

A STRONG VALUE-NEUTRAL THEORY OF AUTONOMY

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2014

A STRONG VALUE-NEUTRAL THEORY OF AUTONOMY

Thesis submitted to the
Institute for Graduate Studies in the Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Philosophy

by
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Boğaziçi University

2014

Abstract

Ozan Güreli, "A Strong Value-neutral Theory of Autonomy"

Manipulation and oppressive socialization are among the most serious issues of the contemporary debates on autonomy. Procedural theories of autonomy focus on the way our beliefs are formed and don't rule out or necessitate having certain norms for autonomy to obtain. In this sense, procedural theories are content-neutral. However, these theories are limited to an analysis of our mental structure and preference formation. Thus, they lack analytical tools to account for the relation between autonomy and social phenomena like oppressive socialization. Substantive theories, on the other hand, associate heteronomy in such cases with the presence or absence of certain norms and values, albeit in problematic ways. While substantive theories bite the bullet and approach the problem of oppressive socialization in a more serious way, they do it at the expense of losing value-neutrality and defining autonomy in an arbitrary way. In this work, an alternative social theory of autonomy is propounded in order to explicate the problem of oppressive socialization in the context of autonomy. By employing the method of "via negativa", a definition of autonomy is reached by showing what it shouldn't be. Various works of philosophers like Gerald Dworkin, Harry Frankfurt, John Christman, Natalie Stoljar, Sigurdur Kristonsson are criticized in order to reach an alternative which doesn't have their common defect, namely epistemic individualism, a concept further developed within the context of autonomy by Peter Nelsen. In this context, indispensability of a power relations oriented analysis for a social theory of autonomy is stressed. While content-neutrality is preserved, it is demonstrated that achieving various degrees of autonomy is mainly determined by social conditions and attainment of these conditions may require radical social change. This is how a strong content-neutral approach, a seeming oxymoron is turned into a plausible theory.

Tez Özeti

Ozan Güreli, “Katı ve Değerlerden Bağımsız Bir Özerklik Kuramı”

Manipulasyon ve baskıcı toplumsallaşma günümüz özerklik tartışmalarının en ciddi sorunlarından. Yordamsal özerklik kuramları fikirlerimizin nasıl oluştuğuyla ilgilenir ve özerkliğin sağlanması için belirli normları zorunlu kılmaz yada reddetmez. Bu anlamda, yordamsal kuramlar içerik bakımından tarafsızdır. Ne var ki, bu kuramlar zihin yapımızın ve tercihlerimizin nasıl biçimlendiğinin analiziyle sınırlıdır. Baskıcı sosyalleşme ve özerklik arasındaki ilişkiyi açıklamak için gerekli analitik araçlardan yoksundurlar. Öte yandan, değer yüklü kuramlar, bu durumlardaki özerklik yoksunluğunu belirli norm ve değerlerin varlığı/yokluğu ile ilişkilendirir, fakat bunu sorunlu bir şekilde yapar. Değer yüklü kuramlar baskıcı sosyalleşme problemini daha derinlemesine ele aldıkları halde, bunu içerik bakımından tarafsızlığı kaybetmek ve özerkliği keyfi bir şekilde tanımlamak pahasına yaparlar. Bu tezde özerklik bağlamında baskıcı toplumsallaşma problemini açıklamak için alternatif bir sosyal özerklik kuramı ortaya atılmaktadır. “Via negativa” yöntemi kullanılarak özerklik tanımına özerkliğin ne olmaması gerektiği gösterilerek varılmıştır. Gerald Dworkin, Harry Frankfurt, John Christman, Natalie Stoljar, Sigurdur Kristonsson gibi felsefecilerin çeşitli yapıtları eleştirilerek bu yaklaşımların ortak kusuru olan “epistemik bireyseliği” aşabilen bir alternatif ulaşmak amaçlanmıştır. Peter Nelsen'in özerlik bağlamında geliştirdiği bu kavram ile güç ilişkileri odaklı analizin bir sosyal otonomi kuramı için vazgeçilmezliği vurgulanmıştır. İçerik bakımından tarafsızlık korunurken, otonominin büyük ölçüde toplumsal koşullarla belirlendiği ve bu koşulların gerçekleşmesinin köklü bir toplumsal değişimi gerektirebileceği gösterilmiştir. İlk bakışta oksimoron gibi görünen, katı ve değerlerden bağımsız bir yaklaşım bu şekilde makul bir kuram haline getirilmiştir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express the deepest gratitude to my supervisor Assist. Prof. Yıldız Silier who taught me not only how to produce an academic work but also how to work collectively in academics. Yıldız Silier dedicated one of her books to her students; and I am really lucky to understand and appreciate her motivation for that. I would like to thank Assoc. Prof. Zeynep Gambetti who helped me broaden my philosophical horizon and showed me that another academic life is possible. I am also grateful to Prof. Johannes Fritsche who is one of the most respectable and skilled academicians I have ever met. I would like to thank Prof. Murat Baç who has always tried his best to help his students, especially in internalizing philosophy as a way of life. I sincerely respect all of my committee members who have great personalities. I really enjoy what I am doing, so it is really important for me to work with people who are not only good at their work but also enjoy it and make other people feel the same way. In this respect, I consider myself really lucky to be a fellow philosopher among other members of Boğaziçi University Philosophy Department. I am also greatly indebted to my family and friends, who shared my enthusiasm for philosophy and supported me in various ways.

To my mom...

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Even if you are someone who is not familiar with contemporary discussions on theories of autonomy; a little knowledge about the basic concepts of philosophy might be enough for you to have some doubts about the title of this thesis. The title is intended to be thought provoking since I will actually be questioning the possibility of a strong value-neutral theory of autonomy. In order to explain what I mean by “a strong value-neutral theory” let us first clarify what may sound unclear in this statement.

Value-neutrality or content-neutrality with respect to autonomy is the irrelevance of the content of one's beliefs, values or motivational structure to the autonomy of that individual. This means that, from a content-neutral perspective, one needs some other criterion which is generally expressed in a formal way. Value-laden theories or approaches, on the other hand, are divided into strong and weak versions. While weak value-laden rule out certain norms or values, strong ones necessitate certain norms or values for autonomy to obtain. In this respect, while strong and weak are usually taken merely as the possible attributes of a value-laden theory; an expression like strong value-neutral theory may raise doubts or can even be conceived as an oxymoron. In order to show that such a theory is in fact possible, we need to clarify a specific conception of autonomy.

Without giving a spoiler about the rest of the text, I can say that using the expressions of strong and value-neutrality in different senses and different fields of application is what enables us to come up with this combination. However, for all this to be better understood, we need to give some definitions and make some distinctions necessary for any debate on contemporary autonomy theories.

The etymology of the term autonomy indicates self-rule; but what should we

understand from it and where should we put the emphasis? Historically speaking, the term was first used for Greek city states. A city state would be autonomous if its citizens make their own laws instead of being under the rule of some alien power. Departing from that definition, philosophers like Kant emphasized the *lawfulness* aspect of the notion along with the individual's *ability* to be author of her own rules. Kant states that “The will is . . . not merely subject to the law, but is so subject that it must be considered as also making the law for itself and precisely on this account as first of all subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author).”¹ Also according to Onora O’Neill, “Kant holds that autonomy is a matter not merely of *self-imposed* law, but specifically of self-imposed *law*.”²

Whereas philosophers like John Stuart Mill stressed the independence aspect of the notion more than internal conditions of autonomy. While writing about liberty, Mill also mentions dangers of being other-ruled in terms of belief formation.

Protection . . . against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation, of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compels all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own.³

These different points of emphasis do not need to exclude each other; however, what I understand from autonomy, in other words, what I find valuable in the notion of autonomy is the independence aspect of autonomy, which is “not being other-ruled”. In this sense, I take the opposite of autonomy as being other-ruled as opposed to not being able to govern oneself. While indoctrination can be an example

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 98-99.

² Onora O’Neill, “Autonomy, Coherence, and Independence” in *Freedom: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. Ian Carter, Matthew H. Kramer, and Hillel Steiner, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 340.

³ John Stuart Mill, *On liberty*, ed. Charles W. Elliott, (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), p. 5.

of the former, being weak-willed can be an instance of the latter. I hope this difference in approach will be made clearer once we examine different perspectives on autonomy in the following chapters.

Rather than speculating about the characteristics necessary for being eligible to rule oneself, I prefer to build my theory on the prima facie threats to autonomy which are mostly related to oppressive socialization, and then move to conditions necessary for not being other-ruled. The above mentioned preference goes hand in hand with problem-oriented approach which departs from cases where autonomy becomes problematic and worthy of attention due to the suspicion of being other-ruled.

The concept of autonomy I am trying to develop here is mainly motivated by the concrete problems we face, rather than philosophical speculations and abstractions. This is also why discussions on autonomy has gone through a resurgence thanks to the efforts of feminist writers who are mainly concerned with the cases where autonomy of the individual is questioned mostly due to the oppressive norms involved.⁴ Distinguished from long criticized masculine ideals of self-sufficiency and the figure of atomistic isolated individual, the notion of autonomy is re-appropriated by feminist thinkers such as Marilyn Friedman to address the problems of oppressive socialization.⁵ This problem-oriented approach provides more fruitful grounds for linking the arguments on autonomy with other issues on freedom such as oppression and domination.

The most fundamental distinction in contemporary debates in autonomy is between procedural and substantive theories. Roughly speaking, procedural theories

⁴ John Christman and Joel Anderson, "Introduction," in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism*, ed. John Christman and Joel Anderson (New York: Chambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 12-13.

⁵ Marilyn Friedman, "Autonomy, Social Disruption, and Women," in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 38-39.

are content-neutral; content of an individual's beliefs or motivational structure does not determine the autonomy status; rather for an individual to be autonomous the adoption of a certain belief must follow an appropriate kind of procedure, which can be expressed in a formal way. In other words, it is the way or the form of having certain motivational structure which determines the autonomy status of the individual, not the content of the beliefs or motivations behind one's actions.

Especially faced with the problem of oppressive socialization, strong substantive theories put forward that procedural conditions like critical reflection are not sufficient, so we either need to preclude some norms as autonomy inhibiting; or require some specific values as necessary for any preference to count as autonomous. While the former theories are called weak substantive, the latter are called strong substantive theories of autonomy. As we will see in the following chapters, internalization of oppressive feminine roles is a suitable case for substantive theories to claim that even in the presence of critical reflection introduction of substantive requirements is necessary for autonomy to obtain.⁶

Although the terms content-neutral and procedural are used interchangeably within the literature, the theory I will try to introduce does not confine itself with procedural conditions which pertain to the mental states of the individual (like proper kind of critical reflection); but it further requires social conditions to be fulfilled. Thus, it would be more adequate to call my theory content-neutral instead of procedural. The reasons for this would be better understood once we proceed with the critique of diverse accounts of autonomy.

Another distinction that has been used in this literature is between external and internal explanations. Conditions which are expected to be fulfilled by the

⁶ Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, "Introduction," in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 23-24.

individual like critical reflection are called internal conditions; and social conditions like absence of manipulation are called external conditions. While explanations which focus on the former are called internalist, others which focus on the latter are called externalist.

This very distinction can be questioned on the grounds that it may contribute to the supposed opposition between the subject and the social; according to which the former is presumed autonomous in itself and any social influence coming from the latter counts as a possible treat to the autonomy of the individual. There have been various attempts to oppose this misleading opposition; relational approach to autonomy is the most prominent among them.

Relational theories take the individual not as an isolated atom; but as a socially situated being who may have gone through different kinds of socialization which may have diverse effects on the autonomy competency of the individual. This approach also suggests that there may be diverse ways of being autonomous; the self-sufficient image of autonomous person being only one among many. While most relational accounts try to find a solution to oppressive socialization problem by criticizing the content of oppressive norms; I will try to turn my attention to the social conditions. To express it according to the prevalent terminology, I will emphasize external conditions more than internal ones in order to address the problems of indoctrination and oppressive socialization; however this is not to overlook the internal conditions. Rather I will try show that from a relational/social perspective, to search for the social conditions of autonomy is to overcome the false dichotomy of the internal and external explanations.

Some key differences between varied theories also result from employing same concepts in a totally different manner. That's why I find it crucial to mention a difference in the use of concepts before proceeding with some exemplary cases and

critiques of specific theories. It is the distinction between autonomy and positive freedom.

I consider autonomy as a mental phenomenon which is related with the way our ideas and beliefs, that make us perform certain actions, are formed. In this sense, a prisoner can be totally autonomous with regard to the formation of her reasons to act, even if her freedom to act freely is diminished. Autonomy is an exercise concept, but its exercise happens first in the mental level and then manifests itself in the intentions of the agent. It is true that if the agent does not think in an autonomous way and intend to take action accordingly she can't be deemed autonomous; but if her actions are constrained by external factors (factors other than those effecting one's competency to think autonomously) while she can still think autonomously then it is her freedom that is under threat, not her autonomy.

About the relation between positive freedom and autonomy Marina Oshana comments as follows:

When we say that a person is self-governing because she is in control of her actions and choices, we are saying more than that the person's actions coincide with preferences or values that are her own. We are also saying that the person has the power to determine how she will live. Being autonomous is not simply a matter of having values and preferences that mirror those a person holds under conditions in which control is absent. Rather, being autonomous is a matter of directing one's life according to such values and preferences. Autonomy or self-directedness, so described, calls for positive freedom.⁷

Even though I agree with Oshana that autonomy requires something more than negative freedom, still I want to criticize her conflation of autonomy with positive freedom. The question we should ask at this point is whether autonomy is exercised just in the same way as positive freedom is. In this sense, power to determine one's own beliefs (autonomy) should be distinguished from power to act

⁷ Marina Oshana, "How much should we Value Autonomy," in *Autonomy*, ed. Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr and Jeffrey Paul, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 101.

according to one's beliefs (positive freedom).

Although Oshana thinks that she is establishing a link between autonomy and the social, which is the aim of most relational theories, she is indeed conflating the concept of autonomy with that of positive freedom in the above quotation. For example, manipulation of people by a mainstream ideology is what restricts their autonomy; whereas outlawing a political party is what may reduce their positive freedom. For the sake of the argument we momentarily ignore the indirect effects on autonomy of outlawing a political party like diminished knowledge and access to form autonomous beliefs and actions concerning that party and ideology. This abstraction is just intended to demarcate concepts of positive freedom and autonomy. In practice, the relation is so direct to be overlooked. In the following chapters similar abstractions will also be provided for the task of distinguishing the concepts of oppression and autonomy which goes hand in hand with defense of value-neutral autonomy.

After clarifying the distinction between the concepts of positive freedom and autonomy; we can further mention the relation between different aspects of freedom. Because, to analyze the possibility of value-neutral autonomy is to analyze the nature of freedom in general and how its inner dynamics (oppression, autonomy) interact with each other. These two questions go in parallels, and answering one would help answering the other.

The main problem facing theorists of autonomy is distinguishing oppressive socialization from other kinds of socialization and pin down its impact on autonomy. Showing that autonomy should be value-neutral may even amount to showing that a happily oppressed person, a happy slave can well be autonomous. In other words, value-neutral accounts can distinguish the phenomena of oppression and autonomy rather easily, while allowing any possible interaction between the two. A value-laden

theory of autonomy can still conceptually demarcate those two phenomena; however linking a norm which is oppressive to the agent with its *necessary* effects on autonomy of the agent may result in turning a blind eye to the question of autonomy. Practically speaking, if one concentrates solely on the content of the norms as the determinants of the autonomy of the individual; one can't but turn her attention to the wrongness or oppressiveness of those norms instead of the way they are internalized by the individual. This may result in conceiving oppression (or oppressive norms) as the only cause of the non-autonomy of an individual, and losing the 'autonomous sphere of the problem of autonomy'. Autonomy might no longer be studied on its own as a distinct problem; hence become a derivative problem emanating from the phenomenon of oppression.

I believe that subjective aspect of freedom and autonomy are indispensable aspects of freedom which can't be reduced to anything else. While I will try to adopt a social and relational approach to autonomy; I will try to retain "the individual", which is the very ontological ground for any argument on autonomy. This is why I leave aside the free will and determinism debate.

In order to further illustrate the interrelation between subjective and objective aspects of freedom we can start with distinguishing these two statements:

1. She is thinking that her beliefs are genuinely her own while she is indeed deeply manipulated; hence not autonomous. She thinks herself as autonomous but she is not.

2. She is actually acting autonomously; however the acts she is performing are oppressive in character and this is enough to render her unfree at the end of the day. She *is* autonomous although she is oppressed and hence unfree in that respect (i.e. does not have positive freedom).

Let's give a concrete example to clarify the issue. You just open the door of

a room and see someone chained and a guard with a stick in her hand. If someone asks your opinion whether the chained person is free or not, your first impression is likely to be misleading. You might have witnessed a sadomasochistic couple who both enjoy themselves or a painful torture. Merely by observation, we cannot have a conclusive idea about the freedoms of the people involved. According to procedural theories, the first thing we need to check is whether people who are involved are thinking that they are free or not. If we get positive answers from them the next thing we need to check is whether they are under some illegitimate influence like being under pressure, being indoctrinated or highly manipulated.⁸

However, here is the part where we can't appeal to their testimonies, what we need to do is to analyze the motivations behind their actions in an objective manner. Being objective means here checking the way such and such norms and beliefs which lead to such actions are adopted regardless of the content of those norms. This is how procedural theories of autonomy would approach the case at issue. While substantive theories of autonomy would take into account the content of the norms which are adopted by the people involved to reach a conclusion; procedural theories remain value-neutral and focus more on the way those beliefs are internalized.

At this point, the most crucial question to be asked is the following: How can we decide which way of formation of beliefs and socialization promotes autonomy? We are all socially embedded beings and we are under constant influences coming from various sources. Which sources or conditions are illegitimate then, the ones whose normative content are wrong? If so, then this would be inviting a substantivist solution from the backdoor. Imagine someone is thinking S&M is not only morally wrong but also oppressive no matter how much it is enjoyed by the

⁸ John Christman, "Autonomy and the Split-Level Self," in *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 25 (1987), p. 291.

people involved; but he also grants that people are involved in autonomous ways. Then can we say that what he is seeing are autonomous but oppressed individuals (although they are not aware of it)? Another interpretation would be that they are free in terms of autonomy but unfree in terms of objective requirements of freedom such as not being oppressed.

We will turn back to these questions after giving another example which shows the relation between normative "mistakes", oppressive socialization and freedom in general. Imagine that there is a box in front of you and it is forbidden to open the box. You are informed (or you happen to believe) that there is a piece of cake in the box. So, being prevented from opening the box you actually think that your freedom to have the cake is impeded. Now, let's assume that there is actually an insect inside the box and you are misinformed about this fact. Is it really your 'freedom to eat the cake' which is precluded? Not, indeed. It can be said that someone is restricting your field of action but not restricting a particular action you intend to do. This is why we need to take into account to what extent the agent is knowledgeable about her situation and how her present beliefs are formed.

For the sake of the argument we started with a really simple and obvious example. Here, the way agent is informed about the situation is indubitably misleading. These misleading beliefs about the situation can stem from various sources. It may be a mistake on the part of the agent in question, a simple misunderstanding, self-deception, malevolent disinformation of another person, a particular instance of brainwashing or manipulation which can be observed in many other individuals at the same time.

Unlike the box example mentioned above which can easily be acknowledged by everyone given the necessary access to relevant information; when it comes to more complicated moral or political issues "the mistake" is not that easy

to reveal. Most of the time there is a dispute rather than a mistake; people have diverse views on such issues which can't be reconciled so easily.

In our example mentioned above, freedom to eat the cake inside the box was inhibited only seemingly. Even though there was no cake inside the box, it was the reality for the person who wanted to eat the cake and it was real because it had real effects on people. However, once the person realizes that she was mistaken about it, she would be expected to change her former beliefs. In a similar manner, social conditions may hinder the possibilities of autonomous thinking and action; yet once those conditions are altered, the autonomy of individuals are expected to develop, regardless of the content of their beliefs (from a content-neutral point of view). What's crucial at this point is not to forget that social institutions and relations also enhance autonomy as in the case of proper kind of education which promotes critical attitude.

Now imagine that a person knows that there is an insect inside the box and still wants to be free to open the box and eat it. Most of the people would think that she is somehow mistaken about her desire. But the mistake we are talking about here is totally different than the one before. She may want to give it a try even though she is aware of the fact that it may be poisonous; in such a case you may have hard time to persuade her not to try it. You may call it a mistake but obviously it is not from her perspective. She may just want to show off by showing that she is able to eat it; in such a case we can call this a moral mistake. However, what should interest us here mistakes which can be corrected when the agent is made knowledgeable about relevant facts. For instance, she might have been misinformed about the tastes and dangers of insects. She would not try to eat it if she had the relevant information. This would count as an objective mistake which calls for the analysis of social reasons behind the withholding of relevant information.

In content-neutral accounts of autonomy it is only the objective mistakes which renders someone non-autonomous; while according to substantive accounts one may be considered to be non-autonomous also because of the content of her beliefs; the person who wants to be free to eat an insect just to attract some attention may be rendered non-autonomous because she is misguided about her self-worth. So, if proponents of a substantive theory can justify the link between the content of S&M or voluntary slavery and one of the values deemed inimical to autonomy, then they can rule out the possibility of someone performing those acts and remaining autonomous no matter how competent they can be in terms of other aspects of being autonomous. On the other hand, according to procedural theories we need to check the way one's beliefs are formed or adopted to decide whether she is autonomous or not rather than the content of her beliefs.

We will try to find ways of distinguishing objective mistakes, which pertain to the way the agent adopts her relevant beliefs, from the moral mistakes which are necessarily perspective bound. Here, objective mistakes correspond to autonomy inhibiting formal and social conditions; whereas moral mistakes correspond to "wrong" norms like unconditional obedience or being a happy slave. Please note that most of the procedural accounts do not really give weight to the social conditions of autonomy as my account does. When substantive theories do, they generally focus on the content of the social norms which are internalized rather than the fact of internalization itself. My aim is to retain the value-neutrality while turning almost all of the attention to the social conditions of autonomy as opposed to internalist approaches.

According to my way of formulating the question which puts emphasis on the social conditions of autonomy as well as the competence of the individual, if we have an intuition about someone's being non-autonomous we first check if there are

external reasons for this rather than providing an introspective analysis. This is a way of defining autonomy in relational and social terms as opposed to associating autonomy with presence of authenticity and some other competencies or personality traits like having self-worth, self-esteem, and self-sufficiency.

Differences will be seen clearer once we proceed by giving brief summaries of main approaches to autonomy and discuss vulnerable points in each of them. In this way we will see how those main approaches differ from each other, how they are built upon other theories and what kind of progress they made. The progress we are talking about here is a progress in terms of the adequacy of the responses given to the problems of manipulation and oppressive socialization. Although the order of theories dealt with here can be said to exhibit such a progress; the more importance theories attach to those problems and the more sophisticated answers they offer, the more open to criticism they become. That's why we will allocate more time to the critique of substantive theories. On the other hand, despite the above mentioned progress and variations among theories, we will also lay bare an underlying common defect shared by all theories, namely "epistemic individualism"⁹. The critique of particular theories of autonomy will enable us to see what do we mean by a strong value-neutral theory of autonomy; and the critique of epistemic individualism in general will lay out the theoretical foundations of such a theory. In short, we will employ the method of *via negativa*: We will try to build up a new theory of autonomy by showing what autonomy should not be.

⁹ Peter Nelsen, "Oppression, Autonomy and the Impossibility of the Inner Citadel," in *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 29, no. 4, (June 2010) p. 339.

CHAPTER II

PROCEDURAL THEORIES OF AUTONOMY

Frankfurt's Hierarchical/Structural Theory of Autonomy

We can start analyzing procedural theories with Harry G. Frankfurt's structural account of autonomy which associates autonomy with critical reflection of an appropriate kind.¹⁰ Frankfurt's theory is structural in the sense that it is the proper sort of structure and hierarchical order of our mental structure that makes an action autonomous. In this respect, an agent's first order desires must be in accordance with her second-order desires.¹¹ To put it more concretely: A person may have a simple desire to eat chocolate; but she may also have a second-order desire not to desire to eat chocolate maybe because it is unhealthy or boosts consumerism. Even if she may not be able to change her desire, this type of critical evaluation of one's desires and inclinations is what is necessary for autonomy according to Frankfurt.¹² It is all about the ability to step back and reflect on one's behavior. If the desire to eat chocolate is critically reflected upon and one identifies with that desire; that person can be equally autonomous. In this sense, the content of the action is irrelevant to the authenticity of the person in question.

Our second-order desire –inasmuch as it is properly structured- confers autonomy competency on our actions according to the picture above; however can't we ask the source of these higher order desires as well? Gary Watson asks, and questions whether this leads to an infinite regress, or at least necessitates a third-order which is responsible for the control of the second order in turn?¹³ Another objection raised by Irving Thalberg is about the problem of identification which is

¹⁰ Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68, no. 1, (January 14, 1971), p. 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

¹³ Gary Watson, "Free Agency," in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 72, no. 8, (April 24, 1985), pp. 218-219.

also shared by other views of autonomy built on authenticity conditions¹⁴: Thalberg asks how can a certain part of our selves constitute our true self and the reference for identification and why should we think of our higher order desires as manifestations of our 'real' selves resting on a superior ontological/epistemological standing?¹⁵ According to Watson, this can be considered as another reflection of the age-old divided soul conception which consists of rational and desire-driven parts; along with the former's duty to control and subdue the latter.¹⁶ If this rational part is associated with autonomy it brings along the questions about the formation or nature of this real self itself. Given the socially-embedded self, this rational part is either to be conceived as a self-determined source of agency, free of empirical causation (which makes autonomy less probable according to many), or as an equally structured aspect of ours just like our first-order desires are (which makes it devoid of any prior ontological status).

Diana T. Meyers also criticizes Frankfurt's structural account of autonomy on the grounds that it ignores the conflicting aspects of our valuation system and takes the rational aspects of ours as if it is the only representative of our supposedly uniform and (preferably) integrated selves.¹⁷

As a response to the criticisms mentioned above, Frankfurt writes as follows: "When a person identifies himself decisively with one of his first-order desires, this commitment 'resounds' throughout the potentially endless array of higher orders."¹⁸ However, this is far from being a satisfactory response because it rests on assuming there should be an end of series where we have no guarantee at all.

¹⁴ Irving Thalberg, "Hierarchical Analyses of Unfree Action," in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 8, no. 2, (June 1978), p. 223.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.224.

¹⁶ Gary Watson, "Free Agency," in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 72, no. 8, (April 24, 1985), p. 217.

¹⁷ Diana T. Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1989), pp. 37-38.

¹⁸ Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68, no. 1, (January 14 1971), p. 16.

Rather than discussing Frankfurt's possible responses, we can modify his argument in order to bypass those criticisms. Thereby a defense of structural theories can be given in such a way that ontologically divided self would no longer be an inevitable byproduct of the theory. This split order can be conceived merely as a model to depict critical reflection rather than a categorical split. Conceived in this way, infinite regress or incompleteness criticism can be opposed with more ease; while two orders would be sufficient to express critical reflection, a third-order which confers autonomy to the second order can be regarded as unnecessary. Micheal E. Bratman also defends Frankfurt's hierarchical account by associating the concept of “valuing” with second-order desires and in that way distinguishes second-order desires from the first-order desires by remaining loyal to Frankfurt's original idea.¹⁹ However, what I am offering here is a modification of Frankfurt's original idea in order to use it as a model for expressing merely critical attitude, an internal aspect of autonomy, rather than the whole concept of autonomy.

Let's try to answer some questions brought about by the infinite regress critique: Where do we owe the autonomy conferring status of the second order desires? If they are not somehow superior to first order desires, why don't we need a third order which convey autonomy to the second order in turn, and so on?

In order to respond to the questions above we should consider second order desires as conveying autonomy simply because they are desires about desires. That's what makes them special, not any superior ontological standing or corresponding faculty. In this respect, “a desire to desire to desire x”, namely a third order desire, would be no different than “a desire to desire x”, namely a second order desire; since they are both desires about desires. In this context, I believe that an interpretation

¹⁹ Micheal E. Bratman, “Autonomy and Hierarchy” in *Social Philosophy and Policy* 20, no. 2, (July 2003), pp. 157-258.

which takes this model as a metaphor for critical thinking would do more justice to hierarchical theories than a split-level self interpretation does.

The above mentioned criticisms have various counter arguments and those counter arguments have some other counter arguments too; and we can play devil's advocate as long as we like. However, those arguments are no good for our main purposes since they do not say anything about the burning issue for contemporary debates on autonomy, namely the problem of manipulation and oppressive socialization. There is no reason for us to assume that our second-order desires can transcend the effects of oppressive socialization which affects the subject as a whole. These arguments are noteworthy because they show why questions regarding manipulation and oppressive socialization can't be addressed by focusing merely on the identification process of the individual.

Once an individual is under the influence of manipulation or oppressive socialization, first order desires' being in proper relation with second-order desires have no significance at all. Even though we take this relation to be nothing but an expression of having a critical attitude; the phenomenon of manipulation overrides critical attitude. No matter how much we explicate the relation between first and second-order desires, if one of them or any medium linking them is contaminated with manipulation, indoctrination or oppressive socialization; mere analysis of this relation would be at best insufficient and at worst misleading. Furthermore socialization in general still remains as a problem; which calls for relating critical reflection with social conditions rather than the inner mechanism of the self.

The main problem of structural theories is overemphasizing the inner organization of our motivational structure. Once you put the main requirements of autonomy as the integration and coherence of our evaluative mechanism, it may

result in being almost obsessed with some character traits like self-consistency and conflate them with autonomy. This is nothing but being imprisoned within one's "inner citadel" and trying to make sense of autonomy within that citadel; and the most severe outcome of this is ignoring the social aspect of autonomy and falling short of responding to the problems of manipulation and oppressive socialization.

Marina Oshana criticizes both structural and historical kinds of procedural theories on the grounds that what they offer is only an internalist explanation. Oshana proposes her criticism as follows:

My complaint about internalist accounts of autonomy is not that they fail to include among the components of a person's psychology certain relational or "interactive" qualities or abilities. Rather, my complaint is that such accounts are exclusively subjective. The agent's psychological condition – specifically, the structural and historical character of her judgments and preferences – is alone important for her autonomy. The psychological emphasis of internalist theories reflects the conviction that preserving the autonomy of persons consists in preserving what is metaphorically described as the "inner citadel". The metaphor asks us to assume the existence of some essential (presumably psychological) element of the individual, independent of the world and inviolable, in virtue of which autonomy is safeguarded. This element is often referred to as the "true self" or "real self."²⁰

As it is argued by Oshana, rather than first dividing the self, assigning a special role to a certain aspect of it and then looking for an integration of a certain type, maybe we should focus on other requirements of autonomy, especially the social ones. Exclusively focused on the internal aspect of autonomy, these structural formulations turn a blind eye to social determinants of autonomy and its relational aspect. Let's see if introducing independence as a condition of autonomy would make structural theories any better.

²⁰ Marina Oshana, "Personal Autonomy and Society," in *Journal of Social Philosophy* 29, no. 1, (Spring 1998), pp. 85-86.

Dworkin's Hierarchical/Structural Theory of Autonomy

Dworkin formulates autonomy simply as combination of authenticity and independence; and explains authenticity condition as the control of the first-order desires by second-order desires.²¹ As it was in Frankfurt's theory, this can be interpreted as an ability to critically reflect on our behavior rather than a categorical distinction. But how can our decisions be truly our own? Since we are all socially-embedded beings, decisions cannot be made ex-nihilo, they are always based on the social norms and roles we have identified with. Dworkin explains what he understands from autonomous choosing in a very lucid way.

We simply find ourselves motivated in certain ways and the notion of choosing, from ground zero, makes no sense. Sooner or later we find ourselves, as in Neurath's metaphor of the ship in mid-ocean being reconstructed while sailing, in mid-history. But we always retain the possibility of stepping back and judging where we are and where we want to be.²²

Most of the contemporary arguments on autonomy bypass the free will and determinism problem on the grounds that autonomous action is not creating one's motivational structure but having an appropriate relation with it. Even if the strong version of determinism is true, we can still make distinctions between influences which enable the individual to make autonomous choices and the ones which imply being other-ruled. It is a widely shared belief that there must be a difference between these two types of influences; yet what lies behind this difference is the key question. This question becomes more visible under the titles of the problems of manipulation, indoctrination and oppressive socialization which raise doubts about the autonomy of the people who are influenced by them.

Let's see if Dworkin can provide a satisfactory answer to those questions. According to Dworkin, authenticity is not enough for autonomy; we also need

²¹ Gerald Dworkin, "Autonomy and Behavior Control", *Hastings Center Report*, no. 6 (February 1976), p. 25.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

independent decision making, but what sort of independence are we looking for?

In the contemporary literature, independence can also be classified as procedural or substantive. Dworkin considers the former as a necessary constituent of autonomy but rules out the latter since it has serious drawbacks which threatens value-neutrality and hence the spirit of autonomy. While procedural independence requires that the above mentioned identification process itself is not influenced by manipulation or indoctrination; substantive independence requires certain character traits which are associated with an independent personality. If we can imagine an utterly obedient person who still retains critical thinking and who is not under any influence like indoctrination, manipulation or withholding of relevant information; that would be an example of being procedurally independent while lacking substantive independence.

Dworkin doesn't think that we can find a way of pinning down threats to substantive independence without the risk of ruling out values like compassionate commitments which can be adopted autonomously.²³ This brings along the danger of arbitrarily associating autonomy with certain images and values. In other words, no matter how refined our conditions of substantive independence can be, linking autonomy with substantive requirements bears the risk of throwing the baby with the bath water. This also reflects Dworkin's understanding of the spirit of autonomy and content-neutrality which can be used as a weapon against paternalistic interference. Dworkin summarizes this spirit with his following reputed statements:

In my conception, the autonomous person can be a tyrant or a slave, a saint or sinner, a rugged individualist or champion of fraternity, a leader or follower. But I believe that there are contingent connections between being autonomous and the substantive nature of such person's values. Although there are no a priori truths about the content of an autonomous person's values, one can speculate about psychological and sociological

²³ Ibid., p. 23.

connections.²⁴

Although I share similar opinions with Dworkin on the spirit of autonomy; I find his approach to the problem of manipulation and oppressive socialization quite inaccurate. Possible threats to procedural independence mentioned by Dworkin are limited to obvious cases like subliminal motivation and ignorance of true determinants of one's behavior.²⁵ The scope is limited because Dworkin checks how the agent is influenced by external influences, rather than providing separate analysis of *social conditions and relations*. Besides, with regards to procedural independence and manipulation problem, we need to remember that not every source of manipulation is as obvious as a lie about the content of a mysterious box that we mentioned in the first chapter.

Although Dworkin does not ignore the positive influences on autonomy like a proper kind of education; he still abides by the liberal image of the individual which is taken as an isolated atom. According to this epitome of liberal approach, the individual is the only focal point with regards to its relations with the social. Social relations take the form of a confrontation; and Dworkin together with other liberal theorists, focus merely on one side of this confrontation. These relations are taken to be nothing but influences on the individual. Conceptualized in this way, one can't but check how the individual is *influenced* in case of a manipulation or oppressive socialization, rather than analyzing the *relations* which give rise to that kind of situation.

Whenever we turn our attention merely to the perspective of the individual we are trapped again within the inner citadel. Unless we abandon the language of influence, there doesn't seem to be a decisive way of distinguishing the manipulative

²⁴ Gerald Dworkin, *Theory and Practice of Autonomy*, (New York :Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 29.

²⁵ Gerald Dworkin, "Autonomy and Behavior Control," *Hastings Center Report*, no. 6 (February 1976), p. 26.

from the merely influential, since how the individual is influenced doesn't say much about the character of the influence or the relation in question. Therefore, instead of searching for a criterion to distinguish legitimate *influences* on the individual from the illegitimate ones; we can investigate the illegitimate *relations* behind the suspected non-autonomy of the individuals living in a particular society.

We will develop this idea in the following chapters; however, before proceeding we need to mention another criticism directed against structural accounts in general which laid the foundations of historical accounts of autonomy. As we have already examined, structural accounts focus on the question of whether an agent's mental state embodies a certain structure or integrity. However, while checking the autonomy status of a certain action they concentrate on the authenticity and independence of 'desires to desire' or beliefs *at a given moment*. All the assessment is made according to the snapshot of this mental structure of the agent. What is missing and what we can't infer from this picture is the *process* leading to the formation of one's desires and volitions in question. Since the process itself is not taken into account, the *conditions* of autonomy are also inevitably overlooked. Not paying enough attention to those conditions causes our theory to be stuck within the mental structure of a person, the inner citadel. This in turn causes a theory to remain purely internal and fall short of accounting for the external influences or conditions. Let's see if taking into account the historicity of the formation of our beliefs would help us break down the walls of the inner citadel and reach a social relational account of autonomy.

Christman's Historical Theory of Autonomy

Christman developed his historical account of autonomy to improve the deficiencies of structural accounts. According to Christman, the most vulnerable point of those theories was ignoring the process behind the formation of our beliefs and desires.²⁶ Christman invites us to turn our attention to the conditions of autonomy and formal process of the emergence of our motivational structure. This shift in focus is important because it doesn't confine the criteria for autonomy with the mental structure of the agent at a given moment; instead it takes into account further conditions and processes. Christman explains the novelty of his theory as follows:

[...] what is crucial in the determination of the autonomy of a desire is the manner in which the desire was *formed* - the conditions and factors that were relevant during the (perhaps lengthy) process of coming to have the value or desire. And these conditions may have little to do with how the agent evaluates the desire itself (qua desire).²⁷

Christman's last statement here is worthy of attention because it detaches conditions of autonomy from identification with one's desires or evaluations of the desires by the agent. However, what the agent thinks is still decisive regarding her autonomy status, albeit in a counterfactual way. In this sense, we can't talk about a total detachment from the limits of the introspective analysis.

What matters is what the agent thinks about the *process* of coming to have the desire, and whether she resists that process when (or if) given the chance. The conditions of autonomy must, then, set out the conditions that determine the agent's 'participation' in this process of preference formation. We must ask if the person would have or did resist the adoption of a value or desire and for what reasons.²⁸

The points made above should be taken as a first step in stepping out of the

²⁶ John Christman, "Autonomy and Personal History," in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 21, no. 1, (March 1991), p. 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁸ John Christman, "Autonomy and Personal History," in *The Philosophy of Free Will: Essential Readings from the Contemporary Debates*, ed. Paul Russel and Oisín Deery, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 327.

borders of the individual and internalist explanations. Therefore, it is a progress over structural theories; yet such a progress can't find its ultimate expression unless it is furthered by an analysis of the social conditions which are distinct from what the agent thinks about her desires or even the process.

In the above quotation, Christman speaks about a chance to step back and evaluate the process leading to one's motivational structure at a moment. Can this be a solution to the problems of manipulation and indoctrination? It doesn't seem to be. Aren't we going to need a certain set of beliefs to evaluate the process, and can't those beliefs themselves be the product of deeply rooted indoctrination or manipulation?

Christman's historical account provides a more elaborate model for critical reflection than structural or hierarchical accounts do. However, when it comes to the problem of manipulation it seems to be stuck where structural theories are also stuck: the inner citadel and the liberal conception of the individual. One of the motivations for Christman not to disregard the testimony of the agent might be unwillingness to abandon value-neutrality and the subjective character of autonomy. However, we should not confuse deciding one's autonomy status by oneself with holding whatever kind of belief one likes in an autonomous manner.

Remembering the S&M example we gave in the introduction chapter can be illuminating at this point. The reason for not appealing to the testimonies of those people with regards to their autonomy was the possibility of their being manipulated. No matter how active one may be in the preference formation process, and no matter how transparent this process can be to the agent; if there is manipulation and conditioning going on we would still have the same problems at the end of the day. That's why we need to go beyond the parochial perspective of the individual and

focus more on the social conditions of autonomy.

In the above quotation, Christman relies on the agent's capacity to reflect on her decisions and preference formation process as long as she is "given the chance". According to the picture depicted by Christman, conditions of autonomy should be such that they don't hinder this capacity but encourage the agent to participate in this process. The question is: How can we be sure whether we have suitable conditions, thus the agent is given the chance.

In order to be more precise about those conditions, Christman introduces the concept of illegitimate external influences.²⁹ Paul Benson summarizes Christman's concept as follows:

Christman characterizes procedural independence negatively, as the absence of "illegitimate external influences" (IEIs) on an agent's reflective identification with certain first order volitions. He tentatively describes IEIs as follows. First, IEIs are external in that they originate outside the agent and interfere with normal cognitive processes of reflection. Second, IEIs are illegitimate in that, upon becoming aware of their influence, an agent would be led to revise his identifications.³⁰

This definition urges one to question the distinction between external and internal before anything else. What counts as external influence? While obvious cases of manipulation can be regarded as external influences with ease; profound and subtle sorts of manipulation are internalized to such a degree that they may not be considered as external anymore. In this respect, historical account of autonomy has serious trouble in expounding the cases of deeply rooted manipulation and indoctrination, let alone cases of oppressive socialization which are even harder to pin down.

²⁹ John Christman, "Autonomy and the Split-Level Self," in *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 25, (1987), p. 291.

³⁰ Paul Benson, "Autonomy and Oppressive Socialization," in *Social Theory and Practice* 17, no. 3, (Fall 1991), pp. 392-393.

Let's put Christman's theory in action in order to see if his concept of illegitimate external influences can help us solve the problem of manipulation any better than the structural accounts do. This will also provide us with a chance to compare Christman's approach with my alternative and get some clues about how a strong content-neutral theory would look like and how it would differ from other theories.

We all know that some advertisements make use of subliminal messages to which we are not immune at all. During 1930's advertisements in movie theaters used such methods to influence us in an illegitimate way. We perceive motions in a movie with the help of 24 frames shown in a second which we cannot perceive one by one but only the collection of them. For instance if there is a scene of a man holding a gun which is composed of relevant images, it may also contain a totally irrelevant image of a popcorn -which is not seen by us as a popcorn image but nevertheless perceived by our brain somehow- and this triggers some effects in us such as a growing appetite. This would be a clear example of an illegitimate influence; it is illegitimate because it intervenes with our capacities of critical reflection.

We need to make some crucial distinctions at this point to see why exactly this advertisement would count as an illegitimate external influence. It is illegitimate neither because it turns us into a slave to our appetite, nor because it fosters consumerism which is a moral evil. It is not illegitimate because of the malevolent purposes of the multi-national companies; or because of the sexist imagery/language it may use. These are all important matters of struggle but not relevant for our purposes here. That advertisement is illegitimate simply because it inhibits our critical reflection capacities. Here again -parallel with the distinction between substantive and procedural theories- the emphasis is on the way external influences work on us rather than their content.

Let's imagine an ideal case where a person, who gets popcorn as a result of the subliminal advertisement, was made knowledgeable about the subliminal advertising. She would say "Oh man! That wasn't an autonomous preference to have popcorn. I wish it was an autonomous decision." In this case, she has been given "the chance" to evaluate the case and see herself if she would have resisted the preference formation. In that sense, Christman's account seems to work here. However, if we take external influences to include less obvious examples, things may get more complicated and we may need to introduce stronger conditions for autonomy. Think of an advertisement which doesn't make use of such obviously deceptive means; don't they still deceive us in some other ways? We are born into a society where advertisements are natural parts of our daily lives; we seldom question them and their effects on us. How can we get 'the chance' to step back and reveal the particular impacts of those advertisements on us as decisively as we can do in the case of subliminal advertising? They have been around for a long period of time and their cumulative effects are not easy to mark unlike a particular case of subliminal messaging. Is there a single prescription for all individuals or should we turn our attention to social analysis of those advertisements instead?

If you are living in a city, even if you try hard to escape from advertisements, they would find you everywhere you go. You may be trying to eat less chocolate but on your way home you may notice an advertisement which may make things harder for you. Expecting one to be strong-willed as the only solution and associating this character trait with autonomy prevent us from concentrating on the *causes* of the problem. Why don't we put the blame directly on the social conditions instead?

This doesn't mean that to be autonomous, one needs to live in a vacuum. We are all socially embedded beings and we are born into certain cultures which make

up the core of our self-conceptions. We are all surrounded by influences of different types since our birth and shaped by those influences. Influences are everywhere and there is no point in considering all kind of influences as potentially illegitimate. As it is already discussed in the previous chapter, the main problem is about the liberal conception of the individual who is taken to be the center of all social relations. As a result of this, all relations are reduced to influences on the individual; and this model of confrontation already bears a negative meaning in itself. Built on this liberal conception of individual and its relations with the social, the concept of illegitimate external influences is a futile attempt to come up with a criterion to discern illegitimate influences from legitimate ones, where the conception of the influence *itself* bears the meaning of a potential threat to the individual in the first place. If we shift our terminology from influences to that of relations, it would be easier for us to see that social relations both diminish and promote our autonomy in various ways. What we need is a deliberative and focused analysis of those relations in order to evaluate them in terms of their effects on our autonomy.

In this context, subliminal advertising as a clear case of illegitimate external influence is a too restricted example of manipulation and thus falls short of being a model for comprehending other types of manipulation, let alone oppressive socialization and its effects on autonomy. That's why we need to introduce an analysis of power relations in order to see the *common causes* behind the problems posed to autonomy by not only subliminal advertising but also other types of advertisements which are no less problematic with respect to autonomy. While doing this we still want to distinguish effects of an advertisement on our autonomy on the one hand and the influence we get by seeing someone eating popcorn on the other.

Christman's illegitimacy condition is far from being informative because it doesn't rest on a social analysis. The only perspective it employs is the agent's

perspective: If there would be no illegitimate influences on the agent, it means that the agent has critical attitude. If the agent has proper kind of critical attitude, she would be immune to illegitimate influences. Here we need a separate criterion to assess the social conditions of autonomy, a social critique.

As it is argued by Oshana in the previous chapter, both structural theories we have studied and the historical theory of Christman have a common defect: they are exclusively subjective and thus can't adopt external criteria of illegitimacy in a non-eclectical manner. Although Christman introduces the possibility of further conditions of autonomy other than identification; it is still the agent who is going to decide about the process. As it has already been mentioned, taking the individual as the only focal point and talking merely about social 'influences' rather than social 'relations' is the main reason why Christman's theory falls short of explaining less obvious cases of manipulation or oppressive socialization. Simply because taken as mere influences they are not visible; they can be properly analyzed only structurally, as social relations and with the help of a directed and focused perspective. That's why critique of the conception of liberal individual and epistemic individualism is only half way done. Christman lays emphasis on the formal and historical conditions of autonomy; but the social analysis of conditions of autonomy has not been introduced yet. Therefore, the problems of manipulation and oppressive socialization couldn't be addressed properly.

Substantive theories embark upon the project of solving problems of manipulation and oppressive socialization more seriously than procedural theories do, yet they do it at the expense of losing the autonomy of the question of autonomy. My theory, on the other hand, aims to reconcile the merits of a social-relational perspective with that of value-neutrality. That's why following chapters are mainly devoted to the defense of value-neutrality against the attacks of substantive theories.

CHAPTER III

SUBSTANTIVE THEORIES OF AUTONOMY

Kristonsson's Weak Substantive Theory of Autonomy

In the following chapters, substantive theories are analyzed with the purpose of showing that we don't need to introduce substantive restrictions or requirements in order to make sense of the relation between oppressive socialization and autonomy. In order to defend value-neutrality of autonomy we can't posit positive values like substantive theories do. Instead, we can proceed by developing counter arguments to the critiques of value-neutrality made by substantivist theorists like Sigurdur Kristinsson, who claim that some self-effacing values can be inimical to autonomy in a non-contingent way.³¹ Kristinsson's paper 'The Limits of Neutrality: Toward a Weakly Substantive Account of Autonomy' is worthy of attention for my purposes here, because it criticizes value-neutral accounts not because of their particular insights on the internal conditions of autonomy but because of their very value-neutrality. The method adopted by Kristinsson is to grant an agent all relevant capacities of autonomy while representing her as incapable of autonomy because of the content of the values she appropriates. Kristinsson assumes that one can commit oneself to unconditional obedience while fulfilling various procedural requirements and writes as follows:

Neutral Accounts suggest, roughly, that if someone consistently endorses (or could endorse) a desire to follow orders without question or condition, then he may be autonomous in acting on that desire. Intuitively however, an autonomous action must involve the agent's own choice of ends at a more concrete level than that of pursuing whatever ends some authority commands.[...] This intuitive demand for an independent setting or constraining of ends places the onus of justification on defenders of neutral conceptions.

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³¹ Sigurdur Kristonsson, "The Limits of Neutrality: Toward a Weakly Substantive Account of Autonomy," in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30, no. 2, (June 2000), p. 258.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.

In order to challenge Kristinsson's point we can either argue that the person who blindly and unconditionally obeys also lacks the basic rational thinking skills or claim that she *can be* autonomous as opposed to our intuitive ideas. Related with the first option, we can also question the plausibility of a concept like unconditional obedience. To speak about the autonomy of a person, before all else that person needs to be a rationally eligible agent. If unconditional obedience entails suspending the critical evaluation permanently, shouldn't we question the minimum reasoning requirements of that person? Another possible form of criticism is questioning the very possibility of the notion of unconditional obedience, does such a thing or even anything close to it exist in actuality? Doesn't such a concept overlook and wrongly rule out the possibility of the agent to employ her critical skills at some point in future?

Above all, if one's critical skills are impaired "permanently" then she wouldn't count as a minimally rational person in the first place. Mere adherence to a certain value can't inflict such a devastating harm. So, if someone lacks such basic skills, that means she is simply not eligible for autonomy in the first place. In such a situation, one can hardly put the blame on the content of the norms that person holds.

One possible objection to this criticism can be that the alternative itself is not value-neutral enough if it entails rationality as one of its basic requirements of autonomy. I would agree with this criticism if I used rationality in a broader or in a specific sense. However, I use the terms reason and rationality as minimal conditions of being eligible for reflective thinking, not autonomous thinking. In other words, being rational here means having such and such capacities not to count as a wanton. I am well aware of the fact that assuming any kind of rationality, which is beyond the minimum requirements of personhood that distinguish us from wantons, would be

nothing but begging the question. Furthermore, I do not posit rationality here as a criterion of autonomy in my theory; rather I use the concept to give a response to the Kristinsson's critique of value-neutral theories of autonomy. The most common defect of these theories is giving really extreme and abstract examples such that the person in question lacks minimum requirements of rational thinking in the first place, let alone possible autonomy requirements. Then these people are shown to be non-autonomous due to the content of their beliefs rather than their lack of critical thinking competencies. As a matter of fact, in most of the cases the agent in question is depicted almost like someone with a mental illness. In order to show the supposedly necessary relation between submissive norms like self-effacement and heteronomy, Kristinsson gives really extreme and abstract examples like that of a slave, who regrets becoming free and believes that she is created to be a slave.³³

Both in Kristinsson's and other substantivist thinkers' examples we can find extreme cases like permanent impairment of critical judgment or unconditional obedience, which should make us question the minimal rationality of the person before questioning her autonomy and internalized beliefs. However, this is totally different from including rationality (especially a particular form of it) among the requirements or criteria of autonomous action and excluding other actions as non-autonomous because they do not conform to our specific conception of rational action. Here, like elsewhere in this text, in order to preserve value-neutrality I abstain from specifying particular conditions and values as necessary components of autonomy. The same applies to the matter of rationality too.

In the above argument I do not claim that unconditional obedience is a conceptual impossibility, nor should I rule out it as such; what I am doing is questioning if it has any significance in actuality and/or any significance for our

³³ Ibid., p. 259.

purposes. No matter how blindly a person may follow someone or a set of values, we need to grant her a capacity to question her existing beliefs under some extreme conditions. If someone is required to do really extreme things (like sacrificing one's own children), in most of the 'actual' cases we can find exceptions to the supposedly 'unconditional' obedience of that person. Besides that, we can always conceive of possible cases of exception even though it doesn't appear in actuality.

In spite of all these considerations, if we really need to think of someone as unconditionally obedient, why don't we question the relevant rational capacities of that person before linking her obedience with the particular values accompanying this obedience? In this sense, I don't think that unconditionally obedient person is a probable case; even if it is, it doesn't point to the content of the norms but rather to a deficiency in the *formal* capacities of a person.

So, we don't need to rule out the possibility of unconditional obedience, but rather show that it doesn't fulfill its task neither for our argument nor Kristinsson's. Even if we ruled out unconditional obedience it doesn't follow that everyone has critical attitude to a sufficient extent. We *know* that not everyone has critical attitude (or has it in varying degrees); and this empirical fact is the main motivation behind my whole project of distinguishing autonomous action from non-autonomous action without getting into determinism-free will debate.

Although the initial task was to grant the agent all relevant procedural capacities of autonomy but at the same time show her to be non-autonomous because of the content of the norms she has internalized; whenever substantive theorists like Kristinsson set out for this task, they end up claiming that the people in question actually lack some formal capacities which have been granted beforehand. That's also why I criticized the very idea of 'unconditional obedience' which is far from

being a useful example. If someone is blindly following a particular norm or belief; it must be the extreme character of the act of blindly following itself which is worthy of our attention, rather than the content of the belief which is blindly internalized. In other words, blindly following can at best imply a formal deficiency, not a norm. One can blindly follow a norm, yet 'blindly following' can't be regarded as a norm in itself.

The argument that unconditionally obedient indeed lacks basic rational skills, which would make him a wanton whose autonomy status is of no concern to us, is already supported by another argument showing that unconditional obedience is not a feasible and usual case. This argument in turn should be supported by a claim that norms with repressive contents can be internalized without diminishing the autonomy of the person in question; and this is what we are going to do below.

Since a proponent of a content-neutral account can't determine the autonomy status of a particular case according to its content; what can be done is to respond to the charges of the substantive accounts of autonomy which claim that such and such values can't be adopted autonomously. In order to give voice to such a claim, in the same paper Kristonsson picks the example of Fransiscan monks who intuitively appears to be non-autonomous and describes their situation as follows:

To illustrate, Fransiscan Monk appear to have taken their vow of obedience to monasterial superiors to an extreme. They believed it required them not only to obey, but to obey without permitting the slightest questioning or evaluation to enter their minds. Their goal was unconditional obedience to their superiors. This was very difficult for them to achieve, so they had to *work constantly* on whatever mental exercises would keep them from giving in to the natural tendency to form judgments about the reasonability of specific orders. (emphasis added)³⁴

Kristonsson relates this apparent non-autonomy with the norms they adopt and uses this example to refute value-neutrality. On the other hand, what we are

³⁴ Ibid., p. 278.

going to do below is not arguing that they are in fact autonomous; but establishing that the content of their beliefs in themselves do not constitute an impediment to their being autonomous. Kristinsson further comments on the situation of Franciscan monks who put a lot of effort to resist the tendency to use their own evaluative judgments to attain perfect obedience:

[...] consider the Franciscans, who *deliberately* isolate operative motives from the rest of their wants and beliefs. As already mentioned, there need not be any failure of autonomy when they act to instill or maintain this rigid disposition. But when the isolated motive operates, the Franciscan himself seems passive with respect to the direction of his behavior [...] By contrast, an actively self-governing agent uses her perception and judgment to determine whether the action or end fits her overall purposes [...] (emphasis added).³⁵

Operative motive here stands for the motive of perfect obedience which overrules any other possibly conflicting desires or reasonings. However, in case of Franciscans that operative motive is *deliberately* isolated by the individual and this calls for an active involvement on the part of the agent. Doesn't the very fact that they are putting so much effort indicate that they are in one way or another mentally active?

Even though they don't seem to have critical attitude from others' perspective, they are obviously putting tremendous efforts to sustain the privileged role of operative motive, namely perfect obedience. It is hard to imagine someone who is always reflectively checking the way one lives (whether it suits the commands) to be passive in the sense most of the non-autonomous persons are considered to be. In this sense, being 'actively' obedient is mentally so demanding that one is likely to fulfill most of the basic procedural requirements in virtue of being so active. However, this doesn't prove them to be autonomous. As I stressed before, this is not our purpose here either. We are only checking if we have sufficient reason to rule out certain type

³⁵ Ibid., p. 282.

of behavior as incompatible with autonomy, and it seems that we don't.

According to another possibility, one can be too passive to consult her own feelings and ideas. Imagine someone who is blindly obeying another's orders which are totally conflicting with each other. If the obedient person is so blind to see the conflicting character of orders and doesn't question the situation at all, we need to question her reasoning capacities before her autonomy. This amounts to a serious problem which cannot be resolved by resorting to the content of the value which is internalized. In such a case, we should rather suspect that a formal capacity is severely impaired.

Another remarkable point of the above quotation is about the relation between operative motive and rest of one's beliefs and desires. According to Kristinsson when operative motive rules over other motives, it turns the agent into a passive follower of itself.³⁶ But why should we consider the agent "passive with respect to the direction of his behavior" just because of the hierarchy among his motives? One of his motive can be so dominant that other motives are subordinated by that motive; but this doesn't give us any clue whether the dominant motive is itself questioned or not. Expecting everyone to have a balance among motives in order to be autonomous is nothing but coming up with an arbitrary formulation of autonomy. Kristinsson also warn us that this kind of disposition has nothing problematic about autonomy unless operative motive subordinates other motives in action. However, can we make a clear distinction between merely having such a disposition and its being operative?

Imagine a perfectly obedient member of a sect who can do anything for her sect. For the sake of the argument assume that she has been critically reflecting on her devotion for all her life. While her devotion is the most important thing in her life, she is also confident that she has deep attachments with other things. For

³⁶ Ibid., p. 284.

example she loves her child, but this love is not even comparable with her feelings towards her sect. In order to illustrate further let's say she can relinquish all her money for her child. It goes without saying that she can do the same for her sect too. One day she is asked to sacrifice her children for the sake of the sect and she didn't hesitate at all. From this situation how can we infer that she didn't critically reflect on her decision?

In order to contrast this situation with another example, let's imagine a woman who is asked to give all of her money in order to save her child. She needs money and giving all her money would have devastating results. However, she didn't hesitate a single moment either. In both cases, let's assume that love turns them equally blind. Then why would most of us question the autonomy of the first agent rather than the other? It's simply because we are familiar with the second case, and once we are faced with unfamiliar hierarchies among our motives we are inclined to doubt the autonomy of the person in question.

In the above quotation one is expected to be responsive to one's "overall purposes", however, this is nothing but imposing a balanced order on one's motivational structure. What if my overall purposes are best served when my operative motive is served foremost? What if I do not have many remarkable purposes but only one or few? In this context, we also need to emphasize that there is no such norm as being obedient. Every obedient person is obedient to something or some norm. One may have a tendency to become obedient easily but if the same person is asked to be rebellious can she follow this order that easily? In this sense, it doesn't make sense to say that the norm of being obedient in itself overrules other norms; rather it is the norm of the sect along with a powerful attachment to it which subdues other norms like motherhood.

In relation with the above quotation we have already raised the question of

making a distinction between having a hierarchical motivational structure and its being operative. Is there an actual gap between the two; if there is, is it under our control to make it operative or not? To put it more broadly, is there a control mechanism between our mental structure and our actions or does the latter follow from the former automatically? Let's try to answer this question with an abstract example.

Think of a spiritual man who has been reading and contemplating throughout his life and this eventually made him a person with relevant critical reflection skills necessary for autonomy. However, this man's moral outlook is far from the liberal ideal image of the self-confident, self-reliant individual. Still, let's assume for the sake of the argument that he has competencies relevant for autonomy and attained his set of values under conditions of autonomy.

One possible way to interpret the situation is claiming that he can't be regarded as autonomous since autonomy is an exercise concept and he doesn't prefer to exercise his relevant skills for autonomy. On the other hand, what if the exercise of autonomy is not under our control? What if this potential manifests itself in one way or another regardless of the agent's evaluation of this potential? I think we can well think of someone who criticizes the concept of autonomy and denies himself to be autonomous in a quite autonomous manner, like the spiritual man does.

Or to put the question in another way: Can we think of someone who has all the relevant capacities of autonomy but prefers and manages not to use them? Can we have such control over our mental mechanisms, or is it more like our digestive system which can be affected by both external and internal factors (stress, pollution etc.)? Maybe the way it works can't be controlled at our will, but we can affect it in an indirect way by nutrition or living in a certain environment. I think the spiritual man cannot but exercise his critical capacities; in other words as long as he has the

potential he can't choose to be non-autonomous, but he can well reject the concept of autonomy. The former view doesn't seem plausible to me since it assumes a really high degree of control over our mental mechanism. Please note that the latter view does not deny that autonomy is an exercise concept; rather it establishes a direct and necessary link between the existence of relevant capacities and their exercise which follows automatically and irrespective of the agent's consent and more importantly irrespective of her seeming conformity to "the ideal image of autonomous person".

Following a similar line of reasoning we can infer that Fransiscans' motivational structure entails the isolation of the dominant motivation. Kristinsson tries to be neutral towards diverse norms but at the same time puts the blame on the isolation of a single dominant norm. However the norm itself entails its isolation and it is the same norm which makes Kristinsson skeptical simply because it doesn't fit the pre-established familiar image of the autonomous individual in her mind. As we have stated before, being obedient doesn't count as a norm in itself, it only makes sense when one is obedient to a specific norm. Sustainivist theorists need to offer a separate argument to explicate how operation of certain norms differs from others. Otherwise, they seem to rule out certain norms as inimical to autonomy without providing any structural explanation.

To put forward that autonomy is an exercise concept and associating its proper exercise with a certain figure and behavior; is actually defining autonomy beforehand in a substantive way. It is no different than saying "You may have potential for autonomous thinking and acting; but to convince me you should 'exercise' that potential. I need to see such and such behavior so that I can be convinced." This would be nothing but conflating the exercise of autonomy with conforming to certain values. Substantive arguments have some really advantageous points which are hard to criticize, but this exercise concept argument does not say

much; it is merely another way of defining autonomy in a substantive way and using the term “exercise” accordingly. On the contrary, according to the reading I suggested above, autonomy is no longer associated with stereotypical images like masculine strong-willed man; rather it is compatible with diverse life views and values. Exercising one's autonomy competencies does not mean that one is accommodating oneself to the stereotypical image of autonomous man or values deemed necessary by substantive theories.

If someone has sufficient skills and means to evaluate the situation from her own perspective, who are we to insist that she in fact lacks those skills? This idea is an expression of the spirit of autonomy I was talking about. As long as internal and external conditions of autonomy obtain, there is nothing wrong about being influenced by an authority; moreover this is a quite conceivable possibility. One can critically reflect on the beliefs she has internalized as a result of an influence. In other words, given the conditions of autonomy, one's deeply influenced ideas and the actions following them can be made her own. It is conceivable that one regularly reflects on her existing beliefs and employs critical scrutiny tools but still sticks to same set of norms and has an obedient appearance. But wait, doesn't this approach assume everyone to be autonomous or isn't it at best circular? I would say no. It just shows that there are virtually no constraints upon the content of one's autonomous choices; it doesn't have a claim about autonomy conditions of particular individuals just because it can't. We may not be able to label someone as non-autonomous in a concrete situation simply due to the content of her beliefs like substantive theories do; but this is totally different from assuming everyone to be autonomous.

From a content-neutral perspective, presence of certain conditions (pertaining both to the social and the individual) is sufficient for autonomy to obtain. However, since we can't resort to normative arguments; there is no way of deciding

the autonomy status of a particular individual. While content-neutral theories allow for more diversity; the payoff for this is not having explanatory power and a decisive answer for particular cases and individuals, even though we assume that people have varying degrees of autonomy. That's also another reason that I am turning my attention to social conditions of autonomy in order to say something more concrete about the implications of my approach.

Although we can't find out the autonomy status of a certain individual simply by checking the norms she embraces, we can try to discover which conditions are likely to hamper or foster autonomy of the individuals with the help of a directed social analysis. So we need a directed and focused analysis of social determinants of autonomy in order to make our theory more informative.

Kristinsson argued that some norms like Franciscans' perfect obedience are inimical to autonomy but she couldn't specify how these norms differ from other norms in terms of autonomy. While weak substantive theories rule out certain norms, strong substantive theories entail adopting certain values or attitudes for autonomy. For an action to count as autonomous, some strong theories also demand the normative content of the action to be the "right" or appropriate sort. In the next section, we will analyze Natalie Stoljar's strong substantive account to see if we really need such requirements in order to solve the problem of oppressive socialization in terms of autonomy.

Stoljar's Strong Substantive Theory of Autonomy

After responding to the criticism of value-neutrality coming from a weak substantive theory of Kristinsson, let's have a look at Natalie Stoljar's 'Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition' which defends a strong substantive theory of autonomy by addressing the effects of internalization of oppressive norms on autonomy.³⁷ The method adopted by Natalie Stoljar is to check if the cases which seem to fulfill the requirements of procedural theories like critical reflection can still go against the "feminist intuition", which denotes our intuitive ideas about why some oppressive norms cannot be congenial to the idea of autonomy. Stoljar provides a theoretical framework to make sense of the prima facie non-autonomy of certain subjects. Departing from that, she tries to show that procedural conditions of autonomy are not sufficient for explaining oppressive socialization problem and we need to introduce some substantive requirements; although she doesn't specify those in detail. Stoljar's paper also provides a good framework to analyze different procedural approaches and their shortcomings with respect to the oppressive socialization problem.

In her paper, Stoljar refers to a case study of Kristin Luker³⁸, which reveals the impact of internalized social norms on preferences of individuals. The study group consists of women who attended an abortion clinic. Luker wanted to analyze the link between the internalization of oppressive norms and unwanted pregnancies which result from not using accessible methods of contraception.

Luker was interested in the fact that subjects were not ignorant about birth-control methods, nor did they lack access to them. What they did was actually taking risks. However, Luker did not want to label the risk simply as irrational from the

³⁷ Natalie Stoljar, "Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition," in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 97.

³⁸ Kristin Luker, *Taking Chances: Abortion and the Decision Not to Contracept*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 13.

outset; rather she wanted to make sense of their decision by interviewing them. The subjects consider both costs and benefits of taking contraceptive risk which are mostly shaped by the social norms. For some subjects using contraception would mean that they are acknowledging an active sexual life; and this is an idea to be resisted because of various reasons, religious ones to be first and foremost. On the other hand, interviews also shows us that proving one's fertility and readiness to become mother is also counted among the benefits of getting pregnant by some of the subjects.

According to Stoljar behavior of these women bring us to question their autonomy which can be explained by feminist intuition. Stoljar accounts for feminist intuition and its relation with autonomy as follows:

[The subjects]... are judged to be non-autonomous because they are *overly influenced* in their decisions about contraception by *stereotypical and incorrect norms* of femininity and sexual agency. Unlike risk takers in other domains such as those who fail to wear safety belts in a car, Luker's subjects are motivated by *oppressive and misguided norms that are internalized as a result of feminine socialization*. (emphasis added).³⁹

One possible reading may focus on the first part in italics: being overly influenced as the main source of the problem. However, read together with the latter part it is obvious that problem for Stoljar is not only/mainly about being overly influenced but rather about the content of the influence. As opposed to this, according to a content-neutral approach the content of the norms at stake must have nothing to do with autonomy status of the individual.

A possible objection to this may be that internalization of *incorrect* norms actually makes a difference inasmuch as those inhibit critical reflection or any other traits which are deemed necessary for autonomy by procedural accounts. From a

³⁹ Natalie Stoljar, "Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition," in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 98.

formal or procedural perspective, hampering autonomy competency is the only way one's autonomy can be impaired; any other reason like an oppressive norm can effect autonomy in an indirect way, through effecting one's critical thinking capacities or any capacity you may relate with autonomy.

I agree that certain norms may contingently diminish our capacities for autonomy. However, despite empirical evidence which shows it to be more likely, we cannot infer a necessary relation here. One may rightfully object to this: “What is the point of a theory of autonomy if it keeps silent about our basic concerns like ‘the feminist intuition’?” A response from a value-neutral standpoint can be that those individuals may be non-autonomous because they are overly influenced, not because of the content of the norms they internalized. Nonetheless, being overly influenced is not a very informative expression either. If substantive theories want to search not only for the internal conditions of autonomy but also the social ones, they need to differentiate the ways of being influenced which fosters autonomy from the ones which are inimical to it. However, there is no easy way of doing it. As we have mentioned in the previous chapters, confined with the terminology of 'influences', both procedural and substantive theories have serious difficulties in figuring out socialization and its effects on autonomy.

We may have intuitive ideas about the regular impact of a particular set of norms on our autonomy competencies and this relation can be supported with various empirical data and arguments. However, this would be a contingent relation and it needs to be differentiated from a necessary and conceptual relation. On the other hand, obvious interferences with the individual's critical thinking abilities, like hypnosis or subliminal messages, have a direct link with autonomy of the individual. Whenever these kinds of influences are present, autonomy would be *necessarily* under threat. Yet, these simple cases cannot be a model to analyze complex effects of

socialization on the autonomy of individuals.

Stoljar checks if procedural theories can provide sufficient means to account for the feminist intuition in order to show that we need additional substantive requirements for autonomy. According to feminist intuition, Luker's subjects should count as non-autonomous; so Stoljar is actually trying to find a theory of autonomy which is in harmony with these intuitive ideas about the effects of oppressive feminine roles on autonomy. She proceeds by showing that Luker's subjects satisfy different conditions of procedural autonomy, whereas they *must* be non-autonomous because they *look* non-autonomous!

Maybe it is not as simple as rationalizing an intuition since feminist intuition can be supported by feminist theories in various ways; yet, it can only have intuitive role when it comes to choosing a suitable autonomy theory to rationalize this *prima facie* non-autonomy. This is why feminist intuition can be elaborated with the help of complex arguments on oppression; yet a theoretical link is missing when we want to transfer these arguments into an autonomy theory.

Stoljar criticizes procedural theories because “[...] procedural theories are at best equivocal on the question of whether Luker's subjects are autonomous. They do not vindicate the feminist intuition.”⁴⁰ Stoljar assumes the subjects to be non-autonomous from the outset and tries to build her theory on this; on the contrary what a value-neutral theory can do is to show that we don't have enough means to rule out these subjects as non-autonomous. In this sense, procedural theories are equivocal where they have to be. Nevertheless, they need to say something more concrete through social analysis of determinants of autonomy. Departing from the point made in the above quotation, we can also question if it is really the task of a theory of autonomy to “vindicate the feminist intuition”.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 100.

All contemporary theories of autonomy face the problem of oppressive socialization and try to come up with their own solutions; but the way substantive theories handle the problem is eclectic in such a way that they start from an analysis of oppressive norms and then question their compatibility with autonomy. On the contrary, an autonomy theory should have a distinct perspective on socialization in general and then try to resolve seeming problems which emerge due to our intuitive judgments. In other words, we should account for *oppressive socialization* with regards to autonomy; rather than finding a suitable autonomy theory to express our pre-established ideas on *oppression*. Oppression is still an urgent and important subject to deal with; but linking it with autonomy like substantive theories do, can be misleading. This is where demarcating the phenomena of oppression from autonomy becomes crucial; to enable them to speak to each other and make proper sense of oppressive socialization with respect to autonomy.

Stoljar checks if Luker's subjects satisfy different procedural conditions in order to reveal the incompetence of procedural theories to solve the problem of oppressive socialization. She starts with Christman's counter-factual condition according to which an agent is autonomous if she does/would not resist the emergence of a preference given that she is given the chance to participate in the formation of that preference.⁴¹ Stoljar asks the question in this way:

Does the preference of Luker's subjects to take a contraceptive risk fail the counter-factual condition? [...] they weighed up the costs and benefits of using contraception and decided to take a risk. [...] On the other hand, since the bargaining described by Luker was mostly tacit, it is likely that Luker's subjects did not sufficiently attend to their motivational structure, in particular to the influence of the norms of femininity and sexual agency on the bargaining process; hence that they did not sufficiently attend to the process of formation of the preference. If they had attended, would they have resisted? ... It is unlikely that they would have, precisely because

⁴¹ John Christman, "Liberalism and Individual Positive Freedom," in *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy*, ed. Henry S. Richardson, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, January 1991) p. 349.

the habits of deference and the internalized norms, that is, the values that govern the agent's motivational structure, would themselves justify holding the relevant desire.⁴²

This is basically the problem of oppressive socialization for autonomy theories on which my thesis is also centered. I also agree that Christman's counterfactual condition, along with other procedural conditions, fall short of explaining both the feminist intuition and the problem of oppressive socialization. While I do not believe that any theory of autonomy should be required to explain feminist intuition, problem of socialization remains to be a problem facing all kinds of approaches to autonomy. To put it in other words, the phenomenon of internalization is of concern for us with regards to autonomy, not the normative value of what is internalized.

Could subjects in Luker's study resist the impact of those oppressive norms and feminine roles? If they had essential capacities of critical reflection they could, but this amounts to saying that if they had already been autonomous they could have acted autonomously. We are not talking here about an innate capacity which can confer autonomy regardless of any external influence. The capacity for critical reflection can be both developed and hampered only within a social context. This is why we need to focus on the social aspect of the issue rather than inner mental states of the agent.

As we have already noted, Christman's theory and other internal theories are stuck within the 'inner citadel' and that is the reason why they cannot make proper sense of socialization problem. For autonomy to obtain, social *conditions* and *relations* should allow for critical reflection to emerge before anything else. Thus, we should take social relations not only as possible hindrances but also as the ground of

⁴² Natalie Stoljar, "Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition," in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 100-101.

possibility of autonomy. I believe that these conditions can be expressed in a formal way; yet this doesn't make them less stringent. That's why I think that a strong value-neutral theory of autonomy is plausible. We can talk about the fulfillment of really strong conditions without adhering to certain limitations on the moral content.

For instance, we can count any type of advertisement or peer pressure as obstacles to autonomy while we can allow some counter-intuitive cases (as in the example of the spiritual man who let things slide, hence lack substantive autonomy; notwithstanding his formal autonomy capacities and means for critical reflection) to be autonomous assuming that sufficient autonomy conditions hold including the social ones.

In order to further clarify this issue we can analyze the way Stoljar compares Luker's case with Christman's happy slave case along with his inhibiting factors (illegitimate external influences) condition.

[...] the lack of resistance to the development of a preference or desire must not have taken place under the influence of factors that inhibit self-reflection (unless exposure to such factors was autonomously chosen, in which case that choice had to be made without such factors). There are at least two kinds of factors that might inhibit self-reflection, external factors and internal factors. An example of the former is offered by Christman's own "happy slave" case. Suppose a "happy slave" has expunged her desires for freedom *only* as a result of the oppressive presence of the restraints she faces. In other words, the slave has adapted to the oppressive circumstances imposed on her and no longer desires to be free of them. Her desires are nevertheless not autonomous, even if she has not resisted their process of formation, because the desires to adapt and remain unfree were formed only as result of the presence of oppressive external factors that she *could not avoid*. [...] External factors that operate to inhibit self-reflection are not present in the case of Luker's subjects. Unlike happy slaves, Luker's subjects are not subject to external constraints that make it *impossible* to extract themselves from an oppressive situation. Their lack of resistance to the formation of the preference to take contraceptive risk is *not* the product of adapting to circumstances that they *cannot* avoid. (Emphasis added).⁴³

⁴³ Ibid., p.106.

Stoljar comes to the conclusion that Luker's subjects still have sufficient procedural capacities like self-reflection, so the problem should stem from somewhere else: namely the content of the oppressive norms. Unquestionably, Luker's subjects had a way out to resist those oppressive norms; but comparing them with happy slaves whose capacities are seriously damaged does not help at all. If we take it to that extreme and equate being a happy slave with almost having a mental disability, it becomes harder to make sense of real cases we experience. Our analogies should work with the real problems we face; otherwise they may even conceal the fact that we are all happy slaves *to some degree* as we are all manipulated or indoctrinated in one way or another.

To further elaborate on the idea of 'being happy slave to a certain extent', we can think of cases where it is really unlikely for someone to resist certain norms that she is exposed to; albeit not impossible. Instead of giving an example of an extreme case of being a happy slave which is far from being of practical use, we can talk about the ability and opportunity to resist prevalent norms as a matter of degree.

The people we encounter in real life are not like happy slaves who has no choice at all but to adopt. Rather we mostly experience cases where people have varying degrees of opportunity to resist; and we need to theorize on this. Stoljar's intention was to prove that Luker's subjects satisfy procedural conditions, so we would further need a substantive condition and a substantive theory to give an account of their prima facie non-autonomy. Yes, Stoljar showed that Luker's subjects are not extreme examples of happy slaves without introducing substantive requirements; yet, she couldn't show that they are not happy slaves *to some degree*; hence non-autonomous to some degree, without introducing substantive requirements.

Although I believe that we shouldn't overlook the fact that we are all happy

slaves to some extent as we are all socially situated beings, this doesn't mean that I agree with Christman's purely procedural and internalist formulation either. So, does the above discussion make Luker's subjects non-autonomous? They can be both autonomous and non-autonomous; it all depends on *the way* they internalized such and such norms. From a value-neutral perspective, I cannot label them as non-autonomous, but what I can do is checking a certain norm and show that it *can* be hold in an autonomous way. Here again, rather than taking critical reflection as a mental ability which either exists or not (whose absence indicate almost a mental sickness) we should construe it as a capacity which depends on the social context to flourish, and also something which appears in degrees. By conceding the social aspect of autonomy, we can seek reasons for the failures of autonomy in the social environment we find ourselves in. This can give us a chance for directing our inferences from autonomy theory to a social critique, vice versa.

Same question can be asked again: Is it the content of the norms or the way they are adopted or both what is responsible for the holders of those norms to be non-autonomous? A counter-example can be helpful at this point: Someone who has autonomously reached some oppressive values which are supposed to undermine some values associated with substantive autonomy. Can't we expect from this individual to have the capacity to change her set of values whenever she deems it necessary? Since she has formed her own judgment, she can change it too. Can those set of values -only in virtue of their content- impede the autonomous agency altogether? According to Stoljar they can. Well then, can't we also think of someone holding the very same norms in an autonomous manner? Let's lend an ear to what Stoljar says about these questions.

Women who accept the norm that pregnancy and motherhood increase their worthiness accept something *false*. And because of the internalization of the norm, they do not have the capacity to

perceive it as false [...] It is the content of these norms that can be criticized from a feminist point of view, not the way in which Luker's subjects engage in the bargaining process.⁴⁴

According to Stoljar, the norm in question is simply false and oppressive, and that's the reason behind the non-autonomy of the people who adopt such a norm. I agree with Stoljar that it is the content of the norms which must directly be related with a feminist critique; however, there is more to analyze when it comes to a theory of autonomy: the way those norms are adopted. However, we should not confine our attention with the individual's way of adopting a certain norm. Social circumstances which surround the individual are equally important for us to contemplate about the autonomy of that individual.

Stoljar also checks if normative competence theories can theoretically account for the feminist intuition; which is a task unaccomplished by procedural theories according to her. Paul Benson's works are particularly suitable for Stoljar's intentions since Benson has defended both weak and strong versions of substantive theory during his career and this provides suitable grounds for Stoljar to mark the difference between the two and claim why we need a stronger version; according to Benson's weaker substantive theory, an individual is autonomous if she has a kind of self-worth which enables her to consider herself competent to give an account of her actions which can be a model for other people as well.⁴⁵

Although Luker's subjects may seem to lack self-worth to a certain degree this doesn't make them normatively incompetent according to Stoljar. For instance, some of them believe that by being pregnant their status in the community will elevate and this may be interpreted as a lack of sense-worth. However, they can still give an account of their actions and provide their own reasons for choosing that path. The subjects express this competency in their actions too; they talk the talk and walk

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴⁵ Paul Benson, "Free agency and Self-worth," in *The Journal of Philosophy*, (2008), p. 661.

the walk. So, they have relevant kind of self-worth to speak for themselves. Thus, Stoljar concludes that the problem must be sought somewhere else, maybe in the particular content of the norm they have embraced. Unsatisfied with the solution provided by the weak substantive theories; Stoljar opts for Benson's stronger normative theory as a model for her autonomy theory; Benson summarizes his stronger theory as follows:

[...] it is still not the case that having control, or this specialized ability to do otherwise, exhaust the content of free agency. The central point of this essay is to argue that, however we understand control, there is a further, equally significant ability necessary for free action. This is an ability to criticize courses of action competently by relative normative standards. This ability lends normative substance to the idea of free action, for it entails that full freedom of action is impossible without certain appreciation of values.⁴⁶

What needs to be clarified here is the connection between the wrongness of the norms and diminishing of capacities for autonomy. While the severity of effective internalization can be directly related with the latter, we don't have enough reason to claim that wrong norms in themselves impede autonomy, just because they are wrong; nor we have valid reasons for arguing that the way wrong norms are internalized (in contrast to right ones) is necessarily more severe which renders it harder to resist.

It is true that, most of the time people who consider a norm as oppressive also consider its way of being conveyed and adopted also as oppressive and hence hostile to autonomy. However, this observation in itself is not sufficient for us to establish a theoretical link between the phenomena of oppression and autonomy. Besides, we can also talk about examples of right norms being indoctrinated in an oppressive manner; which makes the remedy even more troublesome. For the sake of the argument assume the rightness of the norm "killing animals is wrong" and think

⁴⁶ Paul Benson, "Freedom and Value," in *The Journal of Philosophy* 84, no. 9, (September 1987), p. 969.

of a parent who raises her child by indoctrinating this norm without letting her child to question this norm by any means. She doesn't let her to critically evaluate this norm and contrast it with alternative views. This would be an example of a non-oppressive norm's being internalized in an oppressive manner.

Moreover, as opposed to the quotation above, if one's *capacity* for autonomy is hampered due to some oppressive norms; this would not remain limited with the oppressive norms that are internalized; rather this would have general effects on one's autonomy and her ability to critically reflect on any kind of norms or ideas she endorses.

In order to further clarify these differences between strong and weak substantive theories and show how to adopt strong normative theory to her autonomy theory Stoljar interprets an example given by Benson in his paper "Free Agency and Self-worth".⁴⁷ An example of an agent who lacks autonomy on the stronger but not the weaker normative competence theory is that of Benson's eighteen-year-old student who has internalized the norm purveyed by the fashion industry that most women's natural physical appearance is deficient. The very internalization of the norm blocks her capacity to effectively criticize this "false construal of [her] personal value," and hence she fails to be autonomous with respect to the domain of her decision making that is governed by the norm.⁴⁸

First of all, in this context we can easily imagine a woman who has similar opinions but not influenced by fashion industry like that eighteen-year-old student is; in that case the very same norms would have different effects on autonomy. We can say that once those norms are conveyed and internalized in a particular manner it makes a difference with respect to autonomy; otherwise it is doubtful that such a

⁴⁷ Paul Benson, "Free agency and Self-worth," in *The Journal of Philosophy*, (2008), pp. 655-657.

⁴⁸ Natalie Stoljar, "Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition," in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 107.

norm in itself has a potential to block decision making or critical reflection process. In this sense, both a submissive wife and a woman who can't live without beauty industry can adopt their own values in both autonomous and non-autonomous ways; what we need to check is the way they have internalized those beliefs and the social conditions of that internalization.

Within the context of the above quotation we also need to add that the student is assumed to have all these competencies which is evident in all other spheres of her life. Despite all these competencies she is still suspected to be non-autonomous with respect to a particular action. According to a strong substantive theory of autonomy the reason for that can be nothing but the content of that particular norm behind that action. However, what is overlooked here is the fact that there is a doer behind each deed.

Stoljar's strong substantive theory underestimates the role of the subject, as if a norm in itself is enough to produce a certain action in a certain way. This in turn causes us to ignore the social conditions which determine an individual's autonomy status in general.

A crucial distinction should be made at this point. While local sense of the autonomy pertains to autonomy of particular actions, autonomy in its global sense is an attribute of agents. If one uses autonomy only in its substantive and local senses, one cannot but deal with particular norms and check only if *decisions* about them are autonomous, rather than checking if the *agent* is behaving autonomously or not. This would in turn lead to overlooking the *general* (and social) conditions crucial for autonomy, and put the blame merely on the content of those norms. As a result of such an approach, once a certain norm is internalized it seems as if it is the norm what "blocks agent's capacity to effectively criticize" rather than the history of the individual and complex web of relations of which she is a part.

Stoljar gives another example about smoking and differentiates it from the individuals who abstain from using contraception as a result of oppressive norms:

[...]suppose that the financial and health costs of continuing to smoke are weighed against its benefits, such as that smoking is pleasurable, that it is relaxing or therapeutic, or that it would be financially onerous or otherwise too much trouble to seek professional help to overcome the habit. For smokers who engage in a tacit bargaining process of this sort, although we may judge them weak-willed or wrong in giving too little weight to the medical costs, we are unlikely to judge that their decisions are not autonomous because smokers are not typically opting to smoke on the basis of false and oppressive norms. Notice, however, that when smokers (especially children) do opt to smoke on the basis of false and oppressive norms, for example, in response to images of smoking as glamorous and promoting one's desirability, the intuition that they are not autonomous is triggered. Unlike risk taking among smokers, the contraceptive risk taking of Luker's subjects attracts the feminist intuition because the internalized norms motivating the decision to take a contraceptive risk have criticizable contents.⁴⁹

Although one can deem someone weak-willed because of her addiction; this is not the aspect of the issue that I find fruitful for any discussion of autonomy. Since I define autonomy as not being other-ruled rather than being able to rule oneself; I want to make a distinction between being strong-willed and being autonomous. This is not to say we can define autonomy only in relation with negative external influences; socialization in the positive sense is equally important for autonomy to obtain. Moreover, we can talk about some features and capacities on the part of the agent (internalist aspect of autonomy) as necessary for autonomy; which makes autonomy to entail something more than the mere absence of manipulation or social hindrances to autonomy. Still, whenever we turn our attention to the internal aspect of autonomy we also need to be cautious not to relate autonomy with arbitrary selection of values, hence relinquish value-neutrality.

If we further elaborate on the rest of the quotation, we see that Stoljar

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 99-100.

stresses the role of manipulative images on young individuals to make them smoke, which render them non-autonomous. However, the emphasis is still on their being normatively false rather than manipulative. What is the reason for us to regard someone less autonomous if she is smoking because she believes that it gives her a cool look; just because we think that it is childish or irrational; or do we need to analyze the way this norm is appropriated? In my opinion, the former is not only insufficient but also misleading when taken as the only criterion for autonomy. According to the conceptual framework I am trying to convey here, we need to suspend our intuitions and allow for the possibility for someone to *autonomously decide* to smoke just because she thinks that it is cool.

It is commonsensical to employ a substantive approach to autonomy when we face a problem or a sign that things are going wrong, as in the case of internalization of oppressive norms. However, equally blind and unquestioned internalization may take place when everything seemed to be alright thanks to the seeming correctness of the content of the values in question. Please remember the example we have already given which shows how a rightful norm like 'killing animals is wrong' can also be imposed severely.

If we focus merely on the examples with oppressive content this may lead not only to underestimate the formal aspect of the issue but also ignoring the crucial role played by the social circumstances for the emergence of autonomous individual. This type of reasoning may depict external influences altogether as an enemy, as it is the case with the liberal paradigm in general.

What I am trying to point out above is that we should allow for any set of values to be equally manipulative regardless of their content. In other words illegitimate internalization of 'correct' norms must be considered as a hindrance to autonomy too; and this illegitimacy must be sought through a social critique.

While we cannot decide once and for all about the *contingency* of the relationship between autonomy and moral content of a set of oppressive values (and prove it conceptually); what we can do is to find counterexamples to the claims which try to establish a *necessary* relation between the content of a set of values (like smoking cigarette to show off or thinking that women's natural appearance is deficient) and autonomy, by showing that it is feasible for us to think such and such norms to be hold autonomously as well.

Even if we arrive at a conclusion that the relation has to be contingent and oppression has to be demarcated from autonomy, we need to accede that it doesn't make the former's impact on the latter less significant. Still, it is a crucial step to be taken for any account of autonomy to demarcate the problem of manipulation and autonomy from other problems like oppression and domination.

Construed in social and relational ways, my alternative theory of autonomy entails a thorough analysis of the social relations which links most of the failures of autonomy with deficiencies of the social circumstances like lack of knowledge of available options, indoctrination, manipulation, restricted social imagery, invasion of the ethical realm etc. In this way, autonomy and oppression would have distinct fields of analysis without being collapsed into each other; and still able to communicate with each other theoretically. By relating the non-autonomy of individuals merely with the content of the norms they embrace, substantive theories fall short of this task. Now, our task is to introduce an analysis of social relations which can be carried out in the service of an autonomy theory. For that purpose, we will first criticize epistemic individualism which precludes all theories we have studied from accomplishing that task.

CHAPTER IV

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

Till now, we have analyzed various accounts of autonomy in conjunction with their main defects and the challenges they pose for a strong value-neutral account of autonomy. Let's now discuss an underlying problem shared by all accounts we have studied which is an obstacle to the power-functional analysis of social relations. This discussion is important because this sort of analysis constitutes the key element of my alternative approach.

In this context, Peter Nelsen's "Oppression, Autonomy and the Impossibility of the Inner Citadel" is of great benefit for my project since it introduces the critique of epistemic individualism and provides a social/relational approach to autonomy.⁵⁰ Nelsen questions the limits of the liberal paradigm by taking into account the social situatedness of the individual. While he calls for a power-functional social critique to arrive at the social conditions of autonomy, he remains faithful to the subjective/individualistic spirit of autonomy.

As opposed to the liberal conception of the subject who is situated in isolation and detached from social relations, Nelsen makes use of a conception of the subject who can become autonomous through the self-discovery of one's position within power relations which thoroughly shape one's belief formation.⁵¹ Thereby, the term self-discovery is used with the purpose of acknowledging social situatedness of our subjectivities and identities, along with dependence of our autonomy on social relations.

According to Nelsen, main problem with the liberal theories of autonomy is

⁵⁰ Peter Nelsen, "Oppression, Autonomy and the Impossibility of the Inner Citadel," in *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 29, no. 4, (June 2010) p. 333.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

the epistemic individualism which takes belief formation to be a totally internal process and hence focuses merely on the individual capacities like critical thinking. Those purely internalist explanations are inevitably stuck in the 'inner citadel' where they are supposed to account for the effects of social phenomena like manipulation or oppressive socialisation.⁵²

In his paper, Nelsen problematizes the way working class students form their decisions about leaving school under the effect of particular experiences and inferiority feelings they have stemming from their certain positions within power relations. We should note that our focus of attention here is not how one's position determines possibilities open to one, but rather its effects on one's choice making. Nelsen explains why we can't account for this problem within the liberal / epistemic individualist paradigm as follows:

When examined through the lens of the liberal account of autonomy, such situations can only be interpreted as examples of working class students autonomously exercising individual choices; there is no room for interpreting their decisions as the complex by-products of a social milieu in which working class kids may not embrace academics in part because the dominant messages they receive from a wide variety of sources lead them to internalize the view that they are less intelligent and less motivated.⁵³

First of all, we need to recognize that certain power relations lie behind the dominance of messages which are internalized by the working class students. Seemingly self-directed working class students may in fact reiterate and display oppressive feelings and relations in their seemingly autonomous behavior. Liberal accounts, merely focused on formation of one's beliefs within "the inner citadel", do not have proper means to see that the problem arises from the relations where individual is situated within.

After adopting this valuable insight, we can try to reconcile it with a

⁵² Ibid., p. 334.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 338.

content-neutral approach by claiming that the real problem for autonomy is reiteration of such and such norms by bypassing agent's critical evaluation; not the oppressive content of the norms. However, it's true that the latter makes the former visible and most of the time these two phenomena intermingle; but this shouldn't retain us from posing the question of autonomy as a distinct question. The immediate question we need to ask here is whether this power relations focused approach suits a content-neutral theory of autonomy; or a critique of power relations inevitably invites a kind of substantivism from the back door.

We need to differentiate between two types of values at work here: The standards we use for a critique of hegemonic ideology on the one hand, and the norms which are internalized under the influence of that ideology on the other. Our theory is value-laden to the extent that it is based on a critique of a particular social form which needs to employ some normative standards eventually; but it is content-neutral with respect to the norms which can be adopted autonomously by individuals.

Immanent critique can be a good example in this context. Immanent critique of capitalism checks if capitalism keeps its own promises or conflicts with itself. It is not a criticism of capitalism by use of a distinct criterion; like contrasting its values against the values of a religion. Nevertheless, the critique itself is based on some evaluations; the most basic can be that 'contradictions should be overcome'. Also there is an evaluative judgment to be reached at the end of the day. Still, scope and use of those standards are quite limited when contrasted with other types of critique; and this is enough for distinguishing immanent critique from other methods of critique. In a similar manner, the ideological critique which is also normative in character can have results which can be expressed in a formal way to allow for the diversity of the norms that can be held autonomously.

Let's remember once more Benson's example where a student who thinks

that to be respected one needs to be attractive is considered to be non-autonomous because of the content of the belief she holds. However, I criticized that example on the grounds that very same content of beliefs can well be formed in an autonomous manner.

What I first tried to show was that there is nothing which precludes beliefs with such content to be attained in an autonomous way; hence the content of a set of beliefs in itself can't be decisive on the question of autonomy. When we move from obvious cases of manipulation like the use of subliminal messages to more complicated cases, a critique of ideology is indispensable. However, with such a critique there is no way of seeing which particular individuals' belief are formed (and to what extent) as a result of those blind internalization of dominant messages and which are autonomously formed.

Price of preserving value-neutrality is remaining agnostic about autonomy status of particular actions and individuals. You need to be contented with refuting the claims that such and such norms or values are (necessarily) incompatible with autonomy by showing the plausibility of counter-examples where you can think of autonomous actions/people having those values or norms. On the other hand, what a content-neutral account can say with the help of a social analysis is the likelihood of certain social conditions and relations to foster or hamper autonomy of the individuals.

To this end, we need to reveal the links between hegemonic ideologies and their effects on belief formation. This relation by its very nature has to remain mysterious with regards to how particular individuals are affected by them. However a social critique would provide more solid grounds to speculate about autonomy compared to our intuitions regarding the content of the norms involved in particular situations. Once we can manage to separate questions of autonomy from oppression

in order to see the real interaction between them, value-neutrality in terms of the content of beliefs and value-ladenness in terms of the relevant ideology critique would seem more compatible with each other.

While the distinction is more obvious in the example given by Benson, many people may think that working class students' thinking themselves as incompetent is simply wrong and autonomy inhibiting. What we need to take into account here is that same power relations may have varying outcomes; some students might have groundless self-esteem in a different situation. Thus, we can't establish a direct and necessary relation between a particular social relation and its effect on one's autonomy unlike Stoljar, for example, who correlates content of a norm and its outcome in terms of autonomy which is supposed to follow automatically.

To express it in accordance with Nelsen's example, we need to distinguish between the problem of inferiority complex and one's being unaware of the forces which affects her belief formation. What is of concern for us here is the systematic *concealment* of certain facts and their impact on our ways of thinking, rather than *wrongness* of certain ideas. Even if internalized ideas happen to be right, we still need to evaluate the way certain facts are concealed from us. One can still stick to the *same* ideas after a process of self-discovery and revealing of the ideological veil; yet this time same ideas would be held in a relatively more autonomous way. If the ideas at work are self-destructive, ethically wrong or repressive these would remain so, while the autonomy of that individual may utterly change. This is what I mean by distinguishing problems of oppression from those of autonomy. It may be helpful to remember mysterious box example which illustrates how concealment of a certain fact and doing a simply wrong thing (if we assume eating the insect was wrong) differs with respect to theory of autonomy.

What I share with Nelsen's approach is his insistence on the content-

neutrality to some extent while turning our attention to “the social”:

It might be reasonably objected that building some sort of criteria that focuses pernicious socialization at the level of the definition of autonomy threatens to build too stringent an account to be useful. One might worry that such a move might also equate autonomy with the acceptance of a set of political opinions, or to act in ways that those judging one’s autonomy might find acceptable (as in one’s judgment about whether or not the acceptance and performance of gender norms signals conformity to oppression or not). Such consequences would render a definition of autonomy inadequate; the spirit of the autonomy project is to recognize the worth of individual choice [...] The direction I will outline below rejects such a move, while it also seeks to open space for raising concerns about the ways that social influences may inhibit autonomy in importantly hidden ways.⁵⁴

While Nelsen tries to retain the spirit of individuality, he also wants to take into account the "pernicious socialization". According to Nelsen, some relational accounts of autonomy rightly turns our attention to the external/social determinants of autonomy; however they can’t do much progress because they can’t do away with epistemic individualism or have to employ substantive values at the end of the day. In order to challenge the epistemic individualism, which is the core of the problem according to Nelsen, we need to revise our conception of agency in a relational manner.⁵⁵ Still, the complex nature of social relations turns a power-functional analysis into a difficult task.

At this point, we should be cautious not to conflate a power-functional analysis with a pre-determined attitude towards existing power relations. A sociological critique of a particular system in relation with its effects on autonomy of individuals does not entail a certain attitude against that system. Expecting one to behave in accordance with class interest amounts to arbitrarily inviting a substantive value into the notion of autonomy. However, simply knowing the fact of class antagonism (if we can assume that it’s a fact for the sake of our argument) would

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 339.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 342.

make us critical of our own position within society and enable us to see how it effects our belief formation. Later on one may well prefer to overlook one's class interests, but he would become more conscious and hence autonomous even if her beliefs and actions haven't gone through a change in content. Again for the moment if we assume the validity of some facts like exploitation etc., an agent who continues to act contrary to her own interest would be *still oppressed*; however, at the end of that process which raises her consciousness and self-discovery she would become a *more autonomous* person by knowing the forces effective on her belief formation. Our theory can be considered as content-neutral in this respect too.

As I have already criticized substantive accounts in the previous chapter Nelsen also follows a similar line of argument:

[...] relational theorists tend to blend a social critique about the conditions that help nurture autonomy's growth with substantive definitions of what agents can and cannot believe [...] While the general literature associated with relational autonomy blurs the lines between the inner world of choice and rationality and that of the external, they do not provide a truly revised, relational definition of autonomy.⁵⁶

Substantive theorists like Stoljar relate autonomy with social phenomena, however they do it at the expense of losing value-neutrality along with the individualistic spirit of the concept of autonomy. The fact that norms are shared by other individuals and they are internalized through social means doesn't make an analysis of those norms a social analysis. What we need is a direct analysis of the social relations to break through the inner citadel.

I believe that a social content-neutral theory is a quite feasible project; yet, in order to develop such a theory it is meaningless to dwell upon the working mechanism of the inner citadel and appeal to substantive solutions in an eclectic way whenever we are faced with socialization welded problems. That's why we need a

⁵⁶ Ibid p. 341.

genuinely *social* critique to distinguish autonomy-inhibiting socialization from autonomy-promoting socialization.

We shouldn't forget that autonomy is an attribute of agents, but such questions of oppressive socialization and manipulation forces us to look beyond the individual; for this reason, we need to give a 'directed' analysis of power *relations* and its relationship with the individual rather than its *effects* on the individual. On the “directedness” of the analysis of power relations in relation with autonomy Nelsen explains his approach as follows:

The argument's conclusion is that autonomy is enhanced when we question beliefs that may sustain oppression and exploitation. Rather than adopting a *general* questioning attitude with regard to the origins our beliefs –which can be argued is the hallmark of liberal approaches to the critical thinking skills necessary for autonomy- the point developed here is that autonomy must entail a focused examination of how oppression may influence one's belief formation and decision making processes. Rather than being a more general and potentially passive “openness” to any potential ways that decision making might be unduly tainted, it is an active engagement with issues of power and oppression.⁵⁷

In the quotation above, Nelsen mentions giving an analysis of *potentially* pernicious influences on our belief formation, instead of postulating certain beliefs as inimical to autonomy beforehand. As I interpret it, directed analysis doesn't mean that one knows what is substantially inimical to autonomy beforehand. Rather, it is about being aware of the possible sources of heteronomy since autonomy is nothing but resistance to such sources.

Nelsen uses the term ‘camouflage’ to talk about the way ideologies work; they can be seen only if one knows how and where to look for it by bearing in mind that there might be camouflaged things in particular areas.⁵⁸ I think it is a brilliant metaphor. Power relations focused analysis of the social conditions of autonomy is nothing but searching for the reasons behind cases of heteronomy. While some of

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 343.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 344.

the theories ask *how* one *can* be autonomous, others are doing a bit better by adopting a problem-oriented approach and ask *how* one *fails* to be autonomous. What Nelsen and I try to do, on the other hand, is asking *why* we are *not* autonomous; by employing both problem-oriented and focused analysis. While other theories are dealing with symptoms, we are dealing with causes.

Let me explain what I mean with symptoms and causes. When we got flu most of the time we do not need to consult a doctor, a symptomatic treatment can be done on our own. This resembles obvious cases of manipulation like a subliminal advertising. A basic acquaintance with the symptoms is enough to make sense of the situation and react to it. However when things are getting more complicated, symptomatic approach won't be sufficient; a further insight of the causes is necessary; just like in the case of thorough manipulation or oppressive socialization. However, in order to reveal the causes we cannot get whole body check-up each time we got sick; rather we should get particular tests in the light of the proper evaluation of the symptoms we have. We need a knowledgeable and focused analysis which knows where to look. In a similar fashion, we need to employ a social critique which reveals the causality behind the symptoms of heteronomy. Departing from observation of concrete problems, we should be sensitive to the singularity and uniqueness of particular cases. This power-functional analysis should be systematic, but not fixed on a single universal explanatory model which is supposed to be trans-historically valid for all individuals. Unlike hierarchical theories of autonomy, I am not giving a model of critical thinking which is purported to be valid for all individuals at all times, nor am I talking about *the* procedure or *the* condition of being autonomous. I am not concerned here with the workings of the inner citadel of the individual; I am concerned with the question of why we are not autonomous, and the answer to this question can't be fixed, since along with social conditions,

conditions of autonomy and the way we become non-autonomous are also changing.

As I appropriated and modified Dworkin's account of hierarchical account in order to provide a model for critical thinking, I will also offer a different interpretation of the approach of Catriona Mackenzie, according to whom oppressive socialization also impairs our autonomy by inhibiting our imaginative thinking which enables us to see what we really want and what matters to us.⁵⁹ However, oppressive socialization impairs autonomy also by restricting our imaginative repertoires⁶⁰ and this is the part of Mackenzie's argument which we can adopt for our purposes. Mackenzie argues that “[...] our abilities to imagine ourselves otherwise, draw on a cultural repertoire of images and representations. When this cultural repertoire is predominantly phallogentric, the culturally available images on which women can draw seriously constrain their imaginative possibilities and hence their self-conceptions.”⁶¹

Stoljar would be really happy with this kind of approach because just like Mackenzie associates the restriction of imaginative possibilities with the *content* of cultural repertoire, Stoljar also associates the non-autonomy of the subjects in Luker's study with the oppressive *content* of the ideas they have internalized. However, as I have argued before autonomy is about the way one's beliefs are formed not about their content. The relation between autonomy and the content of one's beliefs is a contingent and indirect one.

Most of us intuitively suspect the autonomy of the oppressed individuals rather than non-oppressed ones, and we know that if there is oppression in a society it is less likely for autonomous individuals to appear. Although oppressive norms

⁵⁹ Catriona Mackenzie, “Imagining Oneself Otherwise,” in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 125.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

actually cause heteronomy they do not do it directly, there is a missing conceptual link here, as there were also in the substantive accounts we have analyzed so far. To be more precise, prevalence of oppressive norms in fact impair autonomy but they do it through the restriction of social imagery. Oppressive content of a cultural imagery and its being restrictive are two closely related but distinct phenomena.

In a society phallocentrism may be the dominant norm, but the problem regarding autonomy is not phallocentrism itself but specific way of its being dominant. Two inter-related questions arise at this point: The first is: "Do we need to rule out all kinds of dominance as inimical to autonomy?", and the second is: "Aren't some norms are inherently more prone to be repressive?" Regarding the first question, it is totally normal for a certain norm to be dominant. In most of the countries there is only one prevailing religion. Therefore, within the context of autonomy it is neither necessary nor realistic to rule out a dominant norm or cultural imagery. However, when a social norm is structured in a manner which represses the emergence of different ideas and restricts the repertoire of social imagery, autonomy of the individuals living in that society is *necessarily* impaired because the available repertoire itself is restricted.

Ninety percent of the population of a society can believe in the same religion and in itself this fact doesn't pose any problem for autonomy. However, if the possibilities to form ideas about other religions are blocked, it directly concerns autonomy. What is limited in this case is the freedom and possibility of the people to think otherwise. In this sense, it is no different than deliberately withholding the information about the content of the mysterious box we mentioned in the first chapter. Moreover, when it comes to religion it is both systematic and power related, and this makes things even worse.

Now we can question whether some dominant social imageries can be

inherently more prone to restrict the whole social imagery. It is true that some religions are less tolerant to other religions or forms of existence, hence more likely to invade the social imagery altogether. However, prevalent social imagery of a society shouldn't be mistaken for norms or ideas adopted by individuals. Although their content maybe similar, the way they effect the autonomy of individuals are different. In one society, homophobic social imagery may restrict the social repertoire of people to such an extent that no one ever come close to think in a queer way; but same ideas can still be adopted in an autonomous manner in a different society. In short, a norm can be inherently oppressive, but cannot be inherently indoctrinating. Also seemingly non-oppressive norms can become prevalent in a society with a really restricted social imagery, where people are bound to think only nice and beautiful things.

Although in a society, where an intolerant religion is prevalent, it is more *likely* that alternative ways of thinking would be blocked; these two are distinct phenomena which doesn't follow from each other necessarily. As I have stated in the first chapter, autonomy is about the way one's ideas are formed, so is the restriction of social imagery. Also in the first chapter we stated that outlawing a political party may restrict one's freedom but it can have only indirect and contingent effects on the autonomy of people's ideas about that ideology. Although this contingent relation can be supported with various arguments, it is bound to be a contingent one. This is why problem of autonomy should not be assimilated under that of oppression. Value-neutrality of the former enables us to distinguish it form the latter. While the former pertains to form, the latter pertains to the content. Here a dualism between content and norm is not intended; on the contrary, we are trying to overcome such a dualism by giving oppression and autonomy their distinct spheres and enabling them to interact with each other without being reduced to each other.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

As we have discussed in the previous chapter, a power-functional analysis of social relations are more likely to reveal the reasons behind instances of heteronomy. In order to question the relevance between power relations and autonomy let's play the devil's advocate and try to think about counter examples where there are no power relations behind intuitively non-autonomous actions.

To illustrate a possible counter example, let's imagine an individual who started to like blue color in a seemingly non-autonomous way. According to a power-functional social account of autonomy what we need to do is looking for power relations which bring about such an action. It can be the effect of advertisements which promotes consumption in general, and consumption of goods with blue color in that particular situation. It can be gender roles associating wearing blue color dresses with being masculine. However, let's assume for a moment that the agent just likes to wear blue colors because he is easily influenced by the people who are wearing blue color. Although it may sound too abstract, assume that it has nothing to do with gender roles, consumer society or any other power relations, neither is it a result of malicious intention of another agent which would be an obvious example of a power relation. Would this type of non-autonomy have any significance? I would say no, especially if we define autonomy as the absence of heteronomy (other rule). Moreover, if we narrow down our concern accordingly, we wouldn't have any reason to consider it as an instance of heteronomy, let alone a significant instance. Maybe that individual should have been more reliant on her own ideas; however I can't see an instance of being other-ruled here. The difference between the two is as simple as the difference between dying and being killed from the perspective of a detective.

It is true that various substantive theories associate autonomy with certain values and character traits. However, as I have already tried to show none of those values are indispensable for autonomy. Traits like being strong-willed and having self-esteem have only a contingent relation with autonomy. They have significance only as possible measures against being other-ruled. My approach is motivated by concrete problems like oppressive socialization or manipulation which are historically contingent and apt to change through time, rather than inner mechanisms of our mental structure which is supposed to give us the secrets of autonomous thinking irrespective of time and place. That's also why I have formulated my conception of autonomy as the absence of other-rule, rather than a positive capacity on the part of the agent. So, what I am interested is more of a tension, rather than a sum of positive character traits.

Unlike the highly abstract example given above, a desire to buy yellow t-shirt within a different context can be worthy of attention due to various reasons. Imagine an individual buying a blue shirt as a result of the advertisements or pressures on him to look more masculine. While being influenced to like blue color (if there can be such a pure influence which bypasses one's judgment) sounds quite innocent and trivial, the latter case immediately calls for an analysis of power relations behind.

As long as we are concerned with the autonomy of that individual, we should check whether she is aware of the effects of those power relations on her preference formation. Whether one should wear blue color to look more masculine or whether one should resist the impacts of an advertisement are totally different questions and irrelevant for our purposes.

Actually the former example sounds abstract also because it is really doubtful if we can have such ways of being influenced isolated from power relations.

Even if there are such cases, it is really hard to notice them because they are not related with serious problems which can make them more visible. That's also why they are generally of no practical concern for us. On the other hand, the latter case is more visible due to its power-functional genesis. As in Plato's sun simile according to which sun is the ground of possibility of both becoming and appearing; power relations are both causes of heteronomy cases (cases of being other ruled) and what makes them visible.

Another reason for associating heteronomy and hence autonomy with power relations is the systematic reiteration of power relations in different forms. An influence to like a color, which is devoid of power relations, appears as a singular case and we need to encounter exactly same kind of influence to make an analogy between the two. Whereas with a power-functional analysis we can see the commonality between buying a blue shirt to look more masculine and uttering sexist curse words to look more masculine. This would allow us to examine diverse phenomena in a more systematic way given that our analysis retains the sensitivity to the uniqueness of particular cases.

Last but not the least is the difference between two approaches in terms of the subject and the global sense of autonomy. While the former case is strictly about particular actions and pertains to the local sense of autonomy, power-functional analysis tells us more about the subject, the global sense of autonomy and the social relations that she is a part of. When we analyze a single act of a person through the lens of relations of power, it urges us to look beyond that single act and scrutinize the social conditions which not only produce that act but also shape preference formation of an individual in general. If we employ only the local sense of autonomy, according to a substantive theory it would be a particular norm and according to a social/relational theory it would be a particular social relation which directly

produces a certain action as if there is no medium of the agent in between. Focusing merely on the local sense of autonomy takes the subject out of the picture and this defect can't be easily remedied by coming up with a formulation of equating autonomy of individual with the sum total of her autonomous actions.

Power relations permeate through subjects and this makes the role of the subject in showing the underlying causes of heteronomy irreducible. Whereas, according to a picture without the subject, it would look as if an action and its autonomy conferring status directly follows from its content, bypassing the history and particularity of the subject. Looking through the lens of power relations, we can have ideas about the process behind an action, social conditions surrounding the individual and most importantly autonomy status of the *individual*, not merely of her actions.

As I have already argued obvious cases of manipulation like subliminal advertising provides only a limited scope to account for different kinds of manipulation and oppressive socialization with regards to autonomy. Also in the absence of a power-functional analysis, particular examples of “illegitimate influences” sound like nothing but a subject's malicious interference with another subject's actions. However, complex web of social relations turn autonomy into a complex phenomenon. This complex structure is not reducible to the liberal triadic formulation of freedom and autonomy: X is free/autonomous to do/think A without any interference from Y.⁶² Power-functional analysis will enable us to shift our focus from particular actions to a critique of social relations. However, this critique should be made in the service of an autonomy theory, otherwise problems of oppression and autonomy can easily be conflated. These two problems are distinct problems and

⁶² Gerald C. MacCallum, “Negative and Positive Freedom,” in *Freedom: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. Ian Carter, Matthew H. Kramer, and Hillel Steiner, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 70.

subjective character of autonomy should be preserved not to reduce the problem of autonomy into that of oppression.

Within the framework of a social content-neutral theory of autonomy, we can preserve the content-neutrality and allow wide range of preferences and beliefs to be held autonomously by an individual; but at the same time, if our social theory of autonomy is strong enough it may entail much more radical and stringent requirements than substantive theories do. In this sense, strongest versions of social autonomy theory may even require getting rid of advertisements altogether. This is not to say that any strong version of social autonomy should be (even potentially) opposed to advertisements, but it is conceivable as long as an additional argument regarding the effects of advertisements on people's autonomy is provided.

Let's try to provide this additional argument in light of the discussions above. We have already contended that whereas obvious cases of manipulation are easy to reveal, we also wanted to conceptualize what can be wrong with advertisements in general with regards to autonomy.

Advertisements can diminish our autonomy by restricting our social imagery by reproducing prevalent sexist, consumerist dominant imaginary they can impede our capacities to think for alternative ways of self-realization. However, we should note here that it is not the sexist, consumerist content of the advertisements that is at stake here; but the way advertisements limit our social imagery and preclude our innovative imaginative and self-formative capacities. Although we should be careful not to conflate autonomy with positive freedom as self-realization, the relation between being able to think for alternatives by enlarging one's horizon is definitely related with autonomy.

One of the first immediate objections to this strong formal theory can be expressed as follows: “Why do we need to get rid of advertisements to speak about

autonomy of the individuals? Aren't you asking too much by demanding such a devastating social change for the autonomy of the individuals?" Firstly, we should note that autonomy is a matter of degree; mere existence of advertisements do not rule out the possibility of autonomy altogether. One's being utterly autonomous while being exposed to advertisements is a totally conceivable possibility. Advertisements diminish our chances of autonomy by limiting our social imaginary and our capacities to "imagine ourselves otherwise"; hence it is much less likely to have autonomous individuals in a society dominated by advertisements and similar asymmetrical media relations. The way we are exposed to advertisements does not leave much space for resistance and this is what makes it problematic with regards to autonomy of the individuals.

Any critique about the effects of advertisements on our autonomy would necessarily involve normative judgments; but this doesn't abolish the content-neutrality of our theory with regards to the content of the norms which are conveyed through advertisements. Consumerism or whatever norms conveyed through advertisements may be the most evil thing in the world and personally I would be happier in a world without such norms; however the burning issue here is not the moral content of what is conveyed through advertisements but the way they are conveyed. Condemning advertisements as inimical to autonomy in general doesn't rule out the possibility of an individual's arguing for advertisements in an autonomous way either. The asymmetrical power relations behind the advertisements make it almost impossible for individuals to resist them. It would be asking too much from the agent if we expect him to detach himself from such phenomena by which he has been surrounded since his birth.

What is required here on the part of the agent instead can be an awareness of the effects of power relations and one's particular position within them on our

motivational structure. However, it is still the social relations which should be altered principally in order to solve deep rooted problems of heteronomy. In this respect, power-functional analysis also calls for more materialist solutions like directly changing power relations, rather than idealist 'solutions' like revealing the mysteries of our supposedly uniform mental structures.

In short, blame should be put on the power relations rather than the individual. The underlying reason for that is not a groundless confidence in the individual to be the best judge of her action when left alone, which is the hallmark of liberal conception of the subject. On the contrary, power relations are the causes of heteronomy, of being other ruled; that's why we need to seek for a solution wherein the problem has its source. This is how a content-neutral theory can be strong and demanding in terms of social requirements of autonomy.

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