

1

Introduction

John Christman and Joel Anderson

Recent theoretical debates over political liberalism address a wide variety of issues, from citizenship and minority rights to the role of constitutional foundations and democratic deliberation. At stake in virtually all of these discussions, however, is the nature of the autonomous agent, whose perspective and interests are fundamental for the derivation of liberal principles. The autonomous citizen acts as a model for the basic interests protected by liberal principles of justice as well as the representative rational agent whose hypothetical or actual choices serve to legitimize those principles. Whether implicitly or explicitly, then, crucial questions raised about the acceptability of the liberal project hinge on questions about the meaning and representative authority of the autonomous agent. Similarly, in the extensive recent philosophical literature on the nature of autonomy, debates over the content-neutrality of autonomy or the social conditions necessary for its exercise ultimately turn on issues of the scope of privacy, the nature of rights, the scope of our obligation to others, claims to welfare, and so on – the very issues that are at the heart of discussions of liberalism regarding the legitimate political, social, and legal order.

Despite the conceptual and practical interdependence of liberalism and autonomy, however, the recent literature on liberalism has developed without much engagement with the parallel boom in philosophical work on autonomy, and vice versa. This book serves as a point of intersection for these parallel paths. The chapters connect the lines of inquiry centering on the concept of autonomy and the self found in relatively less “political” areas of thought with the debates over the plausibility of liberalism that have dominated political philosophy in the Euro-American

tradition for some time. While the main focus of the collection is to explore the intersection we are describing, the chapters also represent efforts to make free-standing contributions to debates about autonomy as well as to the foundations and operations of liberal justice itself.

In what follows, we begin by outlining the recent debates over autonomy, before noting some of the challenges to liberalism that have motivated current rethinking within political theory. We then discuss four key themes at issue in both the debates over autonomy and the debates over liberalism: value neutrality, justificatory regresses, the role of integration and agreement, and the value of individualism. This is followed, by a summary of each of the chapters, with a brief discussion of how the individual essays create a dialogue among themselves concerning these broad and fundamental issues of political philosophy.

I An Initial Characterization of Autonomy

As we map the terrain of these controversies, it will be helpful to spell out the central features of the conception of autonomy, and some key distinctions relating to it, that predominate in discussions of autonomy and autonomy-based liberalism.

Three terminological distinctions are central here. First is that between moral and personal autonomy. “Moral autonomy” refers to the capacity to subject oneself to (objective) moral principles. Following Kant, “giving the law to oneself” in this way represents the fundamental organizing principle of all morality.¹ “Personal autonomy,” by contrast, is meant as a morally neutral (or allegedly neutral) trait that individuals can exhibit relative to any aspects of their lives, not limited to questions of moral obligation.² Under some understandings of the term, for example, one can exhibit personal autonomy but reject or ignore various of one’s moral obligations. The chapters by Forst, Gaus, and Waldron specifically address this distinction.³ Second, the autonomy of *persons* can, in principle, be separated from *local* autonomy – autonomy relative to particular aspects of the person, say, her desires. Though the question of whether these ideas can and should be separated is an issue that theorists have directly debated in the literature.⁴ Finally, we can distinguish between “basic” autonomy – a certain level of self-government necessary to secure one’s status as a moral agent or political subject – and “ideal” autonomy – the level or kind of self-direction that serves as a regulative idea but not (or not necessarily) a set of requirements we must meet to secure our rights, be held morally responsible, and enjoy other status designators that basic autonomy mobilizes.

These distinctions are important, but the notion of autonomy still finds its core meaning in the idea of being one's own person, directed by considerations, desires, conditions, and characteristics that are not simply imposed externally on one, but are part of what can somehow be considered one's authentic self.⁵ There is disagreement about whether the concept should rest on reference to a "true" self (see, for example, the chapters in Part I), but in general the focus is on the person's competent self-direction free of manipulative and "external" forces – in a word, "self-government".

To govern oneself, one must be in a position to act competently and from desires (values, conditions, and so on) that are in some sense one's own.⁶ This delineates the two families of conditions that have played central roles in recent debates over autonomy: *authenticity* conditions and *competency* conditions. Authenticity conditions are typically built on the capacity to reflect on and endorse (or identify with) one's desires, values, and so on. The most influential model – that developed by Gerald Dworkin and Harry Frankfurt⁷ – views autonomy as requiring second-order identification with first-order desires. Competency conditions specify that agents must have various capacities for rational thought, self-control, self-understanding, and so on – and that they must be free to exercise those capacities, without internal or external coercion.⁸ Dworkin sums up this hierarchical account by saying that autonomy involves second-order identification with first-order desires under conditions of "procedural independence" – that is, conditions under which the higher-order identification was not influenced by processes that subvert reflective and critical capacities.⁹

This standard conception of autonomy fits well with standard accounts of political liberalism – and not by accident. In particular, the notion of "procedural independence" is meant to specify in a non-substantive way the conditions under which individual choice would count as authoritative – that is, without any reference to constraints on the *content* of a person's choices or the reasons he or she has for them. In a thoroughly liberal manner, this shift to formal, procedural conditions allows this model to accommodate a diversity of desires and ways of life to count as autonomous.

II Challenges to Liberalism's Reliance on the Autonomous Individual

Within recent discussions of liberalism, debates over the nature of autonomy have emerged from a slightly different view point. Liberalism can

be characterized in a number of ways, a point addressed in several of the chapters here, but it generally involves the approach to the justification of political power emerging from the social contract tradition of the European Enlightenment, where the authority of the state is seen to rest exclusively on the will of a free and independent citizenry.¹⁰ Justice, defined with reference to basic freedoms and rights, is thought to be realized in constitutional structures that constrain the individual and collective pursuit of the good. Central to the specification of justice in this tradition are the interests and choices of the independent, self-governing citizen, whose voice lends legitimacy to the power structures that enact and constitute justice in this sense.¹¹

The multivocal contestation of this tradition has often centered on the conception of the person that functions as both sovereign and subject of principles of justice. In particular, the conception of the person as an autonomous, self-determining and independent agent has come under fire from various sources. Communitarians and defenders of identity politics point to the hyper-individualism of such a view – the manner in which the autonomous person is seen as existing prior to the formulation of ends and identities that constitute her value orientation and identity. Feminists point up the gender bias implicit in the valorization of the independent “man” devoid of family ties and caring relations; communitarians note the inability of such a view to make full sense of the social embeddedness of persons; and various postmodernists decry assumptions of a stable and transparent “self” whose rational choices, guided by objective principles of morality, define autonomous agency. From these various directions, the model of the autonomous person has drawn powerful calls for reconsideration.

What has emerged from discussions of late of both liberalism and the nature of the autonomous self is a set of controversies that mirror each other in provocative and constructive ways. Amidst the wide range of such controversies, four stand out as particularly relevant for our purposes: the question of value-neutrality, the problem of foundations, the questionable emphasis placed on unity and agreement, and the allegedly hyper-individualism of both autonomy-based liberalism and standard accounts of the autonomous self.

Iia Value Neutrality

One of the major disagreements in the philosophical literature is over whether autonomy should be understood in a “procedural” – and hence

“value-neutral” – manner, or whether it is better understood in a “substantive” way. The latter view is defended for example, by Marina Oshana (4) and Paul Benson (5) in their chapters. On this view, autonomy must include conditions that refer to substantive value commitments, both by the autonomous person herself and by those around her – conditions concerning her own self-worth, the constraints others set, and the like. A driving force behind the call for substantive conceptions is, among other things, the claim that autonomy should not be seen as compatible with certain constrained life situations – such as positions of social domination and self-abnegation – no matter how “voluntarily” the person came to choose or accept that situation.¹²

Correspondingly, critics of liberalism have claimed that “procedural” liberalism fails to take account of the way in which fundamental value commitments constitute the identities and motivational structures of those citizens expected to accept and endorse principles of justice.¹³ Like the defenders of substantive accounts of autonomy, “perfectionist” critics of liberalism claim that political commitment cannot be expected of citizens whose identities are constituted by commitments to values they see as having objective status to bracket those commitments while contemplating principles of justice.¹⁴ These critics charge that “neutralist” liberalism removes from the political process the motivational anchor of these deep commitments, without which it is difficult to stave off political apathy and maintain civic engagement.¹⁵ And strict value-neutrality requirements even threaten to “gag” citizens from expressing their most heartfelt concerns within the political process. With regard to both autonomy and liberalism, then, critics have raised the question of how one can ground political legitimacy in a conception of autonomous choice without allowing substantive values (communitarian or perfectionist) to play some role in the conception of autonomy utilized.

Ib The Regress Problem and the Foundations of Liberal Legitimacy

In another complex discussion concerning the conceptual conditions of autonomy, the issue has been raised as to whether reflective endorsement of first-order desires (or other aspects of the personality) is sufficient for the authenticity required of autonomy. Commentators have pointed out that such a condition invites a regress, since the question is left open as to whether any *given* act of endorsement (and the desires and values it rests on) merits the authenticity that it itself bestows on first-order aspects of

the self. If so, and authenticity is established through critical reflection, then a *third-order* desire must be postulated to ground an endorsement of the second-order desire in order to retain the first. But this merely raises the same question once again concerning that third-order desire, and so on. Yet, if even the second-order appraisal is not tested for its authenticity, the question is left open as to whether a person thoroughly manipulated in her desires and values (hypnotized, brain-washed, etc.) would be called autonomous if those second-order attitudes were themselves manipulated by her captors.¹⁶

Critics of “hierarchicalist” conceptions of autonomy have also raised the question of why intrasubjective endorsement confers normative authority on first-order wants and values in the first place. What is special about the higher-order voices that render other aspects of the self so (metaphysically) special? We can certainly imagine cases where a person’s first-order drives and motives are better reflections of their independent and self-governing natures (their “true selves,” if you wish) than second-order reflections, which may themselves simply mirror relentless conditioning and inauthentic responses to social pressures. This point is touched on in Meyers’s (2), Benson’s (5), and Christman’s (14) chapter. Meyers and Benson both express skepticism, for example, that higher-order reflective endorsement is the core element of autonomy in all its important guises, while Christman claims that in the context of liberal political theory, seeing autonomy as including self-reflection of this sort is crucial, despite difficulties with that process.¹⁷

In the political realm, a similar issue arises with regard to the traditional liberal assumption that citizens’ choice is sufficient to legitimize political principles and policies. Critics have long been skeptical of the claim that mere public acclamation of some issue, even if such approval has been reflected on and consciously endorsed with reasons, reflects unmanipulated and independent voices when there exists pervasive ideological and other social pressures working to undermine such independent reflection.¹⁸ These discussions parallel questions about a regress of conditions for autonomy in asking whether political legitimacy requires something more than the collective endorsement of political preferences. Similarly, it can be asked of procedural liberalism why plebescitary endorsement by legislative bodies (the element of government corresponding to “higher-order” reflection) should automatically render the judgments they produce legitimate. One of the challenges that democratic liberalism has always faced stems from cases in which

formally valid procedures lead to abhorrent results, results that may even threaten the very foundations of liberalism. Is democracy its own justification, or must there be “extra-legislative” constitutional checks to ensure free, independent debate in the public sphere and ground legitimacy?¹⁹

IIC The Problematic Emphasis on Integration, Unity, and Agreement

Whereas the previous two challenges to standard approaches to autonomy and liberalism suggest the need for a more substantive approach, two other lines of critique accuse such approaches of *unduly* substantive (and contestable) value commitments. These critics charge that standard accounts of autonomy and liberalism are less value-neutral and pluralist than they claim, for they actually presuppose, for example, values of personal integration, or egoistic individualism. And the problems this raises concern not only theoretical coherence but also the inclusiveness of social and political application of principles centering on autonomy so conceived.

Various writers focusing on the standard conception of the autonomous person have raised trenchant questions about the degree to which such conceptions problematically assume a unified, self-transparent consciousness lurking in all of us and representing our most settled selves. These commentators point out the ways in which conflict and irresolvable ambivalence characterize the modern personality. They emphasize that our motivational lives must be understood as containing various elements that are hidden from reflective view and disguised or distorted in consciousness (as Meyers and Anderson and Honneth discuss in their chapters). The idea of unified, transparent selves being a mark of autonomy has thus come to be seen as suspect.

In a parallel manner, critical analyses of political liberalism have centered on the desirability and coherence of demanding full collective endorsement by the governed in order to establish legitimacy. As van den Brink (11) suggests in his chapter, below, liberalism *without* agreement may well reflect the deep and abiding conflicts (as well as multiple identities) characteristic of modern societies. Additionally, there has been much discussion among (especially) Marxist and other radical writers of the way in which liberalism’s pretensions of deliberative transparency ignore or suppress what truly drives the social and political movements in a society – the dynamics of economic and social power and its often hierarchical distribution and exercise.²⁰

IId Individualism

Also prominent in recent literature on both autonomy and liberalism are discussions of the alleged hyper-individualism of the liberal conception of the autonomous person. Feminists have developed extensive critiques of the overly masculine emphasis on separated, atomistic decisions operating in this conception. Communitarians have famously claimed that the liberal emphasis on autonomy has obscured the socially embedded nature of identity and value.²¹ Motivated by these and related critiques, calls have been made to reconfigure the idea of autonomy in ways that take more direct account of the social nature of the self and the relational dynamics that define the value structure of most people. “Relational” and “social” accounts of autonomy have been developed to respond to such calls, defining the autonomous person in ways that make direct reference to the social components of our identities and value commitments.²² The chapters by Meyers (2), Benson (5), Oshana (4), and Anderson and Honneth (6) all touch on this issue.

Communitarians, feminists, defenders of identity politics, and others have long claimed that liberal political philosophy rests on an unacceptably individualist understanding of human value and choice.²³ Some liberal theorists have insisted that the charge of hyper-individualism is overdrawn.²⁴ Others, famously, have followed Rawls’s “political” turn in claiming that models of personhood at work in political principles serve merely a representative function for the purposes of consensus and compromise, rather than claiming universalistic applicability or metaphysical truth.²⁵ But other theorists have taken a second look at the idea of personhood at the center of liberalism, and adopted more socially embedded conceptions meant to be sensitive to charges of exclusionary individualism of this sort.²⁶ However, in the chapters by Dagger (8), Forst (10), Heath (9), and Anderson and Honneth (6), the issue of the split between traditional liberal individualism and more social conceptions of the self (as, for example, in “republican” traditions) is examined in a manner that sheds new light on these conflicts.

As can be seen from this review of these four broad challenges, there are parallel implications for discussions of the conceptual structure of autonomy and for debates over the problems and promise of liberal political philosophy. There is thus much to be gained by bringing these discussions together. The chapters collected here represent just this kind of cross-pollination. Although the discussions of liberalism and autonomy are interwoven throughout, we have arranged them thematically in a progression of sorts, tracing a spiral that moves from conceptions of the self

and the individual (where autonomy has been conceptualized in seemingly less “political” ways) to the confrontation between self and other, to the role of autonomy in evaluative interpretations of social life and social policies, and then finally to the overt consideration of the political-theoretical importance of autonomy in the foundations of liberalism.

III The Self: Conceptions of the Autonomous Self (Part I)

Since liberalism is centrally a view about the extent of legitimate interference with the wishes of the individual, it is not surprising that debates over liberalism have centered on the nature of the self. The respect that individuals claim for their preferences, commitments, goals, projects, desires, aspirations, and so on is ultimately to be grounded in being the person’s *own*. It is because those preferences, commitments, and so on are a person’s own that disregarding them amounts to disregarding him or her *qua* that distinctive individual. By contrast, disregarding preferences, commitments, and so on that are the product of coercion or deception does not seem to involve a violation in the same sense, raising the vexing issue of what makes some preferences, commitments, and so on “one’s own,” and others not. Given the recent pressure on concepts of the true self, authenticity, or reflectively endorsed higher-order desires, further work is needed in order to clarify the grounds for treating individuals as the autonomous agents of their lives or the sovereign source of political authority. Central to this work are the questions – regarding the nature of the self – taken up in Part I, by Diana Tietjens Meyers, David Velleman, and Marina Oshana.

In her chapter (2), “Decentralizing Autonomy: Five Faces of Selfhood,” Meyers challenges the standard liberal assumption that autonomy is exclusively a matter of reflective self-definition and rational integration. She develops an account of autonomous agency as a matter of navigating a complex plurality of demands. Most fundamentally, she argues for the need to redress many theorists’ overemphasis on self-definition to the neglect of *self-discovery*. Whereas self-definition is a matter of the self-analysis and inner endorsement so prominent in hierarchical accounts, self-discovery is more diffuse, and more a matter of sensitivity and openness. In order to clarify the skills needed for self-discovery – and to underscore their importance – Meyers develops a “five-dimensional account of the self”: the self as unitary, social, relational, divided, and embodied. Corresponding to each of these dimensions of the self, she suggests, are agentic skills that are crucial to autonomy. Capacities for critical reflection

and ego-integration are among them, but they belong to only one of the registers in which we come to discover who we are or even exercise self-direction. For, as Meyer points out, autonomy often emerges in unexpected places: the unexpected smashing of dishes in the sink, the body's refusal to relinquish its hold on life, or even a revealing slip of the tongue. Meyers concludes that unless we have the skills to stay in touch with the non-unitary and non-individual components of the self, we lack what is needed for full autonomy, however good we might be at critical reflection.

Like Meyers, Velleman (Chapter 3) is concerned with the issue of how to understand autonomous agency once one has given up the idea that there is a "true self" to be discovered. If the self turns out not to be a fixed star to guide one's deliberations but rather a shifting, inchoate, plural, and perhaps even illusory point of reference, it becomes much harder to say what it is that makes some desires truly one's own and others not. Unlike Meyers, Velleman *does* see unification of the self as a central component of autonomous agency. Taking as his point of departure Daniel Dennett's idea that the self is no more *real* than a person's center of gravity – that the self is simply one's "narrative center of gravity" – Velleman argues that although our selves are indeed our narrative inventions, they are nonetheless real, because "we really are the characters whom we invent." Velleman is not, however, defending the view that anything goes, that there are no constraints on that narrative. But neither are these constraints *external* to the self. His ingenious move here is to point out that we not only identify narrative patterns in our actions, we also choose actions so as to ensure that there is a pattern into which they will fit. Otherwise, we cannot make sense of ourselves. The idea of the self as narrator is thus not a fantasy of arbitrary control; we cannot make ourselves up simply by wishing. Instead, when we are living the life we are narrating, it is built into the task that we have to ensure both that the narrative fits the life and that the life continues to fit the narrative. This does not require that autonomous agents always continue a past trajectory, but any departures from past patterns must then cohere with a larger narrative identity and self-conception.²⁷

But however much we may write our own narratives, we do so under conditions that are not of our own choosing. This is a central theme in Oshana's chapter (4). She takes up the thorny issue of whether – and, if so, under what conditions – one can act autonomously on the basis of inescapable components of one's identity. Classical liberal conceptions of autonomy typically focus on voluntary consent as the sole basis for

legitimate choice, whether in the domain of personal autonomy or political deliberation. This suggests that one acts autonomously only if one acts from values, desires, traits, and so on that one could give up if one wanted to. In the 1980s, this assumption of detachment came under fire from such theorists as Harry Frankfurt and Michael Sandel, who argued that such a requirement would eliminate far too many of our best reasons for acting. In particular, if “shedability” were a necessary condition for a component of one’s identity to count as a grounds for autonomous action, then it would be non-autonomous to act out of love for family members or, in general, from many of our deepest commitments (commitments, incidentally, that liberalism was designed to protect).²⁸ But if autonomy involves acting from reasons that are most fully one’s own, then it would seem that conceptions of autonomy must not rule out attachments and commitments, for it is often precisely those that it is *unthinkable* for us to give up that are most centrally constitutive of who we are.²⁹ As Oshana points out, however, some defining and inescapable components of one’s identity may be unwanted. She insightfully analyzes her own case of having ascribed to her the racial identity of an African-American. This racial attribution is inescapable and clearly determinative of who she is, despite the fact that, as a biracial woman, she is alienated from it. This seems to generate an unwelcome implication for authenticity-based accounts of autonomy. For if autonomy requires wholehearted endorsement of one’s self-conception, then one cannot allow into one’s self-conception any components about which one is ambivalent. But in some cases, Oshana argues, this creates an indefensible disjunction between either being autonomous or viewing oneself clearly – for example, acknowledging the social reality of being African-American. One response, for which Oshana has a great deal of sympathy, is to say that this is a further cost of living in a racist society, and that promoting autonomy is a matter of promoting justice, racial and otherwise. Her core theoretical response, however, is to call for a rethinking of the requirement that one not be alienated from components of one’s identity. It may be, she suggests, that full authenticity is not actually necessary for autonomy.

IV The Interpersonal: Personal Authority and Interpersonal Recognition (Part II)

Oshana’s point about the ambivalent character of having one’s identity tied to the attitudes of others provides a bridge to the chapters in Part II, which situate the exercise of autonomy within the interpersonal domain.

The chapters by Paul Benson (5) Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth (6), and Marilyn Friedman (7), represent distinct approaches to the idea of the “social,” “relational,” or “intersubjective” self that emerged especially in feminist work of the late-1980s, and has continued since.³⁰ A central challenge faced by defenders of “social” conceptions of autonomy is how to acknowledge the ways in which individuals’ most authentic desires are not merely generated within but even *authorized* by their social context, while at the same time keeping in mind the ways in which interpersonal relations can distort and dominate individuals’ desires. There is widespread agreement on rejecting the idea that authenticity and autonomy come exclusively through retreating into an “inner citadel” of detached, higher-order reflection. What is less clear, however, is what should replace this notion, if one is to avoid eviscerating the idea that exercising autonomy – and demanding the respect for individual autonomy that is central to liberalism – is a matter of opposing others’ demands for conformity or submission.

Benson’s approach to autonomy focuses on the dual aspects of being *accountable to others* for one’s self-authorization. In light of various difficulties with accounts of autonomy that focus on identifying with one’s motivational states, Benson argues that we should rethink the active, reflexive character of autonomy in terms of the agent’s assertion of her authority to speak for her actions, and the desires, values, and so on that provide the warrant for those actions. As autonomous agents, we invest ourselves in our actions by vouching for ourselves as authorized to speak for them. This emphasis on autonomous agents’ reflexive attitudes is in line with standard views of autonomy. But Benson’s approach departs from such views in analyzing autonomous actions as the actions of agents who vouch for their authority to give reasons for their behavior, should they be called on to do so. This shift to a social and discursive perspective on self-authorization raises anew the issue so central to liberalism – how to understand the authority of those whose accounts of their actions are dismissed in the larger social context. The stakes are high here, for as Benson points out, “internalized invisibility can defeat agents’ capacities to take ownership of what they do.” One central difficulty with approaches that conceptualize autonomy as requiring that one be able to *actually satisfy* others’ demands for an account of oneself is that it can end up denying marginalized voices the authority (as autonomous agents) to assert their concerns. Benson’s strategy for avoiding this difficulty is to tie autonomy not to a stronger requirement of full normative competence but rather to the act of taking responsibility for responding to “potential

challenges which, from [*a person's*] *own* point of view, others might appropriately bring to his view." In this way, Benson's account situates the idea of personal autonomy within a social and discursive context, but still leaves the focus on the claim that individuals stake to being heard.

Like Benson, Anderson and Honneth situate autonomy within the interpersonal context of answering for one's actions, and they too are concerned with the ways in which a lack of social recognition can impair an individual's autonomy. But they go much further than Benson. For Anderson and Honneth, autonomy emerges only within – and is largely constituted by – relationships of mutual recognition.³¹ Building on that central idea, they focus on the vulnerabilities of individuals regarding the development and maintenance of their autonomy and, in particular, on the question of what it would mean for a society to take seriously the obligation to minimize individuals' autonomy-related vulnerabilities. According to their dialogical model of autonomy, individuals are much more deeply dependent on their social environment for the acquisition, maintenance, and exercise of their autonomy than liberals usually acknowledge. Therefore, questions of social justice need to be reframed to focus on equality of access to participation in the relationships of recognition through which individuals acquire the autonomy needed for true freedom.

Friedman is also deeply concerned about the ways in which relationships of inequality, injustice, and domination undermine personal autonomy, and especially the autonomy of women in interpersonal relationships. But her approach is quite different from Anderson and Honneth's. Although she would no doubt agree that more just and egalitarian social relations would greatly enhance the opportunities for developing personal autonomy, instead she reframes the question of the nature and value of autonomy in terms of the question of what autonomy women need in the face of apparently intransigent patterns of male domination. Given the evidence that male domination is likely to be a long-term feature of the social world, she argues, the type of autonomy particularly valuable to women is the capacity to resist subordination, by "acting for the sake of wants or desires that were not adapted to mimic the wants or needs of their dominators." Thus, although Friedman is well aware of the importance of social relationships for the formation of autonomous selfhood,³² her research into the dynamics of domestic violence in particular lead her to sound a clear note of caution regarding attempts to rethink autonomy in ways that make it indistinguishable from oppressive forms of accommodation and submission. As her chapter

here makes clear, however “social” or “relational” autonomy may be, what lends such urgency to its value is its role in shielding individuals within relational and political contexts from oppression and subordination.

V The Social: Public Policy and Liberal Principles (Part III)

One traditional way of drawing the line between liberal and “republican” approaches to political principles is in terms of the level of public participation and active citizenship required by one’s status as a free person. Traditionally, the liberal emphasis on the “liberty of the moderns” has placed protection *from* social and political pressures to engage in public activity at the center of conceptions of justice, whereas republican politics have linked the obligations of public life and participation in the collective self-government that defines social freedom with the status of a free citizen. Richard Dagger, in his chapter (8), argues that when autonomy is seen as occupying a central place in (the best version of) republican politics, this contrast blurs significantly. He makes this point by examining two influential recent attempts to revitalize republican theory (by Philip Pettit and Quentin Skinner), attempts that seek to highlight the contrast with liberalism. Dagger shows how close attention to the concept of autonomy relied on in both traditions dilutes the supposed clash between these traditions.

Many of the alleged tensions between liberalism and traditional republican conceptions of justice also turn on the contested meaning of political *freedom* or *liberty* and its relationship to an understanding of citizen autonomy, especially insofar as that understanding assumes a division (and potential opposition) between autonomy as individualized self-government and autonomy as collective, socially instituted self-legislation. The complex relationship between individual liberty and autonomy (in both its individualized as well as more social manifestations) has been the subject of numerous discussions.³³

Rainer Forst (Chapter 10) investigates the meaning of political liberty in a way that rests on, and insists on the protection of, five conceptions of autonomy, each of them salient in different contexts but all related to the overall protection of citizen sovereignty (in both the individual and collective senses). To enjoy political liberty, for Forst, is to enjoy the status of the citizen of a political community and thereby to be positioned to engage in procedures of reciprocal justification of guiding principles. This “intersubjective” conception of liberty depends on the protection of

individual autonomy in various respects, including: (1) *moral* autonomy (the ability to act on reasons that take others into account, and thereby contribute to the justification of coercive practices); (2) *ethical* autonomy (the formation of a distinct identity and conception of the good, including second-order abilities to reflect on and alter such conceptions); (3) *legal* autonomy (the protection from being forced to live according to others' value conceptions); (4) *political* autonomy (maintaining one's status as a participant in public justification); and (5) *social* autonomy (having access to the internal and external means of securing one's status as a member of the political community). Forst concludes that "citizens are politically free to the extent to which they, as freedom-givers and freedom-users, are morally, ethically, legally, politically, and socially autonomous members of a political community."

The challenges to classical liberalism coming from republican political theory highlights the precariousness of assumptions about citizens' ability to choose independently of social pressures.³⁴ The lively debate around such issues of *political* sovereignty contrasts sharply with discussions of "consumer sovereignty," which tends to be either quietistic and uncritical or naive and paternalistic. The familiar challenge is how to accommodate strong intuitions about the way in which "consumerist" pressures (say, from advertising) lead to *substantively* bad choices without slipping into paternalism or elitism about people's choices. In his chapter (9), Joseph Heath argues that such a critique is possible, but that theorists must proceed with caution. After identifying the failures in typical critiques of consumer sovereignty, Heath argues that two such lines of critique – those focusing on failures of collective action – can indeed be defended, but these critical strategies should be understood as resting on a richer understanding and appreciation of consumer autonomy rather than on a call for its limitation. In the process, Heath highlights the need for a more nuanced conception of individual autonomy. For example, he mentions that critiques of consumer sovereignty based on the pervasive nature of advertising often naively consign all socially influenced desires to the category of non-autonomy, critiques that display an over-zealous skepticism about preference change, thereby masking a surreptitious perfectionism of political values. However, a fully worked out model of autonomy that is meant to apply to contexts of this sort should aid us in differentiating socially *manipulated* desires changes from merely socially *influenced* ones, and of doing so in a way that does not end up violating principles of value-neutrality. In this way, critical appraisals of the role of

advertising in undermining autonomous consumer choice would rest on firmer ground.

VI The Political: Liberalism, Legitimacy, and Public Reason (Part IV)

As mentioned earlier, autonomy figures in the structure of liberalism as the feature of the subject whose endorsement of principles of justice provide the fundamental legitimacy of those principles. However, assuming full consensus – such as a Rawlsian overlapping consensus by agents who consider themselves free and equal autonomous persons but who are motivated by mutually incompatible moral viewpoints – is not universally accepted as either a necessary or a sufficient condition for the justification of principles of justice. Bert van den Brink argues in his chapter (11), in fact, that liberalism *without* agreement must be accepted as the working model of justification in light of the deep and abiding multiplicity of value frameworks in the modern world. Establishing legitimacy without agreement demands a collective understanding of a constitutional structure that is itself evolving and subject to review. The autonomous citizen under such a model is more than merely the bearer of rights; she is a person with the capacity both to accept and to contest conceptions of citizenship on which such constitutional structures rest. Public reason, then, demands that citizens be secured not only capacities for deliberation and public discourse, but also the social *virtues* of “civic endurance” and “civic responsiveness.” The former must be exercised by those victims of social inequality who contest dominant principles but who must accept the evolving nature of social institutions. The latter is required of those (alleged) beneficiaries of social injustice who must be open to challenges from victims and sensitive to the systematic ways in which such challenges can be suppressed and misunderstood. The result, Van den Brink argues, is the establishment of “agonistic” autonomy, as a component of reasonable pluralism.

Liberalism is often characterized as based on the commitment of the priority of the right over the good. However, an alternative view of liberalism sees its foundations as more substantive – namely, that the particular principle of “right” that must be secured prior to the promotion of the good of citizens is the protection of individual *liberty*.³⁵ On this view, liberalism is a political morality that requires that any interference with the freedom of action of any person is unjust unless that interference

can be justified, and it must be justified in terms that the victim of the interference can somehow accept as a reason. This ties the structure of liberalism inherently to the giving of reasons and the justification of actions. Gerald Gaus, in his chapter (12), explores this structure and its implications for the conception of autonomy that functions at its center.

Gaus points out how liberalism is traditionally understood to rest on the value of *personal* autonomy, autonomy conceived in a morally neutral manner without specific reference to substantive values. *Moral* autonomy, on the other hand, takes up the Kantian mantle of defining the self-governing person as having the capacity to grasp certain objective moral norms. Gaus argues, however, that insofar as liberalism requires that interferences be justified according to reasons that all accept – and the standard for acceptance displays a modest internalism by claiming that such reasons must appeal to considerations operative in or accessible by the motivational system of the person accepting the reason – then liberalism cannot rest simply on the protection of personal autonomy. For unless we understand the autonomy of citizens as containing commitments to shared moral norms, then no such general justifications can be successful, and the overall legitimacy of coercive political principles (all of which involve interferences with freedom of action) would be lost. This, then, is Gaus’s way of addressing the issues of value-neutrality and justificatory regress raised earlier.

The line between personal and moral autonomy, and that distinction’s relevance to liberal political theory, is the central target of Jeremy Waldron’s chapter (13). Waldron examines Kant’s positions on the importance of protecting individual freedom and, in particular, Kant’s claim that pursuing one’s own happiness is morally praiseworthy, even though it involves the heteronomous pursuit of one’s own desires, whereas being coerced by another is categorically wrong, even though it equally involves being moved by external desires – that is, desires that are not fully one’s own (in Kant’s strict sense). Indeed, one can wonder, Waldron suggests, whether Kantian theory makes room for valuing personal autonomy as such. There is some basis for interpreting Kant as seeing reason as playing a key role in the choice of non-moral ends, and hence securing a basis for respect of others’ pursuit of happiness (despite its involvement in pathological desire). But the question remains as to what extent moral autonomy (the value-laden, substantive conception of self-government) is implicated in the traditional liberal respect for (only) personal autonomy?

The central liberal principle that citizens should be allowed to pursue their own conception of the good involves recognition of personal autonomy insofar as that pursuit is understood to proceed autonomously – that is, as the pursuit of ends endorsed by second-order (or some such) reflection and evaluation. Moreover, in a political conception of liberalism, such as Rawls’s, there must also be general consensus on such principles achieved in a way consistent with each seeing herself and her co-citizens as free and equal persons autonomously pursuing a plan of life. (This “seeing” of herself and others need not involve believing it to be true of them, merely that they can be represented as such for the purposes of consensus building.) For the overlapping consensus to be generated, however, people must be willing to circumscribe their conception of the good by the conditions necessary for a similar pursuit on the part of others. And given the deep plurality of such conceptions, the value of personal autonomy must be kept clearly separate from the value of moral autonomy, since the latter defines autonomy with reference to a single comprehensive set of moral values. But personally autonomous citizens do not merely endorse their first-order preferences out of some passing desire; rather they see their individual commitments as an act of *conscience* – a morally obligatory commitment to self-imposed principles (manifesting, that is, moral autonomy). So the problem is that if personal autonomy and moral autonomy are seen as too separate, it is unclear why personally autonomous citizens following their conscience would be willing to circumscribe their pursuits by the requirements of consensus. But if the autonomy respected in the liberal state is moral autonomy, then respect for a deep and abiding plurality of moral viewpoints is thereby threatened. Waldron leaves us with that ponderous and trenchant dilemma.

In the final chapter (14), John Christman takes up the role of autonomy in public reason and liberal legitimacy. He confronts, in particular, those critics who argue that autonomy-based liberalism is problematic because it makes unreasonable assumptions about a person’s ability to know herself. Christman begins by clarifying and supplementing the claim that persons are systematically opaque to themselves regarding their motivations, deepest commitments, and psychological dynamics. Despite this, however, respecting people’s autonomy in ways that ask them to represent themselves, so to speak, is required by the dynamics of collective choice and public reason that political legitimacy depends on. Public reason is necessary for the establishment or even merely the aim of legitimating principles of justice, and the dynamics of public reason demand

that participants engage with each other as sincere representatives of points of view who are willing to give reasons to others as a way of justifying (potentially) shared principles, and to do this in a way that does not revert simply to a Hobbesian clash of desires. Seeing the process of public legitimation this way provides a principled argument for recognizing and respecting people's abilities to reflectively endorse their own commitments (their autonomy) despite the admission that in doing so we will often systematically misunderstand our own deepest motives. But holding people responsible for what they reflectively accept about themselves is essential in the dynamic of democratic interchange that political legitimacy demands.

VII Conclusion

This attention to the relationship between different conceptions of autonomy and the requirements of public deliberation brings to the fore a set of themes that weave through virtually all of the papers in this volume. In what ways can autonomy be defined so as to take seriously the broad multiplicity of value orientations, modes of reasoning and reflection, conceptions of identity, and approaches to politics and social life that mark the modern condition? And how can respect for autonomy take seriously the way that identities as well as abilities to pursue values and relationships are fundamentally structured by the social dynamics one finds oneself within, social dynamics whose very structure ought to be the subject of politics? The key tensions in debates over the meaning of autonomy – substantive versus procedural notions, the contested requirement of reflective self-endorsement, the complex relationship between internal authenticity and social definitions of identity, and so on – are replicated in political debates over the possibility of legitimate principles of justice in a complex, pluralistic world. What these chapters at least show is the irresponsibility, if not impossibility, of separating these lines of inquiry: the conceptual, the moral, and the political are all mutually implicated in reflections on these issues.

Notes

1. Thomas Hill, "The Kantian Conception of Autonomy," in John Christman, ed., *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 91–105.
2. Gerald Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 34–47.

3. According to Waldron, for example, the standard Kantian distinction between the pursuit of mere desire – what personal autonomy refers to – and willful adoption of the moral law – moral autonomy – breaks down once one considers the role these notions play in the protection of individual liberty that is central to liberal politics.
4. See, for example, Marina Oshana, “Personal Autonomy and Society,” *The Journal of Social Philosophy* 29 (1998): 81–102.
5. For a general discussion of the concept of autonomy, see Bernard Berofsky, *Liberation from Self*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995; John Christman, entry on “Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy” in Edward Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html>; Gerald Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988; Lawrence Haworth, *Autonomy: An Essay in Philosophical Psychology and Ethics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986; Richard Lindley, *Autonomy*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1986; Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, “Introduction: Autonomy Refigured,” in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000; Alfred Mele, *Autonomous Agents: From Self-Control to Autonomy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995; and Diana T. Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
6. As has regularly been pointed out, conceptions of autonomy that see only *desires* as the focal point will be too narrow, as people can exhibit autonomy relative to a wide variety of personal characteristics, such as values, physical traits, relations to others, and so on; any element of body, personality, or circumstance that figures centrally in reflection and action should be open to appraisal in terms of autonomy (see Richard Double, “Two Types of Autonomy Accounts,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 22 (1992): 65–80, p. 66).
7. Frankfurt’s view is not explicitly an account of autonomy, but rather of freedom of the will. See Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 80–94. Nevertheless, the account has been absorbed into the literature on autonomy as a model of that notion.
8. On the variety of competency conditions, see for example, Bernard Berofsky, *Liberation from Self*, Chapter 8; Robert Young, *Autonomy: Beyond Negative and Positive Liberty* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986); Lawrence Haworth, *Autonomy*, 83–122; and Diana T. Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice*, 76–97.
9. See Gerald Dworkin, “The Concept of Autonomy,” in John Christman, ed., *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 54–62, p. 61. Partially in response to objections of the sort discussed, Dworkin has revised his view to exclude an explicit requirement of identification. For Dworkin, autonomy involves (among other things) the *capacity to raise the question* of whether one identifies with the desires in question (*The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*, p. 15).
10. Of course, this model of popular sovereignty has been known to exhibit serious exclusionary tendencies, specifically concerning the makeup of this “citizenry.” For a discussion, see Carol Pateman *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford,

- CA: Stanford University Press, 1988) and Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).
11. As noted, this characterization is the subject of much debate. For overview discussions, see Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), chapters 2–3, and John Christman, *Social and Political Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), Part I.
 12. See, for example, Natalie Stoljar, “Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition,” in *Relational Autonomy*; Paul Benson, “Freedom and Value” *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987): 465–86; Sigurdur Kristinnsson, “The Limits of Neutrality: Toward a Weakly Substantive Account of Autonomy,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30 (2000): 257–86; Diana T. Meyers, “Feminism and Women’s Autonomy: The Challenge of Female Genital Cutting,” *Metaphilosophy* Vol. 31 no. 5 (October, 2000): 469–491; and Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).
 13. See Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
 14. See Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986); George Sher, *Beyond Neutrality: Perfectionism and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Bert van den Brink, *The Tragedy of Liberalism: An Alternative Defense of a Political Tradition* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000); Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Steven Wall, *Liberalism, Perfectionism and Restraint* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
 15. See Charles Taylor, “What’s Wrong with Negative Liberty?” in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, vol. 2 of *Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 211–29.
 16. For discussion of this difficulty, see Christman, “Introduction” to *The Inner Citadel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 11.
 17. Earlier discussion of this issue can be found in Marilyn Friedman, “Autonomy and the Split-Level Self,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 24 no. 1 (1986) 19–35, and Irving Thalberg, “Hierarchical Analyses of Unfree Action,” in *The Inner Citadel*, 123–36. In fact, Frankfurt himself acknowledges that “The mere fact that one desire occupies a higher level than another in the hierarchy seems plainly insufficient to endow it with greater authority or with any constitutive legitimacy” (Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” in *The Importance of What We Care About*, 166f.). Indeed, this is already clear in the 1976 essay, “Identification and Externality,” reprinted in *The Importance of What We Care About*; see esp., 65f.
 18. This charge takes many forms, from focusing on how advertising subverts supposedly free-market behavior to the manner in which public interchange has become subverted by the dominance of corporate and ideological structuring. See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1991).
 19. This is a complex issue about which much has been written. See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, William Rehg, trans. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); and Jeremy Waldron, *The Dignity of Legislation*

- (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), for discussion of some aspects of it.
20. See, for example, Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); David Harvey, *The Condition of Post-Modernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); William Connolly, *Identity/Difference* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). Liberal writers who show sensitivity to these challenges (in some form) include Donald Moon, *Constructing Community: Moral Pluralism and Tragic Conflicts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) and Bert van den Brink, *The Tragedy of Liberalism: An Alternative Defense of a Political Tradition* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000). For an overview discussion, see John Christman, *Social and Political Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction*, chapter 7.
 21. See, for example, Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1982; Nell Noddings, *Caring: A Feminist Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984); Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*; and Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1984).
 22. See, for example, Catriona MacKenzie and Natalie Stoljar, "Autonomy Reconfigured" and John Christman "Feminism and Autonomy," in Dana Bushnell, ed., *Nagging Questions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 17–39.
 23. See, for example, the essays in Mackenzie and Stoljar, eds., *Relational Autonomy* and Young, *Distributive Justice and the Politics of Difference*, chapter 4).
 24. See Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture*, 47–99; see also Forst, *Contexts of Justice: Political Philosophy Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism*, John M. M. Farrell, trans. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).
 25. Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); John Gray, *Post-Liberalism: Studies in Political Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
 26. See, for example, Jack Crittenden, *Beyond Individualism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
 27. For a discussion that raises questions about the use of narrativity as a condition of personhood, see John Christman, "Narrative Unity as a Condition of Personhood," *Metaphilosophy* forthcoming (Oct. 2004).
 28. For a discussion of this issue, see Alfred Mele, *Autonomous Agents*, Chapter 4; John Christman, "Liberalism, Autonomy, and Self-Transformation" *Social Theory and Practice* Vol. 27, no. 2 (2001), 185–206; and Joel Anderson, "Autonomy and the Authority of Personal Commitments: From Internal Coherence to Social Normativity," *Philosophical Explorations: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Mind and Action* 6 (2003): 90–108.
 29. See Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*: Chapter 13; *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999): Chapters 9, 11, 14.
 30. See Diana T. Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice*; Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New

York: Routledge 1992); Marilyn Friedman, *What are Friends For? Feminist Perspectives on Personal Relationships and Moral Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); and "Autonomy and Social Relationships: Rethinking the Feminist Critique" in D. Meyers, ed., *Feminists Rethink the Self* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997): 40–61; Paul Benson, "Feminist Second Thoughts About Free Agency" *Hypatia* (1990): 47–64; John Christman, "Feminism and Autonomy"; Eva F. Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Loraine Code, "Second Persons," in *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991). See also Jürgen Habermas, "Individuation through Socialization: On George Herbert Mead's Theory of Subjectivity," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, William Hohengarten, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 149–204; and Joel Anderson, "Wünsche zweiter Ordnung, starke Wertungen und intersubjektive Kritik: Zum Begriff ethische Autonomie." *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 42 (1994): 97–119.

31. See Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Joel Anderson, trans. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).
32. See *What Are Friends For?* and *Autonomy, Gender and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
33. Most notably, perhaps, Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118–72.
34. This is particularly clear in Philip Pettit's "republican" account of freedom as non-domination in *A Theory of Freedom*.
35. See, for example, Raymond Geuss, "Liberalism and Its Discontents" *Political Theory*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2001): 320–39.

