several clinical variables reflecting the degree of stress and distress in various psychiatric and physical disorders. Further analysis of the data on which many reports relating to the dexamethasone suppression test are based may provide support for this hypothesis, but definitive studies would need to be prospective and to compare results of dexamethasone suppression tests with the severity of disease. Many of the variables mentioned above such as loss of weight, degree of affective disturbances, and loss of sleep, would need to be included, in addition to measures of speed of onset, degree of deviation from previous state, perceived importance of the illness, and quantity of tissue damage, for example.

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Philosophical Medical Ethics

Autonomy and the principle of respect for autonomy

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One part of the moral defence of Dr Arthur was that doctors should not impose their views on parents; rather, their role was to provide good expert advice concerning the various available options and then to support the parents in their decision, whatever that was, provided that the parents were not incompetent to decide and not acting maliciously. The claim rests implicitly on the principle of respect for people's autonomy. In this article I shall outline what is meant by autonomy and the principle of respect for autonomy.

A definition

Autonomy (literally, self rule) is, in summary, the capacity to think, decide, and act on the basis of such thought and decision freely and independently and without, as it says in the British

passport, let or hindrance. (The word is sometimes used to mean other things as well, for example, moral reflection,¹ but moral reflection seems to be only one aspect of autonomy of thought and I therefore think it best to confine these concepts.) In the sphere of action it is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, freedom, liberty, license, or simply doing what one wants to do and, on the other hand, acting autonomously, which may also be doing what one wants to do but on the basis of thought or reasoning. Animals are not said to have autonomy but they may be perfectly free (at liberty), in what might be called the thin sense of freedom or liberty, if they are not constrained, for example, by cages, drugs, or having their wings pulled off by little boys.

Autonomy is a subclass of freedom or liberty, but not all freedom or liberty is autonomy. The concept of autonomy incorporates the exercise of what Aristotle called man's specific attribute, rationality.

Three types of autonomy

Autonomy is sometimes subdivided into autonomy of action, autonomy of will, and autonomy of thought.

Autonomy of thought embraces the wide range of intellectual activities that are called "thinking for oneself," including making

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decisions, believing things, having aesthetic preferences, and making moral assessments.

Autonomy of will (or perhaps autonomy of intention) is the freedom to decide to do things on the basis of one's deliberations. Although the idea of "the will" went into a phase of philosophical disrepute, it currently seems to be undergoing some sort of rehabilitation.⁷ For the ordinary man and his doctor there is not much doubt that there is a human capacity corresponding to the idea of willpower (to the idea, for example, that one can decide to do, or not to do, something despite a powerful contrary desire and then act accordingly). Equally, there is little doubt that some people have more of such autonomy of will than others, that it is variable in all of us, and that it may be diminished by among other things, disease and chemical agents.

Autonomy of action—The patient whose voluntary muscles are paralysed by curariforms but who is conscious because his anaesthetist has forgotten the nitrous oxide and who tries in vain to devise a way of stopping the surgeon cutting him is perhaps a paradigm of a person whose autonomy of thought and will are active but whose autonomy of action is temporarily completely absent.

It should be noted that specific actions may be autonomous even though they are not the immediate or direct results of a thought process. One may drive to work perfectly autonomously without thinking what one is doing. One has, however, done so on the basis of reasoning, and one's actions are at any stage responsive to reasoning—one may, for example, suddenly remember the iron and decide to turn back.⁸ Autonomy of thought, of will (or intention), and of action require some basis in reasoning.

Autonomy as a virtue

The philosopher Professor John Benson, in a stimulating paper on autonomy,⁴ described autonomy as a state of character manifesting reliance on one's own powers in acting, choosing, and forming opinions. Seeing it as a virtue, he suggested, in Aristotelian vein, that it is a mean between, on the one hand, the deficiency of heteronomy in which one is excessively influenced by others (for example, by being credulous, gullible, compliant, passive, submissive, overdependent, or servile) and, on the other hand, the excess of arrogant self sufficiency or even solipsism (various doctrines exhibiting a total concern with self).

I am disinclined to accept that autonomy is a virtue—a villain is surely not rendered in any way virtuous by his autonomy. Rather, autonomy is a prerequisite for all the virtues in that these must, it seems to me, be based on deliberated choice if they are to be virtues. (That I take it is why the concept of virtue has only marginal applications to non-human, non-rational animals.) Whether or not this contentious position is accepted we can surely agree with Benson, and with the philosopher Dr Onora O'Neill,⁹ that autonomy is a characteristic possessed by people in varying degrees.

The principle of respect for autonomy

Autonomy must be distinguished from what is often known as the principle of autonomy and which for clarity would be better known as the principle of respect for autonomy. It is essentially the moral requirement to respect other people's autonomy. In practice everyone accepts this principle to some extent: we all believe our own autonomy ought to be respected (who would accept arbitrary imprisonment without even a feeling of moral outrage?) and we are all prepared to accept that we ought to respect the autonomy of at least some others in at least some circumstances. In the case, however, of autonomy of action the need for some restriction on respect for autonomy is obvious; otherwise we should be morally required to respect any deliberated course of action no matter how horrible the results might be for others. How, however, are such intuitions to be justified?

Two great philosophers, one a founding father of utilitarianism,

the other an exemplar of deontological (duty based) ethical theorists, argued for the moral importance of respecting people's autonomy and elaborated restrictions within this principle that, although expressed very differently, have perhaps some similarities. John Stuart Mill argued that to maximise overall human welfare respect for the autonomy of others was required in so far as such respect did not harm others and in so far as the people thus respected possessed a fairly basic level of maturity ("a capability of being improved by free discussion").¹⁰ Immanuel Kant argued that both autonomy and respect for the autonomy of all other autonomous agents were necessary features of rational agency itself and thus of any rational agent. Let me offer crude thumbnail sketches of their arguments.

KANT'S ARGUMENT

Kant's metaphysics divides what exists into two great realms: the intelligible or "noumenal" world (the world of reason) and the phenomenal world of sense perception. In both realms everything that exists works according to universal laws.¹¹ Rational beings can act autonomously according to their idea of laws; non-rational beings are acted on, and their behaviour is heteronomous—that is, causally necessitated or determined by outside causes. Human beings are an amalgam of the rational and the non-rational, and it is the will that links these two aspects enabling people to use their reason to produce effects on the non-rational world, including the non-rational aspects of themselves.

There are various objective universal laws recognised by reason (think of mathematics and logic), and among these are a single moral law (which, as we have seen in the article on deontological ethics, Kant believed could be presented in three different ways). Expressed as the famous categorical imperative, it requires us to "act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." His argument in summary is that, as any objective universal moral law must apply to all rational agents, no maxim (principle on which in fact we act) could be consistent with such a law unless the maxim could consistently be willed by the agent to apply to all rational agents.

It is not sufficient, however, merely to act according to such a maxim; it is also necessary to will or choose to do so, for otherwise one is not acting autonomously but being acted on, and it is a necessary feature of rational agency that the agent acts autonomously. It is by both rationally recognising the validity of the moral law and willing or choosing to accept it for ourselves that we can be subject to the universal moral law and yet at the same time also authors of it.

Furthermore, because rational agents necessarily have wills they are necessarily ends in themselves, unlike entities that do not have wills and are (at most) mere means to an end. This, argued Kant, is true not only objectively but also subjectively in that rational agents necessarily conceive of themselves as ends in themselves. From the fact that people are ends in themselves and the categorical imperative it follows, argued Kant, that one must always "act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end." Thus for Kant respect for autonomy was both a logically necessary feature of being a rational agent and also required that respect for the autonomy of any individual rational agent could be exercised only within the context of respect for the autonomy of all other rational agents.

MILL'S ARGUMENT

Mill also argued for the moral obligation to respect people's autonomy (except when to do so would be harmful to others), supporting this claim, as does R M Hare today,¹⁰ on the utilitarian grounds that such respect would maximise human welfare.¹¹ Mill has traditionally been pilloried for trying to square the circle in endorsing both an absolute principle of respect for liberty (by which he clearly means autonomy) and utilitarianism, but the

philosopher John Gray puts up a good case for Mill's consistency here.¹²

In the first place, Mill's "absolutism" is only apparent, for he builds in the qualification that respect for an individual's autonomy governs absolutely provided that this does not harm others¹³ or deprive others of beneficial acts "which he may rightfully be compelled to perform."¹⁴ In the second place, Mill may be interpreted as arguing that the principle of utility (maximising overall welfare) entails this respect for autonomy, for the welfare to be maximised is "in the largest sense grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being."¹⁵ Given that human happiness (in the broad Aristotelian sense of eudaemonia or flourishing) is constituted to a large extent in the exercise of people's autonomy and that people's autonomous requirements are so very different, indeed unique, it follows that respect for their autonomy will be at any rate a major obligation if the utilitarian objective of maximising welfare is to be achieved.

Bearing in mind the qualifications indicated above it is possible to understand how Mill as a utilitarian was able (arguably hardly less strongly than Kant) to advocate the principle of respect for autonomy:

"The object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control. . . . That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-

protection. That the only purpose for which power can rightfully be exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant."¹⁶

In my next article I shall look at some counterarguments to this position.

I thank Dr Michael Lockwood for drawing to my attention the argument of A MacIntyre.

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Green College Lectures

Educating the doctor: postgraduate, vocational, and continuing education

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At graduation the doctor is still a raw recruit. The increase in specialisation of medical practice over the past few decades has made it almost impossible for the student to learn many skills which are needed for practice. The recognition of this inadequacy led to the introduction of the preregistration year in 1953. Specialisation has increased since then, making the educational task more difficult for both the student and teacher. Moreover, the rate of accumulation and obsolescence of knowledge and skills is now so great that it is trite to say that education must continue throughout the whole of professional life.

The problem is how to get each doctor to a state of competence for

his chosen tasks, and how to keep him at least at that level of competence and preferably beyond it. It is an enterprise demanding commitment from every doctor, but especially consultants and principals in general practice. They are ultimately responsible for maintaining and improving standards of medical practice, and for seeing that the juniors for whom they are responsible attain and keep to the standards consonant with their experience and degree of responsibility. Many senior doctors understand their places in the educational scheme of things, but by no means all of them shoulder their responsibilities and fully discharge such duties.

Preregistration house officers

The aims of the preregistration year¹ are laid down in the *Recommendations on Basic Medical Education* of the General Medical Council.² Inevitably the aims are vague. Even the code of good practice for the preregistration year, also from the General Medical Council, is vague about educational duties towards preregistration house officers. These should now be more closely defined, and made into objectives, so that consultants in charge of these posts know just what is required of them. It is not enough simply to assume that they will work this out for themselves on the basis of the recommenda-

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