satisfy different agents to different degrees (Dworkin 2000). A billion dollars or a beautiful home on Pacific Palisades may satisfy one agent to 100 utils, whereas a thousand a year and a small home Zambia may satisfy another to 100 utils. However, some of the nine traits above serve as good bases for a society-wide effort to maximize welfare for most. Certainly, encouraging sharing and cooperation while discouraging greater prestige, wealth, and power over others should spread to most group members the basic goods needed for welfare while the maximum or ceiling on each person means that goods are not diverted into some individuals’ lairs. And certainly, a few, those who’s tastes tend toward great wealth, prestige, and power, may experience diminished welfare compared with what they might have experienced were egalitarian cultural values and practices not in place.

However, at least three major ethical outlooks would find such a result for the few would-be upstarts not ethically troubling. By Kantian Categorical Imperative, universalizing the maxim that one should operate such as to have greater power over others leads to a contradiction, as every member would have to have power over everyone else, a logical impossibility. By Millian (or similar utilitarian) Greatest Happiness Principle, it is doubtful that allowing the few upstarts to have their way would lead to greater overall happiness. Those few, if they took power, could preclude automatic impeaching and resigning of group headman by popular will, diminishing most people’s welfare, use of resources, and equal opportunity and undermining of the valuing of individual autonomy pervasive in egalitarian societies.[[30]](#footnote-30) Third, Aristotilian virtue ethics would encourage a golden mean within the given society, from which upstarts and free-riders, even if they successfully gained their tyrannical positions, would diverge. Certainly, already existing tyrants and monarchs, as in Aristotle’s society, may rule according to a golden mean. But shifting an entire society just so that upstarts can follow through with their impulses to dominate others who are otherwise abiding by their society’s mean is not following a golden mean.

Equality of access in many ways seems similar to equality of resources, and equality of starting position shares much with equality of opportunity. Without going further into these interpretations of equality, it should be clear that the nine traits offer means of ensuring such equalities. Similarly for variants on the equality types I have just now discussed, such as Arneson’s (1989) equality of opportunity for welfare. In the final sections, I go into further detail about these interpretations of equality and how they compare philosophically with equalityA.

For now, the point of these comparisons between equalityA and common interpretations of equality is that, for the most part, the former encompasses all of the latter, but none of the latter encompass the former but account for only part of it. There is one interpretation of equality, though, that equalityA may not encompass so readily, and that is formal equality. If formal equality is understood in its strictest sense, that of the equal standing of all citizens in the eyes of the law of the state, equalityA cannot entail formal equality. EqualityA, or equality in the anthropological sense, as I have described it all along, has been observed by ethnographers in nomadic foraging economies, and to a lesser extent in sedentary foraging cultures and some horticulturalists and pastoralists. This fact does not mean that it cannot be brought about by citizens in more complex societies. But insofar as formal equality is defined as conditionally an equality of states and foraging societies are not states, equalityA does not perforce entail formal equality. Only if states somehow were able to establish equalityA in their societies might it then entail formal equality.

However, allowing a less strict definition of formal equality, equalityA may entail it. If formal equality is seen as not merely the equality extending to all members before the law, but to all of them in their standing before the practices, values, and beliefs of society, one may say that among nomadic foragers formal equality is possible and equality entails it. I will not defend this view here but leave it as a possibility that equalityA can entail formal equality along with other common interpretations of the concept.

Now that I have indicated how equalityA has a broader scope, if not the broadest, among common interpretations of equality, the next step in the argument is to show how equalityA links with freedom and liberty.

3.2.1. EqualityA Entails Freedom

Among the traits typifying equalityA societies, 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 help to ensure individuals’ freedom-from. Traits 1 and 3 dampen the potential threat to freedom-to imposed by someone officially in power over others. Trait 5 keeps in check the potential threat to individuals’ freedom-from that may arise from a member’s accumulating wealth. Given limited resources in a group’s region, wealth in the hands of one individual or family can in effect operate as official power over others. Trait 6 discourages prestige acts, similarly to Trait 5 with respect to freedom-from. Trait 7, proscribing competitiveness, means that no hierarchy is established (except in the hypothetical case where there are prizes or advantages for the winner) such that some members are on the lower rung, which acts against their freedom-from. Trait 9, encouraging gender parity, helps ensure that women can enjoy the same freedom-from that men enjoy and vice-versa.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Many of the nine traits also work toward ensuring freedom-to, the social means for individuals to pursue their goals and life in general. Trait 4, enjoining generosity and sharing, positively enables people to have the basic resources they need to pursue their projects. Subtly, Trait 2, fostering certain traits in headmen, such as self-control, generosity, and even-temperedness, works to make the leader a good counselor, not only in dispute resolution but in counseling on individual growth. However, Trait 8, emphasizing individual autonomy, also means not relying too strongly upon others’ advice but relying more upon one’s own sense of what is most appropriate in pursuing life goals. To help avoid risk of begging the question in my overall argument about equality, autonomy, and freedom,[[32]](#footnote-32) it is better to say that Trait 8, nurturing individual autonomy, at least *reflects* the drive in equalityA societies to ensure freedom-to.

Trait 7’s fostering of coöperation, like Trait 4’s injunction to share resources, means that those with lesser ability in a particular field should have compensatory assistance from others, as groups strive to work on projects as a group as well as at the individual level. Trait 9 of gender parity means that among many nomadic foragers, while on average men tend toward the hunting and women toward the gathering, often women may take up hunting, men may do gathering, and men often share in childrearing While there are roles among nomadic foraging groups, these are usually not strictly enforced, opening the possibility for peoples’ freedom-to to open up across genders.

As equalityA entails a strong degree of freedom-from and freedom-to, and as freedom is constituted by freedom-from and freedom-to, then equalityA entails freedom. One should consider whether or by what means it is possible to ensure a greater degree of freedom, for any particular kind of sociability seen among humans. One may allege that a greater degree of freedom would be experienced by an individual who is completely free from constraints imposed by the mere presence of others (as in duties that others by their sheer existence impose), living wholly alone with no contact with others, free to do absolutely what one desires. It is evident that this scenario may maximize freedom-from. But because of the peculiar type of sociality in which human predecessors developed into *Homo sapiens* and which evidently shaped the kind of being humans are—developing an elaborate language, devising arts such as painting, dance, and music, and hunting game in groups and thereby surpass the capacities of loners—this scenario starts looking like an impoverished, limited scope of freedom-to. That is, few people in such a circumstance would have much freedom-to.

Still, it may be objected that individuals in typical equalityA societies, that is, nomadic foragers, have a limited freedom-to themselves, compared with agents in industrialized societies. For example, the former lack the freedom-to that an automobile or computer seem to provide, much less the freedom-to boosted by vaccines and steady sources of clean water. I respond to this objection in two parts, first with the former two examples of freedom-to (cars and computers), then to the latter two. First, we have to be careful to distinguish between the means to freedom-to within particular social contexts and the freedom-to actually experienced (as well as consider whether a presumed freedom-to in such a context is not actually a freedom-from).

An auto or computer is not, of course, freedom of any kind, but has the potential to serve as means to freedom-to for some agents in some social contexts. A house-call physician covering a thousand square miles’ territory may find that freedom-to to pursue such a practice is strongly facilitated by recourse to a car. Going by foot or bicycle instead would make the freedom-to more difficult but (discounting potential threat from competition) not impossible. The occasional extreme emergency case that needed a half-hour’s quicker response than the best cyclist can provide may not be treated in time. But making a freedom-to more physically demanding does not in itself eradicate the freedom-to. One simply needs to relinquish some of one’s erstwhile ease and convenience. Not recognizing this distinction between freedom-to and one’s other values such as ease and convenience can lead to absurdities, rendering all freedom-to impossible. One may fancy that lacking a device *D* which has not yet been invented because it is beyond current knowledge is actually imposing a limitation upon one’s freedom-to. Thus the house-calling physician’s lack of an instantaneous transporter, which can beam anybody anywhere in an instant, is obstructing that agent’s freedom-to. Every agent, then, lacks infinite devices presumably inducing of freedom-to, and thereby entirely lacks freedom-to.

One may try to get around the looming *reductio* here by asserting that, once an invention exists, and an agent ‘s freedom-to would be more difficult without that device, then any agent’s lack of access to that invention is obstructing that agent’s freedom-to. But, insofar as it was just explained that rendering a freedom-to more difficult does not in itself obstruct freedom-to, this assertion must be qualified: If lacking the device renders the freedom-to impossible, then lacking it obstructs freedom-to. And yet this revision only yields essentially a tautology.

There is thus no firm evidence that automobiles and computers are necessary for human freedom-to, nor that freedom-to cannot be maximized without these devices. As for vaccines and clean water, these are certainly means by which to increase the likelihood of good health and disease prevention. Vaccines and public sanitation may be history’s most effective and singular inventions for improving human (and domestic and even wild animal) health. However, it is hard to contend that these inventions amount to either freedom-to or freedom-from. They may represent or be sine qua non for particular instances of freedom-to, such as for aspirants to careers in public sanitation or vaccine manufacture. But in themselves, they, like automobiles or computers, at best may provide means for many persons’ freedom-to. An agent whose life goals demand decades of experiment and observation, such as one founding a Mars colony, may need many decades to fulfill the project, and so vaccines and clean water will help fulfill that goal. But holding that the lack of these diminishes freedom-to runs into problems similar to those for the car and computer: If a lack of such techniques diminishes freedom-to, then we lack an infinite amount of health-improvers, leaving little hope for freedom-to. Similarly, lack of these techniques cannot be said to diminish freedom-from--unless, of course, someone were withholding these techniques from an agent who sought them. But it is then not the lack of the techniques obstructing the freedom, but the act of withholding that is.

The distinction between cars and computers, on the one hand, and vaccines and clean water on the other, in terms of freedom, is that the former, offered as choices, are particular to and contingent on cultures, whereas the latter appeal to a universal human need for health. Health is essentially the basis of life, without which life and its potential freedoms-to cannot proceed. Cars and computers are not the basis of life from which all freedoms-to proceed. They are contingent cultural articles, which some group members may assume is a need, but they are not plausibly the basics of human life, such as food, water, and health. One can lack cars and still live, but no one may lack food and water and still live.

Because of this distinction between cars/computers and vaccines/sanitation, there is reason to inquire into whether there is some moral obligation to ensure vaccination and sanitation to all peoples. Despite my argument, intuitively it seems that not providing these techniques to all peoples acts as withholding, affecting their freedom and other human rights. This intuition deserves further inquiry, which I will not pursue here. Tentatively I venture that any human-rights program pursuing such a health project as a freedom and human-rights issue should consider the broader human-rights context, which includes group rights: 1) The peoples lacking should be fully apprised of what is being offered to them and should not be coerced; 2) This consent is hard to attain faithfully to all group members’ desires; 3) They should be advised of the fact that steady provision of these techniques could affect their culture; 4) If they refuse contact, that request for privacy and group rights should be respected. (See various chapters in Sen and Nussbaum 1993 for similar concerns, as well as Teays et al. 2014)) Among the issues involved in this question are many that bear deeply on freedom (including freedom-to and freedom-from.)[[33]](#footnote-33)

Concluding the response to the objection that the nomadic forager lacks certain freedom-to if lacking devices available in other cultures, it is evident that many artifacts of industrial cultures are not necessary for maximal human freedom-to. Substantial argument for the necessity of such artifacts is wanting, and the proposal that equalityA entails freedom is not detracted by this objection.

3.2.2. Freedom Entails EqualityA

The contention that freedom entails equalityA faces a different challenge and may prove more controversial than the converse. The challenge arises from the fact that freedom is harder to define, to make empirically concrete, than equalityA. I defined equalityA with some ambition to completeness by referring to the nine traits of nomadic-forager equality that ethnographers have observed. EqualityA, as I have treated it, has some empirical foundation. Certainly, freedom was defined as consisting of freedom-to and freedom-from, and we can to some degree empirically spot and label policies and acts violating freedom-from. But freedom-to is much more difficult, if only because, as I implied, freedom-to has a strong cultural facet (one’s culture includes a large portion of what kinds of things one is free to do)—while at the same time freedom-to thereby seems partially opened-ended.

As I argued, freedom-to is not entirely open-ended, as it is constrained by the kind of being that a human is. To say freedom-to includes being free to become a black hole or to turn all H2O into XYZ (as long as no one is hurt) simply does not register. By contrast, freedom-to to become an architect or to learn how to gather the tastiest tubers does register. They are humanly feasible. However, contending that a culture that lacks an automobile or a type of career that depends upon an automobile has an attenuated freedom-to, compared with cultures that have those things, runs into logical problems, as the previous section described. It is then hard to assert cogently that a culture that offers more choices of kinds of devices to master or kinds of life goals to choose from provides, by this difference alone, greater freedom-to than a culture with fewer such kinds of devices or life goals.

Yet I am not proposing a hardline stance on cultural relativity. I propose instead to examine which features may run across all cultures and values in terms of how their members experience freedom, to see if there is some way we can determine how to assess and compare them vis-à-vis experienced freedom.

3.2.3. Particular Types of Freedom-to and EqualityA

One value that appears to run cross-culturally is that of establishing life goals and seeking to fulfill these. This valuing is seen in the value of autonomy among members of forager and horticultural economies as well as those of contemporary industrial states and other types of agrarian/urban civilization (perhaps not in extreme totalitarian states, such as North Korea) This widespread human tendency is reflected in Gould’s (2014) urging the notion of humans as “self-transformative beings” (65) who must be able to “exercise [their] agency in the development of capacities or the realization of long-term projects or goals.” (39).

Life goals may not always be intended to run throughout a life time but may persist for some fraction thereof. The idea is that the individual anticipates developing certain skills, knowledge areas, and social activities over a period of time and works to fulfill these ambitions. Thus, a nomadic forager may seek to master the best formula for manufacturing poison that kills prey quickly without harming humans who eat the flesh. A horticulturalist may aspire to enrich soil that maximizes tuber and harvest size. A contemporary Norwegian may work to build a home for seamen so that upon anchorage they will not fall into dissipation. And a slave in an empire may hope to become a freeman and, like Epictetus, work one’s way up into a respectable freeman’s position.

In each of these cases, we see exercise of freedom-to. (There are also issues of freedom-from at work here, but for now I concentrate on freedom-to.) In the first two cases, there is no state and so, by my definition already given, not a matter of liberty or a state’s establishing policy to ensure freedom. In the latter two cases, there is a state, which allows varying degrees of liberty, which means varying degrees of potentially experienced freedom-to. The scope and possibilities of freedom-to in a modern Western democracy are greater than those in ancient Rome, but there is some amount of overlap between the two, with the former having a higher median of experienced freedom-to (and liberty) than the latter.

3.2.4. Conditions for Freedom-To

3.2.4.1. Enabling Conditions for Freedom-to

Now we should consider what is involved in the composition of the experience of freedom-to. The individual does not just set goals, but must also have the means, tools, resources, ingredients and *informed knowledge* to fashion goals that are fitting to the individual’s capacities, interests, and *emotional profile and makeup*.( I come shortly to the emphasized points. ) Gould speaks similarly of “enabling conditions of action” in “the process of self-development” which “transpires over time” (39). She labels this process “freedom to,” which “requires that choices be effective and that involves also the cultivation of capacities” (39).

My main divergence from her outlook is that I am proposing not that the conditions of society should be established but that they are established in many cultures: namely, those cultures that value autonomy, as indicated in the discussion on autonomy (§5.3), appear to do so in valuing the individual’s setting one’s own goals. If one is self-governing, one has the basic position to formulate and enact one’s own goals. Those cultures, discussed in the autonomy section, that so highly value autonomy as to render childhood hazardous in order to learn autonomy well, seem to place it as among the highest held social values. Members of other cultures, such as contemporary industrial ones, may speak highly of autonomy but exercise it less extensively insofar as other values are given much higher priority, such as values of power-over others, wealth, prestige, and specialization. With lower experienced autonomy, despite ostensibly valuing it, then the less these cultures’ members can be in the basic position to formulate and enact their own goals.

To qualify as experienced freedom-to, the goal must be maximally one’s own. In extreme cases, such as slavery, the individual may have few of the resources or ingredients needed merely to fashion goals, much less the opportunity to execute them. Exceptions such as Spartacus and Nat Turner are rare, and even Epictetus lived in circumstances which less strictly isolated slaves in this respect. In other cases occurring in less slavelike conditions, such as that of novelist Kafka or poet Keats, the individual is so psychologically bound to an authoritative figure, like Kafka infamously to his father, they pursue activities that may appear goal-driven but are not their own goals. (Kafka was coerced into law, Keats into medicine. Fortunately, for us at least, they pursued their own goals on the side. But, consider all those persons in history with comparable amount to offer, while others’ goals for them undermined their capacities!) [[34]](#footnote-34)

3.2.4.2. Pre-enabling conditions for an Informed Choice for Freedom-to

Now, one challenge for goal-formation in terms of freedom-to lies in what I emphasized in italics above: The individual needs reasonably informed knowledge about the different potential life-goals and be able to establish, if desired, a good fit between a potential goal and one’s emotional and psychological makeup. These conditions may be considered as “pre-enabling.” They allow the individual to make the maximally informed goal choice, for which, when acted upon, the other social conditions may enable them to realize.: Certainly, people do establish life-goals without coercion, yet the goals turn out to make a bad fit with one’s emotional profile. But the more that individuals have the means, which include informed knowledge, to fit together their life-goals to their personal and emotional makeup, the more likely they should experience freedom-to. In other words, they simply need to feel they are doing what is truly appropriate for themselves and their capacities, emotional makeup, and character. (Furthermore as I discuss momentarily, human beings will generally have somewhat less articulable interpersonal goals, that is for long-lasting deep relationships with others, as Gould [1988, 2014] describes.)

I next offer a graphic illustration of how the amount of available choices for life goals can affect degree of freedom-to (Figure 1).



Figure 1. A graph of the number of possible types of life careers vs. the probability that the choice makes a good personal fit. The amounts that the curve marks on both the *x*- and *y*-axis are not intended to be empirically accurate but are set for illustrative purposes. However, the amounts are not entirely arbitrary, either. The idea behind the figure is to illustrate the fact that there is some level of possible types of life-careers available in a society or particular culture at which the probability of finding a fit is maximal. Too few choices (1, or 100), and the chance that that one type will fit is low. At the other extreme, if the number of choices is too high, there is simply not enough time and opportunity to try on “for size” a sufficient amount of them for an individual to find a good fit.

Consider an improbable culture where every person has only one choice of life-goal. That situation would narrow the likelihood that a person’s temperament and capacities would find due expression in one’s life activities. Similarly, if one had only one choice in life for a lifetime partner, the likelihood of an appropriate match would be low. However, at the other extreme, in a world of 7 billion people and which (also improbably) has, say, ten million types of life-goals or careers, the likelihood of having a good match would also be low. Moreover, having some kind of first-person, hands-on experience with or witness or grasp of the activities involved would greatly aid the individual in determining whether one kind of life goal would fit better than another. The greater the amount of potential goals beyond a given maximum, the lower the likelihood the individual will have that intimate knowledge before setting out to pursue the goal[[35]](#footnote-35). Between these two extremes, as the graph indicates, we may expect a point or region where life-goal options are not so overwhelmingly numerous and where individuals may have some chance of first-hand experience with many, even all, the options and still have a reasonable amount of choice to ensure a good fit.

Certainly, the problem illustrated by the right-hand, post-peak curve in Figure 1’s graph is reflected by the plethora of methods and institutions better to enable an individual to make, ideally, a good fit: Starting with the testing movement spawned in the 19th Century by Stephèn Binet and continuing with the military sorting of soldiers by tested capacity and career counseling (S. Gould 1981), not to mention the high level of depression and mental disease related to individuals’ hopelessness in finding anything fit for them in life, essaying a good fit has become a cultural obsession. These indices should only bolster the probability that as population rises and technical complexities—meaning ever-tighter specialization and concomitant multi-rerouting of life-careers—increase, these problems of unlikely good-fits and proliferation of methods to combat the problems should also mount. While this situation is morally and emotionally regrettable, the point to be taken from the graph, for present purposes, is this situation’s effect on freedom-to.

If freedom-to does require certain enabling conditions, which include sufficient knowledge to make properly informed choices, then freedom-to is diminished with rising numbers in both population and technical complexity. Under these conditions people simply experience a diminution of informed choice and hence a diminution in freedom-to. (In fact, if the curve in Figure 1. is taken to be *f(x) = axe-x*, for x > 0, then lim x/x → ∞ = 0.) The sense that one seems to have fewer choices in life when the choices actually multiply by orders of magnitude is reflected in the common complaint—not merely from the pathological—that one feels “cut off” and “boxed in” in such a complex culture, not so m much because the average person is cognitively incapable of handling the usual chores of such societies, such as filing income tax returns or operating domestic appliances and electronics; rather, because, partly at an emotional level, they do not find themselves within the proliferated apparent opportunities. Their tasks—both domestic and career-oriented—can lose meaning, not because, as Marx contended (1963) they are not owners of the means of production, but because production, whoever owns it, has multiplied to the extent it is impracticable to make an informed choice (whether for domestic/consumer decisions or life-career choices).

The maximum on the graph would be hard to pinpoint precisely. But as this article’s sections on autonomy has brought to light, members of non-state nomadic forager societies often have good hands-on experience with a great amount of, if not all, types of the culture’s tasks, whether that be gathering, childcare, hunting, or music-making. If the number of such tasks is small, and each one is not so complex as to require a half a lifetime to master (although skills such as hunting may be perfectible over a lifetime, they lack the technical complexity of rocket-building), each member has a high likelihood of being knowledgeably enabled to work out fitting life goals. To this extent, the problem of too-high valuing of specialization among complex state societies becomes apparent: The more highly each member is specialized, the more years are required to develop that specialty and the less likely any member is to have the opportunity to have hands-on knowledgeable experience with a sufficient amount of areas to make a well-informed choice.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The objection may be that in less technically complex societies such as nomadic foragers’, there is still some specialization; and with lower amounts of specialties, compared with industrial societies’, still many people may go a lifetime without a fit any closer than that of many estranged members of industrial societies who find no fit. In reply: the relative generality of each kind of task among nomadic foragers actually makes it more likely to cover the range of an individual’s temperamental and intellectual needs. For example, gathering foods and other plant products is a general “specialty” that breaks down into many subspecialties that require quite different knowledge-intensive skills. Seeking roots and tubers demands a good memory for precise locales, knowledge of seasonal and microclimatic variables, and developed eye for above-surface signs indicating readiness for harvest. Hauling heavy loads of wood over long distances requires intricate skills of its own, a type of biophysics in its own right, as in how to place loads in relation to the body’s skeletal and muscular structure so as to distribute the forces and lighten the effect, as well as fine motor and balancing skills. Other general “specialties” such as music-making and poison-extracting, often very complex, can similarly be broken down into subcomponents requiring different capacities and temperaments, increasing the likelihood that somewhere among them a good fit is achieved. Indeed, as the objection notes, there is a degree of specialization, but markedly less narrowed than the specialties of industrial society; Again, the potential to be able to do many life-tasks should increase the probability of finding some set of partial fits that add up to a reasonably close full fit.

I try an illustration. I preface it with the fact that, because of the forces of acculturation, it is hard to transpose a character type to a very different culture and ask what would the particular personality be like. The exercise demands some imagination. Consider then what would Einstein (that is, the famous physicist’s genotype) have done if he had grown up strictly in an ancient Polynesian fishing village, which would implausibly yield a scientific innovator. But that same intellectual capacity might well have found a good fit in Polynesian navigation, which required mathematically and astronomically precise reckoning (Davis 2011). Without growing up in the tradition of Western physics, the entraining of the very idea and expectations of working within it simply would be out of the question. However, the general character impulse for mathematical and astronomical exploration would find expression—and one can never know, perhaps find it even more fulfilling for that character-type, than what would have been experienced in another society type.

Similarly, a philosophical character type could well find fulfillment in something like many Australian aborigine societies that had highly elaborate and complex philosophies, in many ways comparable to those in Western traditions (Davis 2011). Central Asian traditions of oral poetry can be as fulfilling of literary capacities as much as any in Western tradition as well, considering that some poets memorized oral poems up to 250,000 lines long (A Day in the Life 1987). (The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined come to 37,000 lines.) My response to the objection is, of course, highly speculative, based upon treacherous transpositions of character types between very different kinds of society—yet the objection is based on an equally speculative concern, so one is hard-put to answer but in kind. I have indicated, though, that within that speculative reach, the response to the objection can meet its challenge.

This section’s last objection contends that this characterization of freedom-to is merely contingent, not apodictic, a priori, universal. It only so happens to be the case that, in a finite universe—at least as long as we are still living in one, and not an infinite one—humans, also finite, in increasingly complex cultures too often cannot find a good fit for themselves. Only contingencies have been offered to support the characterization of freedom-to, and only contingent, not a priori or philosophically universal, deductions can be made from it. (Thus, any connection between freedom-to, autonomy, and equality would be merely contingent and not operable as universal policy.) In response I acknowledge that the objection is right about the contingency of the characterization. However, it is not an apodictic truth that only a priori universal truths should underlie policies and their interpretations.. Many widely accepted policies are based upon contingent or even arbitrary propositions. The right to abortion rests entirely upon the contingency that many people find that at somewhere between conception and the beginning of the third trimester (or of the second) the developing embryo becomes a human being and until that (unspecified) point, it does not yet deserve the full human right to life. But I find that the contingency of human freedom-to is an even stronger foundation for policy concerning freedom-to precisely because this contingency is based upon a finite universe and a finite human being. This contingency could be safely and soundly considered as insurmountable given such finitude, as Figure 1. implies. To that extent, it is as good as universal, even if derived by examination of philosophical practicalities (in terms of practical philosophy, which is not always a priori; see Hume 1952) and not by derivation from *a priori* principles. While practical and empirical in derivation, in application, it is, in effect, universal.

3.2.4.3. Gender and Personal-Relationship Development and Freedom-to

Two other areas to consider in gauging relative amounts of experienced freedom-to are that of gender parity and development of personal relationships. The former has been a contentious area within contemporary equality debates. The latter has been emphasized by Gould (1988, 2014) and others as important in assessing freedom-to.

Aiming on gauging gender-parity’s contribution to freedom-to, I should note why I have used that term and not “gender equality” in the context of both equalityA, and nomadic foragers. The equalityA in these cultures consists largely in equality of basic goods and power-to, with minimal power-over. This equality extends to every adult member; thus, there is no clear meaning to the idea that one subgroup, however it is partitioned from the whole, is equal with another subgroup.

By bringing in the concept of “gender parity,” I emphasize the general anthropological finding that gender roles, however fluid they may be for either sex, receive commensurate levels of respect and acknowledgement of their irreplaceable contribution to society, without denigration of one gender or the other (Endicott 1999). Degree of fluidity of the sexes in the different gender roles may vary from one nomadic foraging (NF)[[37]](#footnote-37) culture to the other (Lee and Daly 1999, Kelly 2007), but diminished fluidity does not mean compromised parity. It might seem that diminished fluidity—say, men doing little gathering, or women little hunting—would signify delimited freedom-to. After all, an individual would have fewer life-tasks to choose from. However, whether such delimitation is actually a cap on experienced freedom-to depends on how that delimitation is imposed. With no one in the NF society having power-over, no member is coerced into delimited roles.

In the physically extreme regions where such choices are notably more delimited, such as the Arctic, practicality in survival may be a major factor in restricting gender roles. At this point, it then becomes hard, a real puzzle, to determine whether such pure practicality can be said to delimit the experience of freedom-to vis-à-vis gender roles and life choices. It is at least plausible that in such more extreme physical and social conditions along the “foraging spectrum,” that gender parity would mitigate the erstwhile delimitation. Thus, if what one does for one’s social contribution is still accorded the due respect given to another, then a female group-member who desired other roles than she had opportunity to pursue might at least feel the contribution made was valuable.

Yet, even this mitigating parity may be attenuated by other, inconsistent cultural practices, such as the tendency, especially strong in the Arctic, to practice birth control via infanticide, in which neonate girls are most often the victim because women in such harsh climates rarely hunt, protein is invaluable, and males supply the protein.[[38]](#footnote-38)Any proposal that equalityA is the optimal route to maximizing freedom-to for humans, or conversely that to maximize freedom-to one must realize equalityA, faces a challenge from the empirical fact that some equalityA societies may have limited fluidity for gender roles.

Nonetheless, as Kelly (2007) emphasizes about the foraging spectrum, the fact that there is a spectrum with extreme social conditions at either end does not rule out generalities about the spectrum’s great middle swath. Given equalityA—including gender parity and a great degree of fluidity *generally* among NF societies—a parity of freedom-to among men and women should still manifest. Conversely, if the argument of this article holds—that maximizing one’s fit life project is achievable with equalityA —then maximizing one’s fit vis-à-vis gender parity is also achieved with equalityA.

However, many commentators, especially among care ethicists (Tronto 1993, Held 2006), but others as well (Gould 1988 2004 2014), maintain that the sort of “life project,” which may be taken as meaning mere career, is not all that humans seek in social fulfillment. Development and upkeep of personal relationships is at least as important, if not more for some. Gould is explicit on the matter of how capacity to develop oneself in a lifelong project cannot be abstracted from the social context as if the individual were operating as a wholly isolated agent. Instead, one must take into account meaningful personal relationships. Thus what she calls “equal positive freedom” calls for individual “self-development” or “self-transformation,” which necessarily includes personal relations. “[S]elf-development [is] the freedom to develop oneself through one’s activities.” (1988, p. 40) Furthermore, it is “the development of capacities, projects, and relationships over time that to me constitutes the core notion of positive freedom.” (2014, p. 72) If “positive freedom” is what I am calling “freedom-to,” then by a Gouldian conception of freedom-to, development of personal (and implicitly long-lasting, secure) personal relationships is crucial to self-development or choice of life projects. For some individuals, indeed, these personal relationships are more important than mere career and may constitute the core of a life project. As mentioned, care ethicists, other feminist viewpoints, and other philosophical viewpoints not explicitly feminist have urged that the acknowledgement of freely developing personal relationships is critical to human rights and freedom. (See United Nations 1948, 2007.)

The question here, appropriate for this article’s inquiry, is empirical: How might one maximize freedom-to for developing personal relationships, and how does one minimize this? Obviously, unjust imprisonment and governmental sanctions restricting liberty to associate minimize this freedom-to. But achieving maximization is subtler. Say that a government allows full liberty of association. Now consider non-policy matters such as population growth. It is not clear that with full political liberty, a great increase in population offers a correlative great increase in this freedom-to. That is, it is not clear that an increase in population from one billion to one trillion offers a thousandfold increase in freedom-to. It might seem that given the potential greater variety of people from whom to choose one’s relationships, one has a greater chance to find people who make good candidate’s for a particular personality’s needs for long-term fulfilling friendships.

Yet, it is problematic to maintain that at any point along the population scale, a doubling of the population would lead to a doubling of this freedom-to (say as experienced by individual agents). One practical matter is that of meeting the newcomers: Most individuals have limited social means and time; a doubling of population would not mean that each person *X*’’s access to others would double, nor even that the social circles *X* does have would somehow have increased “stock” in the kinds of people that *X* needs for fulfillment.[[39]](#footnote-39) Thus, time and limited social means neutralize any positive effect of population increase for the freedom-to of developing personal relationships.

Furthermore, there are some contingent factors in high-population societies that render high population not a good means to enhancing this freedom-to. One is that industrial superstructures that appear necessary to allow high population levels (by decreasing infant mortality and increasing reproductive years), such as those seen not only in developed nations such as Canada and Japan, but also developing ones, such as India and Uganda, appear to bring with them a notable degree of psychological depression, alienation, mental illness, and loneliness.[[40]](#footnote-40) These symptoms do not mean that personal relationships cannot be found but do mean the decrease the likelihood of finding them and—at least in the case of depression, loneliness, and mental illness, which often impose interpersonal barriers—decrease the likelihood of fulfilling relationships.

Furthermore, one should consider how in such complex societies, in which a high value is placed on attempting to pursue desires as well as insatiably multiplying desires, each individual has a greater and greater complexity of desires, which render the individual less likely to encounter another whose arrays of desires sufficiently match to make a companionable fit for partners.

Although it has proven hard to pinpoint the causal factors in the increases in these debilitating pathological factors common in industrial societies, while theories abound (Twenge 2006, 2014), the psychological and sociological effects of the contemporary dispersion of family groupings endemic especially in industrial societies have been an explanation. (However, the rise of these problems’ creating barriers to fulfilling personal relationships hardly began with the industrial era but appear to have set in, among increasingly complex, state societies and urbanization starting millennia ago, with the concomitant shifting of values toward prestige, power-over, wealth, specialization, and the endless unfolding of new desires (Flannery and Marcus 2012, Miller 2014).[[41]](#footnote-41) The social practices linked with these values operate together synergistically to make the kinds of complex urban/agrarian societies that dominate the contemporary world. Thus, while ancient Roman, Egyptian, and Meso-American civilizations were not as technologically complex as contemporary industrial societies, they were already cultivating the sets of values of urban/agrarian society which appear to inform the drawbacks for pursuit of freedom-to in personal relationships as I have described.

Looking again to Figure 1., indicating an optimized level of choice in freedom-to in shaping fulfillable life-goals, there could be a comparable graph for optimum level of choice in freedom-to to develop fulfilling personal relationships. However, I believe that the latter graph would be more difficult to estimate than the former. The small groups composing nomadic foragers (NF**)** and some horticultural societies do highly value personal relationships (Boehm 1999, Lee and Daly1999). However, these relationships are almost entirely within the extended family, which composes most of the group, and an individual is essentially born into this extended-family group structure. Certainly, one is not required to form close friendships with everyone in the group, and one may select whom one is closer to intellectually and emotionally. Yet, it is difficult to characterize or place “freedom-to” within such social structure in the same way as freedom-to choose and pursue personal relationships in industrial societies.[[42]](#footnote-42) In NF societies, the very social structure consists in and requires such tight, interlocked relationships; they are not simply options for life-fulfillment as in industrialized societies.[[43]](#footnote-43) The comparison between industrial society’s and NF’s state of personal relationships vis-à-vis freedom-to is thereby stymied.

However, if we look at the outcome of the two types of social structure in terms of personal relationships’ subjective outcome—fulfillment—NF societies may have an edge over industrial, despite minimal freedom-to in the matter.[[44]](#footnote-44) The tight social structure of NF cultures gives individuals the opportunity to be steadily in the day-to-day contact, in the cooperative, mutual goal-directed endeavors that foster human closeness, along with the equality that is key to maintaining relationships between peers in any human society. The tight structure as well means no easy-outs. Certainly, individuals in industrial societies do manage to develop close mutual relationships, in or outside work. But the high rates of concomitant disaffection, alienation, and loneliness in these social structures, while these may signal a degree of freedom-to at work after all, exemplify that the intended outcome of freedom-to in personal relationships—fulfilling relationships—is not well achieved.

In sum, as to freedom-to in social relationships, I hesitate to say that the optimal level is found in small, particularly NF, societies as I suggested for freedom-to in life-goals. However, I also hesitate to place the optimum in large complex societies, where having many fulfilling personal relationships is a great challenge and too many group-members are disaffected and alone. Yet, it appears that freedom-to in personal relationships—a life full of long-lasting personal relationships—is more achievable in smaller, particularly NF societies, where equality erases crucial barriers between people, barriers that the values of large, complex societies facilitate. It is hard to say that NF societies lessen freedom-to, or that complex industrial societies increase it across the board, although it appears that the latter social structures nullify this freedom-to for millions of their members.

3.3. Freedom-from and EqualityA

I have argued that freedom-to may be maximized in conditions of equalityA, that is when equalityA is manifest in cultural practice. This argument lends weak if tractable support for the idea that freedom-to entails equalityA: weak in the sense that the argument contends only that freedom-to is maximized in equalityA, compared with social conditions (such as those of industrial cultures), not that freedom-to wholly entails equalityA. At the least, this weak entailment plausibly allows that cultures other than equalityA-types can also have a degree of freedom-to.

What about the other component of freedom, freedom-from? In an earlier section, I explained the traits of equalityA societies which ensure freedom-from. Does freedom-from in turn entail equalityA? As with freedom-to, it would be incontestable, according to this article’s argument, that equalityA implies freedom-from. By this argument, equalityA implies freedom-to; so to contend equalityA‘s implying freedom-from, as well as the proposition that freedom-from entails equalityA, would mean the biconditional:

equalityA ↔ freedom-from.

But this biconditional cannot hold, because, as, I next contend, it is veritably implausible that citizens in many non-NF or non- equalityA societies, including contemporary industrial democracies, experience a maximal degree of freedom-from. As with freedom-to, then, we should ask if a weaker form of entailment is sustainable—as a maximized entailment of equalityA—for freedom-from.

Freedom-from, of course, concerns prohibitions, coercions, and other active measures against agents vis-à-vis their attempts to pursue their freedom-to. These forces are generally understood to be exterior to the agent. Thus, hesitations, timidity, and personal inhibitions, forces all interior to the agent, do not generally count as operating against freedom-from. If a person decides to become a lawyer instead of a musician, then later in life regrets the decision for its having led to an uninteresting life, it would be inappropriate to say that the decision acted as a force against the agent’s freedom-from by preventing the agent’s freedom to choose music.

Social and cultural forces pose a challenge to this distinction of exterior vs. interior forces vis-à-vis freedom-from. Much of an agent’s formation of values and practices comes from how others operate in the society and influence the agent’s values. It is sometimes hard to pinpoint whether these social factors operate externally and possibly against the agent’s interests, or internally so as not to count as a force against freedom-from. Values and practices can also be conflicted within a single agent. A woman in a given society may aspire to become a doctor, yet cultural values weigh against a woman’s making such a career choice—and the woman may also subscribe to that value. Is the cultural force here external, operating against the agent’s freedom-from, or is it internal, because the agent upholds the value even if inconsistently with her aspirations? If she decides against medicine to become a dutiful wife, but no one coerces her, is that force that operates on her internal or external?

I cannot hope to answer this question here but offer it to affirm that my discussion of freedom-from, while relying on this distinction between forces external and internal to the agent, does not require the distinction to be absolute. And the blurred lines between the two does not mean they are not distinct within certain ranges, just as yellow and green, though having a blurry zone between them, are distinct within certain wavelengths. Again, I find that looking to NF cultures provides a good starting-point for discussion as well as a measuring stick for freedom-from as experienced in cultures.

As previous sections have contended, the generalized nomadic foraging culture emphasizes autonomy, equality, and freedom-to, as the nine traits given above indicate. These nine cultural values and practices operate to pre-empt practices that would threaten autonomy, equality, and freedom-to. Valuing autonomy is strongly related to valuing freedom-from in the following way. Autonomy as discussed in these works, as well as it is widely understood, means self-governing (“No one can tell me what to do”). The more highly one values self-governing, the more highly one disvalues governing by forces outside the self. It would be inconsistent to value self-governing highly and yet to value governing by external forces highly. One may mildly value self-governing and mildly value outside-force-governing (such as paternalism), but either of the two extremes squeezes out the other. High self-governing would then rule out as much as is possible governing by outside forces, whether that be parents, a chief, or a state government. As seen in this article, NF societies (generally) value autonomy so highly that they downplay the role of parents in interfering with children’s learning and practicing their autonomy, even to the point of physical endangerment. These societies typically also have cultural practices that eliminate chiefs or power-grabbing upstarts, which interfere with individuals’ autonomy. These cultures also are non-state societies and lack institutions that may impose limits upon autonomy. With major obstacles to self-governing out of the way, these group members experience a high level of freedom-from. There are simply few social structure to interfere with their freedom-from.

How do other types of economies and cultures measure up in freedom-from? As mentioned in this article’s comparative discussion of parenting, contemporary industrial democracies such as Japan and the UK imbue parents and other guardians with a great amount of control of over children and their autonomy as they grow. Property is essential to these economies, and children must learn the value of and respect for private property, requiring a continual vigilance and reprimanding of ‘‘Don’t do that!’’ While dangerous objects were plentiful in NF societies, children were given to learn these dangers on their own, to protect their autonomy. It is hard to say why parents in industrial democracies are more preemptive in discouraging children’s access to dangerous products; the reason does not appear to be that they love their children more. Rather, the two culture types have different values of autonomy, and they express their love accordingly, NF parents expressing their love by more strongly nurturing autonomy.

Industrial democracies, being state societies, have chiefs, however moderated their powers over individuals compared with chieftains and warlords of early agricultural societies and Caesars and Party Chairmen. Industrial democracies, also state societies, have institutions that delimit what individual citizens may do. While freedom-from is not readily quantifiable, it is unlikely that agents in these cultures experience as high a degree of freedom-from as do members of NF cultures.

It should be readily evident that citizens of even stronger state societies than industrial democracies, such as communist, totalitarian, and theocratic states, experience much less freedom-from. Persons confined in solitary confinement or sexual slavery experience even less. But just because individuals in industrial democracies experience less freedom-from than those in NF cultures does not require that the former cannot experience a very high degree of it. Thus, as with freedom-to, we should consider that those individuals in NF societies enjoy a maximal level of freedom-from. It would then be inaccurate to say that

freedom-from → NF cultures.

Rather,

max(freedom-from)→ NF cultures.

3.4. Conclusion on Autonomy, Equality, and Freedom

This article has argued that

NF culture → (freedom-to and freedom-from).

This proposition means that in an NF culture, members experience freedom-to and freedom-from. It has also argued that the converse of these statements cannot be sustained, that is,

(freedom-to and freedom-from)→ NF culture,

because there are certainly other kinds of cultures whose members experience a significant amount of freedom. However, the article also argues that

max(freedom-to and freedom-from)→ NF culture,

as these cultures do appear to guarantee their members a maximum level of freedom-to and freedom-from compared with other cultures. Thus, the biconditional

(freedom-to and freedom-from)↔ NF culture

cannot hold. Yet, a qualified version,

max(freedom-to and freedom-from)↔ NF culture

plausibly holds. In other words, insofar as freedom consists in freedom-to and freedom-from, in NF cultures and only in NF cultures do group-members experience a maximum level of human freedom. Nonetheless, people in many other kinds of cultures and circumstances can experience varying, lesser degrees of freedom, from near-maximum to almost none at all.[[45]](#footnote-45)

With the previous argument that NF cultures also value and practice a maximal level of autonomy in the overall context of human societies, it is reasonable to conclude that members of NF societies experience the maximal level of autonomy as well as freedom compared with members of other culture types.

max(autonomy)↔ NF culture

Insofar as NF societies value highly and practice equalityA, the implication is that highly valuing freedom and autonomy means equivalently valuing equalityA.

Interestingly, those cultures experiencing the highest degree of freedom have no need for liberty in the sense defined herein. Liberty remains a corrective in cultures, particularly those with state societies, in which freedom has become threatened, as has happened countless times since the onset of agrarian/urban cultures. People, primarily the lower classes, become incensed that powerful chieftains infringe upon their freedoms; the pursuit and establishment of liberty becomes a way—usually in a compromise with powerful leaders—to retain a degree of freedom. Certainly, even the most tyrannical leaders have given into these assertions of liberty, because even tyrannies cannot hold long if the lower classes do not cooperate. Cooperation requires that an outraged, insulted citizenry be satisfied with at least a part of what is naturally due to them.

Many objections are possible, and I cover a few. One is that the analysis of autonomy and freedom has depended upon generalizations about NF societies. Such generalization, as I have mentioned earlier, is both the strength and weakness of this book’s method. The strength is that this method allows a view of what a spectrum of NF cultures seem to hold in common, thereby yielding a unique and enlightening account of the bases of widespread sociopolitical values, namely equality, freedom, and autonomy. The weakness is that this generalization trims off the eccentricities of individual NF cultures, many of which may not be as egalitarian as this averaging would allow or that all of the relevant disciplines of anthropology can condone.

Some of these societies are not as strongly egalitarian and free as these generalizations may lead one to believe. For certain NF societies, it may not well hold that

max(freedom-to and freedom-from)↔ NF culture.

Plausibly, compared with these, it could be that some industrialized democracies with their policies for liberty allow experience of greater freedom than in some of the less equal and free NF societies.

I concede that we should not overlook the possibility that members of some industrialized democracies may experience more freedom than members of some NF societies. Although I have striven to offer an empirical view of equality and freedom, as well as autonomy, this fact does not mean that the result is intended and final and that the empirical view cannot be further sharpened and updated with new findings. My intention has been to seek a generalization about various kinds of societies, most pointedly NF cultures and industrialized democracies, as a kind of averaging of equality and freedom across the nomadic foraging spectrum. This averaging, as I mentioned, cannot help but mean that there are some NF societies with much less of equality and freedom than others, even while the averaging indicates that these societies, as a whole, experience greater degrees of freedom than members of industrialized democracies do as a whole. Certainly, equality is hard to quantify, although laying out the nine characteristics of equalityA societies is a start. Freedom is even more of a challenge to quantify. Thus, equality and freedom present an overall challenge for an empirical inquiry into them. I can only hope that this empirical attempt has been fair and the generalizations have a firm basis.

Another objection is that, in heavily emphasizing freedom and equality, as well as autonomy—and assuming the above result indicating these values are maximally experienced in NF societies—this approach only overlooks the many other excellent qualities of other types of societies, especially industrialized democracies. This approach then seems unfair to the question and pursuit of overall wellbeing. Perhaps equality, autonomy, and freedom are not the number-one priority value for humans, and other values, such as individual comfort, ease, and convenience are more important.

In response, I note that the thrust of this book has been to characterize equality empirically, and concomitantly autonomy and freedom, so as to set forth the kinds of physical, cultural, and sociopolitical conditions in which these values are maximized. That is to say: If one wants maximum equality (as well as freedom and autonomy), then *X* sort of society appears to provide it, for the kind of being humans are. If one opts to more greatly prioritize other values, such as wealth accumulation for the few, prestige for the fortunate, power-over others, and ease and convenience, more than equality and freedom, that is another story and the subject of another book, if not volumes. In Miller 2023, I pursued a normative argument about whether one should attempt to instate equality, in any kind of society. That is, is it morally incumbent upon us, in pursuit of justice, to instate equality, particularly maximized equalityA? Even in that chapter it is not possible to establish whether a value such as ease and convenience should take precedence over equality. But one should note that there is a danger in putting individual ease and convenience, or wealth or power-over, above freedom and equality. Novelists such as George Orwell and Aldous Huxley have suggested, in their allegories, a reasonable wariness of such value prioritizations.

Another objection is that the result indicating a maximization of such values and equality, autonomy, and freedom in NF cultures can be seen as idealizing these types of societies. Doing so has a whiff of the notorious Rousseauian notion of “the noble savage.” Anthropology since then has revealed how early, prehistoric peoples led lives far from ideal (Edgerton 1992, Keeley 1996).

In response, I must re-emphasize that this result about equality, autonomy, and freedom, along with the entire approach of this inquiry, is not idealization. It has set out only to uncover just what is the nature of equality insofar as we can gather from studies into human society and what may be the social conditions in which humans experience maximized equality. Soberly, quite with idealization, Arendt(1998), while in a different context, could have been speaking of NF societies and their values of equality, autonomy, and freedom when she observed:

To be free meant both not to be subject to the necessity of life or to the command of another, and not to be in command oneself.  It meant neither to rule nor to be ruled….. Equality, ... far from being connected with justice, ... was the very essence of freedom: To be free meant to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed. (32-33)

At the beginning of Miller 2026, I spoke further to how this inquiry’s approach circumvents idealization, even if it finds that equality, along with freedom and autonomy, is maximally experienced in such societies.

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1. In fact, a good case can be made that this article’s naturalistic approach is consistent with Kant’s approach, if one considers that what I am laying out here is about the morality specifically of humans, not of all rational agents. To the extent that one is discussing human morality, Kant would concur that what he calls “anthropology” is important ‘considering that what he called “anthropology” appears to mean something more like what we consider psychology, including social psychology; but his works on anthropology seem to allow for what we now consider cultural anthropology). As he writes in the *Grounding*, “All morals, which require anthropology in order to be applied to humans, must be expounded at first independently of anthropology as pure philosophy.” (1993:412) As I have emphasized, this book is not attempting an *a priori* moral philosophy but is entering at that point in moral philosophy where we inquire how the moral terms apply specifically to humans and in what do those terms consist for humans. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This list would include—among the many notable— Haworth (1986), Meyers (1987), Dworkin (1988, 2000), Gould (1988), Feinberg (1989), Butler (1990), Christman (1991, 2001, 2005, 2009), Taylot, C. (1991), Benson (1994), May (1994), Oshana (1998, 2006), Schneewind (1998), Friedman (2000), Cuypers, (2001), Taylor, R. (2005), Baumann (2008), Coburn (2010), Conly (2013), and Westlund (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For criticism of Gardner’s methodology, see “Comments” following his paper, especially by Bird-David (p. 559), Cashdan (p. 559), and Testart (p. 564-565.) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Not all of these theories are mutually consistent, nor are they intended to be. For example, Number 11 speaks of cultural interaction as being the source of autonomy, whereas Number 12 looks to evasion of cultural interaction as a source of autonomy. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I include here Gardner’s own words concerning how these three terms are to be understood: For purposes of this summary, societies have been called “bilateral” if they have all of the following: ambilocal, neolocal, or multilocal… postmarital residence, bilateral descent with either bilateral kin groups or an absence of unilineal kin groups, and (if data are available) Eskimo or Hawaiian kin terms for cousins. They have been called “egalitarian” if they have minimal jurisdictional hierarchy, absence of class distinctions, (if data are available) either no local headmanship or informal, consensual succession, and (given the data) inheritance of movable property by children of either or both sexes or disposal of property other than by inheritance. Because calling for all these traits may be overly restrictive, so long as there is no more than one data gap, a society has been considered egalitarian if all but one of the criteria on which data are available are satisfied. Finally, societies have been termed “individualistic” if they meet the following two criteria fully or one criterion fully and the other by way of the specified alternative: independent nuclear families (or, alternatively, independent polygynous or polyandrous families) and bridal gifts only at marriage (or, alternatively, token bride-price or bride service)—both of these being arrangements which offer people relative independence of other kin. (1991, p. 555). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Another example would be a *Ti* of going without a coat in winter and a *U* of catching a cold. When one has gone without a coat, one catches a cold; and when one catches a cold, one has gone without a coat, but it is unclear whether going without a coat causes the cold. This example helps show how an apparent correlation may signify one proximate cause but not a sufficient cause for a trait. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In this context, one of the advantages of the five-part definition of equality given in Chapter Three—and which is more in the line with more recent anthropological work on equality—is that it is largely positive. Thus, a headman is primarily an advisor and can be kicked from office at any time; there are practices encouraging generosity (and discouraging wealth accumulation); there is gender parity, and so on. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Generally, a finite set of definitional negatives cannot yield a positive. For example, if I have an *X,* and I know that it is not an orange, a blanket, a chicken, a virus, or a Labrador Retriever, whatever the positive is remains fairly widely open. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. It is a good question whether egalitarianism as Gardner negatively defines it can actually propel or proximately cause autonomy. Generally, it is difficult to conceive of a negative causing a positive. We may consider that a negative such as a lack of vitamin C in the diet may cause a positive, scurvy. And yet, a deficiency disease such as scurvy is better considered as a breakdown of health, thus a negative, and not a positive. Furthermore, it is stretching the issue to say that the dietary lack is what caused the disease. The scurvy case is better reframed in a positive sense: In order for the body to operate optimally, it needs nutrients N1, …, Nn.; without these, it operate sub-optimally. For this reason, it obfuscates matters to say that a lack or nonexistence, such as lack of a hereditary chieftain, propels equality. And yet it makes sense to say that equality consists, in part, in a certain specified lack, such as that of a hereditary chieftain, along with certain specified positive s. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. It may seem that egalitarianism is susceptible to similar criticism about cultural relativism. I believe that because it does involve observable relations with people, whatever their beliefs, and it is grounded in a long prehistory, it can be more empirically established than autonomy can be. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. That is, ∀ *x*(*a*(*x*) → *e*(*x*)) ∧ ¬ ∀ *x*(*e*(*x*) → *a*(*x*)), for the function *a*  “is autonomous” and *e* “is egalitarian. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Only recently have some Western societies, particularly Northern European, begun to reconsider at the level of national policy the moral correctness of corporal punishment. These nations have been adjusting national policy to discourage corporal punishment. They have even brought countries that have not reconsidered corporal punishment, such as France, under fire (see *La Croix*, date, 2015). Whether this movement has come about as at least partly a drive to increase individual autonomy or will have such an affect despite other qualities of industrialized society is yet to be seen. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. At least one forager childcare practice may be construed as debilitating or contrary to individual autonomy, and that is one not included in this list, that of comparatively late weaning. Long birth interval among foragers appears to be an adaptive way to ensure that a nursing woman will have enough milk to last through climate fluctuations and resultant irregular availability of food. Children are thus often not weaned until age four or five. This long period of suckling may appear to be conducive to decreasing emotional independence. However, the late weaning also often means a near-traumatic emotional reaction when weaning does occur, leaving children often crying and screaming during the transition period. When they do proceed beyond the trauma stage, the experience may leave them as more strongly emotional independent, as often occurs after emotional traumas, as much as it may possibly leave them emotionally damaged and thus emotionally dependent. It is an empirical issue worth investigating. However, the listed caregiving practices point as a whole toward independence and self-sufficiency, to some degree as a practice reflecting a value. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. It is possible to explain value in a non-relational way, but since no person appears to have one and only one value but to have many values and these values appear always to be contending with one another for greater priority, I here explain value relationally. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I allow this distinction between the practice of equality and the belief in egalitarianism because some groups may practice equality but have little or no concomitant belief in egalitarianism per se. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. However, it would be coherent to apply another sense of “wealthy” seen in the sentence, “They are all equally wealthy”—that sense of “wealthy” that means “level of monetary goods,” by which meaning the alternative sentence “They are all equally poor” or “They all possess the same monetary value” is coherent. This use of “wealthy” then does not mean that they actually possess wealth. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This cultural fact is starting to fade because of inflation’s eating into a million dollars. For a long while in U.S. history a “millionaire” was equivalent with “wealthy,” but now “billionaire” is starting to replace it. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This devaluing usually occurred indirectly through the devaluing and discouraging of wealth accumulation, and prestige, which require or work so as to facilitate specialization. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. It may be argued that foragers, to the extent they license their children’s self-governing to the point of the children’s endangerment,, these cultures value autonomy even higher than life itself. However, this argument is hasty. For one matter, as with many forager cultures, only a few forager societies are so permissive to a degree that leads to frequent child deaths due to recklessness and ignorance of items such as knives or dart poison. Rather, the general forager tendency is to balance significant rein with due vigilance. Second, even the more extremely permissive societies do not seem to disvalue life itself for the benefit of autonomy but rather do not disvalue the scars that people often bear throughout life from the accidents they experience as self-regulated children, to borrow a term from the educator A.S. Neill. These cultures do more highly value autonomy than a scar-free life. Third, one should inquire whether, in the extreme physical circumstances in which at least contemporary foragers live, there may be a higher adaptiveness or survival potential for autonomous individuals which outweighs the maladaptive ness of occasional childhood deaths due to permissiveness. That is, there could be adaptive pressure for autonomy even at the expense of occasional childhood deaths from permissiveness. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. One thinks of the B. Kliban cartoon, depicting a “salt shaker” for saltine crackers, a man with a salt-shaker in hand, sprinkling grains from onto each cracker going down the factory’s conveyor belt. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This argument will hold, in its basics, even in the egoistic case in which one cares only if one’s own autonomy can be experienced, for reasons given in previous sections of this article. If one is the sole person in the position to experience autonomy, because one, say, has acquired sufficient wealth, power, and prestige to exert control over others to attain the position that one hopes will establish full autonomy, one has instead become highly dependent upon others in the process of attaining this position, so that you are indeed mired in an intricate KO instead of being individually autonomous. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. When referring to other authors’ works about freedom and liberty, I therein attempt to interpret how they are using one term or the other according to the two aspects I am setting forth herein. Of course, interpretation may not be able to provide a perfect fit. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. As Pïtkin observes: “freedom would be more likely than liberty to generate philosophical puzzlement and to invite metaphysical speculation about its existence.” (1988, p. 543)  [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. My account here may be interpreted as asserting there are two kinds of constraints upon freedom, external and internal. Thus the account may be seen as running up against those theories of freedom and liberty that do not acknowledge there are internal constraints, only external ones. Thus, what some may call “internal constraints” are actually definitional of the object so cannot be construed as constraints. Much of this discussion has been in terms of desire; thus, one cannot say one’s own desires are a constraint on freedom, even if one’s desires are conflicting (Frankfurt 1987). Rather, those desires (partly) define the agent that is acting. In response to this concern as it relates to my discussion here, I am trying to speak to the definitional problem at a more basic and general level of any kind of thing—whether agent or not—that undertakes some kind of activity/movement and at the same time circumvents the Proteus paradox (if something can be anything and everything, then at the core it is nothing). If it is not Proteus, then it has some kind of persistent form; that form defines or delimits it; in being delimited, it cannot undertake just any activity. The real problem here, though, arises with animate beings, those that have intentions or desires. It seems that such beings can be ambivalent about choices and have conflicted desires. Some observers may find that problems—especially moral ones—arise if one starts speaking of a divided self, as in even proposing there could be a divided self or conflicting desires., hence we should not propose the idea of internal constraints. The fear here, made famous by Berlin (1958), is of a slippery slope: If one accepts there is a divided self, then there are always seem to be a prioritizing of such selves, with the more rational selves taking priority. This prioritization hence leads to the notion that some people are overall more rational than others, and if so, then they have, by rational argument, an inherent social position to guide those less rational. The slippery slope to totalitarianism obviously follows within a few slips more. However, I find that this slippery-slope argument depends upon some false assumptions, the most significant of which is that if among one’s selves there is a more rational self, then it would soon follow that there are more rational people who are in the proper position to guide the less rational. That assumption is misguided for a number of reasons. One is that there may be no way of assessing if some people are indeed more rational than others according to a truly universal scale of rationality see Miller 2014). The main problem here is that there is simply no concurrence—or possibly any coherent idea—of what rationality is. Another faulty assumption of the slippery-slope argument is that if there were divided desire and selves as well as more rational persons, it does not follow that those reputedly more rational ones should guide the less rational. And if there is somehow established a need for such guidance, by many common accounts of rationality (Kant 1993, Nozick 1993) coercion is not rational, so the slippery slope again loses a slip. However, and most important, resolving whether there is a divided self is not germane to my more basic, general concern of what makes freedom possible/ To be free, the thing must exist, and to exist means persistence over some period of time, and persistence of existence means some kind of form, to have form is to have definition, and definition delimits not only what that thing is but what it can do. Commentators decrying internal constraints may contend that that delimitation actually is not a constraint. The disagreement here is not semantic: I believe that if you are delimited, you are limited; non-protean beings are limited. But if in the disagreement there is a semantic quibble, then if “constraint” by definition entails that the force acting to delimit is external (“constrains” may conjure the image of manacles!), we could thence shift to “delimitations,” which allows both internal and external delimitations. I believe, though, it is best not even to bring up the concept of “internal constraints” at this point because those connote agents or animate objects, and I am here laying out the basics of freedom for any kind of material object, both animate and inanimate. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. I hesitate to use this term, because of its strong association, in the context of philosophy of freedom and liberty, with Amartya Sen’s (1995) theory of equality as concerning capabilities. I here simply refer to the set of things an object may do, given the type of thing it is and the particular thing it is. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Some commentators, such as Gewirth (1978, 1982, 1984) speak of actors—beings that can act—as something more like “agents”; but here, with the term “acting,” I am taking the liberty to mean all entities that can undergo action, which includes the electron undergoing a quantum leap. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. It seems that sometimes I inadvertently alternate between “being” and “object” in speaking of the entity that is free. My seeming inadvertency is due to my shying from calling a human an “object” and from calling an inanimate entity such as a proton a “being.” There is no easy compromise in this context, and even “entity” is unsatisfactory. I beg patience and understanding in bearing with this bit of terminological difficulty in this part of the analysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. There are often other social conditions that reflect on gender parity in equalityA nomadic forager societies. In these societies, polygamy, specifically polygyny, was probably rare, compared with hierarchical societies, because the resources required for one man to keep more than one wife were too precious; Yet it is possible that monogamous relations were not strict. As for and domestic violence, While among many prehistoric NF groups there may have been domestic violence, matrilocal societies, in which a married woman, instead of going to the husband’s lived with her group and be protected by relatives. Again, while in many cases of NF groups domestic violence was discouraged, among such prehistoric groups it appears that, as with many practices, there was a spectrum of how these practices actually were, from one group to another. (Boehm 1999, Kelly 2007; see Hamby 2005 for a skeptical view of domestic violence in Native American communities.) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Some forager groups, such as the Inuit, have reportedly more gender-restrictive roles and thereby, if remaining in their community, less occasion for pursuing life goals than many other NF societies. See Wori 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. It could be contended that by allowing upstarts to take power over the group, while possibly undermining cultural values in the short-run, at least during the current members’ lives, in the long-run if that group gives rise to further such power-biased societies, in several thousand years such harnessing of authority and power could lead to benefits finally developing for group members beyond the upstarts, as happened in the line of civilization that led to modern benefits such as clean water and vaccinations that increased longevity. However, 1) it is not clear that this utilitarian calculus could work so extremely diachronically, so that 2) members of the initial society allowing the upstarts their way can serve as “sacrifices” for those possible future generations, 3) while it is unclear that such a move toward power concentration is done so for the sake of weighing the initial group’s utils against those future agents, at least because it is doubtful that such a util projection and fine-grained presaging is plausible; so, 4) a given group just may not develop in such a way as, after thousands of years of peoples’ dying at early ages than before the tyranny, that they would develop the means, such as clean water and vaccinations, to make millennia of tyranny worthwhile. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. For this trait, insofar as it concerns freedom-from, there may be some contention about how well this freedom-from is attained for women in all equalityA societies. Many non-state societies are either matrilineal or patrilineal, or matrilocal or patrilocal. Women in patrilocal societies usually must migrate from their home group to their spouse’s group, meaning these women are less protected from the husband’s family, particularly in disputes., so women’s freedom-from is not as well protected as men’s in such cases. As Miller (2023) often mentions in gender parity, along with many of the other traits of egalitarian societies, is not absolute, but over the average of these traits in these societies, they tend to exhibit these traits. Patrilocal societies often exhibit less gender parity than matrilocal but still may exhibit a good approximation of parity in other ways. Small-band societies such as nomadic foragers, for the benefit of adaptive (genetic) strength, often undergo some amount of spousal exchange across groups. See Boehm 1999 for further discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The risk of begging the question here may arise from the fact this section aims to show that equalityA implies freedom, and later sections work to say that equalityA entails freedom, so that equalityA and equality entail one another. Earlier sections contended that autonomy and equalityA entail one another. But to jump ahead here and say that by Trait 8 that equalityA entails freedom-to because of the society’s nurturing autonomy would be to assert that, in essence, autonomy entails freedom-to. To say that the society’s (Trait 8) nurturing of autonomy only reflects the society’s tendency to freedom-to allows only a correlation and not a causality or entailment. I am then not yet saying that autonomy implies freedom-to. Thus, I am not saying here that relying more upon one’s own sense of what is most appropriate in pursuing life goals necessarily means that one has the freedom-to to achieve those goals. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Such as freedom-to pursue goals particular to that culture and freedom-from unwanted interference. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Beethoven may be one of the few historical examples of when the coerced goal—his drunken father’s insistence the son play the piano—may have coincided with the personally set goal. Or can Beethoven’s case be put so neatly? [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. This is not to deny that many individuals in large contemporary societies of hundreds of millions inhabitants and millions of kinds of life-goals do find a decent fit. One can readily think of s scientists, musicians, writers, politicians, industrialists, and even some philosophers who may find themselves with a perfect fit of career and never feel they made a mistake in choice. Or, some of these may have the temperament to pursue a number of different life goals, such that any of them would fit well. However, looking at the preponderance of job types available, which are much less stellar than these more felicitous examples, as well as at statistics indicating the rise in depression, mental illness, and loneliness in such societies (see Miller 2014 for further discussion and statistics), the better fits start proving to be rare exception. Surely, humans can be remarkably flexible, and someone may work a lifetime examining statistics for plastic-bottle orders from the supplier, for a large soft-drink manufacturer and have no major complaint, but it would be rare for someone to matriculate at a university with such a life goal in mind, even though settling on I at least gets one by in life. The point here is not to even hint that there are simply superior and inferior jobs, but rather that few people are likely to find something that really fulfills their desires, talents, and dreams, and rising numbers of severe depression indicate that citizens are not finding satisfying lives, whether at work or home. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Overall, over-specialization endemic in industrial cultures is then anathema to freedom-to. One may further consider the degree to which an overabundance of tools leads to loss of freedom-to, a concept arising often in the popular media, in which the amount of enslavement of cart-owners to their devices is greater than any freedom they may seem to gain from the device.

    By contrast, though, is it plausible that not providing the opportunity for the proliferation of as many tools as possible mean stymieing freedom-to? For example, an aspiring astronaut’s lacking a spaceship would mean diminishment of freedom-to. Yet, this scenario would then mean that, since it is not possible to supply everyone with endless amounts of devices, everyone would necessarily always be infinitely deprived. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. While the term “nomadic forager” or “nomadic foraging” when applied to a culture-type has been used many places earlier in this work, now that the concepts are well-instilled in the reader’s mind, to gain some brevity, I will now use the abbreviation most of the time. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Despite this cruel fact, many ethnographers still insist that such cultures still have gender parity (Wori 1999). The insistence is not entirely outlandish. Many a culture, of all kinds of economic and sociopolitical structure, are known to have inconsistencies in their beliefs and practices, and group members may hold contradictory or inconsistent outlooks at the same time. It is possible that members of cultures that practice infanticide, most often on girls, can still feel that women’s contribution to the society, no matter how limited the fluidity of roles, make as valuable contribution as men. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Only if *X* were immortal, or living to an extremely great age, might *X* have some likelihood of meeting all new (also immortal) members of the population and thus be benefited by having increasing population. However, it is a curious mathematical problem as to whether population’s increasing beyond a certain rate and growing infinitely would still mean that *X* would never meet everybody, but I leave this issue to mathematicians. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See Miller 2014, Chapter Four, for more discussion. However, it should be noted that statistics compiled on depression rates can vary widely. Sometimes one study into worldwide rates country-to-country can contradict the findings of another. Sometimes the richest countries are shown as having the highest rates, sometimes the less developed, and especially the war-torn, nations having the highest rates. As social scientists and epidemiologists are often involved in such studies, it is important that these researchers face the challenge of these deficiencies and find means to establish study methods that minimize such inconsistencies. In the meantime, among those who, like myself, rely on these statistics, there may be a tendency, to cherry-pick. Aware of this possibility, I hope to be fair in using these statistics, as incorrect information is, of course a possible danger. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Without my going into full analysis of this cultural value of desire insatiability, it appears that rapidly multiplying desires and the pursuit of them was largely an upper-class conceit, growing out of or coupled with acquisitiveness. Perhaps the lower classes held the same value while incapable of pursuing it and lived in envy, as the society as a whole valued wealth and power-over, whether or not all had the fortune of experiencing wealth and power-over. With the onset of liberal democracy and concomitant Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th Centuries, all classes were more and more enabled to pursue endless insatiable desires. One may contend that such pursuit has been a major materialization or interpretation of ‘happiness,” and it certainly plays a role in consumer demand in contemporary capitalized economies. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. It may be objected that the call for optimization for life-goals as illustrated in Figure 1. is beleaguered for reasons comparable to those I elicit for optimizing personal relationships. Indeed, as societies become more complex and individuals more specialized, whether in work-skills or in desires, they have diminished likelihood of encountering the job tasks that fulfill their capacities and emotional needs and the personal relationships that fit their desires and emotional needs. It was proposed that in NF societies, the fewer choices of freedom-to for life goals actually optimized the possibility of finding a good match, contrasted with the too-many choices in complex societies. Why shouldn’t the fewer choices of persons for having relationships in NF societies not also mean optimizing freedom-to in this arena? Indeed, it may. In this subsection on freedom-to in personal relationships, I am being more cautious, finally taking a neutral stance on whether NF societies’ small numbers actually optimize this freedom, because of the emotional drives to seek personal relationships, especially those for sexual relationships, but other types as well. These drives are not comparable to those behind life-goals such as career. Drives for relationships may compel people in larger societies to comprise more than in NF societies. In this way, then, larger societies may offer more opportunities for this freedom than NF societies do. People in these large societies may also have more freedom to “say no” to pursuing personal relationships. In these ways, then, people in large industrial societies may arguably have more freedom-to of this sort than people in NF societies do. And yet, these latter societies, as I shall discuss, may have greater potential for fulfilling the—if you will—intent of this freedom-to, and that is fulfilling relationships. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. I do not mean to imply that NF societies do not create loners and ostracize members. One of the major reasons for ostracism seems to be occasional males’ attempting to exert power-over, that is, being upstarts or free-riders (Boehm 1999). In extreme cases, the social order established by equality is so crucial to their social stability, a group may murder such an upstart if absolutely incorrigible; but ostracism is more common. An ostracized person may attempt to take residence in another group but can face the same fate if not forsaking his upstart ways. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. That is, because of the groups’ the smallness and the general human need to depend upon groups for survival, NF society members of have fewer choices personal-relationship partners, although, as argued here, they have no less likelihood—if not greater likelihood—of finding someone compatible. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Is absolute lack of freedom possible?? A person in shackles in solitary is not absolutely unfree, as there is still freedom of private thought. But what if an entrepreneur invented an absolutely thorough thought-control device, and it was applied to the prisoner? At the same time, the prisoner was physically affixed with a device that prevented absolutely all outward muscular movement? It seems there is nothing of the human left that can have its freedom further restricted. This case, then, may be that of absolute lack of freedom. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)