The ETHICS
of IDENTITY

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Chapter One

∽ The Ethics of Individuality

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The Great Experiment

Depending upon how you look at it, John Stuart Mill's celebrated education was either a case study in individuality or a vigorous attempt to erase it. He himself seems to have been unable to decide which. He called his education "the experiment," and the account he provided in his *Autobiography* ensured that it would become the stuff of legend. He was learning Greek at three, and by the time he was twelve, he had read the whole of Herodotus, a fair amount of Xenophon, Virgil's *Eclogues* and the first six books of the *Aeneid*, most of Horace, and major works by Sophocles, Euripides, Polybius, Plato, and Aristotle, among others. After studying Pope's Homer, he set about composing a "continuation of the Iliad," at first on whim and then on command. He had also made serious forays into geometry, algebra, and differential calculus.

The young Mill was kept away as much as possible from the corrupting influence of other boys ("the contagion," as he put it, "of vulgar modes of thought and feeling"); and so, in his fourteenth year, when John Stuart was about to meet some new people beyond the range of his father's supervision, James Mill took his son for a walk in Hyde Park to prepare him for what he might expect to encounter. If he found that he was ahead of other children, he must attribute it not to his own superiority, but to the particular rigors of his intellectual upbringing: "it was no matter of praise to me, if I knew more than those who had not had a

similar advantage, but the deepest disgrace to me if I did not." This was the first inkling he had that he was precocious, and Mill had every reason to be astonished. "If I thought anything about myself, it was that I was rather backward in my studies," he recounts, "since I always found myself so, in comparison with what my father expected from me."[1]

But James Mill was a man with a mission, and it was his eldest son's appointed role to carry forward that mission. James, as Jeremy Bentham's foremost disciple, was molding yet another disciple—someone who, trained in accordance with Benthamite principles, would extend and promulgate the grand *raisonneur*'s creed for a new era. He was, so to speak, the samurai's son. In the event, self-development was to be a central theme of Mill's thought and, indeed, a main element of his complaint against his intellectual patrimony. When he was twenty-four, he wrote to his friend John Sterling about the loneliness that had come to overwhelm him: "There is now no human being (with whom I can associate on terms of equality) who acknowledges a common object with me, or with whom I can cooperate even in any practical undertaking, without feeling that I am only using a man, whose purposes are different, as an instrument for the furtherance of my own."[2] And his sensitivity about using another in this way surely flows from his sense that he himself had been thus used—that he had been conscripted into a master plan that was not his own.

Mill memorably wrote about the great crisis in his life—a sort of midlife crisis, which, as befitted his precocity, visited when he was twenty—and the spiral of anomie into which he descended, during the winter of 1826.

> In this frame of mind it occurred to me to put the question directly to myself: "Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institution and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, "No!" At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down.[3]

He pulled out of it, stepped blinking into the light; but for a long while thereafter found himself dazed and adrift. Intent on deprogramming himself from the cult of Bentham, he plunged into an uncritical eclecti-

cism, unwilling to exercise his perhaps overdeveloped faculties of discrimination. He was determinedly, even perversely, receptive to the arguments of those he would once have considered the embodiment of Error, whether the breathless utopianism of the Saint-Simonians or the murky Teutonic mysticisms of Coleridge and Carlyle. When intellectual direction returned to his life, it was through the agency of his new friend and soul mate, Mrs. Harriet Hardy Taylor. "My great readiness and eagerness to learn from everybody, and to make room in my opinions for every new acquisition by adjusting the old and the new to one another, might, but for her steadying influence, have seduced me into modifying my early opinions too much," he would write.[4]

It was a relationship that was greeted with considerable censure, not least by James Mill. So there is some irony that it was she, more than anyone, who seems to have returned the rudderless craft he had become to the tenets of the patrimonial cause. His love for her was at once rebellion and restoration—and the beginning of an intellectual partnership that spanned almost three decades. Only when Mrs. Taylor was widowed, in 1851, could she and Mill live together as man and wife, and in the mid-1850s their collaboration bore its greatest fruit: *On Liberty*, surely the most widely read work of political philosophy in the English language.

I retell this familiar story because so many of the themes that preoccupied Mill's social and political thought wend their way through his life. It is a rare convenience. Buridan's ass did not itself tap out any contributions to decision theory before succumbing to starvation. Paul Gauguin, the emblem and avatar of Bernard Williams's famous analysis of "moral luck," was not himself a moral philosopher. Yet Mill's concern with self-development and experimentation was a matter of both philosophical inquiry and personal experience. *On Liberty* is an impasto of influences—ranging from German romanticism, by way of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Coleridge, to the sturdy, each-person-counts-for-one equality and tolerance that were Mill's intellectual birthright. But my interest in Mill's work is essentially and tendentiously presentist, for it adumbrates the main themes of this book, as it does so many topics in liberal theory.

Consider his emphasis on the importance of diversity; his recognition of the irreducibly plural nature of human values; his insistence

that the state has a role in promoting human flourishing, broadly construed; his effort to elaborate a notion of well-being that was at once individualist and (in ways that are sometimes overlooked) profoundly social. Finally, his robust ideal of individuality mobilizes, as we'll see, the critical notions of autonomy and identity. My focus on Mill isn't by way of *argumentum ad verecundiam*; I don't suppose (nor did he) that his opinions represented the last word. But none before him—and, I am inclined to add, none since—charted out the terrain as clearly and as carefully as he did. We may cultivate a different garden, but we do so on soil that he fenced in and terraced.

Liberty and Individuality

"If it were felt that the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being; that it is not only a coordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilization, instruction, education, culture, but is itself a necessary part and condition of all those things; there would be no danger that liberty should be undervalued, and the adjustment of the boundaries between it and social control would present no extraordinary difficulty."[5] So Mill wrote in the book's celebrated third chapter, "On Individuality, as One of the Elements of Wellbeing," and it is a powerful proposal. For it seems to suggest that individuality could be taken as prior even to the book's titular subject, liberty itself. Our capacity to use all our faculties in our individual ways was, at least in part, what made liberty valuable to us. In Mill's accounting, individuality doesn't merely conduce to, it is constitutive of, the social good. And he returns to the point, lest anyone miss it: "Having said that Individuality is the same thing with development, and that it is only the cultivation of individuality which produces, or can produce, well-developed human beings, I might here close the argument: for what more or better can be said of any condition of human affairs, than that it brings human beings themselves nearer to the best thing they can be? or what worse can be said of any obstruction to good, than that it prevents this?"[6]

To be sure, Mill does offer conventionally consequentialist arguments for liberty—arguments that liberty is likely to have good effects. His

most famous arguments for freedom of expression assume that we will find the truth more often and more easily if we allow our opinions to be tested in public debate, in what we all now call the marketplace of ideas. But he argued with especial fervor that the cultivation of one's individuality is itself a part of well-being, something good *in se*, and here liberty is not a means to an end but part of the end. For individuality means, among other things, choosing for myself instead of merely being shaped by the constraint of political or social sanction. It was part of Mill's view, in other words, that freedom mattered not just because it enabled other things—such as the discovery of truth—but also because without it people could not develop the individuality that is an essential element of human good.[7] As he writes,

> He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need for any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision. And these qualities he requires and exercises exactly in proportion as the part of his conduct which he determines according to his own judgment and feelings is a large one. It is possible that he might be guided in some good path, and kept out of harm's way, without any of these things. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being? It really is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are that do it.[8]

Individuality is not so much a state to be achieved as a mode of life to be pursued. Mill says that it is important that one choose one's own plan of life, and liberty consists, at least in part, in providing the conditions under which a choice among acceptable options is possible. But one must choose one's own plan of life not because one will necessarily make the wisest choices; indeed, one might make poor choices. What matters most about a plan of life (Mill's insistence on the point is especially plangent coming from the subject of James and Jeremy's great experiment) is simply that it be chosen by the person whose life it is: "If a person possesses any tolerable amount of common sense and experience, his own mode of laying out his existence is best, not because it is the best in itself, but because it is his own mode." Not only is

exercising one's autonomy valuable in itself, but such exercise leads to self-development, to the cultivation of one's faculties of observation, reason, and judgment.[9] Developing the *capacity* for autonomy is necessary for human well-being, which is why it matters not just what people choose but "what manner of men they are that do it." So Mill invokes "individuality" to refer both to the precondition and to the result of such deliberative choice making.[10]

The account of individuality that Mill offers in chapter 3 of *On Liberty* does not distinguish consistently between the idea that it is good to be different from other people and the idea that it is good to be, in some measure, self-created, to be someone who "chooses his plan for himself."[11] Still, I think it is best to read Mill as finding inherent value not in diversity—being different—but in the enterprise of self-creation. For I might choose a plan of life that was, as it happened, very like other people's and still not be merely aping them, following them blindly as a model. I wouldn't, then, be contributing to diversity (so, in one sense, I wouldn't be very individual), but I would still be constructing my own—in another sense, individual—plan of life. *On Liberty* defends freedom because only free people can take full command of their own lives.

Plans of Life

Why does Mill insist that individuality is something that develops in coordination with a "plan of life"? His training as a utilitarian means that he wouldn't have separated well-being from the satisfaction of wants; but he was well aware that to make sense of such wants, we had to see them as structured in particular ways. Our immediate desires and preferences so often run contrary to other, longer-term ones. We wish to have written a book, but we don't wish to write one. We wish to ace our gross anatomy exam, but don't wish to study for it on this sunny afternoon. It's for this reason that we devise all manner of mechanisms to bind ourselves (in chapter 5, we'll see that much of "culture" comprises institutions of self-binding), so that, as we often say, we "force ourselves" to do what our interest requires. Moreover, many of our goals are clearly intermediate in nature, subor-

dinate to more comprehensive goals. You want to ace your gross anatomy exam because you want to be a surgeon; you want to be a surgeon because you want to mend cleft palates in Burkina Faso or, as the case may be, carve retroussé noses in Beverly Hills; and these ambitions may be in the service of still other ambitions. For reasons I'll explore more fully in chapter 5, it's worth bearing in mind that for Mill the activity of choosing freely had a *rational* dimension, was bound up in observation, reason, judgment, and deliberation. In *A System of Logic*, Mill even suggests that the consolidation of fleeting preferences into steadier purposes is what constitutes maturity:

> A habit of willing is commonly called a purpose; and among the causes of our volitions, and of the actions which flow from them, must be reckoned not only likings and aversions, but also purposes. It is only when our purposes have become independent of the feelings of pain or pleasure from which they originally took their rise, that we are said to have a confirmed character. "A character," says Novalis, "is a completely fashioned will", and the will, once so fashioned, may be steady and constant, when the passive susceptibilities of pleasure and pain are greatly weakened, or materially changed.[12]

Precisely this notion became central to a subsequent theorist of "life plans," Josiah Royce, who essentially defined a person as someone in possession of one. Rawls, too, was working within this Millian discourse when he stipulated that "a person's plan of life is rational if, and only if, (1) it is one of the plans that is consistent with the principles of rational choice when these are applied to all the relevant features of his situation, and (2) it is that plan among those meeting this condition which would be chosen by him with full deliberative rationality, that is, with full awareness of the relevant facts and after a careful consideration of the consequences."[13]

The currency such talk of "plans" has acquired in contemporary liberal theory has invited some gimlet-eyed scrutiny. "In general, people do not and cannot make an overall choice of a total plan of life," J. L. Mackie observes. "They choose successively to pursue various activities from time to time, not once and for all." Daniel A. Bell, in a critique of the sort of liberal individualism associated with Rawls, maintains that "people do not necessarily have a 'highest-order interest' in ratio-

nally choosing their career and marriage partner, as opposed to follow-ing their instincts, striving for ends and goals set for them by others (family, friends, community groups, the government, God), and letting fate do the rest of the work. . . . This, combined with an awareness of the unchosen nature of most of our social attachments, undermines those justifications for a liberal form of social organization founded on the value of reflective choice." And Michael Slote has raised concerns about the ways in which such "plans of life" mobilize preferences across time. Sometimes, given certain future uncertainties, we will be better served if we cultivate a measure of passivity, of watchful waiting. It's also the case that, as he puts it, "rational life-planfulness is a virtue with a temporal aspect"—it's not advisable for children to arrive at hard-and-fast decisions about their careers, because the activity requires the sort of prudence they're unlikely to possess. What's more, there are important human goods, like love or friendship, that we don't exactly "plan" for.[14]

The critics have a point. No doubt such talk of plans can be mis-leading if we imagine that people stride around with a neatly folded blueprint of their lives tucked into their back pocket—if we imagine life plans to be singular and fixed, rather than multiple and constantly shifting.[15] Dickens hardly needed to underscore the irony when he had Mr. Dombey announce, of his doomed young heir, "There is nothing of chance or doubt in the course before my son. His way in life was clear and prepared, and marked out before he existed."[16] Plans can evolve, reverse course, be derailed by contingencies large and small; and to speak of them should not commit us to the notion that there's one optimal plan for an individual. (It's noteworthy that even the great embodiments of ambition in European fiction—Stendhal's Julien Sorel, say, or Trollope's Phineas Finn—stumble into their careers through a succession of fortuities. Sorel's choice of the black over the red reflects not inner conviction, but the particular positions of the army and the church during the French restoration.) Mill himself did not labor under any such illusions. Nobody would have planned to fall in love with another man's wife and spend the next two decades in a nerve-racking ménage à trois.[17] Precisely because of his temperamental constancy, he was acutely aware of the ways in which his thought and goals shifted over time. That's one reason he came to think that the exploration of

the ends of life would yield to "experiments in living," although he had reason to know that conducting an experiment and having one conducted upon you were two different things.

The Soul of the Servitor

Though talk of plans can sound overly determinate, Mill's rhetorical excesses were frequently in the opposite direction—suggesting not too much structure but too little. The way he wrote about individuality, the product (and condition) of the freely chosen life plan, occasionally makes it sound like a weirdly exalted affair—an existence of ceaseless nonconformity, de novo judgments, poeticizing flights. It may conjure the whirling, willowy performance artist the cartoonist Jules Pfeiffer likes to draw, a character who perpetually expresses her every velleity in dance. This is not Mill's view,[18] any more than the engineering-schematic view is, but because Mill speaks abstractly, it may help to imagine a more concrete example. Consider, then, Mr. Stevens, the butler in Kazuo Ishiguro's celebrated novel *The Remains of the Day*. Mr. Stevens has spent a whole life in service in a "great house," and his aim has been to perform his task to the very best of his ability. He sees himself as part of the machinery that made the life of his master, Lord Darlington, possible. Since his master has acted on the stage of public history, he sees Lord Darlington's public acts as part of what gives meaning to his own life. As he puts it: "Let us establish this quite clearly: a butler's duty is to provide good service. It is not to meddle in the great affairs of the nation. The fact is, such great affairs will always be beyond the understanding of those such as you and I, and those of us who wish to make our mark must realize that we best do so by concentrating on what *is* within our realm."[19]

Mr. Stevens takes what is "within our realm" extremely seriously; for example, he feels, as he says, "uplifted" by a "sense of triumph" when he manages to pursue his duties unflustered on the evening that the woman he barely realizes he loves has announced to him that she is going to marry somebody else.[20] By the time he tells us about this fateful day, we know him well enough to understand how such a sentiment is possible.

At the end of the book, Mr. Stevens is returning to Darlington Hall from the holiday during which he has reviewed his life with us, and he tells us he is going back to work on what he calls his "bantering skills" in order to satisfy his new American master.

> I have of course already devoted much time to developing my bantering skills, but it is possible I have never previously approached the task with the commitment I might have done. Perhaps, then, when I return to Darlington Hall tomorrow . . . I will begin practising with renewed effort. I should hope, then, by the time of my employer's return, I shall be in a position to pleasantly surprise him.[21]

Few readers of Ishiguro's novel will aspire to be a butler, least of all the sort of butler that Mr. Stevens aimed to be. And there is, indeed, something mildly ridiculous in the thought of an elderly man working on his skills at light conversation in order to entertain his young "master." Ishiguro specializes in starchy, self-deceived narrators, and readers are likely to feel when they come to these last words a tremendous sadness at what is missing from Mr. Stevens's life.

Nevertheless, Mr. Stevens is continuing to live out the life he has chosen. And it does seem to me that we can understand part of what Mill is suggesting by saying that bantering is something of value to Mr. Stevens because he has chosen to be the best butler he can be. This is not a life *we* would have chosen; but for someone who *has* chosen it, it is intelligible that improving one's bantering skills is a good. Mill isn't very clear in *On Liberty* about how "individuality" might relate to other kinds of goods. But he recognized that sometimes a thing matters because a person has chosen to make a life in which it matters, and that it would not matter if he or she had not chosen to make such a life. To say that bantering is of value to Mr. Stevens is not just to say that he wants to be able to do it well, as he might want to be good at bridge or bowling. It is to say that, given his aims, his "plan of life," bantering matters to him; we, for whom bantering does not matter in this way, can still see that it is a value for him within the life he has chosen.

You may think that this is not a life that anyone who had other reasonable options should have chosen, and that even someone who was forced into it should not have taken to it with the enthusiasm and commitment that Mr. Stevens manifests. You might even explain this

by saying that the life of the perfect servant is not one of great dignity. But the fact is that Mr. Stevens did choose this mode of life, in the full awareness of alternatives, and pursued it with focused ambition: among other things, he clearly sought to surpass his father's own considerable achievement in the profession. It is because of his commitment that he has engaged in such vigorous self-development, cultivating and improving his various skills. And the seriousness with which he takes the imperative of self-development is one that Mill could only have applauded. As Mill wrote in an emphatic letter to his friend David Barclay, "there is only one plain rule of life eternally binding, and independent of all variations in creeds, and in the interpretation of creeds, embracing equally the greatest moralities and the smallest; it is this: try thyself unweariedly till thou findest the highest thing thou art capable of doing, faculties and outward circumstances being both duly considered, and then DO IT."[22] Mill also says that "a sense of dignity" is something that "all human beings possess in one form or another,"[23] and dignity is something that Mr. Stevens himself knows a good deal about. He even offers a definition of it in response to the questioning of a doctor he meets on his travels.

> 'What do *you* think dignity's all about?'
> The directness of the inquiry did, I admit, take me rather by surprise. 'It's rather a hard thing to explain in a few words, sir,' I said. 'But I suspect it comes down to not removing one's clothing in public.'[24]

This is more than a joke. Mr. Stevens *believes* in decorum, good manners, formality. These compose the world that he has chosen to inhabit and make it the world that it is. Once again, these may not be values for us, but they *are* values for him, given his plan of life. When he is serious, when he is explaining to a room full of villagers what makes the difference between a gentleman and someone who is not, he says: "one would suspect that the quality . . . might be most usefully termed 'dignity.' " This is a quality that he, like many conservatives, believes to be far from equally distributed. "Dignity's not just something for gentlemen," says a character called Harry Smith. And Mr. Stevens observes in his narrative voice, "I perceived, of course, that Mr. Harry Smith and I were rather at cross purposes on this matter."[25]

If Mr. Stevens is a helpful illustration of individuality—of the values of self-development and autonomy—it is in part because he must seem an unlikely representative of such things; to cite him as such is to read Ishiguro's novel against the grain. Ishiguro is like you and me, a modern person, and his novel is sad (and comic) because Mr. Stevens's life seems, in ways he does not recognize, a failure. Mr. Stevens is also a contentious example because—for reasons I'll be discussing further in the next chapter—some philosophers would want to deny that he was fully autonomous, and so to ascribe autonomy to him is to challenge a certain conception of what autonomy requires. At first blush, Mr. Stevens represents precisely the dead hand of convention and custom that Mill railed against in *On Liberty*. Yet Mill's view of convention and custom was rather more complicated than such denunciations suggest. In a somewhat wistful passage in *A System of Logic*, he writes:

> The longer our species lasts, and the more civilized it becomes, the more, as Comte remarks, does the influence of past generations over the present, and of mankind en masse over every individual in it, predominate over other forces; and though the course of affairs never ceases to be susceptible of alteration both by accidents and by personal qualities, the increasing preponderance of the collective agency of the species over all minor causes, is constantly bringing the general evolution of the race into something which deviates less from a certain and preappointed track.[26]

At the same time, Stevens's rather circumscribed conception of what belongs in his "realm" of interest and expertise does make him especially vulnerable to the vagaries of moral luck. For Lord Darlington turns out to be a weak man, an easy mark for the National Socialist Joachim von Ribbentrop, Germany's prewar ambassador to London. The result is that (at least in the novel's apparent accounting) Mr. Stevens's life is a failure because his master's life has proved one, not because service is, in fact, bound to lead to failure. After all, if Mr. Stevens had been working for Winston Churchill, he, at least, could deny that he had failed; he could claim to have been the faithful servant of a great man, just as he set out to be.[27] Instead, Mr. Stevens's pursuit of his vocation robs him both of his dignity and of a love life, since the only woman he might have married works in the same household and he believes a relationship with her would most likely have compro-

mised their professional relations. Though Mr. Stevens makes a mess of this, there is, as I say, no reason to think that these losses are the fault of his vocation.[28]

Then again, perhaps the reason his life seems a failure is that he is servile. Servility, as Thomas E. Hill has suggested we understand the term, isn't just happily earning your living by working for another; it's acting as an unfree person, a person whose will is somehow subjected to another's—a person who, in Hill's formulation, disavows his own moral rights.[29] And yet Mr. Stevens might be defended even from this charge. Has he, in fact, disavowed his own moral rights? His sense of duty to his employer seems derivative from his sense of duty to himself and his own amour propre, for we have no doubt that he could let standards slip without his employer's being any the wiser. Mr. Stevens, who holds to his sense of what is proper despite the caviling of his peers and the inattentiveness of his employer, is conscious that he represents a way of life that is endangered; his conservatism is decidedly not that of conformity. What makes Mr. Stevens a useful example of the moral power of individuality, then, is that he exemplifies it even though he himself doesn't much believe in liberty, equality, or fraternity. Even someone as illiberal as Mr. Stevens, that is, demonstrates the power of individuality as an ideal.

Social Choices

For Mill, Royce, and others, as we've seen, a plan of life serves as a way of integrating one's purposes over time, of fitting together the different things one values. The fulfillment of goals that flow from such a plan—or what we might prefer to call our ground projects and commitments[30]—has more value than the satisfaction of a fleeting desire. In particular, Mill says that it matters because, in effect, the life plan is an expression of my individuality, of who I am: and, in this sense, a desire that flows from a value that itself derives from a life plan is more important than a desire (such as an appetite) that I just happen to have; for it flows from my reflective choices, my commitments, not just from passing fancy.

The ideal of self-authorship strikes a popular chord: we all know the sentiment in the form that Frank Sinatra made famous. In a song in which a person reviews his life toward its end, Mr. Sinatra sings: "I've lived a life that's full. / I've traveled each and ev'ry highway; / But more, much more than this, / I did it my way."[31] If my choosing it is part of what makes my life plan good, then imposing on me a plan of life—even one that is, in other respects, an enviable one—is depriving me of a certain kind of good. For a person of a liberal disposition, my life's shape is up to me, even if I make a life that is objectively less good than a life I could have made, provided that I have done my duty toward others.[32] All of us could, no doubt, have made better lives than we have: but that, Mill says, is no reason for others to attempt to force those better lives upon us.

And yet this scenario of self-chosen individuality invites a couple of worries. First, it is hard to accept the idea that certain values derive from my choices if those choices themselves are just arbitrary. Why should the mere fact that I have laid out my existence mean that it is the best, especially if it is not the best "in itself"?

Suppose, for example, I adopt a life as a solitary traveler around the world, free of entanglements with family and community, settling for a few months here and there, making what little money I need by giving English lessons to businesspeople. My parents tell me that I am wasting my life as a Scholar Gypsy, that I have a good education, talent as a musician, and a wonderful gift for friendship, all of which are being put to no use. You don't have to be a communitarian to wonder whether it is a satisfactory response to say only that I have considered the options and this is the way I have chosen. Don't I need to say something about what this way makes possible for me and for those I meet? Or about what other talents of mine it makes use of? It is one thing to say that the government or society or your parents ought not to stop you from wasting your life if you choose to; but it is another to say that wasting your life in your own way is good just because it *is* your way, just because you have chosen to waste your life.

This may be why Mill seesaws between arguing that I am in the optimal position to decide what plan of life is best for me, given "the mental, moral, and aesthetic stature" of which I am capable, and the more radical view that the mere fact that I have chosen a plan of life recommends

it. For on the former view, my choice is *not* arbitrary. It reflects the facts of my capacities, and, given that I have enough "common sense and experience," I am likely to do a better job than anybody else of judging how to make a life that fits those capacities. On this view, I discover a life for myself, based in the facts of my nature and my place in the world. But on the latter, my role is as originator of value, not as discoverer of it. Here the charge against individuality is that it is *arbitrary.*

Let me raise a second worry with the picture of self-chosen individuality we've been examining. At times, Mill's way of talking can suggest a rather unattractive form of individualism, in which the aim is to make a life in which you yourself matter most. This conception has sometimes been prettified with a particular account of the unfettered human soul. The result finds memorable expression in the misty-eyed antinomianism of Oscar Wilde's "Soul of Man under Socialism," in which, once the shackles of convention are thrown off, some sort of dewy and flower-strewn Pre-Raphaelitism will reign: "It will be a marvellous thing—the true personality of man—when we see it. It will grow naturally and simply, flowerlike, or as a dispute. It will not prove things. It will know everything. And yet it will not busy itself about knowledge." And so breathlessly on.[33] This is the sort of moral kitsch that gives individuality a bad name.

And Mill does argue for a view of one's self as a project, in a way that might be read as suggesting that self-cultivation and sociability are competing values, though each has its place.[34] This can lead us to think that the good of individuality is reined in by or traded off against the goods of sociability so that there is an intrinsic opposition between the self and society. It can lead us to think that political institutions, which develop and reflect the value of sociability, are always a source of constraint on our individuality. Here is a second charge against individuality: that it is *unsociable.*

Now, to show that individuality, or, more baldly, self-creation, doesn't necessarily succumb to these pitfalls is not to show that it isn't susceptible to them; but, right away, we can establish that it *needn't* involve either arbitrariness or unsociability. A plan of life for Mill was likely to include family and friends and might include (as his did) public service. Mr. Stevens's individuality, too, is far from unsociable because what he has chosen to be is a butler, which is something you can be

only if there are other people to play other roles in the social world; a butler needs a master or mistress, cooks, housekeepers, maids. It is an intrinsically social role, a station with its public duties, not just an opportunity to follow one's private tastes. And Mr. Stevens's individuality is far from arbitrary because it is a role that has developed within a tradition, a role that makes sense within a certain social world: a social world that no longer exists, as it happens, which is one of many reasons why none of us wants to be a butler in the way Mr. Stevens was. We don't want to be butlers in that way because—without a social world of "great houses," house parties, and the rest—one *can't* be a butler in that way. (This is a point that Bernard Williams has made by noting that, relative to a particular historical position, certain forms of life are not "real options.")[35] Mr. Stevens is an individual, and he has made his own plan of life: but he hasn't made it arbitrarily. The butler elements in his plan, for example, make sense—to give but two reasons—because there is, first, a career available with that role, a way of making a living; and, second, because his father was a butler before him. (Once again, I don't expect you to find these reasons attractive; but you should find them intelligible.)

As we've seen, a plan of life is not like an engineer's plan. It doesn't map out all the important (and many unimportant) features of our life in advance. These plans are, rather, mutable sets of organizing aims, aims within which you can fit both daily choices and a longer-term vision. Still, there remains a certain lack of clarity to talk of Mr. Stevens's plan of life: what precisely is his plan? Forced to speak in that way, we should say that his plan is to be the best butler he can be, to follow in his father's footsteps, to be a man. But I think it is more natural to say that he plans to live *as* a butler, his father's son, a man, a loyal Englishman. What structures his sense of his life, then, is something less like a blueprint and more like what we nowadays call an "identity."[36] For to speak of *living-as* here is to speak of identities.[37]

Mr. Stevens has constructed for himself an identity as a butler: more specifically as the butler to Lord Darlington and of Darlington Hall and as his father's son. It is an identity in which his gender plays a role (butlers must be men) and in which his nationality is important, too, because in the late 1930s Lord Darlington meddles (rather incompetently, it turns out) in the "great affairs" of the British nation, and it is

his service to a man who is serving that nation that gives Mr. Stevens part of his satisfaction.[38] But Ishiguro's character has put these more generic identities—butler, son, man, Englishman—together with other skills and capacities that are more particular, and, in so doing, he has fashioned a self. And, as we shall see in chapter 3, the idea of identity already has built into it a recognition of the complex interdependence of self-creation and sociability.

Invention and Authenticity

At this point, it may be helpful to consider two rival pictures of what is involved in shaping one's individuality. One, a picture that comes from romanticism, is the idea of finding one's self—of discovering, by means of reflection or a careful attention to the world, a meaning for one's life that is already there, waiting to be found. This is the vision we can call *authenticity*: it is a matter of being true to who you already really are, or would be if it weren't for distorting influences. "The Soul of Man under Socialism" is one locus classicus of this vision. ("The personality of man . . . will be as wonderful as the personality of a child.") The other picture, the *existentialist* picture, let's call it, is one in which, as the doctrine goes, existence precedes essence: that is, you exist first and then have to decide what to exist *as*, who to be, afterward. On an extreme version of this view, we have to make a self up, as it were out of nothing, like God at the Creation, and individuality is valuable because only a person who has made a self has a life worth living.[39]

But neither of these pictures is right.

The authenticity picture is wrong because it suggests that there is no role for creativity in making a self, that the self is already and in its totality fixed by our natures. Mill was rightly emphatic that we do have such a role, however constrained we are by our nature and circumstances. Man "has, to a certain extent, a power to alter his character," he writes in *A System of Logic*:

> His character is formed by his circumstances (including among these his particular organization); but his own desire to mould it in a particular way, is one of those circumstances, and by no means one of the least influential.

> We can not, indeed, directly will to be different from what we are. But neither did those who are supposed to have formed our character directly will that we should be what we are. Their will had no direct power except over their own actions. They made us what they did make us, by willing, not the end, but the requisite means; and we, when our habits are not too inveterate, can, by similarly willing the requisite means, make ourselves different. If they could place us under the influence of certain circumstances, we, in like manner, can place ourselves under the influence of other circumstances. We are exactly as capable of making our own character, if we will, as others are of making it for us.[40]

By the same token, the existentialist picture is wrong because it suggests that there is *only* creativity, that there is nothing for us to respond to, nothing out of which to do the construction. "Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow . . . according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing," Mill told us. His metaphor makes the constraints apparent: a tree, whatever the circumstances, does not become a legume, a vine, or a cow. The reasonable middle view is that constructing an identity is a good thing (if self-authorship is a good thing) but that the identity must make some kind of sense. And for it to make sense, it must be an identity constructed in response to facts outside oneself, things that are beyond one's own choices.

Some philosophers—Sartre among them—have tried to combine both the romantic and the existentialist views, as Michel Foucault suggested some years ago: "Sartre avoids the idea of the self as something that is given to us, but through the moral notion of authenticity, he turns back to the idea that we have to be ourselves—to be truly our true self. I think the only acceptable practical consequence of what Sartre has said is to link his theoretical insight to the practice of creativity—and not to that of authenticity. From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art."[41]

Now Foucault, in this passage, speaks of creativity without, perhaps, sufficiently acknowledging the role of the materials on which our creativity is exercised. As Charles Taylor notes, "I can define my identity

only against the background of things that matter. But to bracket out history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity, everything but what I find in myself, would be to eliminate all candidates for what matters."[42]

Let me propose a thought experiment that might dissuade those who speak of self-choice as the ultimate value. Suppose it were possible, through some sort of instantaneous genetic engineering, to change any aspect of your nature, so that you could have any combination of capacities that has ever been within the range of human possibility: you could have Michael Jordan's fade-away shot, Mozart's musicality, Groucho Marx's comic gifts, Proust's delicate way with language. Suppose you could put these together with any desires you wanted—homo- or hetero-, a taste for Wagner or Eminem. (You might saunter into the metamorphosis chamber whistling the overture to *Die Meistersinger* and strut out murmuring "Will the Real Slim Shady Please Stand Up?") Suppose, further, that there were no careers or professions in this world because all material needs and services were met by intelligent machines. Far from being a utopia, so it seems to me, this would be a kind of hell. There would be no reason to choose any of these options, because there would be no achievement in putting together a life. One way of explaining why this life would be meaningless comes from Nietzsche:

> *One thing is needful.*—To "give style" to one's character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed—both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime.[43]

To create a life is to create a life out of the materials that history has given you. As we saw, Mill's rhetoric juxtaposes the value of self-authorship with the value of achieving our capacities, perhaps because the former can seem arbitrary; but once it is tied to something out of our control, once our self-construction is seen as a creative response to our capacities and our circumstances, then the accusation of arbitrariness loses its power.

Thinking about the capacities and circumstances that history has, in fact, given each of us will also allow us to address the worry about the unsociability of the individuated self, further elaborating on the social dependence we ascribed to Mr. Stevens. The language of identity reminds us to what extent we are, in Charles Taylor's formulation, "dialogically" constituted. Beginning in infancy, it is in dialogue with other people's understandings of who I am that I develop a conception of my own identity. We come into the world "mewling and puking in the nurse's arms" (as Shakespeare so genially put it), capable of human individuality but only if we have the chance to develop it in interaction with others. An identity is always articulated through concepts (and practices) made available to you by religion, society, school, and state, mediated by family, peers, friends. Indeed, the very material out of which our identities are shaped is provided, in part, by what Taylor has called our language in "a broad sense," comprising "not only the words we speak, but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the 'languages' of art, of gesture, of love, and the like."[44] It follows that the self whose choices liberalism celebrates is not a presocial thing—not some authentic inner essence independent of the human world into which we have grown—but rather the product of our interaction from our earliest years with others.

As a result, individuality presupposes sociability, not just a grudging respect for the individuality of others. A free self is a human self, and we are, as Aristotle long ago insisted, creatures of the $\pi o \lambda \iota \varsigma$, social beings. We are social in many ways and for many reasons: because we desire company, because we depend on one another for survival, because so much that we care about is collectively created. And the prospect of such sociability was basic to Mill's own ethical vision. "The social feeling of mankind" was, he thought, "a powerful natural sentiment," and one that formed a basis for morality:

> The social state is at once so natural, so necessary, and so habitual to man, that, except in some unusual circumstances or by an effort of voluntary abstraction, he never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body; and this association is riveted more and more, as mankind are further removed from the state of savage independence. Any condition, therefore, which is essential to a state of society, becomes more and more an inseparable part of every person's conception of the state of things which he is born

into, and which is the destiny of a human being. . . . The deeply-rooted conception which every individual even now has of himself as a social being, tends to make him feel it one of his natural wants that there should be harmony between his feelings and aims and those of his fellow creatures. . . . To those who have it, it possesses all the characters of a natural feeling. It does not present itself to their minds as a superstition of education, or a law despotically imposed by the power of society, but as an attribute which it would not be well for them to be without. This conviction is the ultimate sanction of the greatest happiness morality.[45]

And it's worth returning to the point that Mill's conception of happiness or well-being included individuality, freedom, autonomy; that these had a constitutive, not just an instrumental, relation to it.[46] To value individuality properly just *is* to acknowledge the dependence of the good for each of us on relationships with others. Without these bonds, as I say, we could not come to be free selves, not least because we could not come to be selves at all. Throughout our lives part of the material that we are responding to in shaping our selves is not within us but outside us, out there in the social world. Most people shape their identities as partners of lovers who become spouses and fellow parents; these aspects of our identities, though in a sense social, are peculiar to who we are as individuals, and so represent a *personal* dimension of our identities. But we are all, as well, members of broader collectivities. To say that *collective* identities—that is, the collective dimensions of our individual identities—are responses to something outside our selves is to say that they are the products of histories, and our engagement with them invokes capacities that are not under our control. Yet they are social not just because they involve others, but because they are constituted in part by socially transmitted conceptions of how a person of that identity properly behaves.

The Social Scriptorium

In constructing an identity, one draws, among other things, on the kinds of person available in one's society. Of course, there is not just *one* way that gay or straight people or blacks or whites or men or women are to behave, but there are ideas around (contested,

many of them, but all sides in these contests shape our options) about how gay, straight, black, white, male, or female people ought to conduct themselves.[47] These notions provide loose norms or models, which play a role in shaping our plans of life. Collective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their projects and in telling their life stories. (We'll explore this matter further in chapter 3.)

To be sure, an emphasis on how we make sense of our lives, our selves, through narrative is shared by a number of philosophers— Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre among them—who worry that conventional versions of liberal theory scant the social matrix in which our identities take shape. At the same time, the Millian language of life plans resonates with their insistence that to live our lives as agents requires that we see our actions and experiences as belonging to something like a story.[48] For Charles Taylor, it is "a basic condition of making sense of ourselves" that "we grasp our lives in a narrative"; narrative, then, is not "an optional extra." For Alasdair MacIntyre, it is "because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others." As he argues, each of our "shorter-term intentions is, and can only be made, intelligible by reference to some longer-term intentions," and so "behavior is only characterized adequately when we know what the longer and longest term intentions are and how the shorter-term intentions are related to the longer. Once again we are involved in writing a narrative history."[49] Such concerns, as I hope I've established, aren't foreign to the sort of liberalism that Mill, at least, sought to promulgate.

So we should acknowledge how much our personal histories, the stories we tell of where we have been and where we are going, are constructed, like novels and movies, short stories and folktales, within narrative conventions. Indeed, one of the things that popular narratives (whether filmed or televised, spoken or written) do for us is to provide models for telling our lives.[50] At the same time, part of the function of our collective identities—of the whole repertory of them that a society makes available to its members—is to structure possible narratives of the individual self.

Thus, for example, the rites of passage that many societies associate with the identities male and female provide shape to the transition to adulthood; gay identities may organize lives around the narrative of coming out; Pentecostalists are born again; and black identities in America often engage oppositional narratives of self-construction in the face of racism. One thing that matters to people across many societies is a certain narrative unity, the ability to tell a story of one's life that hangs together. The story—my story—should cohere in the way appropriate to a person in my society.[51] It need not be the exact same story, from week to week, or year to year, but how it fits into the wider story of various collectivities matters for most of us. It is not just that, say, gender identities give shape to one's life; it is also that ethnic and national identities fit a personal narrative into a larger narrative. For modern people, the narrative form entails seeing one's life as having a certain arc, as making sense through a life story that expresses who one is through one's own project of self-making. That narrative arc is yet another way in which an individual's life depends deeply on something socially created and transmitted.

I made a distinction earlier between a personal and a collective dimension of identity. Both play a role in these stories of the self. But only the collective identities have scripts, and only they count as what Ian Hacking meant by "kinds of person."[52] There is a logical category but no social category of the witty, or the clever, or the charming, or the greedy. People who share these properties do not constitute a social group. In the relevant sense, they are not a kind of person. In our society (though not, perhaps, in the England of Addison and Steele) being witty does not, for example, suggest the life-script of "the wit." And the main reason why the personal dimensions are different is that they are not dependent on labeling: while intelligence, in our society, is of the first social importance, people could be intelligent even if no one had the concept. To say that race is socially constructed, that an African American is, in Hacking's sense, a "kind of person," is, in part, to say that there are no African Americans independent of social practices associated with the racial label; by contrast, there could certainly be clever people even if we did not have the concept of cleverness.[53] I shall pursue these issues in more detail in chapter 3.

ETHICS IN IDENTITY

How does identity fit into our broader moral projects? One view is this: there are many things of value in the world. Their value is objective; they are important whether or not anybody recognizes they are important. But there is no way of ranking these many goods or trading them off against one another, so there is not always, all things considered, a best thing to do. As a result, there are many morally permissible options. One thing identity provides is another source of value, one that helps us make our way among those options. To adopt an identity, to make it mine, is to see it as structuring my way through life. That is, my identity has patterns built into it (so Mill is wrong when he implies that it is always better to be different from others), patterns that help me think about my life; one such simple pattern, for example, is the pattern of a career, which ends, if we live long enough, with retirement.[54] But identities also create forms of solidarity: if I think of myself as an X, then, sometimes, the mere fact that somebody else is an X, too, may incline me to do something with or for them; where X might be "woman," "black," or "American." Now solidarity with those who share your identity might be thought of as, other things being equal, a good thing. As such there is a universal value of solidarity, but it works out in different ways for different people because different people have different identities. Or it might be thought to be a good thing because we enjoy it and, other things being equal, it is good for people to have and to do what they enjoy having and doing.

As we have seen, however, many values are internal to an identity: they are among the values someone who has that identity must take into account, but are not values for people who do not have that identity. Take the value of ritual purity, as conceived of by many orthodox Jews. They think they should keep kosher because they are Jewish; they don't expect anyone who is not a Jew to do so, and they may not even think it would be a good thing if non-Jews did. It is a good thing only for those who are or those who become Jewish: and they do not think that it would be a better world if everybody did become Jewish. The Covenant, after all, is only with the Children of Israel.

Similarly, we might think that your identity as a nationalist in a struggle against colonial domination made it valuable for you to risk your

life for the liberation of your country, as Nathan Hale did, regretting that he had only one of them to give. If you were not a nationalist, you might still die advancing a country's cause; and then, while some good might come of it, that good would not be, so to speak, a good for you. We might regard your life as wasted, just because you did not identify with the nation you had died for.

There are thus various ways that identity might be a source of value, rather than being something that realizes other values. First, if an identity is yours, it may determine certain acts of solidarity as valuable, or be an internal part of the specification of your satisfactions and enjoyments, or motivate and give meaning to acts of supererogatory kindness. Indeed, the presence of an identity concept in the specification of my aim—as helping a fellow bearer of some identity—may be part of what explains why I have the aim at all. Someone may gain satisfaction from giving money to the Red Cross after a hurricane in Florida as an act of solidarity with other Cuban Americans. Here the fact of the shared identity is part of why he or she has the aim. By the same token, a shared identity may give certain acts or achievements a value for me they would not otherwise have had. When a Ghanaian team wins the African Cup of Nations in soccer, that is of value to me by virtue of my identity as a Ghanaian. If I were a Catholic, a wedding in a Catholic church might be of value to me in a special way because I was a Catholic.

There are still other ways in which the success of our projects (not to mention our having those projects in the first place) might derive from a social identity. Since human beings are social creatures, Mill writes, they are "familiar with the fact of cooperating with others and proposing to themselves a collective, not an individual interest as the aim (at least for the time being) of their actions. So long as they are cooperating, their ends are identified with those of others; there is at least a temporary feeling that the interests of others are their own interests."[55] Projects and commitments may involve collective intentions, as with a religious ritual that requires the coordinated involvement of one's fellow worshipers for its realization.[56] A social project may involve the creation or re-creation of an identity, in the way that Elijah Muhammad sought to redefine the American Negro's collective self-understanding, or the way that Deaf activists seek to construct a group identity that supervenes upon the condition of deafness. For Theodor Herzl,

success depended on creating a sense of national consciousness among a people who might never have conceived themselves (at least in his terms) as belonging to a common nation. But a common pursuit may involve much smaller-scale groups—of twenty, or ten, or two. "When two persons have their thoughts and speculations completely in common; when all subjects of intellectual or moral interest are discussed between them in daily life . . . when they set out from the same principles, and arrive at their conclusions by processes pursued jointly," Mill wrote of the composition of *On Liberty*, "it is of little consequence in respect to the question of originality, which of them holds the pen."[57]

INDIVIDUALITY AND THE STATE

The picture of self-development we've been tracing puts identity at the heart of human life. A theory of politics, I am suggesting, ought to take this picture seriously. That alone doesn't settle much in the way of practicalities, but the picture is one that we can develop and explore in trying to negotiate the political world we share. Self-development, as Wendy Donner has shown, is a theme that bridges Mill's ethical, social, and political contributions; but his view that the state has a role to play in such development brings him into conflict with some powerful currents of modern political thought, which insist that the public sphere be neutral among different conceptions of the good.[58] Unlike many contemporary liberals—Rawls, Dworkin, and Nagel, say—Mill made no claim to be a neutralist. "The first element of good government," Mill wrote in *Considerations on Representative Government*, "being the virtue and intelligence of the human beings composing the community, the most important point of excellence which any form of government can possess is to promote the virtue and intelligence of the people themselves."[59]

This is not, to be sure, a terribly *confining* conception of the good and, in Mill's construction of it, was bound to encourage diversity rather than inhibit it. Still, as we'll see in chapter 4, Mill has been charged with playing favorites among religions, because of his emphasis on the fostering of personal autonomy as an appropriate goal of the state: does this not suggest that strong forms of Calvinism, say, will be contemned?[60]

And so *On Liberty* has had a curious legacy among liberal theorists. On the one hand, it has been taken to advocate a sort of nightwatchman state—a strong, my-freedom-ends-at-your-nose form of antipaternalism. On the other, as we've seen, it has been taken to espouse a sectarian conception of the good, and so a vision of the state that was excessively paternalist, intrusive, intolerant. (In Rawlsian terms, it is guilty of advocating a comprehensive, rather than a strictly political, liberalism.) What Isaiah Berlin called "negative liberty"—protection from government intervention in certain areas of our lives—can obviously be an aid in the development of a life of one's own, as Mill believed. But Mill's view of individuality also led him to suppose that we might need not only liberty from the state and society, but also help from state and society to achieve our selves. Isaiah Berlin taught us to call this "positive liberty," and he was deeply (and thoughtfully) skeptical about it: skeptical because, among other things, he thought that in the name of positive liberty, governments had been—and would continue to be—tempted to set out to shape people in the name of the better selves they might become.[61] It is hard to deny that terrible things have been done in the name of freedom, and that some bad arguments have led people from the ideal of emancipation down the path to the Gulag. But, pace Berlin, enabling people to construct and live out an identity does not have to go awry.[62]

Recall those words of Mill: "What more or better can be said of any condition of human affairs, than that it brings human beings themselves nearer to the best thing they can be? or what worse can be said of any obstruction to good, than that it prevents this?"[63] He took this to be a goal for governance, not merely a brake on governance. Certainly the author of *On Liberty* wasn't any kind of libertarian; he thought the state should sponsor scientific inquiry, regulate child labor, and restrict the working day for factory workers; require that children be educated; provide poor relief, and so forth.[64] At the same time, it was anathema to him that the government should seek to entrench a single form of life. "If it were only that people have diversities of taste that is reason enough for not attempting to shape them all after one model," he writes. "But different persons also require different conditions for their spiritual development; and can no more exist healthily in the same moral, than all variety of plants can exist in the same physical

atmosphere and climate. The same things which are helps to one person towards the cultivation of his higher nature, are hindrances to another." And such are the differences among people that "unless there is a corresponding diversity in their modes of life, they neither obtain their fair share of happiness, nor grow up to the mental, moral, and aesthetic stature of which their nature is capable."[65] Here the idea is that freedom allows people to make the best of themselves. In such passages, it looks as though making the best of oneself entails becoming a kind of person that it is objectively valuable to be—a person of high mental or moral or aesthetic stature—whatever one's chosen plan of life.[66]

In truth, it's not obvious that Mill's "comprehensive" ideals (and I'll have more to say on the subject, under the rubric of "perfectionism," in chapter 5) should estrange him from the standard-bearers of modern liberal theory. The ideal of self-cultivation you find in Mill has enjoyed widespread currency; Matthew Arnold enunciated it in *Culture and Anarchy* when he quoted Epictetus's view that "the formation of the spirit and character must be our real concern."[67] But it is most commonly associated with Aristotle, and it remains a powerful strand in political philosophy today. Indeed, what Rawls famously endorsed as "the Aristotelian Principle" was the notion that "other things being equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities, and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity."[68] At the same time, Mill's insistence that self-development should take diversity into account finds kinship with Amartya Sen's "capabilities" approach to equality. "Investigations of equality—theoretical as well as practical—that proceed with the assumption of antecedent uniformity (including the presumption that 'all men are created equal') thus miss out on a major aspect of the problem," Sen has written. "Human diversity is no secondary complication (to be ignored, or to be introduced 'later on'); it is a fundamental aspect of our interest in equality."[69] And—in ways we'll explore later—Dworkin's "challenge model" of human life, too, has deep affinities with Mill's picture of individuality. In each of these formulations is a version of the ethical idea: that there are things we owe to ourselves.

What my duties to *others* are, of course, remains one of the central questions for liberalism. Making a life as a social being requires making commitments to others. If these are voluntary, it may be proper to

enforce them even against my (later) will. But how much does what I owe go beyond my voluntary undertakings? One of Mill's suggestions was, roughly, that what we owed to others, in addition to what we had committed ourselves to, was that we should not harm them; and that leads to interesting discussions about what counts as harm.[70] But it was critical to his vision that the mere fact that I do something you do not want me to do does not *eo ipso* count as my harming you:

> There are many who consider as an injury to themselves any conduct which they have a distaste for, and resent it as an outrage to their feelings. . . . But there is no parity between the feeling of a person for his own opinion, and the feeling of another who is offended at his holding it; no more than between the desire of a thief to take a purse, and the desire of the right owner to keep it. And a person's taste is as much his peculiar concern as his opinion or his purse.[71]

Accordingly, the view that I should be permitted to make whatever life flows from my choices, provided that I give you what I owe you and do you no harm, seems to leave me a wide range of freedom, which is as you'd expect. And yet Mill could appeal to the ideals of both self-authorship and self-development in order to justify state action.

Governments do, for example, provide public education in many countries that helps children who do not yet have any settled identity or projects, hopes, and dreams. This is more than negative liberty, more than government's getting out of the way. You may say that parents could do this; in principle, they could. But suppose they won't or can't? Shouldn't society step in, in the name of individuality, to insist that children be prepared for life as free adults? And, in our society, won't that require them to be able to read? To know the language or languages of their community? To be able to assess arguments, interpret traditions? And even if the parents are trying to provide all these things, isn't there a case to be made that society, through the state, should offer them positive support?[72]

Or take welfare provision. If individuality is a matter of developing a life in response to the materials provided by your capacities and your social world (including the social identities embedded in it), then liberalism seeks a politics that allows people to do this. But there can be obstacles to the realization of our individuality other than the limita-

tions of law. Can people really construct dignified individual lives in a modern world where there is no frontier to conquer, no empty land to cultivate, unless they have certain basic material resources? Can people be said to be free to develop their individuality if they are ill and unable to afford treatment that will, as we say, "free them" from disease?

What holds together the desire to educate children, provide welfare for the poor, and give physical assistance to the handicapped who need it is the idea that assistance of these sorts enables people to develop lives worth living. Berlin wondered who would decide what a life worth living was. As we have seen, Mill had an answer to that question: "If a person possesses any tolerable amount of common sense and experience, his own mode of laying out his existence is best." But can communal institutions really afford to accommodate everyone's "own mode"? We'll return to this question in chapter 5.

I mentioned just now Mill's celebrated "harm principle"—according to which the only justification for coercion is to prevent someone from harming another—and, though it is often given a libertarian construction, it may actually invite an appreciable amount of governmental intervention. To have autonomy, we must have acceptable choices. We are harmed when deprived of such choices. For Joseph Raz, accordingly, the "autonomy-based principle of freedom is best regarded as providing the moral foundation for the harm principle," and that tenet leads him to a rather expansive interpretation. "To harm a person is to diminish his prospects, to affect adversely his possibilities," Raz maintains. "It is a mistake to think that the harm principle recognizes only the duty of government to prevent loss of autonomy. Sometimes failing to improve the situation of another is harming him"—as when we deny someone what is due him, by, for example, discriminating against a potential employee.[73] Here his position is quite in keeping with Mill's stipulation: "The most marked cases of injustice . . . are acts of wrongful aggression, or wrongful exercise of power over some one; the next are those which consist in wrongfully withholding from him something which is his due; in both cases, inflicting on him a positive hurt, either in the form of direct suffering, or of the privation of some good which he had reasonable ground, either of a physical or of a social kind, for counting upon."[74] More generally, if (as Raz suggests) we harm someone by undermining the conditions necessary for the exercise of his or her auton-

omy (including the social forms in which it takes shape), then the state has considerable, perhaps excessive, latitude for interference.

Mill himself, though he thought the cultivation of individual excellence was central to the role of the state, was hardly impetuous about enlisting state power in the service of this good. He famously held that "there is a circle around every individual which no government . . . ought to be permitted to overstep."[75] And he took seriously the roles played by social approbation and opprobrium as alternate mechanisms for the regulation of behavior. In his essay "Thornton on Labour and Its Claims," he wrote that, outside the realm of moral duty, which must be enforced "compulsively," "there is the innumerable variety of modes in which the acts of human beings are either a cause, or a hindrance, of good to their fellow-creatures, but to which it is, on the whole, for the general interest that they should be left free; being merely encouraged, by praise and honour, to the performance of such beneficial actions as are not sufficiently stimulated by benefits flowing from them to the agent himself. This larger sphere is that of Merit or Virtue."[76]

And though Mill seems to celebrate an ideal of personal autonomy, he did not generally seek to enlist the coercive powers of the state to foster it, perhaps sensitive to the paradox of relying on an outside power to increase self-reliance. He thought the Mormon polygamous way of life inferior, particularly because of the subordinate role of women in a polygamous system, but so long as the marriages were predicated on consent, he thought they should not be unlawful. As Mill wrote in *On Liberty*, "I am not aware that any community has the right to force another to be civilized."[77]

But state action is not restricted to acts that take the form of prohibitions, of course. In *Principles of Political Economy*, Mill distinguishes "authoritative interference by government"—encompassing the realm of crimes and punishment—from another mode of involvement, in which

> a government, instead of issuing a command and enforcing it by penalties, adopts the course so seldom reverted to by governments, and of which such important use might be made, that of giving advice or promulgating information; and when, leaving individuals free to use their own means of pursuing any object of general interest, the government, not meddling

with them, but not trusting the object solely to their care, establishes, side by side with their arrangements, an agency of its own for a like purpose.[78]

And he returned to the point in the fourth chapter of *On Liberty*, when he again abjures the notion that "human beings have no business with each other's conduct in life, and that they should not concern themselves about the well-doing or well-being of one another, unless their own interest is involved." On the contrary, Mill says, "Instead of any diminution, there is need of a great increase of disinterested exertion to promote the good of others. . . . Human beings owe to each other help to distinguish the better from the worse, and encouragement to choose the former and avoid the latter. They should be forever stimulating each other to increased exercise of their higher faculties."[79] But this obligation may not be restricted to individual citizens, and toward the end of *On Liberty*, he acknowledges "a large class of questions respecting to limits of government interference, which, though closely connected with the subject of this Essay, do not, in strictness, belong to it. These are cases in which the reasons against interference do not turn upon the principle of liberty: the question is not about restraining the actions of individuals, but about helping them: it is asked whether the government should do, or cause to be done, something for their benefit, instead of leaving it to be done by themselves, individually, or in voluntary combination."[80] This class of "interferences" has proved equally problematic for recent political philosophy, for reasons we'll explore in chapter 5.

The Common Pursuit

"As Brutus was called the last of the Romans," Mill wrote of his father, "so was he the last of the eighteenth century."[81] John Stuart himself sought a careful equipoise among the various climates of thought through which he lived: it is what made him both deeply constant and deeply wayward. And yet this very equipoise, this sense of balance, ensured that *On Liberty* would not immediately enjoy the reception that Mill might have hoped for his and Harriet's *grand projet*. "None of my writings have been either so carefully composed, or so

sedulously corrected as this," Mill recounted in his *Autobiography*. "After it had been written as usual twice over, we kept going through it *de novo*, reading, weighing, and criticizing every sentence. Its final revision was to have been a work of the winter of 1858–9, the first after my retirement, which we had arranged to pass in the South of Europe. That hope and every other were frustrated by the most unexpected and bitter calamity of her death—at Avignon, on our way to Montpellier, from a sudden attack of pulmonary congestion."[82] A few weeks later, Mill sent the manuscript of *On Liberty* to his publisher.

For various reasons, as his biographer points out, the timing of its publication was less than opportune. There were causes both for distraction and for resistance. *The Origin of Species* appeared in the same year, to be enlisted in causes progressive and reactionary; the Oxford movement was in full flower; and various forms of collectivism—whether promulgated by trade unionists or by Christian socialists—were gathering force. Many radicals found Mill's vision disabling; conservatives found it irresponsible and destructive. Sir James Fitzjames Stephen famously took after it with a cudgel: "To attack opinions on which the framework of society rests is a proceeding which both is and ought to be dangerous," he concluded, and he did his part to make it so. The book sent Thomas Carlyle into a choleric lather (though few things did not). "As if it were a sin to control, or coerce into better methods, human swine in any way; Ach Gott in Himmel!"[83]

For the recently bereaved author, of course, the book was as much a mortuary as a monument. "To us who have known what it is to be with her and to belong to her, this silly phantasmagoria of human life, devoid of her, would be utterly meaningless and unendurably wearisome, were there not still some things to do in it which she wished done, and some public and other objects which she cared for, and in which therefore it is still possible to keep up some degree of interest," he wrote to a friend. "I have been publishing some of her opinions, and I hope to employ what remains to me of life (if I am able to retain my health) in continuing to work for them and to spread them, though with sadly diminished powers now that I no longer have her to prompt and guide me."[84] In his *Autobiography*, too, he wrote of Harriet's role in his life—of their common pursuit—in terms that are almost the reciprocal of the robust individuality he endorsed.

My objects in life are solely those which were hers; my pursuits and occupations those in which she shared, or sympathized, and which are indissolubly associated with her. Her memory is to me a religion, and her approbation the standard by which, summing up as it does all worthiness, I endeavor to regulate my life.[85]

It is the language of religious devotion, abjection, heteronomy, self-abnegation; and yet it does not cut against his commitment to individuality so much as it attests to its profoundly social nature. He was attentive to just those forms of collective intention that were omitted from his father's agent-centered view of politics; deprived of the company of his peers as a child, he tirelessly established societies and reviews as a young man, fraternal associations of politics and culture. And the associations that mattered to him, that gave meaning to his endeavors, were not just fraternal. What had been diminished, on his own account, by the loss of his life companion and of their common pursuits was precisely his individuality.

It did not still his pen. The ends of life may have been revisable; they were not, for him, perishable. And Mill himself—object and subject of so many bold experiments, a man whom all manner of visionary, from Bentham to Carlyle to Comte, sought and failed to enlist as a disciple— had a keen sense that influence went only so far, and communion was always incomplete. If no person was whole author of himself, neither could a person be wholly authored by another. "We can not, indeed, directly will to be different from what we are," as he wrote. "But neither did those who are supposed to have formed our character directly will that we should be what we are." Nobody knew better than Mill how one's life plans could be elevated when fused into a common pursuit. Yet at the same time nobody knew better how readily the attempt to promote another's excellence could become an oppression. As he wrote, in words of peculiar resonance: "Let any man call to mind what he himself felt on emerging from boyhood—from the tutelage and control of even loved and affectionate elders—and entering upon the responsibilities of manhood. Was it not like the physical effect of taking off a heavy weight, or releasing him from obstructive, even if not otherwise painful bonds? Did he not feel twice as much alive, twice as much a human being, as before?"[86]

Mill famously celebrated freedom from government and from public opinion: but what we see here is how much he also believed that in the business of making a life—in shaping your individuality—however many common pursuits you have, you must, in the end, find freedom even from the good intentions of those who love you. However social the individuality that Mill prized was, it was, first and last, still individuality: the final responsibility for each life is always the responsibility of the person whose life it is.

Chapter Three

∿ The Demands of Identity

LEARNING HOW TO CURSE—THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL
IDENTITIES—MILLET MULTICULTURALISM—AUTONOMISM,
PLURALISM, NEUTRALISM—A FIRST AMENDMENT EXAMPLE:
THE ACCOMMODATIONIST PROGRAM—NEUTRALITY
RECONSIDERED—THE LANGUAGE OF RECOGNITION—THE
MEDUSA SYNDROME—LIMITS AND PARAMETERS

LEARNING HOW TO CURSE

In the summer of 1953, a team of researchers assembled
two groups of eleven-year-old boys at adjoining but separate campsites
in the Sans Bois Mountains, part of Oklahoma's Robbers Cave State
Park. The boys were drawn from the Oklahoma City area and, though
previously unacquainted, came from a fairly homogeneous back-
ground—they were Protestant, white, middle-class. All this was by care-
ful design. The researchers sought to study the formation of in-groups
and out-groups—the way that tension developed between them and
the way it might be alleviated—and the Robbers Cave experiment has
justly become something of a classic in the social sciences.

The camp area was heavily wooded and completely isolated. At first,
each group was unaware of the other's existence. Only after the boys
were allowed to settle in on their own for a couple of days did the staff
members tell each group that there was another camp of boys nearby.
The two groups of boys promptly challenged each other in competitive
sports, like baseball and tug-of-war, as well as the less obviously appeal-
ing activity of "tent pitching." Soon—and this was perhaps the study's
most dramatic finding—tempers flared and a violent enmity developed
between the two groups, the Rattlers and the Eagles (as they came to
dub themselves). Flags weren't just captured but burned and shredded.
Raids were staged on the other group's cabin; property was disarrayed,

trophies stolen. Staff members had to intervene when one group of boys prepared themselves for a retaliatory raid by arming themselves with rocks.[1]

A less dramatic, but, for our purposes, equally intriguing, development was also recorded. It starts with the self-assigned labels of the two groups: the Rattlers and the Eagles. The groups did not arrive with these names; nor did it occur to group members that they needed a name, until they learned about the presence of another group on the campgrounds.[2] Among the Rattlers, an ethic of "toughness" had arisen, after it emerged that one of the higher-status boys in the group had stoically endured a minor injury without telling anyone about it. Cursing, for equally contingent reasons, also became commonplace in this group. When the Eagles won a baseball game against the Rattlers, they came, during a postgame conversation, to attribute the victory to a group prayer they'd offered before the game. After further deliberation, the Eagles decided that the Rattlers' tendency to curse had contributed to their defeat as well. "Hey, you guys, let's not do any more cussing, and I'm serious, too," one Eagle said to the others, and the proposal won general approval.[3] In the course of a subsequent football game, the Rattlers (who won narrowly) engaged in clamorous jeering and boasting. Rather than respond in kind, the Eagles decided that yelling in front of the Rattlers would bring bad luck: they came to refrain not only from cussing but from bragging. These differences were reflected in the way the groups described each other. To the Rattlers (in their internal discussions), the Eagles were "sissies," "cowards," "little babies." To the Eagles, the Rattlers were a "bunch of cussers," "poor losers," and "bums."[4] One group saw itself, and was seen, as prayerful, pious, and clean-living; the other as boisterous, tough, and scrappy.

And all this arose in just four days.

The Robbers Cave study, for a student of identity, is a bit like those origins-of-life experiments where scientists direct a bolt of artificial lightning at a solution meant to represent the earth's primordial ocean. It's a long way from those simple amino acids to Noah's ark. Nor would one want to claim that the nascent trait divergence between the Rattlers and the Eagles does justice to the welter of deep social and linguistic diversity human beings have evolved over the millennia. But as a snap-

shot of "ethnogenesis," there is clarity in its lack of complication, starting with the priority of identity to culture. We often treat cultural differentia as if they give rise to collective identities; what happened at Robbers Cave suggests we might think of it the other way around.

Comparative scholars of ethnicity have certainly provided no shortage of confirming examples; their reports suggest a similar dynamic of antagonism, lumping even as it splits. The Malay came to know one another as such only after, and in opposition to, the arrival of the Chinese; the Hindu became Hindu only when the British created the class in the early nineteenth century, to take in those who weren't members of the famous monotheisms, and the identity gained salience only in opposition to South Asian Muslims.[5] As Jean-Loup Amselle, the French anthropologist, says (in his French way), cultural identities arise, in the first place, from a "structured field of relations," which is to say that they might be seen, in the first instance, as the consequence, not the cause, of conflicts. "Culture is important in the making of ethnic groups," Donald Horowitz says, less grandly, "but it is more important for providing post facto content to group identity than it is for providing some ineluctable prerequisite for an identity to come into being."[6] And so I'll be proceeding in this chapter on the not-uncontroversial assumption that differences of identity are, in various ways, prior to those of culture (a view I've argued elsewhere and will defend further in chapter 4).

Among the things we may take from the story of the Robbers Cave experiment is that identity allegiances can be easily conjured into being; and that (if we needed reminding) the Other may not be very other at all. We also know that identity as a social form is no less powerful for all that. Though we may be a society of individuals, in classical liberal terms, the abstraction of that term omits a great deal that matters to us, as individuals and as members of identity groups. Does the liberal goal of equal concern rule out, or require, the acknowledgment of people as the bearers of identities? If identity may be acknowledged, what sort of political demands can we validly make as members of a collective identity, as opposed to members of a polity? These are the sorts of questions I want to pursue in this chapter. But before exploring what identity demands, I shall say something about what identity *means*.

The Structure of Social Identities

The contemporary use of "identity" to refer to such features of people as their race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, or sexuality first achieved prominence in the social psychology of the 1950s—particularly in the work of Erik Erikson and Alvin Gouldner. This use of the term reflects the conviction that each person's identity— in the older sense of who he or she truly is—is deeply inflected by such social features.[7] And it is a fact of contemporary life that this conviction is increasingly prevalent. In political and moral thinking nowadays it has become commonplace to suppose that a person's projects can be expected to be shaped by such features of his or her identity and that this is, if not morally required, then at least morally permissible.

To be sure, not every aspect of the collective dimension of someone's identity will have the general power of sex or gender, sexuality or nationality, ethnicity or religion. What the collective dimensions have in common, as I mentioned in chapter 1, is that they are what Ian Hacking has dubbed *kinds of person*: men, gays, Americans, Catholics, but also butlers, hairdressers, and philosophers.[8]

Hacking relies on a crucial insight about "kinds of person," which is that they are brought into being by the creation of labels for them. So he defends what he calls a "dynamic nominalism," arguing that "numerous kinds of human beings and human acts come into being hand in hand with our invention of the categories labeling them."[9] (It is not incidental that the Rattlers and the Eagles came into being along with their designations.)

Hacking begins from a philosophical truism that finds its most influential formulation in Elizabeth Anscombe's work on intention: actions are intentional "under descriptions"; in other words, action is conceptually shaped.[10] What I do intentionally is dependent on what I think I am doing. To use a simple example, I have to have a wide range of concepts for my writing my name in a certain way to count specifically as "signing a contract." It follows that what I can do intentionally depends on what concepts I have available to me; and among the concepts that may shape my action is the concept of a certain kind of person and the behavior appropriate to a person of that kind.

Hacking himself offers as an example Sartre's brilliant evocation in *Being and Nothingness* of the Parisian *garçon de café*, with his studied air of alertness and solicitude.[11] Our own Mr. Stevens, for his part, was driven, in thinking about whether he should develop his bantering skills, by the thought that he is a butler and that banter is a butler's sort of skill.

The idea of the butler lacks the sort of theoretical commitments that are trailed by many of our social identities: black and white, gay and straight, man and woman. So it makes no sense to ask of someone who is employed as a butler whether that is what he really is. Because we have expectations of the butler, it is a recognizable identity. Those expectations are, however, about the performance of the role; they depend on our assumption of intentional conformity to the expectations.

But with other identities—and here the familiar collectives of race, ethnicity, gender, and the rest come back into view—the expectations we have are not based simply on the idea that those who have these identities are playing out a role. Rightly or wrongly, we do not think of the expectations we have of men or of women as being simply the result of the fact that there are conventions about how men and women behave.

Once labels are applied to people, ideas about people who fit the label come to have social and psychological effects. In particular, these ideas shape the ways people conceive of themselves and their projects. So the labels operate to mold what we may call *identification*, the process through which individuals shape their projects—including their plans for their own lives and their conceptions of the good life—by reference to available labels, available identities. In identification, I shape my life by the thought that something is an appropriate aim or an appropriate way of acting for an American, a black man, a philosopher. It seems right to call this "identification" because the label plays a role in shaping the way the agent makes decisions about how to conduct a life, in the process of the construction of one's identity.

We can describe the relation between identification and identity with a little more precision. In particular, every collective identity seems to have the following sort of structure.[12]

First, it requires the availability of terms in public discourse that are used to pick out the bearers of the identity by way of criteria of ascrip-

tion, so that some people are recognized *as* members of the group—
women, men; blacks, whites; straights, gays. The availability of these
terms in public discourse requires both that it be mutually known
among most members of the society that the labels exist and that there
be some degree of consensus on how to identify those to whom they
should be applied. Let us call a typical label for a group "L."[13] This
consensus is usually organized around a set of stereotypes (which may
be true or false) concerning Ls, beliefs about what typical Ls are like,
how they behave, how they may be detected. Some elements of a stereo-
type are normatively derived: they are views about how Ls will probably
behave, rooted in their conformity to norms about how they should
behave. We can say, in a convenient shorthand, that there must first be
a *social conception* of Ls. Stereotypes are rough-and-ready things, and
there may be different conceptions of Ls associated with different indi-
viduals or groups within the society. For a social conception to exist, it
is enough that there be a rough overlap in the classes picked out by the
term "L," so there need be no precisely agreed boundaries, no determi-
nate extension; nor is it necessary that the stereotypes or criteria of
ascription be identical for all users of the term. We need not worry that
the exact boundary between women and men is not agreed upon (do
F-to-M transgendered folk count as men all along, or only after surgery,
or never?), or that, even given a full specification of his affectional life
and sexual habits, it might well not be universally agreed whether or
not Shakespeare was what we now call "straight." One cannot, there-
fore, always speak of *the* content of a social conception: sketching a
social conception requires an ethnography of ways of conceiving of Ls,
one that recognizes especially that different stereotypes of Ls may tend
to be held by people with different social positions. African Americans,
for example, may well have characteristically different social concep-
tions of a black identity from others in the United States; and homosex-
uals may tend to conceive gay identity differently from heterosexuals.
Now, many people have the idea that the normative content of an iden-
tity should be determined essentially by its bearers. Even if that is true—
which I doubt, since recognition by people of other identities is often
a proper source of their meaning—this would still mean that some
people would have the content of their identities determined in part by
others; namely, those of the same identity.

A second element of a social identity is the internalization of those labels as parts of the individual identities of at least some of those who bear the label. If the label in question is, once more, "L," we can call this *identification as an L.* Identification as an L, as I've suggested, means thinking of yourself as an L in ways that make a difference: perhaps thinking of yourself as an L shapes your feelings (so that you respond with pride as an L when an L triumphs); perhaps it shapes your actions, so that you sometimes do something as an L (offering a helping hand to another L, perhaps, who is otherwise a stranger; or restraining your public conduct by the thought that misbehavior will reflect badly on Ls). Often, then, being an L carries ethical and moral weight: the notion, say, that Jews ought to help other Jews and should avoid behaving in ways that discredit the Jewish community. And often, too, there are behavioral norms associated with identities that it seems wrong to dignify with the epithets "ethical" or "moral": men (sometimes we say *real* men) walk this way, hold their hands that way, don't cover their mouths when they laugh. Eagles refrain from cursing and braggadocio.

Identification, in ways we touched upon in chapter 1, typically has a strong narrative dimension. By way of my identity I fit my life story into certain patterns—confirmation at puberty for a religious identity, tenure in your mid-thirties for a professorial one—and I also fit that story into larger stories; for example, of a people, a religious tradition, or a race. Nor is this narrative element simply a feature of Western modernity. Around the world, it matters to people that they can tell a story of their lives that meshes with larger narratives. This may involve rites of passage into womanhood and manhood; or a sense of national identity that fits one's life into a larger saga.[14] Such collective identifications can also confer significance upon very individual achievements: by way of them, you can think of yourself as the first person of African descent to gain a Harvard doctorate in history, or the first Jewish president of the United States.

The final element of a social identity is the existence of patterns of behavior toward Ls, such that Ls are sometimes *treated as Ls.* To treat someone as an L is to do something to her in part, at least, because she is an L (where "because she is an L" figures in the agent's internal specification of her reasons for the act).[15] In the current landscape of identity, the treatment-as that is often in focus is invidious discrimina-

tion: gender, sexuality, and racial and ethnic identity have all been profoundly shaped (even, in a sense, produced) by histories of sexism, homophobia, racism, and ethnic hatred. But it is as well to recall that not all treatment-as is negative or morally troublesome: sexuality requires responding to people as women and as men, and this means that there are patterns of action toward men and toward women that are constitutive of the standard range of sexual orientations.[16] Many benevolent forms of "treatment-as" are meant to counter malevolent forms of "treatment-as." (Consider the person who, in the late 1930s, urged her German Jewish friends to leave the Third Reich.) Indeed, that identity-based responses can be morally positive should be uncontroversial: many of the world's acts of supererogatory benevolence involve treating people as fellow Ls—generosity, then, is often a form of treatment-as.

Where a classification of people as Ls is associated with a *social conception* of Ls, some people *identify as* Ls, and people are sometimes *treated as* Ls, we have a paradigm of a social identity that matters for ethical and political life. That it matters for ethical life—in the sense I have stipulated—flows from the fact that it figures in identification, in people's shaping and evaluation of their own lives; that it might matter for politics flows from the fact that it figures in treatment by others, and that how others treat one will help determine one's success and failure in living one's life.

In the case of the butler, conventions of behavior associated with a role are explicitly central: the ascriptions are based on the simple idea that someone who works in grand houses of a certain sort will conform to certain expectations; the expectations are based on the conventions that govern the role of the butler; because of those conventions, acting as a butler means constructing a particular performance; and how you are treated may depend on how well you perform the role (even if there are aspects of butlering that are likely to be appreciated only by your fellow butlers). But for some other identities—as a gay man, for example—there is more than convention.

For being a gay man is, in part, a matter of having certain desires, and those desires are not something that the gay man has himself chosen. You can choose whether or not to play a certain conventional role, and, if all there is to an identity is a conventional set of behaviors, and you are capable of them, then you can chose whether to adopt the iden-

tity. But when the criteria for ascribing a certain identity include things over which you have no control—as is the case with gender, race, and sexual orientation—then whether you identify with that identity, whether, for example, you think of yourself as gay and act sometimes as a gay person, is not only up to you.[17] As we saw in chapter 1, while someone who has a gay identity is doing more than simply acknowledging the fact that he has homosexual desires, and someone who has an identity as a black person, identifying with his or her African American identity, is doing more than simply acknowledging an African ancestry, it is nevertheless true that they are responding to a fact (about desire or ancestry) that is independent of their choices, a fact that comes, so to speak, from outside the self. Even Sartre's *garçon de café* takes up an identity that has a function outside himself: he is taking up a profession that provides a service; he is finding, as Mr. Stevens did in butlering, a way of making a life. (Moreover, the profession that he is taking up, with its intricate conventions and protocols, is not one of his own devising.)

For a long time—since the Enlightenment, we might say—the great liberal struggle was to get the state to treat its members as individuals only, without favoring or disfavoring particular ethnic or religious or gender identities. And many people continue to argue that state acknowledgment of such identities is intrinsically illiberal: precisely because the shaping of my life is up to me, the government should seek to constrain my acts independent of my identities. Otherwise the state will be in the business of advantaging and disadvantaging particular identities in ways that encroach upon the individual's freedom to shape his or her own life. Such skepticism draws some of its appeal from the historical arguments for tolerance; and from the apparent clash between the constraining nature of identities and the liberal ideal of the self-directed individual, of the autarky of the soul.

Others, including many so-called multiculturalists, have argued, to the contrary, that the state *must* recognize these identities because without them individuals will lack what they need for making a life. To the extent that social identities allow people options for making their lives, these theorists argue, they are a positive part of that process. And their recognition by the state is part of what makes them available for this purpose.

As we'll see, those who think that the political acknowledgment of identity groups is important have produced various arguments for how

it should matter. Some focus on the state provision of goods and bene-
fits; some focus on the suspension of certain rules or obligations that
unduly burden members of certain identity groups. Some people go
further and—particularly when these identity groups are associated
with "societal cultures"[18]—embrace the principle of cultural sover-
eignty. Multiculturalism, perhaps appropriately, comes in many hues.
In the past decade or so, the slogans and rallying cries have multiplied:
terms like "differential citizenship" (Iris M. Young); the "politics of
recognition" (Charles Taylor); and *modus vivendi* (John Gray) are each
associated with distinct approaches toward the matter.

And there are many who occupy an intermediate position. They
think that the sorts of social identities I have mentioned are, indeed,
ethically central to our lives, but also that this is an argument for tolera-
tion of identities, not for their recognition. That is, they are inclined to
a view about these social identities that is analogous to the position on
religious toleration popularly associated with the American Founders:
so far as is possible, no establishment of identities, on the one hand;
but, on the other, free exercise (subject to the constraints of duty and
harm) as well.[19] This position, too, courts its share of perplexities. What
would it mean to allow (the analogue of) free exercise of them while
avoiding (the analogue of) establishment? The answer, as we'll see, is
far from obvious.

In the next section, I'll be discussing a relatively uncompromised
approach toward the acknowledgment of identities—an approach that
sees the state as a federation of identity groups, each to be ceded a
high degree of autonomy. Group autonomy, as an ideal, comes in many
forms, and I cannot do justice to them all; I have largely confined my
attention to those forms that arise in the context of liberal political
theory (as opposed to, say, Stalinist ethnic engineering). Still, I hope at
least to give a flavor both of what its proponents find appealing in this
approach and of what others of us find worrying.

Millet Multiculturalism

Before proceeding with those questions, however, I
think it will be helpful to make two distinctions: one about individual-

languages result from histories of migration, both voluntary and involuntary, and of conquest.[60] I hope I've indicated a plausible way to frame this issue. But after even this crayon-on-a-napkin discussion of policy it is worth repeating a point I made in the preface: this book aims to pick out and explore certain key concepts in our thinking about the ethics of identity. It is not—it does not aim to be—a book of political prescriptions or policy proposals. If what I have said about Quebec is wrong, I hope it is wrong because I have misunderstood the political history or the facts on the ground. What I am committed to is not the policy I have gestured toward, with all its factual predicates, but rather the claims about the way in which considerations of language as a material for identity and as a tool of citizenship should be brought to bear in the construction of a policy. Here, as everywhere, my aim is to begin with the interests of individuals and to show how identities give individuals complex interests that ethics—and, therefore, a satisfactory politics—must bear in mind.

The Medusa Syndrome

Ethical individualism, it may be worth spelling out, has no simple friend-or-foe relation to "recognition"; and careful readers of Hegel, such as Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth, are surely right that much of modern social and political life turns on such questions of recognition. In our liberal tradition, of course, we see recognition largely as a matter of acknowledging individuals and their identities: and we have the notion, which comes (as Taylor says) from the ethics of authenticity, that, other things being equal, people have the right to be acknowledged publicly as what they already really are. It is because someone is already authentically Jewish or gay that we deny him something in requiring him to hide this fact, to "pass," as we say, for something that he is not. As has often been observed, though, the way much discussion of recognition proceeds is at odds with the individualistic thrust of talk of authenticity.[61] In particular, attending to the oppositional aspects of authenticity would complicate the picture, because it would bring sharply into focus the difference between two levels of authenticity that the contemporary politics of recognition seems to conflate.

To bring out the problem, let me start with a point Taylor has made about Herder—that Herder "applied his conception of originality at two levels, not only to the individual person among other persons, but also to the culture-bearing people among other peoples. Just like individuals, a Volk should be true to itself, that is, its own culture."[62] After all, in many places nowadays, as I suggested earlier, the individual identity, whose authenticity cries out for recognition, is likely to have what Herder would have seen as a national identity as a component of its collective dimension. It is, among other things, your being, say, an African American that shapes the authentic self that you seek to express. And it is, in part, because you seek to express your self that you seek recognition of an African American identity. This is what makes problems for Lionel Trilling's notion of the "opposing self": for recognition as an African American means social acknowledgment of that collective identity, which requires not just recognizing its existence but actually demonstrating respect for it. If, in understanding yourself as African American, you see yourself as resisting white norms, mainstream American conventions, the racism (and, perhaps, the materialism or the individualism) of "white culture," why should you at the same time seek recognition from these white others? (I will have more to say about such paradoxes of support in the next chapter.)

There is, in other words, at least an irony in the way that an ideal of authenticity—you will recognize it if I call it the Bohemian ideal—requiring us to reject much that is conventional in our society, is turned around and made the basis of a "politics of recognition."[63] Now, you may be skeptical of the Bohemian ideal, or see it as a mere indulgence or affectation; but the notion that identities are founded in antagonism—recall the Rattlers and the Eagles—should by now be an unsurprising one.

I used the example of African Americans just now, and it might seem that this complaint cannot be lodged against an American black nationalism: African American identity, it might be said, is shaped by African American society, culture, and religion. Here is how the argument might be framed: "It is dialogue with these black others that shapes the black self; it is from these black contexts that the concepts through which African-Americans shape themselves are derived. The white society, the white culture, over against which an African-American nation-

alism of the counter-conventional kind poses itself, is therefore not part of what shapes the collective dimension of the individual identities of black people in the United States."

This claim seems to me to be simply false. What shows that it is false is the fact that it is in part a recognition of a black identity by "white society" that is demanded by nationalism of this form. And "recognition" here means what Taylor means by it, not mere acknowledgment of one's existence. African American identity (like all other American ethnoracial identities) is centrally shaped by American society and institutions: it cannot be seen as constructed solely within African American communities, any more than whiteness is made only by whites.

There is another error in the standard framing of authenticity as an ideal, and that is the philosophical realism (which is nowadays usually called "essentialism") that seems inherent in the way questions of authenticity are normally posed. Authenticity speaks of the real self buried in there, the self one has to dig out and express. It is only later, after romanticism, that the idea develops that one's self is something that one creates, makes up, like a work of art. For reasons touched on in chapter 1, neither the picture in which there is just an authentic nugget of selfhood, the core that is distinctively me, waiting to be dug out, nor the notion that I can simply make up any self I choose, should tempt us. As we saw, we make up selves from a tool kit of options made available by our culture and society. We do make choices, but we don't, individually, determine the options among which we choose. To neglect this fact is to ignore Taylor's "webs of interlocution," to fail to recognize the dialogical construction of the self, and thus to commit what Taylor calls the "monological" fallacy.

If you agree with this, you will wonder to what extent we should acknowledge authenticity in our political morality: and that will depend, surely, on whether an account of it can be developed that isn't monological. It would be too large a claim that the identities that cry out for recognition in the multicultural chorus *must* be monological. But it seems to me that one reasonable ground for suspicion of much contemporary multicultural talk is that the conceptions of collective identity they presuppose are indeed remarkably unsubtle in their understandings of the processes by which identities, both individual and collective, develop. And I am not sure whether Taylor would agree with

me that collective identities disciplined by historical knowledge and philosophical reflection would be radically unlike the identities that now parade before us for recognition, and would raise, as a result, questions different from the ones he addresses. In a rather unphilosophical nutshell: my suspicion is that Taylor is happier with the collective identities that actually inhabit our globe than I am: and that may be one of the reasons why I am more hesitant to make the concessions to them that he does. For an ethics of identity (to anticipate my discussion in chapter 5) must confront two distinct though not wholly separable questions: how existing identities should be treated; and what sort of identities there should be.

As we saw, the large collective identities that call for recognition come with notions of how a proper person of that kind behaves: it is not that there is *one* way that gay people or blacks should behave, but that there are gay and black modes of behavior. These notions provide loose norms or models, which play a role in shaping the ground projects of those for whom these collective identities are central to their individual identities. Collective identities, again, provide what I have been calling scripts: narratives that people use in shaping their pursuits and in telling their life stories. And that is why, as we've seen, the personal dimensions of identity work differently from the collective ones.

How does this general idea apply to our current situation in the West? We live in societies in which certain individuals have not been treated with equal dignity because they were, for example, women, homosexuals, blacks, Catholics. Because, as Taylor observes, our identities are dialogically shaped, people who have these characteristics find them central—often, negatively central—to their identities. Nowadays there is widespread agreement that the insults to their dignity and the limitations of their autonomy imposed in the name of these collective identities are seriously wrong. One way the stigmatized have responded has been to uphold these collective identities not as sources of limitation and insult but as a central and valuable part of what they are. Because the ethics of authenticity requires us to express what we centrally are, they move, next, to the demand that they be recognized in social life *as* women, homosexuals, blacks, Catholics. Because there was no good reason to treat people of these sorts badly, and because society continues to provide degrading images of them nevertheless, they demand

that we work to resist the stereotypes, to challenge the insults, to lift the restrictions.

These old restrictions suggested life-scripts for the bearers of these identities, but they were, in substantial part, negative ones. I need hardly repeat that one does not construct a social identity ab ovo, that our choices are at once constrained and enabled by existing practices and beliefs; but neither do we always "play it as it lays." And there have been historical moments where we see groups contesting and transforming the meaning of their identities with seismic vigor. Certainly this has been a notable dimension of the grand identity movements of the late twentieth century. In order to construct a life with dignity, it has seemed natural to take the collective identity and construct positive life-scripts instead. An African American after the Black Power movement takes the old script of self-hatred, the script in which he or she is a nigger, and works, in community with others, to construct a series of positive black life-scripts. In these life-scripts, being a Negro is recoded as being black: and for some this may entrain, among other things, refusing to assimilate to white norms of speech and behavior. And if one is to be black in a society that is racist, then one has constantly to deal with assaults on one's dignity. In this context, insisting on the right to live a dignified life will not be enough. It will not even be enough to require that one be treated with equal dignity despite being black: for that would suggest that being black counts to some degree against one's dignity. And so one will end up asking to be respected *as a black*.

Let me rewrite this paragraph as a paragraph about gay identity: An American homosexual after Stonewall and gay liberation takes the old script of self-hatred, the script of the closet, and works, in community with others, to construct a series of positive gay life-scripts. In these life-scripts, being a faggot is recoded as being gay: and this requires, among other things, refusing to stay in the closet. And if one is to be out of the closet in a society that deprives homosexuals of equal dignity and respect, then one has constantly to deal with assaults on one's dignity. In this context, the right to live as an "open homosexual" will not be enough. It will not even be enough to be treated with equal dignity despite being homosexual: for that would suggest that being homosexual counts to some degree against one's dignity. And so one will end up asking to be respected *as a homosexual*.

I hope I seem sympathetic to the stories of gay and black identity I have just told, distilling those identity movements of the 1960s and 1970s. I see how the story goes. It may even be historically, strategically necessary for the story to go this way. But I think we need to go on to the next step, which is to ask whether the identities constructed in this way are ones we can be happy with in the longer run. Demanding respect for people *as blacks* and *as gays* can go along with notably rigid strictures as to how one is to be an African American or a person with same-sex desires. In a particularly fraught and emphatic way, there will be proper modes of being black and gay: there will be demands that are made; expectations to be met; battles lines to be drawn. It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously may worry whether we have replaced one kind of tyranny with another. We know that acts of recognition, and the civil apparatus of such recognition, can sometimes ossify the identities that are their object. Because here a gaze can turn to stone, we can call this the Medusa Syndrome. The politics of recognition, if pursued with excessive zeal, can seem to require that one's skin color, one's sexual body, should be politically acknowledged in ways that make it hard for those who want to treat their skin and their sexual body as personal dimensions of the self. And personal, here, does not mean secret or (*per impossible*) wholly unscripted or innocent of social meanings; it means, rather, something that is not too tightly scripted, not too resistant to our individual vagaries. Even though my race and my sexuality may be elements of my individuality, someone who demands that I organize my life around these things is not an ally of individuality. Because identities are constituted in part by social conceptions and by treatment-as, in the realm of identity there is no bright line between recognition and imposition.

Limits and Parameters

In a well-known essay, "Equality and the Good Life," Ronald Dworkin takes up Aristotle's view that "a good life has the inherent value of a skillful performance," and proposes what he calls "the model of challenge." The model "holds that living a life is *itself* a perfor-

mance that demands skill, that it is the most comprehensive and important challenge we face, and that our critical interests consist in the achievements, events, and experiences that mean that we have met the challenge well." Now, the notion I want to borrow from Dworkin is a useful distinction between different ways in which our circumstances figure in the evaluation of how well we have met the challenge. Some of our circumstances (including our own physical, mental, and social attributes) act as *parameters*, he says, defining what it is for us to have lived a successful life. They are, so to speak, part of the challenge that we must meet. Others are *limits*—obstacles that get in the way of our making the ideal life that the parameters help define.

Each person, in thinking about her own life, must decide how to allocate her circumstances between these categories, just as an artist must decide which aspects of the tradition she inherits define what her art is and which are barriers to or instruments for her creativity. Dworkin writes: "We have no settled template for that decision, in art or in ethics, and no philosophical model can provide one, for the circumstances in which each of us lives are enormously complex. . . . Anyone who reflects seriously on the question which of the various lives he might lead is right for him will consciously or unconsciously discriminate among these, treating some as limits and others as parameters."[64]

Among the circumstances Dworkin regards as his own parameters is his being American. His American-ness is, he says, "a condition of the good life for" him.[65] So, for example, even though he has long taught jurisprudence in England and has no doubt influenced the development of English legal thinking, there surely is, for him, a special significance to his contributions to American constitutional jurisprudence, a significance that derives from the fact that America—and not England—is *his* country. So when we're describing the parameters of our lives, social identities are one obvious class of candidates.

To refer back to the discussion of *identification* with which I started, you might think that to identify as an L is to treat one's being an L as a parameter. But just as with identities there is no bright line between recognition and imposition, the relation between parameters and limits is a fluid and shifting affair. Consider homosexuality once more. For some people, homosexuality is a parameter: they are openly gay, and—

happy or unhappy, rich or poor—the life they seek to make will be a life in which relationships with members of their own sex will be central. Others think of their sexuality as a limitation: they want desperately to be rid of homosexual desires, and, if they cannot be rid of them, they would at least like to succeed in not acting on them. At the same time, circumstances that one might assume would be merely impediments may be transmuted into a positive way of being. Thus for many deaf people deafness is not a limit but a parameter: they are not trying to overcome a disability; they are trying to live successful lives as the hard-of-hearing people that they are. A condition becomes an identity—the deaf become the Deaf.

I think the limit-parameter distinction helps us see why "identity" has become a locus of such warring political intuitions. Black, woman, gay, aboriginal—so many of the identity categories that are politically salient are precisely ones that have functioned as limits, the result of the attitudes and acts of hostile or contemptuous others. Each of these categories has served as an instrument of subordination, as a constraint upon autonomy, as, indeed, a proxy for misfortune. Some identities, we can show, were *created* as part of a classificatory system for oppression. And in the context of antidiscrimination law, say, these identities are treated as a sort of handicap, to be disregarded or remedied. Yet the reversible-raincoat nature of these terms is demonstrated by the fact that categories designed for subordination can also be used to mobilize and empower people as members of a self-affirmative identity. (The disconcerting ease with which limits become parameters recalls the duck-rabbit oscillation between structure and agency we explored in the previous chapter, and it may help explain the ambivalence commonly occasioned by talk of "identity politics.") As a parameter, identities provide a context for choosing, for defining the shape of our lives, but they also provide a basis for community, for positive forms of solidarity. And it is perfectly consistent to consider your membership in an identity group as both parameter and limit: the Black Nationalist who deplores white supremacy is keenly aware of color as constraint, even as he seeks to make it the basis of a political mode of resistance. There is a two-way traffic between limits and parameters, then.

Yet to say all this is not to lose sight of other aspirations and other ideals, among them what Peter Singer has called the "expanding circle"

of our moral sympathies. The contours of identity are profoundly real: and yet no more imperishable, unchanging, or transcendent than other things that men and women make. Indeed, talk of division and disharmony can lead us to neglect the powerful countervailing forces: conflict may be productive of identities, but conflict can also be a powerful unifying force across identity groups. It is not a new thought—and in some ways not an entirely heartening one—that the two world wars had a powerful effect in forging an American identity that lessened the social salience of small social divisions; that the Second World War, in particular, did as much as anything to make the civil rights era inevitable.

What happened at Robbers Cave State Park confirms this intuition with almost comic schematism: the intergroup bloodlust that was so easily conjured into being finally subsided before what the researchers called "shared superordinate goals." As the animosity between the groups and solidarity within them was beginning to boil over, the ingenious researchers devised a series of communal crises. Necessity was the mother of amity.

To start with, the researchers sabotaged the camp's water system. Two groups of increasingly thirsty boys worked together to identify the problem and repair it. And then a truck, which was to have fetched food for them, broke down, or gave every appearance of having done so. It would have to be pulled up with a rope; and only the collective force of both groups—the raffish Rattlers and the high-minded Eagles—would suffice. By the by, banners were set down, putative differences set aside. Shoulder to shoulder, tugging on their tug-of-war rope (the experimenters had an appreciative eye for symbolism), the kids winched the stalled truck uphill.

No single crisis was enough to erase the poisonous animosity between the Rattlers and the Eagles; a series of them, however, produced genuine confraternity and the dissolution of social boundaries. The truck started up, food was brought back, and a meal was collaboratively prepared. "After supper a good-natured water fight started at the edge of the lake," the researchers dutifully noted; but, as they were careful to add, "the throwing and splashing was not along group lines."[66]