**Key Terms**

*Ethical Choices*, Third Edition

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Chapter 3: Autonomy, Moral Agency, and Self-Identity

**authentic choice** The third level of moral agency. This is a choice in which a moral agent exercises his capacity to choose (a) without constraint or compulsion, (b) by rationally deliberating, and (c) by assessing his own values.

**authenticity condition** Requires that an autonomous person have the capacity to discern and freely assess or choose her own values.

**autonomous person** One who is able to make free choices as a self-determining individual; an autonomous person fulfills the (a) independence condition, (b) competency condition, and (c) authenticity condition. For Kant, an autonomous person is a rational free agent who obeys the moral law.

**competency condition** Requires that an autonomous person have the capacities necessary to rationally deliberate when making choices.

**competent choice** The second level of moral agency: a choice in which a moral agent exercises his capacity to choose (a) without constraint or compulsion and (b) by rationally deliberating.

**diffusion** An undesirable outcome from the process of identity development. An individual in this state lacks a child’s identity. He tends to be controlled by external and situational factors.

**exploration** Adolescents engage in this stage of self-identity development by trying out different identities from among a number of identity markers.

**external constraints** To satisfy the independence condition of autonomy in a certain situation, you must not be controlled by things outside of yourself that make you act certain ways—for example, hypnosis or threats.

**foreclosure** An undesirable outcome from the process of identity development. An individual in a state of foreclosure has never really worked through the exploration stage and so falls back on the values, beliefs, purposes, and self-concept he’s received from others and from childhood.

**identity markers** These name social categories (e.g., socio-economic standing, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, religion, nationality) within which people can select specific identities—for example, male, Buddhist, Korean.

**independence condition** Requires that an autonomous person have the capacity to make a choice without being under the control of an external constraint or inner compulsion.

independent choice The first level of moral agency; a choice in which a moral agent exercises his capacity to choose without constraint or compulsion.

**inner compulsion** To satisfy the independence condition of autonomy in a certain situation, you must not be controlled by these—for example, obsessive/compulsive behaviors, addictions, phobias, overwhelming physical or emotional pain.

**life-commitments** As adolescents and young adults successfully finish the self-identity development stage of exploration, they commit themselves to certain values and purposes that will characterize most of the individual’s adult life.

**living will** A document previously prepared by a patient that specifies what sorts of medical treatments the patient either does or does not want when the patient is unable to make decisions for herself.

**moral agent** A person who satisfies all three conditions of autonomy and is able to appropriately apply these capacities to specific choices.

**moral capacity** The condition in which a fully autonomous person can act as a moral agent. A person lacking capacity cannot act as a moral agent.

**moral deference** Respecting another person’s choices without interference.

**moral responsibility** Being morally accountable to others for one’s own choices and actions, thus deserving blame or praise.

**paternalism** Overruling another person’s choices for her own good.

**place (within society)** A given identity (e.g., woman) is partly a social construct that dictates what is expected of her, what opportunities and prohibitions society creates for her, etc.

**relational autonomy** A type of substantive autonomy that rejects individualism and emphasizes the role of human interdependencies especially in establishing self-identity and developing autonomy.

**self/self-identity** A person’s fully constructed Self includes (a) his own working self-portrait, (b) his authentically chosen moral and non-moral values, and (c) his life purposes.

self-portrait A developed Self employs this portrait, or self-representation, as her working picture of herself.

**social construct** A concept or viewpoint that has been defined—partly or fully—by a particular society and is widely assumed within that society—for example, the significance of a Black identity, a person identified as a woman.

**substantive autonomy** The view that we can only be truly autonomous as long as our basic values are consistent with human fulfillment and flourishing, including the foundational values of morality

**value-neutral autonomy** The view that we can only be truly autonomous as long as we are able to choose our values without constraint and that any set of values can serve equally well as the basis for a person’s choices.