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Autonomy, Oppression, and Respect

A Dissertation Presented

by

ANDREA WILSON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2020

Philosophy

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Autonomy, Oppression, and Respect

A Dissertation Presented

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ANDREA WILSON

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ABSTRACT

AUTONOMY, OPPRESSION, AND RESPECT

MAY 2020

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While it is intuitive to many that oppressive socialization undermines autonomy in virtue of its ability to shape the desires and values of the oppressed, it's difficult to provide a plausible account of autonomy that can explain when and why socialization is autonomy undermining. I provide such an account, arguing that self-respect is a necessary condition for autonomous choice and that oppressive socialization functions in part by undermining the self-respect of the oppressed. On my account, our choices lack autonomy to the degree that they are motivated by a failure to respect ourselves as beings whose plans and desires matter as much as anyone else's; whose capacity for rational deliberation and practical reasoning are valuable; and whose particularities and interests contribute to our value. This theory of personal autonomy is able to account for the lack of autonomy in a wide range of cases, for example, a cult member being brainwashed by a cult leader, or a wife being subservient to her husband. I defend this account against objections which claim that it is disrespectful to the oppressed to claim that their autonomy is undermined by their oppression, and in the final chapter, I expand my theory to explain not only what our *minds* must be like for us to be autonomous, but also what the *world* outside of us must be like.

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## CHAPTER 1

### WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT PERSONAL AUTONOMY?

#### 1.1 Introduction

While most everyone seems to agree that personal autonomy is important, few can agree on what it actually is. Of course, being autonomous means being self-governing or self-guiding, but what does it mean to be self-guiding? We're concerned for the woman who was once fiercely independent and eager to succeed, but who has become infatuated with a religious leader and has decided to give up on her goals to live simply in a cooperative. We also worry about the person who is addicted to shoplifting, and the young girl who has been forced to marry against her will. Each of these people seems to display a lack of self-determination, but in spite of this similarity, the sense in which each of them lacks self-determination is very different. In the first example, the woman lacks self-determination because she has been influenced by factors that seem to be foreign to her. The shoplifter seems to act on compulsion rather than on what he truly wants to do, and the woman who is forced to marry is compelled by other agents. So while all seem to lack self-guidance, it isn't obvious that there is one notion of self-guidance that can capture what seems to have gone wrong in each of these cases. When we are then forced to choose between various conceptions of self-guidance, it isn't clear how we should choose which of them is most appropriately deemed *autonomy*.

In philosophical debates about which conception of autonomy is the best, it often seems as though we are at a stand-off; different philosophers prefer their own conception of autonomy because it best accounts for the intuitions they have about their favorite cases, but none of the definitions seems to be theoretically better than any other. In this

paper, I will suggest that in order to make progress here and determine which theory of autonomy is more theoretically fruitful than the rest, we must first determine what theoretical role we need our theory of autonomy to play in the first place. Once we have some idea of what theoretical role our theory of autonomy should play, we can compare different theories to see which plays this role best while remaining intuitively plausible.

In what follows, I begin by giving some background on the autonomy debate so that we have some idea of where it currently stands, and I'll explain the problem and my proposed solution to it in more detail. Then, in the second half of the paper, I'll go through a number of possible theoretical roles we might want our conception of autonomy to play. These are based both on things various autonomy theorists say and on my own predictions of what others will find plausible. For each of these possibilities, I'll consider whether a theory of autonomy could plausibly play the relevant role and, if so, what our theory of autonomy would have to look like in order to adequately do so. I will argue that, for some of the theoretical roles I consider in this paper, no theory of autonomy can adequately play it, and for other theoretical roles, some theories of autonomy play them better than others. Thus, depending on what theoretical role we think is most important, we will have some reason for preferring certain theories of autonomy over others. Alternatively, we may think that there is an additional theoretical role for autonomy to play that has not yet been explicitly identified in the autonomy literature.

## **1.2 Background and Set-Up**

The first distinction I'll make is between what I will call psychological autonomy, on the one hand, and external autonomy on the other. I understand psychological

autonomy to be, roughly, the ability to guide one's own choices, where a choice is a mental act. So for one to be psychologically autonomous, one must have control over one's choices. External autonomy is autonomy with respect to one's interaction with the world outside of one's mind. Depending on one's view, this might require a lack of certain physical barriers or the availability of a variety of choices. So if one were to choose to stand up from one's chair on the basis of one's desires, without manipulation, and with proper reasoning capacities, only to realize that one's body was tied to the chair by some villain, then one would plausibly have psychological autonomy but lack external autonomy. Since the notion of autonomy is so complicated and controversial, it seems valuable to focus on one of these kinds of autonomy at a time in trying to understand autonomy better. In this paper, I will focus exclusively on psychological autonomy.

A second distinction is between autonomous persons versus autonomous choices. While it seems as though both choices and persons can have psychological autonomy, and that the criteria for each are different (though they likely overlap), it is not clear exactly what the relationship is between the two. Plausibly, one is more fundamental than the other, so that we should understand one of these notions in terms of the other, but it's not clear which of them we should start with. While some<sup>1</sup> theorists think that autonomy of choice is more fundamental—and that whether or not a person is autonomous depends on which of her choices is autonomous—others<sup>2</sup> think that our focus should be on autonomy of persons. I do not take a stand on this issue here, and for my purposes it does

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Oshana, 2006 or Dworkin, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Christman, 1991 or Stoljar, 2000.

not matter which of these options we prefer. I move back and forth throughout the paper between talking about autonomous choices and autonomous persons in order to stay true to the theories I'm discussing and to present the ideas as the proponents of those ideas present them.

While there are many ways to taxonomize theories of psychological autonomy, the final distinction I will make here—and the one that I will focus on throughout the paper—is the distinction between content-neutral views, on the one hand, and substantive views on the other. Even this distinction has been made in different ways by different people, but for my purposes I will define a substantive theory of autonomy as one which places constraints on the values, desires, or general pro-attitudes a person can have while still being fully autonomous, and content-neutral theories of autonomy are those according to which a person can be fully autonomous regardless of the particular pro-attitudes she has. An example that can help make this distinction clearer is Thomas Hill's *Deferential Wife*.

This is a woman who is utterly devoted to serving her husband. She buys clothes he prefers, invites the guest he wants to entertain, and makes love whenever he is in the mood. She willingly moves to a new city in order for him to have a more attractive job, counting her own friendships and geographical preferences insignificant by comparison. ...[S]he tends not to form her own interests, values, and ideals; and, when she does, she counts them as less important than her husband's. She readily responds to appeals from Women's Liberation that she agrees that women are mentally and physically equal, if not superior, to men. She just believes that the proper role for a woman is to serve her family. As a matter of fact, much of her happiness derives from her belief that she fulfills this role very well. No one is trampling on her rights, she says; for she is quite glad, and proud, to serve her husband as she does. (Hill 1991)

There are some ways in which the *Deferential Wife* (DW) is clearly self-guiding: she has reflectively endorsed her values, she is not coerced or manipulated, etc. These are the facts about her that are most relevant to the content-neutral theories of autonomy.

However, she also seems to lack self-guidance in some sense given that she consistently

defers to someone else; she does whatever it is he would like her to do even when she has a different opinion on the matter. She also refrains from forming opinions of her own very often and follows her husband's lead instead. For the substantive theories of autonomy, these facts are also crucial when considering her level of autonomy.

According to content-neutral theories of autonomy, the DW is fully autonomous assuming that she has reflectively endorsed her values and desires (Friedman); she has the skills of self-discovery, self-definition, and self-direction (Meyers); the process by which she came to have the relevant values and desires is not one that she would feel alienated from if she were to reflect on it (Christman); and other proposed conditions having to do with the process by which she came to have her pro-attitudes and their structural relation to other of her mental states. As a result, she would probably end up being autonomous on most plausible ways of understanding the details of the case. In contrast, substantive theories of autonomy would maintain that the DW is *not* fully autonomous insofar as she has the relevant values and desires if she has them because she has internalized false norms of feminine socialization (Stoljar) or because she takes herself to lack the standing to be accountable for her choices (Benson). So for the substantive theories, the content of her values and attitudes matter. As a result, on most plausible ways of filling in the details of the case, she would not be fully autonomous on these views.

The disagreement between these two camps does not seem to be one regarding the theoretical virtues of the respective theory of autonomy—at least not for the most part. Instead, the disagreement is one about whether there is any interesting sense in which the DW, and others relevantly like her, are lacking some important kind of self-guidance.

The proponents of content-neutral theories think she isn't, and the proponents of substantive theories think she is. It seems to me that in order to move this debate forward, we need to stop and ask: Important for *what*? It's straightforward that there is some plausible sense in which she is lacking self-guidance, but when we take a stand regarding whether this is or is not an important kind of self-guidance, we need to be clear about what it might be important (or not) *for*. That is, what is the theoretical value or role of this notion of self-guidance that we want our theory of autonomy to pick out? Our claims about the importance of the self-guidance the DW is lacking can be defended only if we have some explanation for why it is important or not, and we can have this explanation only if we have some clear idea of what our theory of autonomy is supposed to be doing for us.

What I am proposing is that we do the kind of thing for autonomy that Harry Frankfurt does with freedom. He claims that our notion of freedom is important because it connects up with moral responsibility in important ways and that, as a result, we should define freedom such that it plays the role of determining who is morally responsible and who is not (Frankfurt, 1988). Of course, the notion of freedom is important because it picks out some phenomenon in the world, but Frankfurt is claiming that we care about that phenomenon largely because it connects up with other theoretically and practically important phenomena. One possibility regarding autonomy is that the concept simply picks out the phenomenon, it is theoretically valuable for that reason, and there is nothing more to say about it. This is a possibility I will consider. However, another possibility is that our concept of autonomy connects up with other of our concepts in important ways, so we need to appeal to it when we're discussing other interesting issues in moral or

political philosophy. Once we have some idea of what role we need autonomy to play in our theorizing, we will then have a clearer standard by which to judge various proposed definitions. Ways of understanding autonomy that better allow it to play the theoretical role it needs to play will, all else being equal, be more plausible.

It's also possible that there are multiple, distinct roles we want a theory of autonomy to play, in which case we may need to adopt multiple, distinct theories of autonomy. The discussions in the literature suggest that most autonomy theorists take there to be one worthwhile way of defining *autonomy*, since they debate solely about what autonomy *is* rather than about which conception of autonomy is most relevant to a particular question or problem. However, it seems initially plausible that there could be multiple theoretical goals we could want a theory of self-guidance to play, but that while each of them is a valuable goal, there is no single conception of self-guidance that can fulfill each of the goals. If this were to turn out to be the case and it seemed appropriate to call each of these ways of understanding self-guidance "autonomy," then it seems like we'd have good reason to suppose that there are simply multiple, distinct conceptions of autonomy, each of which is worth recognizing. I do not argue one way or the other in this paper regarding whether we should accept multiple notions of autonomy; I'm interested simply in thinking through some of the potential theoretical roles we might want our theory of autonomy to play and thinking about whether content-neutral or substantive theories are better suited to play that role. I will argue that, for any of the theoretical roles for *autonomy* that I consider in this paper, existing theories of autonomy are ill-equipped to play them.

### **1.3 Considering the Theoretical Role for *Autonomy***

In the remainder of this paper, I will consider five possible ways of explaining why the notion of autonomy is theoretically valuable, or what theoretical role we need our notion of autonomy to play. I will argue that, for each of them, either it is not a useful goal for a theory of autonomy at all, or if it is, existing theories of autonomy cannot do the relevant work.

#### **1.3.1 Option 1: Picking out a Valuable Phenomenon**

It seems to me that one of the most intuitive explanations of why the notion of autonomy is theoretically valuable is that it picks out and allows us to theorize about a valuable phenomenon. While this may initially seem like a straightforward way to go, it turns out that—by itself—it does not give autonomy theorists any reason to do what it is they are doing, nor does it provide justification for any theory of autonomy over another. To make this clear, I'll begin by distinguishing between two ways of understanding this approach, and I'll go on to consider each of them in turn. The first is that autonomy is just intrinsically valuable, and for that reason it's worth being able to talk about clearly, and the second is that the notion of autonomy captures that kind of self-guidance that is, or tends to be, well-being enhancing.

Consider first the claim that autonomy is just intrinsically valuable, and that it is for this reason that it is theoretically valuable to be able to discuss it and come to better understand it. While this is plausible, this cannot be the whole story. To see why consider first the fact that there are a variety of folk conceptions of autonomy, and that any general appeal to the notion of autonomy is likely going to be ambiguous for this reason. Nomy



Arpaly, for example, has distinguished between eight things we could mean when we talk about autonomy (2003). Some of these include: “Agent Autonomy,” or a kind of self-control; “Independence of Mind,” or a lack of servility; “Authenticity,” or being true to one’s values; “Self-Identification,” or coherence among one’s desires and values; and “Ability to Respond to Reasons,” or deliberativeness and self-reflection. Philosophers who construct theories of autonomy often combine some of these ways of understanding autonomy to form their own preferred definition, and of course they come up with various more precise ways of explaining what is needed in order, for example, to have the proper kind of self-control, or the proper kind of lack of servility. For example, Meyers seems to require a combination of Agent Autonomy, Authenticity, and Ability to Respond to Reasons (1989). Natalie Stoljar, in contrast, focuses on Independence of Mind and Authenticity (though perhaps she does take more than this to be required for full autonomy) (2000).

Return now to the claim that we care about being able to theorize about autonomy because it is intrinsically valuable. Presumably someone who would be inclined to endorse a view like this would think that each distinct kind of autonomy noted above (e.g. Agent-Autonomy, Authenticity, etc.) is intrinsically valuable (or, if they weren’t inclined in this way, they should focus their arguments on explaining why some of these are not intrinsically valuable after all). But we still need some additional reason for thinking that the combination of Agent Autonomy + Authenticity + Ability to Respond to Reasons has special value, as Meyers would claim, or that Independence of Mind + Authenticity matters more, as Stoljar would claim. So in order for some special combination of these kinds of autonomy to matter at all, let alone matter more than some

other combination, we need more than an appeal to its intrinsic value. As a result, this leaves us right back where we started. We entered this discussion looking for an explanation of the theoretical value of the notion of autonomy, but now we're looking for the explanation of the theoretical value of some particular combination of folk conceptions of autonomy; so appealing to intrinsic value didn't get us anywhere.

The second route one could take is, instead of claiming that autonomy is merely intrinsically valuable, maintain that autonomy is also valuable in that it tends to instrumentally enhance our levels of well-being. Thus, the notion of autonomy would be valuable because it would allow us to pick out and theorize about the kind of self-guidance that is well-being enhancing. While this seems like it could be a nice standard by which to judge theories of autonomy—the theory that gives us an account of autonomy that is most well-being enhancing is the best one—in practice neither substantive nor content-neutral accounts of autonomy focus much, if at all, on whether or not their preferred kinds of self-guidance are well-being enhancing.

Consider, for example, a slave who has been conditioned (through years of physical and emotional abuse) into thinking that she is unable to make decisions for herself, and that it is lucky for her that she has others to make those decisions for her. On most content-neutral or substantive views, she lacks psychological autonomy, but she has come to feel peace regarding her situation and gratefulness for those who “take care” of her. She has food, shelter, and a community of friends who share her point of view. Contrast this slave with one whose physical and emotional abuse was unsuccessful, and who constantly defies her masters. She continues to be abused, but she also continues to think for herself and to try to escape to live a life of her own. Of course, while this person

still lacks autonomy in the broad sense, since her options are quite limited, she has significantly more psychological autonomy than the slave from the first example. The second slave's autonomy detracts from her well-being, and the first slave's lack of autonomy increases her well-being.

It might seem as though this is just an extreme example and that it could still be the case that, typically, some forms of autonomy *do* increase well-being. However, I am doubtful of this. Women around the world are denied their moral rights and are forced to suffer through various harms which would no doubt be more tolerable if they were simply to accept them as part of life in the way the second slave does. We could see this happen in the case of the women in India who reported low levels of hunger during a famine—even though they were starving—because they did not take themselves to be entitled to any more (Nussbaum, 2001). This is in contrast to the men in the same scenario who reported hunger because they knew they ought to have more food than they do. Often, resigning ourselves to our problematic situation can allow us to cope with it better, but on many views of autonomy this kind of thing can be autonomy undermining.

Human beings generally suffer through disappointment and regret that could be avoided if some all-knowing, benevolent being were to simply change our preferences so that what we wanted more reliably matched up with what we could get. Although this would leave us more satisfied, it would also leave us less autonomous. As a result, most theories of autonomy are *not* generally well-being enhancing, so if we are to take this as the theoretical value of the notion of autonomy, both content-neutral and substantive theories of autonomy will prove to be inadequate. Those who support either of these

approaches need to look elsewhere for an explanation of the role *autonomy* should play in our theorizing.

### **1.3.2 Option 2: Properly Respecting Individuals**

The second potential theoretical role of *autonomy* that I'll consider was proposed by Paul Benson in his paper "Feminist Commitments and Relational Autonomy." Benson suggests that the role of our theory of autonomy is—at least in part—to show respect to women and members of other oppressed groups by finding a balance between respecting their voices, on the one hand, and recognizing the authority that comes with being autonomous on the other. Benson claims that these are in some sense two competing desiderata—the more we focus on respecting the voices of the oppressed, the more inclusive we will want our theory of autonomy to be, and the more we focus on whether individuals have the proper agential authority over their values, choices, etc., the more exclusive we will want our theory of autonomy to be. His claim is that, since both of these goals is crucial in feminist theorizing, our feminist theory of autonomy should find the proper balance between the two. This gives us a moderately restrictive theory of autonomy which takes seriously women's claims regarding what they want and value but also takes seriously the fact that oppression makes it more difficult for the oppressed to authoritatively form desires and values of their own.

It seems to me that in Benson's explanation of the theoretical role of the notion of autonomy, he is putting the cart before the horse. While I agree with him that our theory of autonomy should capture the proper kind of agential authority over their values, choices, etc. individuals must have to be autonomous, I have concerns about his claim that our theory of autonomy should respect women's voices (and the voices of other

oppressed individuals). Benson explains that those who are motivated by this consideration believe that “theories of autonomy should be as inclusive as they reasonably can be... because this is the best way to ensure that they respect appropriately persons’ authentic voices as realized in their decisions and conduct” (107). The idea here is that in order to respect women’s voices—or their claims about what matters to them and how they want to live their lives—we must have a theory of autonomy that includes them and their choices autonomous (or, at least, this is the best way to respect their voices).

There are at least two problems with this approach. First, it’s not clear what, exactly, it means to respect women’s voices, or to respect their avowed desires and preferences. Presumably Benson thinks that there is a special kind of respect that comes along with deeming a person or her choices “autonomous,” but it isn’t obvious that this exists, or, assuming it does exist, what it is. Perhaps it involves having a particular kind of positive appraisal of them, helping them achieve their ends, or at least not trying to prevent them from achieving their ends. Whatever this respect is, it seems as though Benson owes us an argument for the claim that there is some special kind of respect that most individuals are due and that deeming them *autonomous* is (one of?) the only way(s) of affording them that respect.

A second, and more important problem with this approach is that Benson seems to think that we can know who deserves the respect of being deemed “autonomous” before we know precisely what autonomy is—after all, he is claiming that we are supposed to rely on our intuitions about who deserves the respect of being deemed “autonomous” to determine what autonomy is and how difficult it is to achieve. But a more intuitive way

of thinking of these things is that we should *first* determine what autonomy is and how difficult it is to achieve, and only then will we have some way of knowing who deserves the respect of being deemed “autonomous,” assuming there is some special kind of respect that we are afforded in this way. The people who plausibly qualify as autonomous given the criteria our definition of *autonomy* specifies are those who would deserve to be called “autonomous,” and those who do not meet the relevant criteria would, plausibly, not deserve to be deemed “autonomous.” So Benson seems to have gotten the process inverted here.

While Benson seems clearly right that there is a special kind of agential authority we have over our choices when we are autonomous and that our theory of autonomy should capture that, this is saying nothing more than: Autonomy is a special kind of self-guidance. But knowing that autonomy is a special kind of self-guidance and wanting our theory of autonomy to accurately describe that special kind of self-guidance does not help us understand the special theoretical role we need our notion of autonomy to play. Benson’s other desideratum for a theory of autonomy—namely, that it respect the voices of women and members of other oppressed groups—would give us an interesting and helpful explanation of the theoretical role of the notion of autonomy if he had some clear account of what this special kind of respect is, how we determine who deserves it, and why it is that we can know that all those who deserve it should be deemed “autonomous.” It seems unlikely to me that we could satisfy these requirements because it seems to me that we won’t know who deserves the respect of being deemed “autonomous” until we know what autonomy is. As a result, neither proponents of content-neutral or substantive

theories of autonomy would do well to try to develop a theory of autonomy that played this theoretical role.

### **1.3.3 Option 3: Determining the Appropriateness of Paternalism**

The next option I'll consider is that the notion of autonomy is important because whether or not a person is autonomous determines whether or not paternalistic interference in their affairs is warranted. This is an option defended most ardently and extensively by John Christman, who simply defines *autonomy* as being necessary and sufficient for freedom from paternalism, but Marilyn Freedman expresses a similar view, for example, when she claims that personal autonomy is "a necessary condition for being entitled to live free of domination by others" (68).

Christman's own view is that the notion of autonomy is important largely because we need it to distinguish between those for whom paternalistic interference is morally appropriate and those for whom it is not. As a result, he uses his intuitions about when this paternalism is appropriate to help determine what conditions must be satisfied for someone to be autonomous. When considering theories of autonomy which deem non-autonomous individuals who, intuitively, ought not to be subjected to paternalistic interference, Christman takes this to be sufficient reason to reject them.

It seems to me that defining *autonomy* in terms of the appropriateness of paternalistic interference is unmotivated and gives us an implausible theory of autonomy and its value. It's not at all clear what theoretical reasons we have for thinking that autonomy should be defined in this way in the first place, and my own view is that defining *autonomy* in this way gives us a notion of autonomy that is watered-down and fails to capture many of our important intuitions about autonomy.

With respect to proponents of substantive views in particular, while they would want to maintain that the DW is lacking autonomy so long as her choices are motivated by a certain kind of failure of self-respect or her acceptance of false norms of womanhood, they certainly would not (or, at least, *should* not) claim that it would be permissible for the state to interfere with her choices. Christman seems to be right that a certain kind of minimal procedural independence is all that is needed for paternalistic interference in one's affairs to be inappropriate, and this minimal procedural independence would be far from adequate for autonomy on substantive views.

#### **1.3.4 Option 4: Defining Moral Responsibility**

A fourth possible theoretical role we might want the notion of autonomy to play is to pick out who is morally responsible for their actions and who is not. This could either be because the requirements for autonomy are identical to the requirements for moral responsibility or because autonomy is a necessary condition for moral responsibility. Any combination of Agent Autonomy, Independence of Mind, Authenticity, Self-Identification, or Ability to Respond to Reasons could be a plausible candidate as a theory of autonomy or moral responsibility, so it is quite reasonable to initially think the two might be importantly related in some way.

I'll consider first the possibility that the requirements for moral responsibility are just the same as the requirements for autonomy. If this is how we are thinking of the theoretical role of the notion of autonomy, it seems pretty clear that we don't need it. After all, if we define *autonomy* in just the same that we define *moral responsibility*, then the notion of moral responsibility will do all the theoretical work we might have



otherwise wanted our theory of autonomy to do. As a result, establishing a theory of autonomy that leaves autonomy identical to moral responsibility seems unmotivated.

The alternative is that autonomy is necessary for moral responsibility. If this is right, then the notion of autonomy will be theoretically valuable because it will help us draw conclusions about moral responsibility in various cases. On a view like this, there is some special combination of Agent Autonomy, Independence of Mind, etc. which, when combined with some other condition(s), gives us moral responsibility. “Autonomy” would then just be shorthand for this combination of these otherwise distinct folk conceptions of autonomy, but it would fall short of moral responsibility and would remain a distinct concept. Another way of thinking about it is that the notion of autonomy would be the combination of requirements for moral responsibility that have to do with self-guidance.

Depending on one’s view of moral responsibility, it may turn out that we can construct a plausible account of autonomy that plays the role we would want it to. However, taking this approach to defining *autonomy* seems to have two important methodological implications. First, those who are theorizing about moral responsibility should stop relying on their intuitions about autonomy. After all, we will not know what kind of self-guidance is needed for moral responsibility—and thereby what autonomy is—until we know what moral responsibility is. So while we may be tempted to claim that a person in a particular case lacks moral responsibility because our gut tells us they

lack autonomy, this will be a question-begging way to go if we are defining autonomy in terms of moral responsibility.<sup>3</sup>

The second methodological implication of *autonomy* just being the self-guidance that is needed for moral responsibility is that those who are spending their time trying to define autonomy should stop doing this and instead try to figure out what moral responsibility is. For, once they know what is required for moral responsibility, they will thereby know what is required for autonomy. If this seems unnecessary, and if focusing on autonomy seems worthwhile, then that gives us some reason to think that, at the very least, there is some other interesting notion of autonomy out there that does important theoretical work too but that is not directly related to moral responsibility.

While I take these to be good reasons for thinking that we should look elsewhere for our explanation of the theoretical value of the notion of autonomy—whether we take a content-neutral or a substantive approach—there are additional reasons for proponents of substantive theories to look elsewhere. Return again to the case of the DW. Suppose, for example, that she votes for a particularly corrupt politician because her husband will be doing so. She knows the politician is corrupt and is familiar with many reasons that make it the case that it is morally wrong to vote for this candidate. However, since she has thoughtfully determined that her husband’s preferences and opinions counts for more than hers, she decides to vote for the candidate anyway. It’s not that she thinks that it might be morally permissible to vote for this candidate because perhaps her husband is

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<sup>3</sup> This is true unless by *autonomy* we mean one of the various folk conceptions of autonomy. If this is what we mean, then we must not only be clear about which of them we are referring to, but we must also give an argument defending the claim that that particular notion of autonomy is necessary for moral responsibility.

aware of some facts that are unknown to her; instead, she votes as her husband does because it is more important for her to please her husband than it is for her to do the morally right thing.

In a case like this, it seems relatively clear that she would be morally responsible for her choice—given that she made it freely, without coercion, after reflection, and in accordance with her values—but substantive theories of autonomy would maintain that her choice is not an autonomous one. There are many cases like this, in which a person is plausibly morally responsible for their choices though the choices are not autonomous on substantive theories of autonomy. As a result, proponents of these theories have additional reasons—above and beyond those reasons that I have argued we all have—for finding an alternative explanation of the theoretical value of the notion of autonomy that does not appeal to moral responsibility.

### **1.3.5 Option 5: Identifying the Wrongness of Oppression**

The final option I will consider for the theoretical role the notion of autonomy should play is suggested by proponents of substantive theories themselves. This suggestion is that we need a notion of autonomy to capture a particular kind of harm that oppressive socialization inflicts on members of oppressed groups. Benson has suggested something like this throughout his writing, in that he is consistently concerned with the ways in which certain oppressed women lack autonomy, and he wants his theory of autonomy to contribute to an explanation of the harms of oppression. He takes Marina Oshana in *Personal Autonomy in Society* to argue explicitly for an approach like this, and he characterizes her as claiming that “it is the role of a conception of personal autonomy (among other things) to underwrite and explain what is wrong when women are

systematically deprived of power and authority in patriarchal societies” (Benson 2014, 92). Natalie Stoljar (2000) makes a similar claim when she states that a theory of autonomy must be able to account for the “feminist intuition,” or the intuition that a choice cannot be autonomous if it was motivated by oppressive norms of feminine socialization.

The general idea motivating this approach is that certain choices women make in oppressive, patriarchal societies are not autonomous ones, and that the oppression itself is (at least partly) the explanation for why they are not autonomous. The DW would be one example of a woman like this. Assuming she lives in a society like ours, she has grown up learning that men’s preferences count for more than women’s preferences do and that good women please their husbands. These myths are pervasive, false, and harmful, so perhaps we can use our conception of autonomy to capture (at least some of) the ways in which norms like these are harmful.

It is worth noting at this point that one problem here is that it is not immediately clear that we need a conception of autonomy to capture this harm, since presumably we can explain the harms of norms like these without appealing to autonomy. For example, we can appeal to the value of things like knowledge, well-being, moral respect for equals, fulfillment, or flourishing; it’s not obvious that these notions by themselves couldn’t capture the wrongness of this kind of socialization. As a result, it seems as though we need an argument for why they can’t before we should find it plausible that we need our notion of autonomy to do this work. But supposing there is something missing in our explanation if we are restricted to appealing to some of the things I’ve listed, the next step is to consider what our theory of autonomy would have to look like in order for it to

capture the harms of oppressive socialization. For this approach to work, our appeal to autonomy should give us a plausible enough theory of autonomy while also allowing us to explain the relevant harms, but I will argue that a theory of autonomy cannot do both of these things.

In order for a theory of autonomy to play the role proponents of this approach want it to, it needs to turn out to be the case that oppressive socialization undermines autonomy, and this will be (at least part of) why oppressive socialization is bad. We would be taking it for granted, then, that autonomy is a good thing to have. It seems that if we are taking this approach, we must maintain that a person or her choice is lacking in autonomy to the degree that it was influenced by false norms of oppressive socialization. This seems to be precisely what Benson (1991) and Stoljar (2000) have in mind, so it seems that we're on the right track so far to establishing a plausible theory of autonomy that plays this role. However, as I will argue, the theory of autonomy we end up with once we ensure that it plays this role is unintuitive and ad hoc, and the fact that someone has been subjected to oppressive norms of socialization seems to be neither necessary nor sufficient for their autonomy to be undermined.

First, this approach does not give us a necessary condition for being autonomous—that is, it is *not* the case that anyone who is influenced by oppressive norms of socialization is to some degree lacking autonomy. Consider the case of a feminist who embraces some norms having to do with feminine beauty, such as wearing make-up and high heeled shoes. It's hard to imagine that she would be motivated to dress in these ways were it not for the oppressive norms according to which doing so is beauty-enhancing and beauty is important. However, it seems to me that her embrace of these

ways of presenting herself could be completely autonomous. We need not, I think, maintain that her choice to wear high heels is necessarily lacking in autonomy *to any degree*. So long as she understands that the norms exist and that they are problematic, but decides she'd like to go on dressing this way because she enjoys it and not because she feels as though she must or because she is in some sense dependent upon male attention, it seems to me like her choice in dress is as autonomous as one's choice in dress could be.

Of course, it would be quite difficult to determine for any particular woman how significant a role her oppressive socialization played in motivating her to do such things, but it is hard to imagine that for any woman her oppressive socialization played no role at all. So as long as we can grant that 1) no woman is motivated to wear uncomfortable, expensive shoes without having been subjected to oppressive socialization that glamorizes such shoes, and that 2) some women completely autonomously choose to wear such shoes, then it seems that the claim under consideration deems too many choices non-autonomous. It follows from substantive views that focus on false oppressive norms that, given that her preference was shaped by these false oppressive norms in the first place, the choice must lack autonomy to at least some degree. This seems to me like an unacceptable result, not only in the specific case under consideration, but for many cases in which women decide to do things that would not be attractive in the first place if it weren't for the existence of oppressive norms (e.g. get married).

This approach also does not provide us with a sufficient condition for autonomy, as there is no obvious way for a theory like this to account for cases which, intuitively, involve a lack of autonomy, but do not involve these oppressive norms. Cases like these would include the case of someone who is persuaded to join a cult and whose personality

changes drastically as a result; someone who has been subjected to gaslighting outside of an oppressive context; or just anyone who is not oppressed but who nonetheless seems to be lacking autonomy. Perhaps these people should be considered autonomous, but given how counter-intuitive that is, we'd need a strong argument in favor of the relevant view of autonomy for this to be an acceptable result. As a result of all of these considerations, we can see that this approach to autonomy does not seem to give us necessary or sufficient conditions for what it takes to have or lack autonomy.

In addition to this problem, it also faces certain problems having to do with its theoretical motivation. First, consider the requirement that the oppressive norms be *false* in order to undermine autonomy. It's not clear what the relevance is here of the norm's being false, since it seems as though some oppressive norms are more or less true. Consider, for example, the claim that women should try to look attractive if they want to get jobs, or that they must be amiable and demure if they are to be liked by others. If a mother were to teach this to her daughter, it would be a mistake to claim that the mother was telling her daughter something false; these claims are just true in our society. But when we go on teaching these things to our children, we contribute to the oppression of women and we encourage them to suppress their own desires and goals for the sake of succeeding or getting along with others in a way that men don't have to. It is thus quite plausible that the acceptance of these norms makes women less autonomous than men, but the norms do not seem to be false.

Another question that arises when we consider the claim that false oppressive norms undermine autonomy is: What is it about oppressive norms, in particular, that makes it the case that when they are false and we accept them, our autonomy is

undermined? Why isn't it just that, any time we accept something false, our autonomy is undermined? If falseness should matter at all, it seems like we need an explanation of why falseness is relevant *only* with respect to oppressive norms but not to other claims a person might accept and use to structure the course of their lives. For example, why is it that a pre-Copernican sailor should not count as having his autonomy undermined given that he formulated his life plans around a false belief in the relation of the earth to the sun? No theory of autonomy would want to maintain that a person's autonomy is undermined in any case in which they believe something false and make choices on the basis of that false belief, but it's not clear why a claim's falsehood should suddenly become relevant to autonomy once it's an oppressive norm that is false.

Consider next the requirement that the false norms be *oppressive* in order to undermine autonomy. It's not clear why oppression, in particular, should be relevant here. Some false norms are not oppressive, but still seem to influence people's choices in important ways. For example, men in our society are not oppressed, but they are still subjected to certain false norms that, on the face of it, seem to undermine their autonomy.<sup>4</sup> It's likely that there are many men who might have pursued a career in dance, design, or some other field typically characterized as "feminine"—and thereby inappropriate for men—had it not been for the fact that it is characterized in this way. As a result, they may feel alienated from many of the choices they make and be motivated by

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<sup>4</sup> I am relying on Marilyn Frye's well-known and well-respected definition of "oppression" (1983). Perhaps the proponents of this conception of autonomy have in mind a different understanding of "oppression," but if this is the case then they should be clear about it.



a sense of inadequacy that often characterizes oppression for proponents of substantive views.

This approach to understanding autonomy also seems to be unmotivated except by a desire to explain the significance of oppression. It is quite intuitive that oppressive norms might undermine autonomy; after all, oppressive norms often function by convincing people that they are unfit to pursue their goals, or by altering their preferences in ways that seem problematic. But if this—or something like it—explains why false oppressive norms undermine autonomy, then it seems as though any time someone is motivated by a false belief that they are unfit to pursue their goals or by preferences that have been problematically altered we should think they are lacking in autonomy. But then we need an explanation of when someone's preferences have been altered in a way that is relevantly problematic and why, and appealing to false oppressive norms at this point will take us in a circle. So it seems to me that this appeal to oppressive norms, while plausible, is nonetheless in need of defense because it does not, by itself, seem to explain anything and gives us no motivation for accepting it as a way of understanding autonomy.

As a result of these considerations, it appears that a theory of autonomy that plays the role of explaining the wrongness of oppression is both theoretically and intuitively unacceptable because it deems non-autonomous choices which are intuitively autonomous. It also seems to stipulate conditions that are not directly related to whether or not a person has or lacks autonomy—like the truth of their beliefs—and others which may be related to autonomy but only because of some feature they have—like oppression being relevant because of its tendency to cause people to sacrifice goals they would otherwise pursue or to feel incapable of making choices for themselves. Proponents of

substantive theories of autonomy must, then, look elsewhere for their explanation of the theoretical role the concept of autonomy should play.

#### **1.4 Summary and Conclusion**

I began this paper by noting that the disagreement between proponents of substantive and content-neutral theories of autonomy seems to be one having to do with what kind of self-guidance is important enough to be called “autonomy.” This seems to be so because in cases over which these folks disagree, the disagreement isn’t regarding whether the protagonist in the example is lacking *some* kind of self-guidance—that much is granted by both parties (or ought to be, anyway). Instead, the disagreement is about whether or not the protagonist is lacking the kind of self-guidance one must have to count as autonomous. But, so I have claimed, in order to determine whether a particular kind of self-guidance is important enough to be called “autonomy,” we must first determine why it is that autonomy is supposed to be important in the first place. That is, why should we care about *autonomy*? What theoretical value does the concept have? Once we have some idea of the role the concept should play, then we will be better suited to determine whether or not some particular kind of self-guidance might be relevant to autonomy.

I went on to consider five different theoretical roles we might want our concept of autonomy to play; I claimed that none of them will be suitable for proponents of content-neutral views *or* for proponents of substantive views, though my focus was on the substantive views. These roles were: simply to allow us to pick out a valuable phenomenon; to properly respect individuals; to help us determine the appropriateness of paternalism in various cases; to help us understand and identify moral responsibility; and to allow us to explain the wrongness of oppression. These potential roles are

unsatisfactory because they are theoretically unmotivated, lead to a theoretically problematic theory of autonomy, lead to an extremely counter-intuitive theory of autonomy, take us no distance at all toward a theory of autonomy, or some combination of these. As a result, if autonomy theorists are going to successfully defend their own theory of autonomy over some alternative, they must first put forward some explanation of why the concept of autonomy is theoretically valuable in the first place. Only then will they be in a position to defend the claim that their theory of autonomy picks out the kind of self-guidance that is most appropriately deemed “autonomy.”

## CHAPTER 2

### NO AUTONOMY WITHOUT SELF-RESPECT

#### 2.1 Introduction

Consider the case of a woman who has been socialized to believe that women are incapable of managing their own affairs, and that they need a man to do it for them. As a result of this socialization, she comes to believe that she is indeed incapable in this way and chooses to let her husband guide the course of her life for her. Is this woman autonomous? If you're inclined to say "no," then you might have a substantive notion of autonomy—or an approach to autonomy that places restrictions on the desires, plans, beliefs, attitudes, etc. that can motivate autonomous choice. But it's difficult to give a satisfying explanation of *why* she counts as lacking autonomy since, after all, she is freely choosing to defer to her husband, and she has some good reasons for doing so.

In this paper, I argue for a new requirement for a choice to be an autonomous one that would explain why this woman lacks autonomy, and I argue that it is preferable to some of the leading substantive theories for a variety of reasons. In particular, I argue that we should understand autonomous choices as those choices that involve the kind of self-guidance the self-respecting person would engage in. Thus, the woman in the example lacks autonomy because she lacks an important form of self-respect and this lack of self-respect has impacted the way in which she guides her choices. While this appeal to self-respect as a necessary condition for autonomy may at first seem to be changing the subject from what autonomy theorists have been discussing, I argue that it is actually quite in line with the kind of theories they've been proposing, but is free from the kinds of problems its rivals face.

In establishing this new approach to autonomy, I identify and explain three core features of self-respect that those in the literature generally seem to agree on, namely, appreciation of our own value, appreciation of the value of reasons and rationality, and appreciation of the value of acting in accordance with our personal values. I argue that by focusing on the kind of self-guidance required by each of these three components of self-respect, a plausible account of autonomy emerges. From the feature of self-respect that involves our appreciation of our own value, we get the result that one's choice is not autonomous if it is motivated by false beliefs about one's worth as a person or a failure to be appropriately motivated by this belief. From the second feature of self-respect—that we appreciate the value of reasons and rationality—we get the result that when a choice is motivated by a failure of self-reflection that self-respect would require of us (perhaps because one takes oneself to be incapable of guiding one's choices well anyway, or simply doesn't care about one's capacity for rational agency), that choice is thereby lacking in autonomy. The final feature of self-respect I've noted is that the self-respecting person cares about shaping themselves into someone with values and goals that they take to be objectively worth having. With this as a requirement for autonomous choice, we get the result that when we act without appreciating the significance of our actions to our character or our goals, we are failing to act autonomously. Similarly, when we fail to consider who we want to be and go on making mundane choices about how to live without any reflection, our choices are lacking in autonomy.

The results this view gives us are, I think, quite intuitive, and are also in line with the kind of results popular substantive approaches to autonomy give. For example, on one leading substantive view of autonomy, the woman who takes herself to be incapable of

managing her affairs would lack autonomy because she takes herself to lack the competence to navigate the choices available to her.<sup>5</sup> But this failure to appreciate her own competence just is a failure of self-respect, so the direct appeal to self-respect can give us a more fundamental explanation of what has gone wrong in the relevant case. On a second popular view, the woman lacks autonomy because she has internalized false, oppressive norms, and choices motivated by beliefs of this sort simply cannot be autonomous ones.<sup>6</sup> Again, it seems as though the problem with believing false, oppressive norms is that norms like these tell oppressed individuals that their value as a person depends on something it does not, in fact, depend on. Thus, in accepting them, they fail to have proper respect for themselves. We can see, then, that the appeal to these problematic norms is at bottom a concern with a lack of self-respect. It seems to me that by considering the relationship between self-respect and self-guidance directly, we get a theory of autonomy that is more unified and explanatorily powerful.

We can see the virtues of this theory over alternatives when we consider how it would respond to the example of the woman who feels incapable of competently guiding her life. It seems right that part of what explains her lack of autonomy is her very lack of confidence in herself. However, it also seems right that part of what explains her lack of autonomy is her internalization of oppressive norms according to which women are not too assertive or opinionated and they defer to the men around them. The theories discussed above cannot account for the fact that *both* of these explanations seem relevant,

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Paul Benson (1994).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Natalie Stoljar (2007).

but a direct appeal to the relevance of self-respect to autonomy can explain this. We see the power of this account in other cases as well. For example, the appeal to oppressive norms cannot explain failures of autonomy in cases of, say, gaslighting, whereas the appeal to self-respect can.

In this paper, I start by laying out the leading explanations of why people like the deferential woman lack autonomy, and I argue that these explanations lead to conditions for autonomy that produce counter-intuitive results and theories that seem theoretically unmotivated and disjointed. I go on to explain the ways in which both approaches seem to be concerned with self-respect, and argue that a direct appeal to self-respect as a necessary condition for autonomy allows us to address the concerns that motivate these alternatives without running into the problems they have. I also give some purely theoretical reasons for thinking that self-respect is necessary for autonomy, and I end the paper by giving a sketch of what this theory of autonomy would look like. I argue that it gives us appealing results in important cases, and that it seems to be able to account for these cases in a more unified, explanatorily powerful way than other popular theories of autonomy.

## **2.2 Autonomy According to Popular Substantive Approaches**

The distinction between content-neutral and substantive theories of autonomy is not as straightforward as one might like it to be, but the difference can be understood to be roughly between theories of autonomy which *do not* place restrictions on the desires, plans, beliefs, etc. that can motivate an autonomous choice, and those which *do*. Content-neutral theories maintain that a choice can be autonomous regardless of what the content is of the motivating pro-attitude that ultimately caused the choice; they merely place

restrictions on the structure of one's pro-attitudes and/or their history. In contrast, while substantive theories are also concerned with the structure of one's pro-attitudes and/or their history, they place additional restrictions on the content of pro-attitudes that can motivate autonomous choices.

Consider, for example, someone who gives up their life to save someone else. Regarding the pro-attitude that motivated the person to make that choice, content-neutral theorists will ask questions such as: What was the source of that pro-attitude? Did they reflectively endorse it, or would they do so if they were prompted to? How does that pro-attitude relate to other of the agent's pro-attitudes? Are they consistent or is there a conflict? While substantive theorists will also be interested in the answers to these questions, they will be concerned with further questions such as: Was this person motivated by false beliefs about their own moral standing? Did they believe as a result of oppressive norms that they had a duty to do what they did? What kind of attitude did they take toward themselves? Was it one of confidence and self-assurance, or was it one that displayed a lack of a sense of self-worth? So while the substantive theorists will think that the *content* of the agent's pro-attitude is relevant to their autonomy, the content-neutral theorist will not. In this section, I consider some of the possible necessary conditions for autonomy that would make a theory substantive, focusing on the views of Paul Benson and Natalie Stoljar.

Benson's early work in autonomy<sup>7</sup> is motivated by the importance of what he called "normative competence," or "an array of abilities to be aware of applicable

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<sup>7</sup> He talks about "free agency" rather than autonomy, but it's common to understand discussions of freedom, agency, and autonomy to inform one another in certain ways.



normative standards, to appreciate those standards, and to bring them competently to bear in one's evaluations of open courses of action." (1990; p.54) He claims that this condition on autonomy allows us to explain our intuition that children, persons with certain mental illnesses, and others with the relevant features lack autonomy in certain contexts though they do have the ability to act reflectively and intentionally. For example, a child can think about whether or not to hit his sister and reflect on the fact that his mother has told him how important it is that he not do it, but when he chooses to hit his sister nonetheless we are inclined, according to Benson, to deny that the relevant choice was an autonomous one. Certainly, at the very least, we would not think that his choice to hit his sister revealed something significant about his character. Benson's explanation for this is that people of the sort he is describing "are not aware of or cannot adequately appreciate certain things which free agents must be able to understand and be capable of bringing to bear upon their choices and plans... [T]hey cannot be expected to know any better than to do what they do." (p. 52).

This appeal to normative competence leads Benson to a view according to which our choices can be autonomous in one context but non-autonomous in another, depending upon whether we have knowledge of and the ability to appreciate and act upon certain normative standards that are generally accepted in the relevant domain. A child may be unable to appreciate the significance of normative standards in all domains and so lack autonomy across the board, but if I find myself suddenly being "assessed in relation to the standards governing the conversation and manners of British nobility," then since I have no knowledge of or ability to act in accordance with the relevant standards, my choices will not be autonomous in that context. (p. 55) Benson takes this to be a plausible

way of thinking of things because, after all, my actions in that context do not really reveal anything about who I am; if I act in ways which, given the context, are disrespectful and offensive, this should not inform anyone's understanding of my character. An important feature of autonomous action, then, is that it reveals something significant about who we are in ways that non-autonomous action does not.

Of course, it's possible that a person is, in fact, knowledgeable and capable enough to respond appropriately to the norms in a given context without realizing that they are. They might mistakenly come to think of themselves as incompetent and/or as lacking the standing to participate in the relevant interactions, and this may cause them to make choices they would not otherwise make or to give up on making their own choices altogether. Benson's concern about cases like these motivated him to move from focusing on normative competence—an objective measure of whether a person has the knowledge and ability to act in meaningful ways in a given context—to an agent's "sense of worthiness to act" in a given context. (1994; p. 660) This subjective sense of one's own normative competence is another necessary condition for autonomy on Benson's view. Thus, if a member of a racial minority who does, in fact, have the same worth and moral competence as those around him has come to falsely believe that he has lesser worth and that he is lacking in moral agency, he might lack autonomy as a result. When he chooses as a result of this false belief to consistently defer to the people around him who are members of the racial majority, that choice will not be an autonomous one.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Of course, there may be other factors that could do a better job in certain cases of explaining the choice to defer from a member of a racial minority. In particular, threats of violence are often the explanation. But even if threats of violence—explicit or implicit—are absent, the individual's choice to defer could still lack autonomy if it is motivated by this sense of incompetence.

Benson has provided us with two necessary conditions for autonomous choice—we must in fact have normative competence in a given context, and we must (justifiably) take ourselves to have that competence, which involves taking ourselves to be answerable for our choices if someone were to criticize our choice or to press us for reasons for choosing as we did. This gives us the result that many oppressed individuals, including women in our society, are lacking autonomy in many contexts. Since women are often socialized to believe that they are less competent than men or have less value than men do, they may choose to give up making choices of their own and to defer to others who, as they see it, have more worth and better decision-making abilities than they do. Alternatively, they may go on making decisions of their own, but they may do it in a way that is unreflective and disengaged from their capacities for practical reasoning. We can see examples of both kinds of autonomy failure in Kristin Luker's discussion of women who take contraceptive risks; these were women who had access to birth control but did not use it, had unprotected sex resulting in pregnancies, and then had abortions (Luker, 1975 cited in Stoljar, 2000). Some of these women chose not to use birth control because they deferred to the claims of others that doing so was wrong, while others chose not to use birth control by, in some sense, not making any decision at all; this second group of women took themselves to lack the kind of decision making capacities to choose for themselves whether or not to have sex or try to prevent pregnancy. Both groups of women would, on Benson's account, lack autonomy in the relevant case.

There is, however, at least one other group of women in the study who are worth considering. These are women who reflectively endorsed the norms of femininity according to which good women do not try to prevent pregnancy because good women

do not engage in premarital sex. These women do take themselves to have the standing to make the decision for themselves, and they think the decision they made was a good one. On Benson's view, these women would be autonomous in the relevant case since they had both normative competence *and* a sense of worthiness to act. However, according to Stoljar their choice not to use contraception is not autonomous after all. This is because their choice not to use contraception was motivated by false, oppressive norms that they internalized. If these women had not believed false claims about the source of the worth of women or their proper role in life, they would have made a different decision (all other things being equal). Additionally, in coming to believe these false norms, the number of options that remained available to them decreased and they were more likely to remain subordinate to men.

Stoljar's proposed necessary condition for autonomy, then, is that the relevant choice not be motivated by the acceptance of false, oppressive norms. She seems to think that this condition should be accepted because, once these norms are internalized, the agent becomes unable to evaluate their plausibility and reject them when they are inapplicable. This is related to a commonly appealed to condition for autonomy called "procedural independence," or, as Stoljar puts it, "whether the influence on the formation of the preference constituted coercive persuasion or was reflection-distorting due to insufficient exposure to alternative possibilities or some other factor." (2014, p. 238) Plausibly, when a person internalizes false oppressive norms, they lose the ability to adequately consider alternative options or to reflect on the legitimacy of the relevant norm, so they would lack procedural independence as Stoljar conceives of it. With this condition, Stoljar can capture the lack of autonomy in Benson's example of the member

of the racial minority and his example of the woman subjected to gaslighting, but she can also capture the intuitive lack of autonomy in additional cases in which individuals do have normative competence and a sense of worthiness to act but may seem to lack autonomy nonetheless.

While it seems to me quite plausible that the individuals Benson and Stoljar are concerned with lack autonomy in the relevant cases, their accounts of autonomy face a number of challenges. In the next section, I consider problems for their views and argue that proponents of substantive theories who want to capture the lack of autonomy in these cases are going to have to look elsewhere for the necessary condition for autonomy that can do the work while still providing us with a theoretically plausible view. Then, in sections III and IV, I explain how appealing directly to the notion of self-respect can provide us with just such a condition.

### **2.3 Challenges to these Substantive Conditions**

Return again to Benson's requirement that for a choice to be autonomous, it must be the case that i) the agent has normative competence in the domain in which the choice is being made, and ii) the agent takes themselves to be worthy to act in that domain, or to be answerable for the relevant choice. It seems to me that the first requirement is unacceptable as a necessary condition for autonomy. I suspect that we all would maintain that I can, in fact, autonomously choose to use my fork to eat my salad even if those around me happen to be assessing me based on the norms of British nobility and I am unfamiliar with those norms. While this could certainly lead to a misunderstanding or a miscommunication, it seems implausible that that is sufficient to make my choice lacking in autonomy.

Consider first a version of the case in which I am aware that I am being assessed on the basis of norms I do not understand. In this case, I can appreciate that I lack the relevant information to make the choice that will express what I want to express, and I can use my values, goals, practical reasoning abilities, and so on to autonomously choose how to go forward given my lack of information. I can choose to use my fork while looking out for reactions from others and responding to those actions in ways that seem appropriate to me. For example, if they seem offended or upset, I can explain that I was unaware of relevant conventions and am sorry for any offense I've caused. If none of this is taken as I intended it either, it's still unclear to me why that should make it the case that my choices were not my own, or that I did not have the relevant control over them. We rarely have control over how our choices are interpreted by others, but lacking this kind of control is certainly not sufficient to undermine autonomy.

Even if I am unaware that I am being assessed based on those norms, I am still at a loss regarding why my choice can't still be my own choice. It may simply be the case that those around me are holding me to a standard that it is unreasonable to hold me to, but surely I do not lose my ability to act autonomously whenever I am held to an unreasonable standard by others. Or, if it is reasonable to hold me to the relevant standard and I am responsible for acting in inappropriate ways, then it seems as though we would want to say that I made an autonomous choice to ignore the relevant standards and act in inappropriate ways.

While Benson is no doubt correct that in these cases I am lacking information that would allow me to make a better-informed choice and that, if I had the information, I would be likely to choose differently, this is not enough to undermine my autonomy. We

often lack information that it would be useful to have before we make some choice, and it's often the case that we would choose otherwise than we do if had it. But simply not knowing, for example, how much I will like the tea before I buy it does not make my choice to buy it lacking in autonomy. Perhaps Benson would reply to this example by reminding us that it is only *norms* that we must be familiar with on his view, and not relevant information more generally. But if that's his response, he'll need to explain what it is about norms that makes them such that we must be familiar with them but not other relevant information. After all, as I've noted, it could be that other information unrelated to norms matters to our decision-making more than the norms do.

So making choices that are misunderstood by others does not undermine my autonomy, nor does making a choice without having all (or even most) of the relevant information. It's unclear, then, why we should think that we must have normative competence in a relevant domain in order to make autonomous choices with respect to that domain. Additionally, such a view leads to results that are implausible to say the least.<sup>9</sup> We may be tempted at this point to consider rejecting the first condition for autonomy but still accepting the second, namely, that the agent takes themselves to be worthy to act in that domain, or to be answerable for the relevant choice. However, accepting this condition while rejecting the former condition will lead to a theory of autonomy that is far too subjective unless we add some alternative objective requirement. This is because the second of Benson's conditions allows us to be mistaken in thinking

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<sup>9</sup> Benson's acceptance of this feature of his view was in a paper from 1990, and to my knowledge he has not reaffirmed it since then. However, he has since provided different conditions that must be met for one's belief that one has normative competence in some domain to be a reasonable one. For this reason, I suspect that he would now reject the initial proposal.

that we are competent in the relevant domain, or that we are answerable for the choices we make. For example, a child may take themselves to know all they need to know and have all the deliberative skill required to make the choice to get a tattoo sleeve, but most people would claim that children cannot autonomously make choices about things as permanent as tattoo sleeves. So their belief that they are answerable for the relevant choice is not sufficient to make the choice an autonomous one.

Benson has recently given a more promising explanation of what objective conditions must be met in order for someone's choice to be autonomous. His claim is that our attitude of competence must be *reasonable*, and in order to determine whether or not our confidence in our answerability is reasonable, we should "consider what kinds of revelation about the circumstances under which our attitudes were formed would, upon rational consideration, typically undermine our sense of competence and worthiness as answerers." (2005; p. 118) So if we would lose our confidence upon rational consideration of the circumstances under which we formed that confidence, then we lack autonomy in spite of our taking ourselves to be answerable for our choice.

The problem here is in determining what "rational consideration" involves. Benson himself seems to problematize such a condition in his discussion of "historical" approaches to autonomy which place restrictions on the choices that count as autonomous by appealing directly to the causal history of the pro-attitudes that motivated the relevant choice. On these historical views, if one were to rationally reflect on the process by which one came to have the relevant pro-attitudes and feel resistance to or alienation from the pro-attitudes as a result, then the choices motivated by those hypothetically-



resisted pro-attitudes are not autonomous.<sup>10</sup> In order to argue that the appeal to hypothetical rational consideration is unsuccessful in this context, Benson asks us to consider a case in which a woman is a victim of gaslighting that is not intentional. She lives in a time in which medical science does not understand women's mental health well, and although her doctor genuinely has her best interests in mind, he ends up convincing her that she is hysterical when really, she is merely passionate. She comes to doubt her own ability to make decisions on the basis of the judgment of the best medical science of her time, so it doesn't seem as though rational reflection on the process will by itself undermine her sense of incompetence. Instead, she needs access to more information. However, as I've already noted, it's implausible to maintain that our choice is not autonomous in any case in which we would have made a different one had we had more information.

Of course, in the case just discussed, the woman does in fact have normative competence, but she does not believe she does. According to Benson, rational reflection on the process by which she came to have her lack of confidence in herself will not correct her judgment. Thus, the appeal to rational reflection on the process by which one came to have one's attitudes does not solve the problem in this case. The question now is whether we could get the same kinds of results in a case in which someone lacks normative competence but believes they have it. I think it's clear that we could.

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, John Christman, 1991.

Imagine someone with undiagnosed attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) living in a society in which the disorder is unrecognized as such.<sup>11</sup> This person might find themselves doing things like consistently running late for meetings and appointments, forgetting to take care of their household responsibilities, struggling to focus when listening to their spouse, etc. Since they do not know that their behavior is the result of ADHD, they take themselves to be answerable for it and as a result have quite a negative evaluation of their own character. However, if they were to reflect on the process by which they came to think of themselves as normatively competent, they would not have available to them facts about ADHD. They would only have available the intuitive thoughts about personal responsibility and self-control that seem to be true in others and in other realms of their life. Thus, I think it would be reasonable for them to conclude that they are answerable for their choices and behaviors given their lack of information. However, I doubt that Benson would claim that their choice to, for example, put an assignment off until the last minute or leave late for an appointment is an autonomous one. But since this person does take themselves to be answerable and they would maintain that attitude upon rational reflection of the process by which they came to form the attitude, Benson gives us no way of explaining why their choice was not autonomous after all.

To sum up the problems with Benson's view, the subjective sense of one's worthiness to act or one's answerability for one's choices may be necessary but is not

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<sup>11</sup> While various psychological disabilities and disorders are relevant to autonomy on Benson's view, it's not clear to me that theories of autonomy need to deliver verdicts in these kinds of cases. However, since Benson does, his own view should be able to account for them.

sufficient for autonomy. We need an objective constraint that requires that one *in fact* be answerable. One way to flesh this out is to claim that one have normative competence of the standards by which one's choices will be assessed, but this leads to implausible results and seems to be unmotivated. A second way to flesh it out is to say that one is only *in fact* answerable if one's sense of answerability would not be undermined upon rational reflection on the process by which one came to take oneself to be answerable. But this does not work either, since there are cases in which one meets both of these conditions but lacks autonomy nonetheless.

Consider next Stoljar's requirement that, in order to be autonomous, choices may not be motivated by internalized false oppressive norms. The first problem with this condition is that it appears to lead to a theory of autonomy that is disjunctive, or one which consists of a list of necessary conditions which do not seem to be theoretically motivated but instead simply seem to be attempts at responding in the right way to cases. This is because Benson seems right that gaslighting can undermine autonomy without impairing one's rational abilities, and one need not have internalized oppressive norms in order to be a victim of gaslighting (though it would make it easier, no doubt). So in order to account for cases like that, we will need not only Stoljar's condition but also a version of Benson's, and unless we can find a single consideration that motivates both of them, the resulting theory seems cobbled together.

A second problem with Stoljar's view is the supposed relationship between the internalization of false oppressive norms and procedural independence. To remind us, Stoljar understands procedural independence to be undermined when one's choice was motivated by coercion or as a result of one's ability to reflect being distorted "due to

insufficient exposure to alternative possibilities or some other factor.” (2014; p. 238) But it isn’t clear that internalized false norms distort one’s ability to reflect any more than other kinds of socialization do. Any time we internalize norms—whether oppressive or not, false or true—our ability to reflect on that norm is diminished to some degree. Additionally, our society prevents us from adequate exposure to alternatives for all kinds of beliefs and norms, like that brides wear white dresses, that movies are in English, that female babies can have pierced ears but not pierced noses, and so on. Our failure to appreciate alternatives can be explained based on the way we have been socialized, and it may impact the choices we make in all kinds of ways. Thus, if internalizing false oppressive norms undermines autonomy by preventing us from appreciating alternatives, then it seems as though the lack of exposure to alternatives in the cases above should undermine autonomy as well.

However, I take it to be implausible that our preference for watching a movie in English is not autonomous since we have not been exposed to adequate alternatives, or that a parent cannot autonomously choose to pierce their young daughter’s ears (I would maintain that they *shouldn’t* do this, but we can autonomously choose to do things we ought not do). It’s a desideratum of a theory of autonomy that it be humanly possible to be autonomous (and, in fact, many theorists want a theory according to which *most* people and choices count as autonomous), but given the unavoidability of socialization throughout various aspects of our lives, Stoljar’s approach seems to give us the result that many, if not most, of our choices are lacking in autonomy. Perhaps Stoljar would want to say that there is something special about the internalization of false oppressive norms that causes it to undermine procedural independence in a particularly pernicious way, or

perhaps she would want to say that it undermines autonomy regardless of its effects on procedural independence. If she were to choose the former, she would need to give us some reason for thinking this is so, and if she were to choose the latter, she would have to simply stipulate that the internalization of false oppressive norms undermines autonomy with no explanation why. Given the large number of autonomy theorists who do not share her intuitions about the cases she uses to motivate her view, relying solely on those intuitions seems to be a problematic way to go.

I have argued so far that while the leading substantive theories of autonomy are able to provide intuitive response to a number of important cases, like the enslaved person, the victim of gaslighting, or the women who forgo contraception because they have internalized false oppressive norms, they face serious challenges that should prompt us to look elsewhere for our substantive account of autonomy. In the next sections, I show that even though these particular conditions for autonomy fail, they share a motivation which, when appealed to directly, may be able to provide us with a plausible approach to understanding autonomy.

## **2.4 The Importance of Self-Respect for the Standard Theories**

Although the conditions discussed above are problematic for various reasons, it seems to me that they have in common an underlying concern for self-respect. Thus, it is worth considering what a theory of autonomy would look like with self-respect as a necessary condition for autonomy. In this section, I begin by describing features of self-respect according to popular approaches, and I go on to explain how the views discussed above ultimately seem to be motivated by a concern for the kinds of self-guidance that self-respect promotes.

One of the most influential accounts of self-respect comes from Robin Dillon's various works on the topic. While it is not possible in this paper to provide a detailed discussion of her view or a precise definition of self-respect that encompasses all of its aspects, it will be useful for our purposes to consider some cases of individuals who seem to lack self-respect. These include, according to Dillon, the *Servile*, the *Ashamed*, and the *Self-Doubter*. Consider first the *Servile*. This person, according to Dillon, disavows "their moral rights, either because they do not understand that they have these rights or what having these rights signifies about their status in the moral community, or because they do not properly value their rights." (p. 126) "Moral rights" in this context are just the rights one has as a person to fair consideration and treatment, and Dillon claims that those rights represent and protect "one's moral status and worth as a person." (p. 126) To lack an appreciation of these rights, then, is to fail to see or properly care about what it is that they represent about us, namely, that we have the same moral worth as those around us, that we deserve respect and consideration, that our preferences and goals matter just as much as anyone else's preferences and goals, etc. The *Servile* would then be comfortable consistently deferring to others on matters of significance to them merely because they do not sufficiently appreciate the value of their own preferences, and they would be comfortable allowing others to mistreat them because of their lack of appreciation of their worth.

A second example of someone who lacks self-respect is the *Ashamed*, or someone who takes themselves to have failed to live up to some significant standards that determine one's worth or standing. They have some idea of what it takes to live a worthwhile life or be a person that it is worth being, and they take themselves not to

measure up. This person's lack of self-respect shows us, according to Dillon, that self-respect requires confidence in the worth of one's values and in one's ability to live up to them. The final example, the *Self-Doubter*, need not have taken themselves to have already failed in living up to some significant standards as the *Ashamed* does. Instead, they simply lack confidence in their ability to do so in the future. Perhaps they come to doubt the worth of those values altogether and their ability to evaluate them, or perhaps they doubt their ability to live up to them. This shows that self-respect requires us to have confidence in our evaluative skills and our practical reasoning abilities.

With some idea of what is required to be self-respecting, we can now consider how self-respect relates to the necessary conditions for autonomy that are proposed by Benson and Stoljar. We see a direct relationship between Benson's conditions for autonomy and the conditions for self-respect when we consider the subjective component of his view. This is the condition according to which the autonomous person must take themselves to be answerable for their choices, or to have the standing and competence to act in the relevant context. Consider Benson's own discussion of some of the cases that motivate his view:

The psychologically degraded slaves whom I described lost (or failed to gain) respect for their own moral dignity as persons. The victim of gaslighting and the person experiencing shame normally would not completely lack moral self-respect. And whereas the gaslighted woman is liable to doubt her competence to make reasonable evaluations of herself, the ashamed person normally trusts his evaluative assessments of himself. So these agents differ considerably in the kinds of self-worth they lack. What, then, is the common element among them which accounts for their diminished freedom? (1994; p. 659)

Benson's answer to this question is that "The person's view of herself has been altered so that she does not regard herself as being in a position to meet various normative standards

that she would judge to govern her interpersonal interactions.” (p. 660) But a more straightforward answer is in Benson’s own description of the cases: they each lack a certain sense of self-worth. The slave in his example has clear similarities with Dillon’s example of the *Servile*, and the person who is a victim of gaslighting is a clear example of a *Self-Doubter*. Of course, Benson’s example of the person who lacks confidence in their standing as someone who is answerable for their choices because of their shame is clearly parallel to Dillon’s *Ashamed*. So if self-respect is a requirement for autonomy, we can explain the lack of autonomy in those from Benson’s examples by appealing directly to their lack of self-respect.

The relevance of self-respect is also obvious in Stoljar’s account of autonomy. The crucial condition for autonomy that she proposes is that an autonomous choice cannot be motivated by the acceptance of false, oppressive norms. Note that it is not adequate that the norms be either false *or* oppressive; they must have both features in order to undermine autonomy. One might wonder why this should seem plausible, especially given that, as we determined in Section II, there is no straightforward route from requiring procedural independence to requiring this specific combination of features—that is, it seems just as plausible that false norms that are *not* oppressive, for example, interfere with procedural independence. I suspect that the reason this particular requirement seems plausible is that it is related to self-respect in a way that other factors potentially related to procedural independence are not. When a norm is oppressive, it tends to cause those who it oppresses to think less of themselves than they otherwise would, and when oppressive norms are false, they cause this self-deprecation to occur when it is unwarranted. So false oppressive norms are particularly interesting because



they tend to cause people to lack a sense of self-respect, or to think of themselves as having less dignity than they in fact have.

In Stoljar's case of the women who have internalized the norms about what a woman ought to be like and have, as a result, failed to use contraception before engaging in sexual activity, they clearly lack some of the features of self-respect that Dillon has identified. They believe that their worth as a woman depends in part on their sexual activity and fail to appreciate that their moral status as a person depends not at all on things like sexual activity but rather on their personhood itself. Some of these women also experience self-doubt and perhaps also shame, which is what Benson would focus on, but they need not experience these things on Stoljar's view in order to lack autonomy. Similarly, they need not experience these things in order to lack self-respect. For believing that one's worth as a person is precarious and that it can be lost is sufficient to lack an appreciation of one's value and the treatment one is entitled to as a result of that. I want to suggest that Stoljar takes false oppressive norms to undermine autonomy precisely because they function by causing certain individuals to feel compelled to do things because their self-worth hangs in the balance. If this is right, then it is self-respect more generally that Stoljar is concerned with, not false, oppressive norms in particular, and these norms will undermine autonomy insofar as they undermine self-respect.

In this section I have argued that the leading accounts of autonomy rely on conditions for autonomy that importantly related to self-respect. Benson's requirement for normative competency requires us to take ourselves to be capable of properly evaluating our own goals and preferences and of effectively pursuing them, and Stoljar's requirement that we not be motivated by the acceptance of false, oppressive norms

requires that we not be motivated by a sense of *having* to do something or else losing our worth as a person. All of this is clearly related to self-respect. The question now is just whether a direct appeal to self-respect as a necessary condition for autonomy can lead to plausible responses to the kinds of cases Benson and Stoljar are concerned with without also leading to the problems their theories face as outlined in Section II. In the next section, I address these issues by first discussing some ways in which self-respect is importantly related to self-guidance. I then sketch the theory of autonomy that would result from making self-respect a necessary condition for autonomy, show how this theory can give us the desired results in the relevant cases, and argue that this theory is free from the problems that Benson's and Stoljar's theories face.

## **2.5 Self-Respect as a Necessary Condition for Autonomy**

The goal of this section is to get a better idea of what a theory of autonomy would look like with self-respect as a necessary condition, and to show that this theory would be free from the problems that Benson and Stoljar face.<sup>12</sup> The first thing to consider is whether this approach to autonomy has sufficient motivation in the first place, or whether self-respect has any clear relevance to self-guidance. It seems to me that it does. Consider first the ways in which this is made clear from a review of Benson's theory of autonomy. He claims that one condition for guiding one's choices is taking oneself to be capable of guiding one's choices. If a person feels genuinely incapable of choosing the course of their life and gives up on the task altogether, then there is an important sense in which

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<sup>12</sup> I am certainly not the first to propose that self-respect is importantly related to autonomy, or even that it is necessary for autonomy. See, for example, Hill, 1991; Meyers, 1989; Westlund, 2003. However, there has been no detailed exploration of what an account of this type would look like or how it could account for various cases.

they are no longer doing it. As I pointed out in Section II, this appeal to one's sense of oneself as capable of directing one's life just is an appeal to a feature of self-respect. The self-respecting person is not the *Self-Doubter*; they believe in their ability to form worthwhile life plans and to pursue those plans effectively (though of course there is certainly room to fail in spite of making a competent effort), and they take themselves to have the standing to do so for themselves. And as Benson has pointed out, taking oneself to be capable of and having the standing to guide one's life is necessary for guiding one's life in some significant sense.

Stoljar's theory also helps us see some of the ways in which self-respect is importantly related to self-guidance. Her concern with the effects of internalized, false, oppressive norms seems to reveal that there's something about taking our self-worth to be at risk of being lost that undermines our ability to guide our choices. We again see features of the *Self-Doubter*, who is concerned that any false move could cause them to lose the standing to choose the course of their life or to lose the capacity to do so effectively. There seems to be something parallel to coercion going on, in that when one is coerced to do something, one chooses to do it but only because the alternative is unacceptable; we say that people in situations like this are forced, or that they had no choice but to do what they did. In the cases Stoljar is concerned with, we take ourselves to face the prospect of either losing our worth as a person or making a particular choice. It seems quite plausible to me that when we face the possibility of losing the very features about us that give us the standing or capacity to choose at all, we lack the ability to guide the course of our lives and are instead driven to preserve our self-worth. Of course, we are never actually at risk of losing our self-worth or the standing to choose our course in

life simply by choosing to be sexually active, etc., but if we believe that we face this risk then we will be compelled to make certain choices all the same. Only once we have confidence that our capacity to guide our choices and our worth as a person are stable and incapable of being undermined by any choices we might make will we be in a position to choose for ourselves how to live our lives.

A final way in which self-respect seems to be directly relevant to autonomy is that we cannot be guided by someone unless we have some kind of respect for them; thus, if we lack this respect for ourselves or some crucial component of ourselves, then we cannot be guided by it. The kind of respect that I take to be necessary in order for us to be guided by something is what Stephen Darwall calls *recognition respect* (1995). We have this form of respect for something or someone when we are disposed to recognize the significance of some thing or some feature of a thing, to give it appropriate weight in our deliberations, and to act accordingly. Robin Dillon, for example, claims that we can have this kind of respect for a mountain when we recognize how dangerous it would be to climb it, or for an agreement that we've made when we appreciate the significance of violating it (1997). On this way of understanding respect, it's simply built into what it means to respect something that we are guided by it in the appropriate ways. And it is difficult to see how we could possibly be guided by something *without* having this kind of respect for it. It seems reasonable to conclude that we cannot be guided by our selves unless we respect our selves, where I am understanding our moral status, or rational capacities, and our particularity as being fundamental to who we are. We must then have respect for these components of ourselves in order to be autonomous.

These are just a few of the ways in which I take self-guidance and self-respect to be importantly related to one another. A more complete discussion of the relationship is better suited for a paper of its own. But given that we have some reasons for thinking that the two are connected, it is now worth thinking about what a theory of autonomy would look like with self-respect as a necessary condition. Again, a complete account of this is not suitable for this paper, but we need to understand what this theory would be like well enough to assess 1) whether it can account for the cases Benson and Stoljar are concerned with, and 2) whether it faces the same problems their theories do.

Following Dillon's discussion of self-respect, I maintain that proper self-respect has at least three components: we must respect ourselves as persons with equal moral standing to those around us; we must respect ourselves as rational agents by reflecting on our reasons for action and our motivations in order to ensure that they are worthy of us; and we must respect ourselves in our particularity as the persons we are by appreciating the distinctive qualities we have and striving to live up to worthwhile standards we set for ourselves. By considering what kinds of self-guidance the self-respecting person would engage in, we get a nice picture of what autonomy with self-respect as a necessary condition would look like. So, for example, the self-respecting person would not defer to others because of a sense that their opinions matter less than others' do. They would not live a life of passivity because they take themselves to lack the ability or the standing to make decisions about how to live. They would not debase themselves by acting in ways that conflict with the values that they take to partially constitute who they are, nor would they idly allow their rational abilities to grow duller by underutilizing them because of a lack of appreciation of their value.

It follows from this conception of self-respect, along with accepting self-respect as a necessary condition for autonomy, that one's choice to defer to others because of an improper appreciation of one's value would not be fully autonomous. Our choices regarding how to live our lives would also lack autonomy if they were motivated by a lack of confidence in our ability or standing to make such choices. There would also be a lack of autonomy in one's choice to, say, start making cheap, low-quality prints of one's artwork for sake of making money, so long as one would have made a different choice had one appreciated how deeply one valued art and one's own artistic abilities. The choice to work a mind-numbing job and come home to watch hours of bad television before going to bed would also not be fully autonomous if it were motivated by a lack of appreciation of the value of one's rational capacities. Of course, a choice could be autonomous in some ways but lacking autonomy in other ways. Perhaps one's choice to spend all of one's free time watching television is autonomous insofar as it is consistent with one's conception of oneself as a being with moral worth equal to that of others, but it could still be lacking autonomy in another sense—thus, my talk of these choices not being *fully* autonomous. We need not (and often *should* not) claim that the choices lack autonomy altogether.

Given this picture of what autonomous choices are like, must now consider whether the appeal to self-respect as a necessary condition of autonomy can account for the many cases Benson and Stoljar discuss to motivate their own theories. Benson's enslaved person, who consistently defers to non-enslaved individuals around him because he takes himself to lack the standing and ability to choose for himself, clearly lacks self-respect and so would not be fully autonomous on my approach. Neither would the victim

of gaslighting who doubts her competence to make choices about her life, or the women who do not use contraception because they do not believe that they have the ability to make these significant choices about their lives. The women who do believe in their capacity to choose and still choose not to use contraception because of their belief that doing so would cause them to lose their worth as a person are also lacking in autonomy on this view because their choice is inconsistent with a proper appreciation of their worth as persons.

Since this approach to understanding autonomy does seem to be able to account for the kinds of failures of autonomy that Benson, Stoljar, and other proponents of substantive views are concerned with, the remaining question is whether it is subject to the same problems these other views are. Recall that the problem for Benson's view is that the subjective component of his requirement—that individuals take themselves to be answerable for their choices—requires an objective component as well, and he has yet to propose a plausible objective component. His first suggestion led to a view that resulted in our lacking autonomy whenever we are being held to standards we do not know we are being held to or are not competent with respect to. This seems like too broad of a requirement. His more recent suggestion is that our sense of ourselves as answerable for our choices must be able to survive rational consideration of the circumstances in which that confidence arose. Here the problem is in determining what is involved in “rational consideration”—too lenient an understanding of this will not give Benson the results he wants. On the other hand, too stringent an understanding of this will require us to have access to certain facts we currently lack access to, and this leads to the problem of non-

arbitrarily determining what information we must have access to in order to be autonomous.

The view I propose faces none of these problems. Self-respect is a multifaceted phenomenon that contains within it both subjective and objective components. For example, believing that one respects oneself is not sufficient for respecting oneself; there are certain attitudes and beliefs one must have in order to in fact respect oneself. This gives us one objective component. On the other hand, some of those beliefs and attitudes that partially constitute self-respect are beliefs and attitudes about one's self—one's value, one's abilities, one's standing among others, etc.—so there is a subjective component as well. Additionally, we need not claim that a person's autonomy is undermined any time they lack competence with respect to some particular normative standards, nor need we depend on a notion of rationality that leads us to implausible results any way we define it.

Accepting self-respect as a necessary condition for autonomy also does not lead to the problematic results we get from Stoljar's view. Her theory ends up either theoretically unmotivated, inconsistent, or with far too many restrictions on what choices are autonomous. This is because her concern with false oppressive norms is either related to concerns about procedural independence or it is not. If it *is* related to concerns with procedural independence, then it seems as though the acceptance of *any* falsehood should undermine autonomy; but this is a very implausible way to go. If Stoljar were to maintain that she cares about some falsehoods on the grounds of procedural independence but not others, this would seem to result in an inconsistent view (unless she were able to give us a principled explanation of why some matter and some don't, as I have attempted to do).



Alternatively, if she were to maintain that false oppressive norms matter for autonomy for no explicable reason, this seems to give us an unmotivated account of autonomy.

Although she is able to deliver plausible responses to cases, a theory which could give similar results but with a nice explanation of why would be far preferable. It would also be preferable for her to have a unified theory that can also account for cases like Benson's gaslighting victim. The theory I propose faces none of these problems. I have argued that there are clear ways in which self-respect is importantly related to self-guidance, so the view is motivated (while still being able to account for Stoljar's cases). It can also account for Stoljar's as well as Benson's intuitions about various cases with one unified explanation.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The goal of this paper was to motivate a new approach to understanding autonomy by problematizing some of the popular substantive theories of autonomy and pointing out a common motivation between them. By appealing to the common motivation directly, I argued that we can construct a new theory of autonomy that produces positive results without facing the same problems its alternatives do. In particular, I argued that the theories of autonomy proposed by Paul Benson and Natalie Stoljar are both motivated by a concern for the ways in which self-respect seems importantly related to autonomy. By taking self-respect itself as a necessary condition for autonomy, we end up with a view that is well-motivated, can explain a number of important intuitions, and that avoids the problems Benson and Stoljar face. Of course, a more complete explanation of self-respect and the proposed theory of autonomy is

needed. However, I take it that, at the very least, such an approach is worth taking seriously as a new substantive theory of autonomy.

## CHAPTER 3

### SELF-RESPECT AND SELF-GUIDANCE: THE AUTONOMOUS PERSON AS THE SELF-RESPECTING PERSON

#### 3.1 Introduction

The idea that autonomy and self-respect are intimately related is not new. Kant's own account of these phenomena—an account that has inspired most, if not all, of our current discussions of self-respect and autonomy—maintained that we could not have one without the other. That is, we are not exercising our capacity for autonomy if we are not respecting ourselves, on this account, and we are not respecting ourselves if we are not exercising our capacity for autonomy. Today, most theories of both autonomy and self-respect stray far from what Kant had in mind, and many contain explicit criticisms of his views. Nonetheless, it is still quite common to maintain that recognizing a relationship between these two phenomena is critical for understanding one or the other of them.

Among those whose aim is to understand self-respect, we have people like Robin Dillon who explicitly claims in various works that properly respecting ourselves requires us to strive to be autonomous (1992, 1997). Elizabeth Telfer, in her explanation of what is required for self-respect, claims that people lack self-respect "if they are not 'their own masters' in a metaphorical sense—not in control of themselves" (1995; 111). From the other side, many of those attempting to determine what is required for an agent to be autonomous maintain that there is a close relationship here as well. Diana Meyers (1995), for example, argues that not only does autonomy increase self-respect, but self-respect also increases autonomy. And Paul Benson (1994) and Marina Oshana (2006) both claim that we do not meet the standards for autonomous agency unless we respect ourselves.

However, while there is significant agreement regarding the important relationship between autonomy and self-respect, there is much less agreement regarding what, exactly, either of these things is, and how the two are related. In what follows, I look for common ground among those who discuss self-respect in order to find some features of self-respect that are generally accepted as important. I then consider how self-respect, understood in this way, can inform our understanding of autonomy by considering the various requirements for self-respect that are relevant to self-guidance. In this paper, the goal is simply to lay out some features of this self-respect inspired conception of autonomy, and not to explain it in great detail or defend it against potential objections. Nonetheless, I will point out some ways in which the resulting theory of autonomy is consistent with various views that are currently taken quite seriously in order to motivate its initial plausibility.

In Section I, I identify and explain three core features of self-respect that those in the literature generally seem to agree on, namely, appreciation of our own value, appreciation of the value of reasons and rationality, and appreciation of the value of acting in accordance with our personal values. In Section II, I consider the relationship between self-respect and morality. In particular, I'm concerned with whether or not the self-respecting person must necessarily be a morally good person or at least be motivated to be morally good. This is important for my project because my goal is to present us with a theory of autonomy that is determined by the requirements of self-respect; if being moral is required to respect oneself, and respecting oneself is required for being autonomous, then this would leave us with a view according to which immoral actions cannot be committed autonomously. Given the implausibility of a view like this, it's

something I'd like to avoid. However, as I will argue, while morality is related to self-respect in important ways, we need not be particularly good people to be self-respecting. Finally, in Section III, I will remind us of the features of self-respect that are related to self-guidance in order to formulate a sketch of a theory of autonomy that is grounded in self-respect.

### **3.2 Three Features of Self-Respect**

One of the most influential accounts of self-respect is Stephen Darwall's in his "Two Kinds of Self-Respect" (1995). In it, he distinguishes between what he calls *recognition respect*, on the one hand, and *appraisal respect*, on the other. To have appraisal respect for someone is to have "an attitude of positive appraisal of that person either as a person or as engaged in some particular pursuit" (184). While we certainly can have appraisal respect of ourselves, either by having a positive appraisal of ourselves overall or by having a positive appraisal of some feature of ourselves (our commitment to some good cause, for example), I will not focus on this form of self-respect because it has less to tell us regarding self-guidance than recognition respect does.

Recognition respect, as he defines it, is a disposition to recognize the significance of some thing or some feature of a thing, to give it appropriate weight in one's deliberations, and to act accordingly. Dillon in "Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political" (1997; 227) claims that we can have this kind of respect for a mountain when we recognize how dangerous it would be to climb it, or for an agreement that we've made when we appreciate the significance of violating it. For our purposes, though, it makes sense to focus on the ways in which we might have recognition respect for ourselves. It is almost unanimous in the philosophical literature on self-respect that all persons are due

respect in virtue of the fact that we are persons. The question, then, is regarding what features of persons are significant enough to warrant consideration. It seems to me that the consensus in the literature is that the following three features of persons warrant being taken into consideration: simply that they are persons, that they have the capacity for rationality, and that they are the particular persons they are.<sup>13</sup> I'll consider each of these in turn.

### **3.2.1 Respecting Ourselves as Persons**

The first and perhaps most obvious feature of persons that is frequently taken to warrant recognition and consideration is that they are persons. Of course, it isn't obvious what it is about persons, exactly, that makes it such that we warrant consideration, but although there is disagreement about *why* we matter, those concerned with self-respect tend to agree about much of what follows from the (purported) fact that we matter. Much of what is said on this subject is inspired by Kant, who maintained that, in the first place, all persons deserve equal consideration, and all persons' morally permissible ends matter to the same degree (Kant cited in Hill, 1980). If we were to take this seriously about ourselves, then, we would appreciate the fact that our preferences, goals, etc. are worthy of no less consideration than anyone else's. Kant claims that it follows from this that we may not degrade ourselves in various ways, and while much of what he says on this subject is contentious, there is significant agreement with his claim that consistently

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<sup>13</sup> These three categories or features of recognition self-respect are inspired by and very similar to ones that Dillon discusses in many of her papers (see, for example, 1992, 1995a., 1995b., 1997, 2004). However, I do not follow her way of dividing them up exactly.

being servile to others or allowing others to violate or ignore our rights and our status constitutes a failure to appreciate the respect we are due as persons.

Darwall, for example, echoes these claims when he gives us the following list of actions that are incompatible with self-respect: "Submitting to indignities, playing the fool, not caring about whether one is taken seriously and being content to be treated as the plaything of others ..." (1995; 111). So if we were to allow ourselves to be mistreated, degraded, or consistently ignored by others, we would, all other things equal, be failing to respect ourselves.<sup>14</sup> Unlike appraisal self-respect, or the respect we might have for ourselves if we have a positive attitude toward ourselves (perhaps because we're pleased with our good behavior), recognition self-respect is something we owe ourselves regardless of our character or how we compare to those around us. Thus, there is nothing we could do to deserve to be treated in these ways or to make the treatment defensible. This is something that self-respect requires us to recognize about ourselves.

Probably the most famous proponent of this form of self-respect is Thomas Hill with his example of the Deferential Wife (1991a). The Deferential Wife believes that women ought to serve their families, so she is happy to defer to her husband on issues such as what she wears, who she is friends with, where they live, and so on. While she has preferences of her own on these matters, she takes them to be less significant than

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<sup>14</sup> There are, of course, far too many cases in which *not* allowing oneself to be mistreated, degraded, or ignored, would result in significantly worse treatment (e.g. slaves defending their moral rights, women confronting their sexual harassers, or abused spouses standing up for themselves.) Discussion of cases like these is rare, but Carol Hay discusses them in *Kantianism, Liberalism, and Feminism*. She claims that as long as one mentally acknowledges the wrongness of their treatment, they have shown themselves sufficient self-respect in circumstances like these. However, she maintains that we are required to give up *some* conveniences for the sake of self-respect. Exactly how to determine when we must act and when we may simply acknowledge our mistreatment is unclear.

those of her husband so she takes no issue with doing as he pleases with no regard for her own desires. She falsely believes that her own goals and preferences count for less than her husband's do; this reveals a failure to appreciate that she and her husband are moral equals, or that they have the same moral standing and are due the same consideration.<sup>15</sup> The kind of self-respect that she lacks is recognition self-respect for herself as a person.

Hill also provides as examples the Uncle Tom and the Self-Deprecator. The Uncle Tom is a black man who believes that black people are owed less than white people are. He defers to white people and is grateful for whatever his government and employers provide him with, even when it is consistently less than his white peers receive. He believes that "what he values, aspires for, and can demand is of less importance than what whites value, aspire for, and can demand" (page?). The Self-Deprecator, in contrast to the Deferential Wife and the Uncle Tom, takes himself to have less value than others because of his character and his actions. While his moral inadequacies are real, the conclusion he draws from them regarding his worth as a person are mistaken. He fails to realize that, although he has failed himself and those around him, this does not justify others in mistreating him and using him. He feels a deep sense of shame and self-hatred that ignores the respect he is due in virtue merely of being a person.

In all three of these cases, recognizing ourselves as respect-worthy in virtue of our being persons provides us with restrictions on what attitudes we may have, what we may do, and how we may allow ourselves to be treated. But while they tell us much about how

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<sup>15</sup> Hill actually describes the failure of self-respect in this case and the following case as a failure to appreciate one's moral rights. However, he doesn't tell us what our moral rights are or why we count as violating them by deferring to others, so it isn't clear to me that this is the best way to explain the lack of self-respect in these cases.



a self-respecting person would *not* behave, they don't tell us much about how a self-respecting person *would* behave. Bernard Boxill provides us with helpful insight regarding some of the positive requirements of respecting oneself as a person. He explains that when a person respects herself, she *cares* about respecting herself. This echoes Dillon's claim that the self-respecting person "values valuing herself appropriately" (2004; 49). The idea is that when we appreciate the value we have, we care about having the proper attitudes toward ourselves. Knowing that we have value causes us to want to continue knowing it and to respond appropriately to this fact.

This becomes especially important in cases in which those around us ignore or deny the fact that we have value as persons. Since allowing ourselves to be treated in this way is a sign of a failure of self-respect, we might start to worry that we do not, in fact, respect ourselves in cases in which we have no choice but to allow others to deny our worth. Boxill claims that, in cases like these, "the powerless but self-respecting person... is driven to make his claim to self-respect unmistakable...[H]e will declare his self-respect. He will protest" (1995; 102). There is an abundance of cases of this sort that arose in the civil rights movement. One clear example of this is the Memphis sanitation workers' strike of 1968 when, in response to dangerous working conditions and low wages, the black workers went on strike. They held signs that read "I AM A MAN," thereby asserting their equal worth with white men in the society and their entitlement to equal respect and consideration. So in cases in which our value is denied, the self-respecting person will insist that they do, in fact, have value. If we can't respond directly to those who deny our worth—perhaps because doing so would put us in danger, or perhaps because our worth is denied systematically rather than by any individual—we

will attempt to find some other way to declare our worth. Protest is one positive, active way in which a self-respecting person can affirm their value.

### **3.2.2 Respecting Ourselves as Rational Agents**

A second feature of persons that warrants respect is that they have the capacity for rational agency. This capacity is generally understood as a cluster of abilities such as the ability to engage in theoretical reasoning, understand how to achieve our ends, recognize inconsistencies in our goals or desires, act in accordance with reasons, and develop our rational capacities so that we can exercise them with accuracy and consistency. This is why Kant thought that we fail to respect ourselves when we become drunk, thereby diminishing our ability to think clearly and act rationally (Kant cited in Hill, 1980). Telfer motivates this idea that our rational agency is due respect when she claims that "[w]e naturally identify the self with the reason and speak of a man as 'not his own master' if reason is not in control... thus we think of a man who is 'enslaved' to drink, or who is swayed from his purposes by emotion, as lacking in self-respect" (1995; 111).

We see this same idea in Andrea C. Westlund's "Autonomy and Self Care" when she claims that "the agent who cares about herself...cares about her reasons" (2014; 194). The underlying thought here is that when we have respect for ourselves, we are concerned with our reasons for choosing to engage in one course of action rather than another. We would feel as though we let ourselves down if we were to act for mistaken reasons or to care about things that have negative value. Part of what matters about us as persons is our ability to choose what activities to engage in, and this is an ability that the self-respecting person takes seriously. We are not fully appreciating our value if we are not appreciating the value of utilizing these capacities. Dillon echoes this idea in her

discussion of what she calls "agentic recognition self-respect." She explains that "insofar as [the self-respecting person] understands herself to have some control over her conduct and character, she can regard the dignity she has as a person as both demanding and constraining the exercise of her agency in living her life, as giving rise to a responsibility to shape herself and direct her living so that they are congruent with and honor her dignity as a person" (2004; 51).

This leads the self-respecting person to engage in a certain amount of self-reflection on her values and her motivations and to self-revise as she deems it appropriate. In addition, she will be concerned with understanding others' perspectives on these matters. If someone denies that what she values is, in fact, valuable, she will want to engage with them in order to determine whether or not she has made a mistake. If someone has insights regarding her motivations for acting in a particular way that suggest that she was mistaken about why she did what she did, this will be of great interest to her. Thus, the self-respecting person is motivated to engage with others in an attempt to better understand herself and to better herself.

However, Dillon points out in "What's a Woman Worth?" that while the self-respecting person is necessarily motivated to reflect on her reasons and motivations in order to improve her ability to engage in practical reasoning, she does not have serious doubts about her ability to engage in practical reasoning. She knows that it is a capacity that requires her attention in order for it to function properly, but this is consistent with her trusting her abilities. If she did have serious doubts about her practical reasoning abilities, or take them to be generally less reliable than those of others, she would thereby have compromised self-respect. An interesting point about this is that we humans tend to

need affirmation from others, so if we consistently hear from others that we lack a particular ability, it will be difficult if not impossible for us to believe that we have it. As a result, to respect oneself by respecting one's capacity to engage in practical reasoning, we must receive confirmation from others that we have this capacity. In this sense, our ability to respect ourselves depends on being respected to some extent by others.

We may worry, in response to Dillon's claims here, that perhaps we *ought* to have some doubts about our practical reasoning abilities, so perhaps her conditions for self-respect require us to be overly optimistic. After all, surely not everyone has the same practical reasoning abilities, so perhaps some people *should* take theirs to be less reliable than others'. And there's an abundance of social psychology research that seems to show that our practical reasoning abilities are perhaps not as good as we typically take them to be. This seems just right to me, so while I agree with Dillon that trust in our practical reasoning abilities is crucial for self-respect, it seems to me that we'll need some alternative way of spelling out what this trust needs to involve.

One very practical implication of this feature of recognition self-respect is discussed by Carol Hay in *Kantianism, Liberalism, and Feminism* (2013). She is concerned in particular with the ways in which the sexual harassment of women contributes to women's oppression, and she argues that respecting oneself requires women to confront those who sexually harass them (assuming that doing so won't put them in danger, etc.). This is because women's oppression reduces our capacity to effectively engage in practical reasoning. We are conditioned to believe that certain goals are worth having even when they are not, and we are taught that certain courses of action are best for our well-being when in fact they diminish our well-being. Since oppression

undermines a crucial feature of ourselves that has value, and since sexual harassment contributes to our oppression, we must fight back in whatever ways we can against our sexual harassment. This means letting harassers know that we will not stand for it whenever doing so is plausibly conducive to reducing the prevalence of harassment.

### **3.2.3 Respecting Ourselves as Individuals**

So far, I have discussed the importance of respecting ourselves as persons and respecting ourselves as agents who act for good reasons. Being a person and being an agent with the capacity to act for reasons are features that all persons have in just the same way. These capacities do not distinguish us from one another but instead highlight what we all have in common. To say that persons are valuable only insofar as we have these features is to say, as Dillon puts it, that "[i]ndividual humans are objects of respect only insofar as they are instances of some universal type" (1995b; 57). She claims that this is a hugely problematic way of understanding what makes us valuable because it is self-alienating. It fails to recognize that we have value as the particular individuals that we are rather than merely as instances of a type. It suggests that we can respect ourselves fully as persons without paying attention to any features of ourselves that distinguish us from others. Not only is this approach self-alienating, according to Dillon, but it also seems to rely on a mistaken conception of what selves are. There exist no abstract selves that are blank slates with only the value of persons and the capacity for agency.

Instead, there are only unique individuals with their own sets of desires, projects, and needs. Dillon claims that "we are *essentially* fully specific and concretely particular individuals," (60) and that respecting ourselves therefore requires us to respect the particular persons that we are. Our individuality, Dillon is pointing out, is just as much a

part of what it means to be a person as our moral equality and our rational capacities. This kind of self-respect requires not only appreciating the features we, in fact, have, but also determining what features we think we should strive to have. As Meyers explains, "[h]uman agency...comprises self-chosen constraints on choice. To make only first-order decisions to do this or that, then, is to neglect an important potentiality inherent in personhood, hence to show disrespect for the fact that one is a person" (1995; 220). This is similar to Dillon's discussion of the wanton, who "can have no aims or ideals, no order and design to his life, no clear definition of himself. He therefore cannot be a self-evaluator, nor has he any standards by which to assess himself if he could... [H]e cannot judge certain sorts of behavior and treatment to be degrading or fitting, in keeping with his dignity or beneath him, admirable or despicable, a betrayal of himself, and so on" (1992; 129). Respecting ourselves as the individuals we are, then requires us not only to appreciate ourselves as we are, but also to determine the person we want to be.

Appreciating ourselves as we are does not require a blanket embrace or even acceptance of every single feature of ourselves, but it does require us to appreciate the features of ourselves that distinguish us from others and to be patient with ourselves regarding our flaws. The self-respecting person will, of course, want to engage in self-improvement, but this desire for self-improvement must be consistent with a recognition of the fact that it is impossible for us to be completely without flaws. So respecting ourselves as the individuals we are does not require (or even encourage) us to endorse every characteristic or tendency we have, but it does require us to take seriously those features of ourselves that make us who we are, including some of our values, goals, character traits, and features of ourselves that are out of our control, like intelligence

(Telfer, 1995). In Gabriele Taylor's discussion of what contributes to our individual identity she claims that "what [the agent] thinks very worthwhile doing, and what he thinks very important not to do, contributes essentially to his being one sort of person rather than another," and that we can lose our identity if we consistently fail to act in accordance with these standards (1995; 164). Self-respect requires us to reflect on who we are, to determine what kind of life would be worthwhile for us to live, and to attempt to live in accordance with it.

While these self-defining features of ourselves will result in standards for ourselves that we cannot fall below without displaying a lack of respect for who we are, these standards will differ from person to person. For example, if someone has a talent for teaching, they should appreciate that about themselves and, depending on their values and goals more generally, work on developing that skill. While we need not pursue every talent we happen to have, respecting ourselves requires us to pursue *some* of them. We must also take seriously the values that we take to be constitutive of who we are, even if we do not take them to be objective values that all must appreciate. For example, if I take certain forms of sex work to be debasing for me, then while I need not think that this is a moral standard that all should adhere to, it is one that I should adhere to (Meyers, 1995). And if it seems to me that being a good artist requires me to not "sell out," and I value being a good artist, then I must not sell out (Hill, 1991b). There is a certain consistency that is required here, or a commitment to standing one's ground, and a disregard for who one is for the sake of convenience or acceptance would be to fail to respect oneself. However, a drive for self-improvement is consistent with this; while we cannot mindlessly abandon our values, we can change them if, upon consideration, we determine

that it is what reason demands. After all, self-respect requires us to act for good reasons, so if we determine that our reasons for acting are bad ones then we should give them up.

However, while these norms by which we guide our lives are up to us to some extent, they are also inter-subjective in at least two ways. First, we must take the norms to be the kind of thing that could be recognized by others as worthy of living in accordance with. While they need not endorse the norms themselves, they must be able to appreciate them as worthwhile. If, upon reflection, it seems unlikely to us that most other self-respecting individuals would have this response, then we have good reason to doubt that the relevant norms are fitting for a self-respecting person. For example, if my main goal in life is to make as much money as possible, with little regard for the well-being of those around me, I would be deceiving myself if I thought that others would view this course in life to be worthy of a person. In contrast, the teacher or the artist would have good reason to think that their conception of themselves is one that is worth acting in accordance with. According to Dillon, the self-respecting person "believes she would earn the evaluative respect of those who assess her impartially, for she has confidence in her merit as a person, in the worthiness of her values and in her ability to continue to live in accord with them." (1992; 134)

These standards are also objective in that it is an objective matter whether or not we live up to them. As Telfer explains, "the *fulfillment* of some role is to be tested by an objective standard, even if the choice of role is a personal one" (112). Communication with others becomes relevant at this point as well. We have a better chance of successfully living up to our standards if we do the best we can to determine what, exactly, is required in order to do so. And while we may be able to deceive ourselves into



thinking we've done what we believed we ought to in a particular situation or to make a bad faith decision to suddenly change our values when sticking to them becomes difficult, this is not sufficient for actually conforming to our own standards. Of course, sometimes we decide to change our standards because we've had a change of heart or a conversion experience. In cases like these, we can be self-respecting when we fail to live up to our old standards if doing so is consistent with our new ones.

### **3.3 Self-Respect and Morality**

We now have some understanding of what is required in order for us to have recognition respect for ourselves—namely, we must respect ourselves as persons with equal moral standing to those around us; we must respect ourselves as rational agents by reflecting on our reasons for action and our motivations in order to ensure that they are worthy of us; and we must respect ourselves in our particularity as the persons we are by appreciating the distinctive qualities we have and striving to live up to worthwhile standards we set for ourselves. In the final section of the paper I will sketch a theory of autonomy that is inspired by these features of self-respect, as it seems to me that what we are concerned about when we discuss the autonomy of persons is really the degree to which persons are engaged in the kind of self-guidance that a self-respecting person would engage in.

Before doing so, however, it's important to consider the ways in which self-respect and morality might be related. This is because it will be important to consider the degree to which autonomy and morality might be related. A theory of self-respect that requires us to strive for moral perfection may seem rather plausible (and seems to be endorsed by some of the authors discussed above), but a theory of autonomy with this requirement

would be rejected outright by most (including me). For this reason, it's important for me to argue before we move on that while morality is always importantly related to self-respect, our choices need not be a morally good ones for them to count as consistent with self-respect.

In what follows, I begin by distinguishing between self-esteem and self-respect to make clear the way in which morality is necessarily related to self-respect. I then explain what some authors take to follow from this regarding what kind of people we will be morally if we do, in fact, respect ourselves. For some, quite a range of moral failings prevent us from counting as a properly self-respecting person, but this is a bad result for me since it would follow from this that these moral failings prevent us from being autonomous as well. In the final part of this section, I'll argue that we don't have good reason to believe that these moral failings must prevent us from counting as properly self-respecting after all.

### **3.3.1 Self-Respect versus Self-Esteem**

It may seem somewhat intuitive that morality need not have any connection with self-respect. After all, consider Dillon's example of the unscrupulous business person whose sole purpose in life is to make money, regardless of who he must trample on in the process (2004). We could easily imagine him being very good at reaching his goals and feeling quite pleased with himself as a result. He could have an image of himself as successful, competent, and rational, and given this, it can seem appropriate to describe him as having respect for himself in spite of the fact that he is a very morally bad person. But if someone so immoral can have what appears to be self-respect, then it seems as though we have no reason to think that morality need be involved here at all.

In response to this case, Dillon points out that a crucial feature of self-respect is a recognition of one's value and a pursuit of a life that one takes to be worthy of something with such value. Pursuing such a life involves evaluating our actions, motives, and values, and attempting to determine whether they are the kinds of things that other self-respecting people would endorse as worthwhile. We have to take our pursuits to be objectively justified, and to the extent that it is implausible that we do, in fact, take them to be justified in this way, it also becomes implausible that we are truly motivated by self-respect. After all, while there is some leeway in what kinds of goals a self-respecting person can set for themselves, there are rational constraints on them as well. Regarding the business person, Dillon claims that "it is difficult to see his attitude as anything other than inordinate ego-driven self-esteem" (2004; 61).<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to self-respect, self-esteem—as it is typically taken to be understood by psychologists—merely involves our positive evaluation of some feature(s) of ourselves, where this positive evaluation need not be based on a concern for our own value or the worthiness of our actions. Dillon describes it as "not so much grounded or justified as caused (by one's relationships with others, for example)," but when there is a justification for one's self-esteem it can be pretty much anything that one takes to have an important connection to oneself (1995a; 30). One's looks, wealth, partner, car, hometown, and so on can all contribute to one's self-esteem even when none of these things is taken

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<sup>16</sup> I will argue later that there are ways of understanding what's going on in the case of the unscrupulous business person according to which he does have self-respect after all, but what's important here is just seeing the distinction between self-esteem and self-respect.

to be up to oneself or worthy of pursuit for a being with the kind of value that persons have.

An additional distinction is between the focus of self-respect versus that of self-esteem. When we are motivated by self-esteem, we are motivated by our desire to feel valuable, but when we are motivated by self-respect, we are motivated by our belief that we already are valuable, or that we have a kind of value that cannot be earned. This is compatible with the fact that respecting ourselves requires us to take charge of our lives in various ways because while we want our pursuits and our characters to match the worth that we have, our worth is not at risk of diminishing if we fail. Our concern when we are motivated by self-respect is not one about whether or not we ourselves have value, but one about whether or not our commitments and life plans are worthy for someone with the value that we have (1995; 173). The self-respecting person is not pursuing happiness, but instead an ability to recognize those things that have value and to pursue them. While the person with a high self-esteem may not be motivated to reflect on the course of their lives and the kind of people they are, as doing so might harm their self-esteem, a person with self-respect will be motivated in this way. For the self-respecting person isn't concerned with being able to have a favorable attitude of herself as she would be if she were seeking self-esteem; "her real concern is the objective reality of her worthiness and the appropriateness of her valuing to that reality." (Dillon, 2004; 53)

So there are important distinctions between self-respect and self-esteem, and these distinctions are importantly moral. The value that the self-respecting person takes herself to have is a *moral* value, and the person who merely has self-esteem lacks self-respect because they are not motivated by a recognition of some moral facts about themselves. It

is clear, then, that self-respect is a moral notion, but it is not immediately clear what the consequences of this are in considering what kind of life a self-respecting person can lead or regarding how immoral a self-respecting person can be. If a self-respecting person must be pursuing a life that is worthy of them as a morally valuable individual, then it may seem as though the self-respecting person is necessarily pursuing moral perfection, or that insofar as a person falls short of some moral norm, they thereby fall short of self-respect. In the remaining part of this section, I argue that self-respect does not place these strong moral requirements on us after all.

### **3.3.2 Getting Clear on the Moral Implications for the Self-Respecting Person**

Self-respect and morality could be related in a few ways. One option is that both notions are off/on, and we only have one if we also have the other. Another possibilities is that they both come in degrees, and we have one to the degree that we have the other. A third option, which I will endorse, is that while the two are related, there is no direct correlation between them. That is, we can be perfectly self-respecting while also being seriously morally bad. I will argue that self-respect is simply a recognition of the moral status we have as persons, rational agents, and individuals, and a motivation to act in a way that reflects that value.

Consider first the strongest of these thee options. In Kant's discussion of respect for oneself, or for one's autonomy, he makes it clear that he thinks a perfectly self-respecting person will be a perfectly moral person. For on Kant's view, autonomy is a capacity to legislate and act in accordance with the moral law; this means that when we exercise our capacity for autonomy, we are acting morally (Kant in Dillon, 1995a;14). In addition, when we appreciate the moral value that we ourselves have in virtue of our

capacity for autonomy, we are rationally required to recognize that value in all autonomous beings. This means that “a person shows respect for himself only by treating himself (and others) as an end in himself, that is, by determining his will in accordance with the moral law. According to Kant, the self-respecting person has the attitudes and performs the actions characteristic of the fully virtuous person.” (Massey, 1995; 203).

But while all contemporary views of self-respect take Kant's theory to be far too demanding, it is not uncommon to claim that there is a direct correlation between self-respect and morality. Diana Meyers, for example, claims that “uncompromised self-respect requires the exercise of the complete range of one’s moral faculties,” and that “[t]o the extent that [one's] self-respect is based on conduct that no morally autonomous agent could adopt, it is compromised” (1995; 230). Dillon also makes some claims about certain immoral actions that a self-respecting person simply cannot engage in while remaining self-respecting. She claims that the self-respecting person must appreciate the value of others because “to respect oneself is to understand and value oneself as a person among persons...” (1995b; 63).

It seems to me that Meyers and Dillon are wrong on this point. Regarding Meyers, her claim here seems to rest on the idea that to the extent that we make moral mistakes, we are thereby less self-respecting. The only way that we could possibly adopt faulty norms, she suggests, is by mindlessly following the herd or by intentionally ignoring some features of ourselves and refusing to evaluate them. But it seems clear to me that good-faith efforts to determine how we ought to live can go wrong, and that we can unintentionally ignore some features of ourselves in spite of caring very much about engaging in the kind of self-evaluation that is necessary for ensuring that we are meeting

our own standards. Being a self-respecting person does require us to have a particular conception of ourselves and to be motivated in various ways because of who we take ourselves to be, but I see no reason to suppose that we will always succeed in achieving the goals that self-respect motivates us to pursue. Nonetheless, we may still be fulfilling the requirements of self-respect perfectly.<sup>17</sup>

Consider, for example, Dillon's example of Mrs. Warren from George Bernard Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1894). She is a former prostitute who is now running a brothel, and while many may claim that this is a morally unacceptable way to live, Dillon describes Mrs. Warren as being motivated by her recognition of her own value. Her options are to either live the life she is living or live in filth, desperate for food and in ill health. She claims that Mrs. Warren "cares deeply about being and knowing herself to be worthy, she tries to value herself appropriately, to hold herself to her own conception of what is worthy in defiance of oppressive conventional respectability, to evaluate herself honestly, and to have good reasons for regarding herself as not unworthy." (2004; 61). Some may say that her actions are in tension with what morality requires of us, but Dillon describes her as someone who is trying her hardest to live the life that she thinks she ought to live, or the kind of life that is worthy of her.

Contrast the case of Mrs. Warren with the case of the unscrupulous business person from above. It is hard to believe that someone who lies, cheats, and destroys lives for the sake of monetary gain could be as reflective and eager to live a worthy life as Mrs.

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<sup>17</sup> While I am discussing recognition self-respect throughout this paper, it seems as though Meyers is discussing evaluative self-respect here. If she is discussing evaluative self-respect, her claims are more plausible, but since she doesn't recognize this distinction, it's hard to know for sure what she has in mind. Regardless, the claims she makes are ones that I suspect many would find at least initially plausible when applied to recognition self-respect, so I take them to be worth considering in this way.

Warren is. It was for this reason that Dillon concluded that the business person merely has self-esteem but not self-respect. But suppose he truly does recognize his moral value and is honestly doing the best he can to live a life that is in line with that worth. Suppose that upon deep reflection, discussion with those around him who he takes to be self-respecting, and honest regard for the consequences of his actions he concludes that this way of living is the one that most reflects his value as a person. It's hard to conceive of this as a genuine possibility, but if this were an accurate depiction of the goings-on of the business person, then we would, I think, have to concede that he has full recognition self-respect. For on this description, he is aware of his own moral value, he cares about acting for reasons and making sure those reasons are good ones, and he has an appreciation for his personal strengths and a desire to pursue a course in life that is worthy of pursuit. He has made a horrible mistake, no doubt, but he is self-respecting nonetheless.

Return now to Dillon's claim that a self-respecting person, in recognizing her value as an equal among persons, must also recognize the moral value that all other persons have as well. It seems right to me that to respect ourselves we must have an *accurate* conception of our moral value, which means that we must recognize that our moral value is equal to those around us. However, it also seems to me that we can have a very basic, unreflective appreciation that everyone matters equally while failing to consider all of the implications this might have regarding what kinds of attitudes and actions we should be taking toward others. For self-respect, the crucial step is appreciating our *own* value, and while Kant and Dillon take this value to be conceptually tied to the value of others, it seems to me that, even if they're right, it's quite easy for us humans to appreciate the one without fully appreciating the other.



Additionally, to the extent that we do recognize the value that others have, it seems perfectly possible to make mistakes when trying to determine what requirements fall out of this. It is not clear to me that there are any particular actions that are straightforwardly ruled out merely by acknowledging that all persons have moral value (though there are certain attitudes toward them that I take to be straightforwardly inconsistent with it). Perhaps the business person appreciates the value that all persons have, but believes that he only has obligations to his own family and that harming others is the only way to fulfill those obligations, though he regrets it deeply. And as my students in ethics courses frequently point out, perhaps valuing everyone *requires* us to torture one for the sake of saving hundreds since those hundreds have significant moral value too. Since not all persons have incredibly strong, well-defined Kantian intuitions, it seems very possible to me that they could acknowledge and respect the value of others without taking that to have any clear implications for how they should act.

I agree with Dillon and others that there is a moral component to self-respect in that we cannot count as having recognition respect for ourselves if we do not recognize our own moral value and our moral status as equal to all other persons. However, I do not think that there is very much moral content that must be built into that belief, and I don't think that we have any reason to believe that recognizing this moral equality among persons will necessarily result in an absence of some particular immoral behaviors. In addition, while the self-respecting person should be attempting to live a life that reflects her value, I see no reason to think that she will get it right even if she is making a sincere attempt. An attempt at living a morally worthy life will make it significantly more likely

that one will do so, but it will not guarantee it. As a result, although it is unlikely, a self-respecting person can be a profoundly immoral person.

### **3.4 Self-Respect and Autonomy**

In this last section of the paper, I begin by reminding us of some of the features of self-respect that are particularly relevant to self-guidance. I then use that to sketch a theory of autonomy that takes self-respecting self-guidance to just be what autonomy is. This isn't meant to be a precise account with necessary and sufficient conditions. However, I do give some explanation of why I take this to be a plausible approach to understanding autonomy by comparing it to some other views of autonomy, and I hope to help the reader understand the implications of this view by applying it to some particular cases. I also give a very brief, incomplete response to a potential objection that I expect will be on some readers' minds regarding externally imposed barriers to autonomy.

Before moving forward, it's important to be familiar with some distinctions in order to get clear on what my topic is. First, we can distinguish between *psychological autonomy* and what I will call *external autonomy*. Psychological autonomy is concerned with what is required in order for one's choice, in particular, to count as an autonomous one. In contrast, external autonomy is concerned with what the world needs to be like in order for one to autonomously act. So, for example, if I were to make the choice to stand up and get some more tea right now based on my genuine desire for tea, I would plausibly be autonomous in some sense. However, if it were to turn out that my feet are tied to my chair and that I cannot get the tea after all, then I would plausibly be lacking

autonomy in the other sense.<sup>18</sup> The former sense of autonomy is psychological, and the latter is external. I am concerned exclusively with the former, so I am only interested in the ways in which self-respect can inform us regarding what it would take for us to guide our own choices, where I am understanding a choice as a mental act.

A second distinction is one between an autonomous choice and an autonomous person. It seems to make sense to talk about a person as a whole as having or lacking psychological autonomy, but as I suggested in the previous paragraph, my focus will be on choices in particular. The relationship between autonomy of choices and autonomy of persons is a contentious one; some think that we have to understand the former before we can understand the latter, and others think just the opposite. There is also little agreement about how, exactly, the two are connected (e.g. perhaps there some percentage of one's choices that need to be autonomous in order for one as a person to count as autonomous, or perhaps as long as one's important choices are autonomous then one counts as an autonomous person). I will not discuss the relationship between autonomy of choice and autonomy of persons at all, or assume that one is more fundamental than the other. Instead, I will simply consider what is required in order for one's choice to count as autonomous, leaving open how this is related to questions about autonomy of persons.

### **3.4.1 Self-Respect and Self-Guidance**

One idea that may seem obvious is that there is no use in attempting to determine what kinds of choices a self-respecting person would make given that I've already discussed at length what it means to be self-respecting. One might think that the kinds of

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<sup>18</sup> You might think that this is just a lack of *freedom*, not autonomy, but some, like Marina Oshana (2006) and Joseph Raz (1988), describe these kinds of barriers as interfering with autonomy.

choices a self-respecting person would make just correspond with the discussion above regarding what a self-respecting person is like more generally. However, it seems to me that the matter is not quite this straightforward since I take it to be important that perfectly self-respecting people may not be perfect in other ways; that, is, they can make mistakes regarding what follows from an appreciation of their worth as a person while still being self-respecting. Self-respect is simply a recognition of the moral status we have as persons, rational agents, and individuals, and a motivation to act in a way that reflects that value. But it is perfectly possible for us to draw mistaken conclusions about what kinds of acts do, in fact, reflect it. This is a distinction that I hope will become clearer as I discuss self-respecting self-guidance in more detail.

The first feature of persons that warrants respect is their personhood itself. Having recognition respect for oneself as a person is to appreciate one's equal moral standing with other persons and the fact that one's own pursuits and preferences count for no less than those of any other. It is also to appreciate that we have this value regardless of anything we do or any features of ourselves that are particular to us (e.g. our great looks or impressive intellect). The question, then, is what role this appreciation must play in our choice-making in order for our choices to count as self-guided, or autonomous, on my view. Is it necessarily the case that a choice to be servile, to play the fool, or to suffer the abuse of others is thereby non-autonomous?

The answer here is that so long as our choice to be servile, play the fool, or suffer abuse is motivated by a lack of self-respect, then it is not autonomous. However, it may be possible to make these choices in spite of one's respect for oneself because of the circumstances one is in. Return to Hill's case of the Deferential Wife who believes that

her preferences and pursuits matter less than her husband's do because her role as a wife is to support her family, regardless of what she prefers. It's clear that she is lacking self-respect here, so her choice to, say, go to the restaurant her husband chooses because his preferences are the only ones that matter is not an autonomous one. But suppose that her husband takes his preferences to count for more than hers and that he is quick to anger; suppose in addition that she is completely financially dependent on her husband, that she lacks reliable friends, and that she fears that she will lose her children if she were to become separated from her husband. If she appreciates the fact that her preferences matter just as much as her husband's do but consistently defers to him regarding restaurant options, her choice here seems to be a perfectly autonomous one even though it is deferential. She is motivated not by a failure to recognize her worth, but by a desire for self-preservation.

One might think that her willingness to consistently defer to someone who fails to respect her in itself signals a lack of self-respect, and that as a result her choice to remain with her husband cannot count as an autonomous one on my view. Here I'd like to make two points. First, it seems plausible to me that there is a sense in which she is lacking external autonomy, since the world is such that it does not seem possible for her to act on her true desires. This is important to note because I am keeping psychological and external autonomy distinct, and a lack of external autonomy may explain some intuitions that women who are stuck in abusive relationships are lacking autonomy. Thus, she may be lacking one kind of autonomy while retaining the other.

Second, recall that we can make mistakes about what kinds of actions are worthy of us while still appreciating our value. Perhaps it is simply true that to remain in a

relationship with someone who does not appreciate your value is always a failure to act in accordance with your value. Even so, it seems to me possible for someone who recognizes their own worth to reasonably believe that staying in the relationship is all things considered the best thing to do, especially in cases in which the alternatives plausibly involve destitution or being deprived of a healthy relationship with your children. Additionally, Dillon has argued (and I agree) that self-sacrifice can be consistent with self-respect so long as one recognizes the value of what one is giving up. So if a parent decides to live a difficult life for the sake of making their children's lives better, this can be an autonomous choice if they are not motivated by a belief that their children matter more than they do, or that they will lose worth as a person if they are not willing to make this sacrifice.

In general, one's choice meets the requirements for autonomy that are set by the standards of recognition self-respect of oneself as a person so long as one's choice isn't motivated by false beliefs about one's worth as a person or a failure to be appropriately motivated by this belief. So if the Uncle Tom decides to move to the other side of the road when he sees a white person walking toward him, and he does this because he believes that the white person has more value than he does, then his choice was not autonomous. And if the Self-Deprecator decides to laugh along when his co-worker makes a humiliating joke at his expense, and his decision to do so is motivated by his belief that he deserves to be mocked in such a way, then his choice was not autonomous.

But if these choices are motivated by considerations that are consistent with their proper appreciation of their own value, then their deference may be perfectly autonomous.<sup>19</sup>

The second kind of recognition respect that one owes oneself is respect for oneself as a rational agent. To have this kind of respect for oneself is to care about one's reasons for acting (whether or not they are good ones, whether or not they are consistent with one another, etc.). It is to recognize our ability to act in the world and contribute to shaping who we are, and to take this power seriously. This will require us to engage in a certain amount of self-reflection and self-correction. If we care about our reasons then we will reflect on them honestly and modify them when necessary. We will also have faith in our capacity to do so. We must strike a balance between taking ourselves to already be perfect agents and taking ourselves to be incapable of making accurate judgments about ourselves by recognizing that we are capable enough to self-correct but flawed enough to need self-correction. While we need not constantly be self-consciously reflecting in these ways, self-respect requires us to be disposed care about having good reasons for acting and to stop and reflect when find that we're not sure what we should do (especially when the choice is a reflection of our values or will have a significant impact on our lives).

This means that when a choice is motivated by a failure of self-reflection that self-respect would require of us (either because one has too much confidence in one's practical reasoning abilities, takes oneself to be incapable of guiding one's choices well anyway, or simply doesn't care about one's capacity for rational agency), that choice is thereby lacking in autonomy. Of course, self-respect does not require us to reflect on *all*

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<sup>19</sup> One might think that "deference" that isn't motivated by a lack of self-respect isn't deference at all. That seems plausible enough to me, but it is of no consequence for this argument.

of our reasons. If I am motivated to choose chocolate ice cream rather than vanilla, or to take the back stairs into my office rather than the front stairs, I need not at any point have reflected on whether or not my reasons for making these choices are good ones in order to count as properly self-respecting. Caring about acting for good reasons that are coherent with one another is consistent with recognizing that some reasons just don't really matter.

This gives us the plausible result that my choice is not lacking in autonomy when I choose to have chocolate ice cream over vanilla even when I have not reflected on whether or not my reason is a good one. My choice is lacking in autonomy, however, when I choose to marry Josh over Jocelyn without really thinking about why I'm doing it, or to have a child without sufficiently appreciating how it will affect my ability to live my life the way I would like to. This is because the choice of which ice cream to eat does not have a significant impact on our lives and whatever we choose will be consistent with our values, whereas the latter two choices are likely to have tremendous effects on the course our lives take and impact our abilities to live with integrity and in accordance with what we value. Thus, in these latter cases, self-respect requires us to care what these effects will be and whether our integrity will be threatened.

The final requirement of recognition self-respect is respecting oneself as the particular individual one is. This requires us to appreciate ourselves for who we are, but also to care about shaping ourselves into someone with values and goals that we take to be worth having based on intersubjective standards (though we need not think that all must share them with us). It requires us to figure out what we could do with our lives that would have value, and then to pursue that. This feature of self-respect also requires us to



engage in self-reflection, as we have to be conscious of what it is about ourselves that we take to make us who we are, or what standards we feel as though we would never be able to fall below while still remaining true to ourselves.

It follows from this that making autonomous choices requires us to have some conception of who we are and how the choices we make contribute to or conflict with that self-conception. When we act without appreciating the significance of our actions to our character or our goals, we are failing to act autonomously. Similarly, when we fail to consider who we want to be and go on making mundane choices about how to live without any reflection, our choices are lacking in autonomy. A final consequence of this feature of self-respect is that once I have determined what my values are and what standards I will never fall below, I am making a choice that is, to some extent, lacking autonomy if I later choose (without actually changing my values) to undermine those values or fall below those standards. It is for this reason that the artist who "sells out" was not fully autonomous when he made the choice to do so.

### **3.4.2 The Plausibility of This View**

We now have a sketch of the theory of autonomy that understands autonomy as the kind of self-guidance a self-respecting person engages in, but we have yet to determine whether or not this account of autonomy is a plausible one. In this section, I'll begin by considering some of the cases I discuss that may seem implausible to some in order to defend the answers this view gives. I'll then discuss some cases and ideas that come from other theories of autonomy and explain how this view can account for them nicely. Finally, I'll consider the objection that this view cannot account for lack of

autonomy in people who are psychologically manipulated by others and argue that it can, in fact, account for cases like these.

Consider first some of the cases in which the view I am proposing determines that some choices are lacking autonomy, such as the case of the Deferential Wife or the Uncle Tom, the unscrupulous business person, the person who gets married or has a child without putting much thought into it, or the artist who "sells out." The claim that these people's choices lack autonomy may seem implausible to some, but many of these results are in line with some of the most popular theories of autonomy out there. The Deferential Wife, for example, is one that Oshana (2007), Stoljar (2014), and Benson (1994) all take to be lacking in autonomy. Since the Deferential Wife and the Uncle Tom are motivated by the same considerations and have been subjected to similar kinds of oppressive socialization, it seems as though reason for thinking one is lacking autonomy is reason for thinking the other is as well. Regarding the person who, say, decides to have a child without thinking about whether or not it coheres with their other goals in life, it seems clear that Meyers's view of autonomy would leave them lacking autonomy as well. She has a degree of notion of autonomy according to which we are autonomous insofar as we develop and utilize our capacities for self-discovery, self-definition, and self-direction. Since this individual is not developing or utilizing these capacities, it seems safe to say that Meyers would come to the same conclusion about them that I have.

The cases of the unscrupulous business person and the artist are tougher. After all, both of them seem to be intentionally guiding the course of their lives and both of them seem to appreciate their ability to determine what is good for themselves. But recall that the unscrupulous business person as described by Dillon does not reflect on himself and

what he takes to be valuable, attempt to determine whether or not his goals are, in fact, valuable, or open himself up to criticism from others in an attempt to ensure that he is living a worthwhile life. And once we consider a version of the case in which he does, in fact, reflect and attempt to self-correct in this way, but he remains deeply immoral, it does seem to me that he is self-respecting so I have no reason to doubt that he is autonomous as well. Again, I take this to be a very unlikely case, and I suspect that most deeply immoral people are experts at self-deception and evading self-reflection and are for this reason lacking in self-respect and autonomy.

Finally, return to the case of the artist who understands himself to essentially be a dedicated artist, where being a dedicated artist entails not "selling out," but who does start selling meaningless and poorly crafted prints for the sake of paying the rent (without changing his values). We could imagine at least two versions of this case. Imagine first that he does this only temporarily all the while committed to returning to meaningful work and actively working toward that goal. In a case like this, it seems to me that he has retained his psychological autonomy, though his external autonomy may have been compromised due to an inadequate range of options. His psychological autonomy seems to have remained intact because while he faced a temporary setback in expressing his values, he did not give up on them and continued to work toward them.

However, imagine now a version of the case in which he falls into the routine of making a living in this way, and although he resents himself for it, he continues on because it is easier than finding an alternative, more meaningful line of work. While the person in this version of the case also plausibly lacks external autonomy, here his psychological autonomy is also compromised. He has failed to respect himself in some

sense by failing to respect himself as the individual he is and living a life that he thinks is worthy of him. It follows from the view I am proposing, then, that his choice to sell these prints would be lacking in autonomy. This may seem implausible since he has presumably considered his options over and over again and determined that selling the prints is the most reasonable thing for him to do. If his choice is based on his all-things-considered judgment that it is the right choice, then he may seem self-guiding in any important sense.

However, there is some sense in which his "self" is not guiding him at all in this case. For he takes himself essentially to be a dedicated artist, and that self is not guiding the relevant choice at all. We find the same kinds of considerations in a number of theories of freedom. Consider first that of Nomy Arpaly and Timothy Schroeder who argue that an action counts as our own to the extent that it is motivated by our "deep self," or those of our beliefs and desires that are hardest for us to give up and most well-integrated (1999). They could explain the artist's motivation to sell the prints as less his own than his desire to remain true to himself because it is less well integrated, or it conflicts more with his other desires and beliefs. And it would likely be easier to convince him to give up his desire to sell the prints than it would be to convince him to give up his desire to be a dedicated artist since he takes his desire to be a dedicated artist to be essential to who he is. Some other views that seem to give the same results in this case are those of David Shoemaker (2003), who thinks that an action is our own only if it is motivated by what we most care about (with respect to the situation we're in), and Gary Watson (1989), who thinks that an action is our own only if it expresses what we value. On both views, the artist's choice to sell the prints would not be free since he is not

doing what he most cares about or what he values. While I am discussing autonomy, not freedom, the point here is that it is not uncommon to think that it is significant whether or not the self that is guiding one's choices is one's *true* self.

So while the view I am proposing does give some results that may seem initially implausible, there is quite a bit of support out there for drawing the conclusions that I draw. Not only that, but this view can account for some other common ideas regarding autonomy that many take to be of importance. Paul Benson (2000), for example, argues that in order for our choices to be free we must take ourselves to be answerable for our actions, or to take ourselves to have the standing in our community to be accountable for what we do. It would follow from this that in cases of gaslighting, in which a person is made to question their mental stability, the choices that are partially motivated by feelings of self-doubt and unworthiness to guide one's choices are not free ones. The view I am proposing can explain why these actions are not autonomous because in order to respect ourselves as agents we must take ourselves to be capable of determining what kinds of reasons are good ones for acting on.

Another common theme in discussions of autonomy is oppressive socialization and the extent to which it undermines the autonomy of women in particular. Authors including Benson, Christman, Meyers, Oshana, and Stoljar have argued that oppressive socialization does, at least to some extent, undermine autonomy in some cases. However, they have not (it seems to me, anyway) been able to give a satisfying account of exactly when and why autonomy is undermined by this socialization or why oppressive socialization should be taken to be any different from regular socialization to which everyone is subjected. One nice feature of the view that I am proposing is that it does

seem to do this and it does so in a way that lines up nicely with many of the intuitions that these authors share. Any time socialization undermines a person's sense of respect for themselves, it thereby undermines their ability to choose autonomously, and when their choice is motivated by a lack of self-respect resulting from that socialization, then that choice was lacking in autonomy. This allows us to recognize that many women who spend hours daily grooming themselves to meet the standards that society has set for them are not autonomously choosing to do so, while also acknowledging that a woman can autonomously choose to wear expensive make-up or uncomfortable shoes, so long as she is not motivated by a sense that her self-worth depends on doing so.

This view can also explain why we do not have to reflect on every choice we make or be aware of all of our motivations in order for the choices to count as autonomous. Not all of our choices have any reflection on ourselves as persons; as I noted above, my choice to have chocolate rather than vanilla or to use the back stairs rather than the front ones are of no consequence for who I am as a person. They are not related to my sense of respect for my agency or myself as an individual. Reflecting on choices that we have no reason to believe are interesting is not required in order to count as respecting ourselves as agents; we need only to reflect on those reasons that contradict one another, that others claim are problematic, or that we feel we have some other reason to reflect on. Since a person can be perfectly self-respecting without analyzing every choice they make, they can be autonomous without doing so as well. However, many other theories of autonomy do not seem to give us an explanation of why we need only to reflect on some of our reasons for actions and not all of them.

One final feature of this view that will be important to some is that it can account for the sense in which autonomy is relational, or the sense in which autonomous humans are dependent on others in important ways. A common feminist claim is that we ought not to think about the autonomous individual as the self-creating individual whose reasons for acting are never influenced by those around them. Instead, it is important to recognize the ways in which all of us are influenced by our societies and the ways in which this can often help us to be autonomous. The view I propose accounts for this in recognizing that a person cannot come to respect themselves without getting respect from others. When those around us consistently deny that we have the same moral standing that they do, it becomes difficult if not impossible for us to go on believing that we have that moral status. And when we are told over and over again by our peers that our mental processes cannot be trusted, we will lose our ability to trust them ourselves. Since we cannot be autonomous without self-respect, and we cannot have self-respect without the respect of others, autonomy is something that we achieve only in community with others who value us. Additionally, the self-respecting person cares about getting things right, and this should motivate her to engage with others in search of a fuller self-understanding.

So we can see that this view leads to results that are widely endorsed, and that it can account for intuitions that many other views do not seem to be able to account for. But before concluding, I will address one final potential objection. Consider a woman who cares deeply about her work and her family, but who becomes infatuated with a religious leader. After attending a number of meetings, she decides to give up her job to live in a cooperative with other members of the religious group. As time goes on, she has

less and less communication with her family, and the things she once cared most about become absent from her life. While those who used to be close to her claim that she has been manipulated by the religious leader, she claims that she is happier than she has ever been and that she feels as though she has finally discovered her true self. This is a case in which many of us are inclined to say that her choice to give up her old life was not an autonomous one, but it may seem as though my account of autonomy does not provide us with the resources to do so. After all, it does not seem as though the problem is one having to do with her own sense of worth; instead, it seems to have to do with manipulation by an external force.

Of course, we would need to know significantly more about this case to say anything for certain about it. Perhaps the protagonist is not mistaken at all and she really is acting in a way that is consistent with who she takes herself to be. Perhaps she really has come to believe that her old way of life was problematic and that this new way of living will be more fulfilling and allow her to express herself more truly. It is not particularly hard to imagine the details such that this is rather plausible (e.g. her family has always been rather toxic, her job was somewhat empty but it was the best she thought she could get, etc.). If she has reached this decision while remaining self-respecting, I see no reason to think that she is lacking autonomy in this case.

But supposing that this is not what went on, and that the case is, in fact, problematic, it will be because she has been manipulated, so it is important to think about what manipulation of a human being involves. Sometimes it can merely involve lying, but in a case like this it seems clear that a simple lie will not be sufficient to get the protagonist to give up her life. Instead, a set of complicated lies will be required, and in



order for those lies to go undiscovered, there will more than likely involve some amount of gaslighting. In addition, it is likely that the protagonist in a case like this will be made to feel as though she does not have the value that she does, in fact, have. Her sense of worth will likely be wrapped up in the approval of the religious leader or the other members of the cooperative. Diminishing a person's sense of self-worth and their confidence in their ability to reason well tend to be key ingredients in manipulation, but if this is what is going on, then it is clear that her self-respect has been diminished and that she is thereby lacking in autonomy.<sup>20</sup>

### **3.5 Conclusion**

I have argued that one plausible understanding of autonomy takes the kind of self-guidance necessary for autonomy to be the kind of self-guidance that a self-respecting person would engage in. I began by describing three components of recognition self-respect for persons as commonly understood in the literature on self-respect: respect for oneself as a person, respect for oneself as a rational agent, and respect for oneself as the particular individual one is. I then argued that the self-respecting person need not be particularly morally good because we can appreciate the value of these three things and be genuinely motivated to act in a way that reflects their value without having an accurate conception of what it takes to do so. We can make no mistakes at all in recognizing our worth while still making significant mistakes in trying to live a life that is worthy of us. The significance of this is that on some views (such as Kant's), self-respecting people are

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<sup>20</sup> Perhaps there is some other way of explaining the case such that her choice does not seem to be autonomous but the manipulation does not involve undermining her self-respect. I can't think of one, though.

morally good in at least some ways, but if self-respect is required for autonomy, it would follow that we cannot autonomously make immoral choices. Thankfully, this is a result that we have avoided by appreciating the fact that it is all too easy for us to make mistakes even when we are guided by facts and good intentions.

I then described the kind of self-guidance a self-respecting person would engage in: she would not consistently defer to others because of misconceptions about her own worth; she would care about whether or not she was engaging in practical reasoning well so she would self-reflect and self-revise as needed; and she would care about living up to her value by developing some of her skills and making and achieving objectively worthwhile goals. I argued that this notion of self-guidance seems to correspond nicely with many features of some more popular accounts of autonomy and that it can explain some intuitions that other theories don't seem to be able to explain while giving us a consistent way to respond plausibly to various cases in which someone's autonomy is at issue. While understanding self-respect as a necessary condition for autonomy likely sounds initially like an overly moralistic and implausible route, I hope to have shown that it is rather promising as a way to provide a coherent, well-grounded theory of autonomy that lines up nicely with many of our pre- and post-theoretical intuitions.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**RESPECTING THE OPPRESSED IN THE DEBATE BETWEEN SUBSTANTIVE**  
**AND CONTENT-NEUTRAL THEORIES OF AUTONOMY**

**4.1 Introduction**

It is common in the autonomy literature to claim that the more restrictive a particular theory of autonomy is, the more at risk it is of disrespecting the individuals it excludes, or deems non-autonomous. This claim is often made in the context of the debate between substantive and content-neutral theories of autonomy. While this distinction has been made in different ways by different people, I will define a substantive theory of autonomy as one which places constraints on the values, desires, or general pro-attitudes a person can have while still being fully autonomous, and content-neutral theories of autonomy are those according to which a person can be fully autonomous regardless of the particular pro-attitudes she has. Since substantive theories place more constraints on who counts as autonomous than content-neutral theories do, proponents of content-neutral theories often argue that, in deeming certain people non-autonomous, the substantive theories disrespect those people. They take this to be reason to accept content-neutral views over substantive views.

Consider, for example, Thomas Hill's example of the Deferential Wife (Hill 1991).

This is a woman who is utterly devoted to serving her husband. She buys clothes he prefers, invites the guest he wants to entertain, and makes love whenever he is in the mood. She willingly moves to a new city in order for him to have a more attractive job, counting her own friendships and geographical preferences insignificant by comparison. ...[S]he tends not to form her own interests, values, and ideals; and, when she does, she counts them as less important than her husband's. She readily responds to appeals from Women's Liberation that she agrees that women are mentally and physically equal, if not superior, to men. She just believes that the proper role for a woman is to serve her family.

As a matter of fact, much of her happiness derives from her belief that she fulfills this role very well. No one is trampling on her rights, she says; for she is quite glad, and proud, to serve her husband as she does.

On Natalie Stoljar's substantive theory of autonomy the Deferential Wife (DW) would not be autonomous insofar as she is motivated by false norms of womanhood that take a woman's worth to be tied up with her ability to please men (Stoljar 2000). In contrast, a content-neutral theory of autonomy would have no problem maintaining that the DW is fully autonomous so long as she has certain capacities for self-reflection and self-awareness, say, or is not alienated from her desire to serve her husband at the expense of her own preferences. One argument frequently given by proponents of content-neutral theories is that the substantive theories disrespect people like the DW by denying that she is autonomous, and that this fact lends support to the plausibility of content-neutral theories.

We see this appeal to respect in arguments for content-neutral theories of autonomy throughout Marilyn Friedman's discussion of autonomy in *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*. She makes this point most clearly when she claims:

If content-neutral and substantive accounts of autonomy are roughly equally convincing on conceptual and intuitive grounds, then a content-neutral account should be preferred for the fact that it will serve better in one of the normative roles that an ideal of autonomy fills, that of motivating people to treat others with an important form of respect. An account of autonomy that is too demanding will prompt persons to regard a greater number of others as failures at personhood and thereby reduce the number of others they will regard as respectable. (23)

Friedman is far from alone in her pursuit of this line of argument. Paul Benson uses this line of argument to defend a weaker version of a substantive view (2014); John Christman uses it to defend a content-neutral view (2009); and Diana T. Meyers also defends a content-neutral over a substantive view on the basis of this appeal to respect (2014).

Despite its ubiquity, this concern about disrespect is hard to pin down precisely. The first question to ask here is who, exactly, is supposed to be disrespected by substantive views? Surely, we need not claim that *everyone* is autonomous merely in order to avoid disrespecting anyone, so who is it that we must include on these grounds? The obvious answer, of course, is that we need our theory of autonomy to deem autonomous everyone who is, in fact, autonomous, and that it is disrespectful to deny that someone is autonomous when they are. But this is not what the proponents of content-neutral theories are proposing, as that would be straightforwardly begging the question against the proponents of substantive views. What they need is a category of persons who we can determine ought—on the grounds of respect—to be deemed autonomous before we even know what autonomy is. But what features must persons have in order for us to know that respect requires us to deem them autonomous?

The second question that needs to be answered in order to understand this objection to substantive theories is: Why is it that excluding people with these features is disrespectful? We claim that some people are immoral, unfree, vicious, and so on without worrying that doing so will disrespect them, and we don't seem to think that respect for persons must play a role in our theoretical attempts at defining these notions. Instead, we start by coming up with a plausible definition and then we take it to be a matter of respect to apply it consistently and accurately. The objection to maximizing act utilitarianism isn't that it is a disrespectful theory because it deems too many people immoral; instead we simply appeal to examples of apparently morally permissible behavior that

maximizing act utilitarianism would claim is immoral.<sup>21</sup> And while Frankfurt's example of the unwilling addict has spawned tremendous disagreement about a number of things, no one has argued that it is disrespectful of Frankfurt to claim that the unwilling addict is unfree. So what is it about deeming certain people non-autonomous that is so widely thought to be disrespectful?

In this paper I consider a number of possible answers to each of these questions and argue that none of them gives us a plausible explanation of why we should think substantive theories of autonomy are disrespectful to anyone. No matter how we fill in the details, I will argue, there is simply no reason to prefer content-neutral theories of autonomy over substantive ones on the grounds of respect. In fact, once we get clear about who it is that the proponents of content-neutral views are so concerned about respecting and why, it seems to me that the substantive theories turn out to do a better job of respecting them.

In what follows, I begin in Section I by discussing three possible features a person could have that would make it disrespectful to deny that they are autonomous: a) they believe they are self-guiding, b) they meet a set of standards that some take to be plausible criteria for autonomy, and c) they are oppressed, and features of their oppression explain why substantive views deem them non-autonomous. In Section II I move on to laying out some possible explanations of why it would be disrespectful to

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<sup>21</sup> While it does seem that some people think it is disrespectful to call any behavior or person "immoral," philosophers generally take great pains to argue that it is not; perhaps you've experienced this yourself when a student has argued for moral relativism by asserting that any categorical moral claims are disrespectful to those who disagree with them. While there may be some intuitive appeal to the idea that our theory of morality should deem everyone morally good on pain of disrespect, no philosopher I've heard of defends such a view.

deny that people in these categories are autonomous. For example, perhaps it is disrespectful because by denying their autonomy we are sanctioning paternalistic intervention in their lives, or because denying that a person is autonomous fails to recognize the ways in which she may still engage in some kinds of self-guidance. In Sections I and II I am simply providing us with the available options for filling in the details of this objection to substantive views, but in sections III and IV I evaluate them and argue that they do not do the work proponents of content-neutral views need them to. I end section IV by arguing that, in fact, substantive theories of autonomy do a *better* job of respecting certain people than content-neutral theories do.

#### **4.2 Who might we disrespect by claiming they are not autonomous?**

When proponents of content-neutral theories accuse substantive theories of disrespecting certain people, they tend to focus on people who have one or more of the following qualities: they take themselves to be self-guiding (call this *self-confidence*), they've achieved a certain level or kind of self-guidance—perhaps by reflectively endorsing their behavior or rationally considering multiple courses of action (call this *self-guidance*)—or they are a member of an oppressed social group and their autonomy is being denied in part because of their oppression (call this *oppressed*). In this section, I will lay out these three features a person might have and provide the reasons people give for thinking that they are significant in determining who deserves, on the basis of respect, to be deemed autonomous.

##### **4.2.1 Self-Confidence**

The first feature of persons that many content-neutral theorists of autonomy take to warrant the relevant kind of respect is that they take themselves to be autonomous,

self-guiding, or generally in control of the course of their lives and the decisions they make. Benson<sup>22</sup> expresses this idea explicitly in “Feminist Commitments and Relational Autonomy,” though others such as Marilyn Friedman (2003) and Diana T. Meyers (2014) seem to hint at it. Benson explains that on substantive views like Stoljar’s, some women who experience themselves as autonomous will not be autonomous after all. He claims that this result reveals that substantive views fail to respect these women’s experiences and their voices. Consider, for example, Hill’s DW. She is not coerced or manipulated in any straightforward way. She believes that a woman’s role is to serve her family, and she takes great pride in fulfilling this role well. She takes herself to be freely choosing her course in life; it’s just that she consistently chooses to do whatever her husband prefers in virtue of the fact that he prefers it. It seems as though she takes herself to be self-guiding, but on most substantive views she would not meet the relevant criteria for autonomy for various reasons (e.g. her lack of power or her lack of self-respect).

This is something Benson takes to be particularly problematic for a view like Stoljar’s since she is motivated largely by what she calls “the feminist intuition,” or the intuition that when women are motivated by false, oppressive gender norms, they are not choosing autonomously. The motivation here is to show proper respect for women by recognizing the harms that result from this feminine socialization, but Benson claims that this approach to defining autonomy ends up disrespecting women in a different way by ignoring their voices.

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<sup>22</sup> Benson defends a substantive theory of autonomy, but he takes it to be more inclusive than some other, “stronger” substantive theories like Stoljar’s. For this reason, I sometimes note his objections to stronger substantive theories and I sometimes note his objections to content-neutral theories which he takes to be *too* inclusive.



On Stoljar's account, the familiar feminist dictum that we should take women's experiences seriously cannot mean that women's sense of their own agential authority must be respected... For the feminist intuition entails that women who regard themselves as competent and worthy to answer for their actions can nevertheless suffer diminished autonomy if their attitudes and decisions are the products of internalized oppressive socialization that they do not see to be misguided. (Benson 2014, 95)

Benson is claiming here that there is a particular kind of respect that is due to women who are autonomous, but that on certain substantive accounts of autonomy some women who take themselves to be autonomous will nonetheless fail to be and will therefore not be due this respect. He claims that this is a problem for these theories and that we should instead accept his own weaker substantive view according to which being autonomous is largely a matter of taking oneself to be answerable for one's choices, or taking oneself to speak for one's decisions. This will allow for more overlap between those who take themselves to be self-guiding and those who are deemed autonomous, which Benson and others maintain is crucial for showing people proper respect.

#### **4.2.2 Self-Guidance**

Of course, even Benson notes that there must be *some* objective standards for autonomy and that we shouldn't maintain that the only criterion for autonomy is that one takes oneself to be autonomous. This leads to the second feature of persons that many claim warrants the respect of being deemed autonomous, namely, that they do have certain capacities for self-guidance. For Benson, one's belief that one is answerable for one's choices must be reasonable, and it is only reasonable if one has certain capacities including the ability to reflect and to regulate one's intentions (2005, 118). Thus, when it is disrespectful to deny autonomy to those who take themselves to be autonomous, this is

partly because they have good reason to think they are autonomous because they have these abilities.

Benson seems to express a similar idea when he endorses the view that the result of substantive theories like Stoljar's is "the silencing, or exclusion, of authentic voices" (2014, 107). The claim seems to be that failing to deem autonomous those who are able to express their genuine preferences and values is failing to give those people the respect they deserve. Similarly, John Christman claims that if we deny the autonomy of someone who is subservient when "she has accepted this subservient position out of sincere and reflective religious devotion, without defects in her competence as a reasoner," then denying her autonomy is "tantamount to silencing [her] voice" (176).

Friedman gives further support to this approach when she claims that respect is "the distinctive reaction owed to those who have perspectives comprising important wants and values they can reflect on and evaluate and who can act accordingly" (2003, 74). The respect she has in mind here is the respect that she takes to be owed to autonomous individuals. She seems to be claiming that, as a result, we must conclude that individuals who have these perspectives and are able to reflect in this way are autonomous. For Christman and Friedman, individuals are owed the respect of being deemed autonomous when they have certain capacities, and for Benson, they are owed this respect when they have certain capacities and conclude on that basis that they are answerable for their choices. Since these individuals are owed the respect of being deemed autonomous, Benson, Christman, and Friedman take this to be good evidence that they are, in fact, autonomous.

### 4.2.3 Oppression

The third and final feature of persons that content-neutral theorists of autonomy seem to take to warrant the respect of being deemed autonomous is that our only or main reason for denying the individual's autonomy is a factor only because of the oppressive socialization the person has undergone. We can see this idea, again, in Benson. His focus on protecting the voices of women in particular reveals that he is concerned with protecting women as members of an oppressed group which has historically been dismissed and whose voices have been ignored. Meyers makes this explicit when she claims that “[f]eminists have repeatedly underscored the personal and societal damage caused by silencing women’s voices. Value-neutral autonomy theory guards against suppressing the diversity of women’s perspectives and concerns because it does not preemptively deny the autonomy of any woman’s beliefs about how she should live.” (2014, 130-1)

Friedman echoes this concern: “Whenever an ideal has more extensive requirements, the risk arises that it will turn out in practice to be attainable, or viewed as attained, by only a privileged minority. The ideal of autonomy is hampered by a history in which it has been associated in Western cultures with a select few, typically, successful white men.” (23) Not only this, but it is the deprivation of the oppressed—which inhibits their autonomy—that allows for the privileged to have the freedom that enhances their autonomy (46). Friedman takes this to be good reason to support a content-neutral theory of autonomy since it tends to be easier for members of oppressed groups to count as autonomous on those views than on substantive ones.

To recap, it is commonly claimed in the autonomy literature that theories of autonomy that are particularly restrictive are disrespectful to certain individuals who fail to count as autonomous on those views. In order to attempt to better understand this claim, I have so far looked for answers to the question: Who is it that is disrespected when they are not counted as autonomous? I've considered three possible answers to this question: those who take themselves to be self-guiding—or those who have *self-confidence*—those who have the ability to engage in some forms of self-guidance, and those who are oppressed and whose autonomy is denied at least in part because of features of their oppression. I will critically consider these answers later in the paper, ultimately arguing that none of them is satisfactory. However, I will first lay out some answers to the second question I've asked about this claim regarding respect: Why is it that these (variously specified) individuals are disrespected when we deny that they are autonomous? This is the project I undertake in the next section.

#### **4.3 Why might it be disrespectful to maintain that they are not autonomous?**

We have so far considered some groups of people who might be disrespected if we conclude that they are not autonomous, but it is not yet clear why we should think that people who are members of these groups would be disrespected in this way. After all, as I mentioned above, it does not seem disrespectful to claim that someone is immoral simply because she claims that she is morally good. And while a person may meet some plausible utilitarian standard of morality, it is not disrespectful of the deontologist to claim that she is not moral after all. Finally, while some people might, given their circumstances and through no fault of their own, have a particularly difficult time making the moral choice, we do not take a moral theory to be disrespectful if it gives us the result

that they have still done the wrong thing (though we may take it to be implausible for other reasons). So what is it about denying a person's autonomy in these circumstances that makes it so intuitive to many that we have disrespected them?<sup>23</sup>

In this section I lay out five possible answers to this question which are as follows: 1) to deny someone's autonomy is to thereby authorize paternalistic interference in their affairs, 2) to deny the autonomy of oppressed people in particular is to place unjust burdens on them, 3) to deny that a person is fully autonomous is to overlook the ways in which she might, in fact, be self-guiding (even if not fully so), 4) if we claim that a person is not autonomous then we are thereby claiming that she is not a moral agent and perhaps does not deserve the same moral consideration that moral agents do, and 5) it is simply inherently respectful to claim that a person or her action is autonomous.

We should understand each of these possible answers as saying that it is disrespectful to deny someone's autonomy for these reasons *if* they have one or more of the qualities of *self-confidence*, *self-guidance*, or *oppression*. Since the proponents of this view have their strongest case when they are discussing people who have all three of these qualities, I will assume for now that this is what they all have in mind. Thus, in laying out the five possible answers to the "why?" question, I will be understanding them as attempting to explain to us why it is disrespectful to deny autonomy to individuals who are *self-confident*, *self-guiding*, and *oppressed*.

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<sup>23</sup> Of course, to claim that something is true need not involve saying it to anyone in particular. We can claim that certain kinds of individuals or certain particular individuals lack freedom or virtue without saying it to their faces or discussing it as gossip. Doing those things likely would be disrespectful, but claiming it, by itself, does not seem to be.

### 4.3.1 Answer 1: Sanctioning Paternalism

The first reason for thinking that it is disrespectful to deny that these people are autonomous is that to deny that they are autonomous is to sanction paternalistic intervention in their lives, and this kind of intervention is inappropriate for people of this sort. This is probably the most frequently discussed reason for thinking that substantive theories are disrespectful<sup>24</sup>, with Christman being its most ardent defender. Christman defines autonomy in a way that allows it to play certain roles in political theory. Not only does he want autonomy to be the characteristic that makes citizens' perspectives a source of legitimacy for laws and institutions, but he also wants it to be the characteristic that "places limits on paternalistic interferences or manipulative dealings" (135). Thus, as a matter of stipulation, if a person is not autonomous on Christman's view, they are not protected from this paternalistic interference. For this reason, it is important for him to have a theory of autonomy that includes anyone who we think ought not to be subjected to this interference. Plausibly, this would include the *self-confident*, *self-guiding*, *oppressed* person.

Christman makes a clear connection between respecting persons, recognizing them as autonomous, and refraining from paternal intervention in the following passage:

So the autonomy of participants in collective deliberation projects onto the outcomes of those deliberations a particular legitimacy, in the same way that the autonomy of a single person grants status to the choices such a person makes. This distinguishes such decisions, in at least a minimal way, from pathological, addictive, manipulated, or compulsive ones. We might properly respond to the latter in any number of ways—with compassion, tolerance, strategic maneuvering, or resistance. But autonomous acts have a minimally self-validating imprimatur; they command a degree of respect that non-autonomous choices do not. (135)

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Benson, 1991; Nussbaum, 2001; Oshana, 2003 and 2006.

When Christman claims that autonomous choices demand a degree of respect, he seems to mean that they cannot be responded to in the same ways we may respond to non-autonomous choices, such as strategic maneuvering or resistance. So to respect a choice is to not interfere with it, and only autonomous choices warrant such respect. Since Christman endorses a liberal political theory that allows for a wide variety of conceptions of the good, he claims that we are compelled “toward a maximally flexible notion of autonomy, so that a broad variation of conceptions of the good, ideals of personhood, and approaches to personal and social life receive full respect” (161). On this view, we would begin by determining who should be free from paternalistic intervention, and then conclude that they must be autonomous; to conclude otherwise would be to endorse paternalism when it is inappropriate to do so, and this would disrespect them. He makes this straightforward connection between autonomy and paternalism when he claims that “autonomy in this sense must pick out all and only those agents whose capacities and point of view should matter as the sources of valid claims in collective decisions and toward whom paternalistic intervention would be disrespectful.” (162)

Friedman also maintains that to respect a person’s autonomy is to refrain from interfering with their choices. She claims that respecting someone’s autonomy involves “...not interfering unduly with her choices or behavior (assuming she is not harming others)... giving her the freedom to choose and act unimpeded by such hindrances as deception, manipulation, and coercion,” and “...treat[ing] her appropriately in virtue of what she wants and values” (73-74). On Friedman’s view, so long as a person has reflectively endorsed their choices in a particular kind of way, they are due the respect of not being interfered with, and she takes this to be good evidence that content-neutral

views are preferable, all other things equal, to substantive views (75). It is noteworthy that both Christman and Friedman have stipulated rather than argued for the claim that respecting autonomy involves avoiding paternalistic intervention and that this intervention is appropriate with regard to the non-autonomous.

#### **4.3.2 Answer 2: Burdening the Oppressed**

A second answer to the question of why it might be disrespectful to deny that the *self-confident, self-guiding, oppressed* person is autonomous is that in denying that they are autonomous, we are suggesting they are failing in some way and that they thereby have some reason to remedy the situation so that they can become autonomous. But since this person is oppressed, and features of her oppression explain why we are inclined to deny that she is autonomous, it seems as though we are placing more burdens on victims of oppression than we are placing on those who benefit from this oppressive system. On the face of it, this seems unjust. Meyers expresses this concern when she states:

A final worry about identifying more emancipated behavior with more autonomous behavior is that it assigns disproportionate responsibility for social change to individual women. It seems to me that the onus of confronting and overcoming structural injustice should be borne by social movements and persons in politically or economically powerful positions. Yet to avoid having their autonomy downgraded by a value-laden or value-saturated account of autonomy, women facing entrenched patriarchal institutions and repressive practices would be obliged to devise individual workarounds consonant with progressive values. In my estimation, then, such theories load too much of the work of fighting injustice onto vulnerable individuals. (133)

This concern is related to the worries people have about victim-blaming; to claim that the oppressed display some moral failing in virtue of their oppression seems to shift our moral blame from those who deserve it to those who instead deserve our compassion and support. In Anita M. Superson's discussion of right-wing women, she argues that although they contribute to the harm that sexism causes women generally, we ought not



blame them because they are victims of patriarchy and this is what explains their being right-wing (1995). To blame them for the harms of sexism would be to suggest that they are the cause of sexism, but Superson claims that this is parallel to the case of accusing the rape victim of causing the rape by dressing provocatively:

In other words, the victim is the cause of the harm. But in truth, it is the rapist alone who is at fault in the latter case, just as it is those men who ‘oil the gears’ of patriarchy in order to profit who are at fault in the former case... To focus on *women’s* contribution to the perpetuation of sexism is wrong in both cases because it is sexist. (91)

According to Meyers’s line of objection, if we deny that the oppressed are autonomous, we are somehow downgrading their moral status, and if they are to bring their moral status back up to the ideal level, they must take on additional burdens that it is unjust for them to have to take on given the cause of their lack of autonomy in the first place. Similarly, to adapt Superson’s argument to the present discussion, the claim would be that by denying that the oppressed are autonomous because they are victims of oppression, we may seem to be suggesting that, in some sense, their oppression is their own fault. This is because if they were to take steps to increase their levels of autonomy, they would also thereby decrease the degree to which they suffer from oppression. Thus, it would seem that their own failure to increase their autonomy contributes to their oppression, and making a claim like this seems to be blaming them for their oppression.

### **4.3.3 Answer 3: Overlooking Certain Capabilities**

A third consideration that is often appealed to in support of choosing a content-neutral theory of autonomy is that a person can have some important capacities for self-guidance without meeting some of the more stringent requirements in substantive theories, and for the substantive theory to deny that the person is autonomous is to

overlook or deny the importance of the self-guiding capacities they do have. To overlook or deny these capacities would be disrespectful. According to proponents of substantive views, oppression undermines women's ability to choose for themselves with respect to a number of important aspects of their lives. A woman's choice to sacrifice her hard-earned high-status career to stay home with the children while her husband works will, in many cases, be such an example. For these substantive views, this stay-at-home-mom's choice to give up her career may not be an autonomous one (depending on the details of the case), but denying her autonomy is arguably failing to appreciate the ways in which she used certain practical reasoning skills to make the choice.

Uma Narayan argues that portraying women's choices in this way is to adapt what she calls "the engulfing view":

In the engulfing view, women's agency is represented as if it were completely "pulverized by patriarchy"—so maimed that women have no wit, no capacity for critical reflection or resistance, no real stakes in their way of life. They are capable only of zombielike acquiescence to patriarchal norms, beings whose desires and values are patriarchal excrescence not attributable to women as real free agents. This engulfing view portrays women's desires and attitudes as 'not really their own' in any meaningful or legitimate sense, reducing them to mere symptoms of their being individuals-subject-to patriarchy. (422)

Thus, by claiming that many of oppressed women's choices are not autonomous, we risk denying their agency altogether. We risk failing to recognize the ways in which women consciously and rationally deliberate among their options, and while these options may be unjustly limited, women are nonetheless capable of navigating them, on Narayan's view, as full-fledged agents.

Friedman shares this concern about substantive theories of autonomy. She grants that theories like Stoljar's are able to accommodate *one* "feminist intuition"—Stoljar's term for the intuition that choices motivated by oppressive socialization are not

autonomous—but argues that there is another feminist intuition that can only be accommodated by more lenient theories of autonomy—namely, that “traditionally subordinate feminine lives nevertheless can and do often nonslavishly embody and express values worth caring about” (Friedman, 25). She is echoing the idea that by denying that a choice is autonomous, we are suggesting that the choice is “zombielike” or “slavish”. She also takes issue with Marina Oshana’s theory of autonomy according to which a person must have significant options available in order to be autonomous (Oshana 2006). According to Friedman, even when a person’s options are severely limited, “the alternatives facing her may differ in ways that have both personal significance for the person facing those options and general moral significance” (26). Thus, the more requirements we pack into our theory of autonomy, or the more stringent those requirements are, the more likely we are to ignore or deny certain individuals’ admirable, or even morally praiseworthy, practical reasoning abilities.

#### **4.3.4 Answer 4: Denying Moral Agency or Moral Worth**

There is little agreement in the literature on autonomy (or in the literature on moral responsibility) regarding how autonomy and moral responsibility are related. Some take the two notions to be equivalent, others take autonomy to be necessary for moral responsibility, and others seem to think the relationship is more complicated. But for those who think that the notions are equivalent or that autonomy is necessary for responsibility, it appears that the non-autonomous person will be incapable of being responsible for her actions or that she will not be responsible for her choice if that choice

was not an autonomous one.<sup>25</sup> Benson expresses as much when he claims that, for example, “a woman whose socialization has impaired the autonomy of certain of her actions will also have sufficient grounds for being excused from full liability to moral criticism for those actions” (1991, 391).

On many substantive views of autonomy, the oppressed will frequently fail to be fully autonomous persons, and many of their choices will fail to be fully autonomous choices. Thus, there is some concern that these views of autonomy restrict the class of responsible individuals (or the class of actions for which someone is responsible) too much. Superson explains that “[b]ecause women’s agency historically has not been respected or even acknowledged... it is particularly salient that we not make moral claims about women that treat them as if they have no agency” (2010, 255). So not only is it important that we hold people responsible when it is appropriate to do so because it’s morally appropriate (Benson 2004), but it is also crucial that we appreciate women’s status as morally responsible agents because this comes with an appreciation of the constraints their preferences and choices place on us—constraints which have historically been largely ignored.

Friedman builds on this idea when she explains that, historically, women have not been thought of as full moral agents, and as a result their preferences and choices have not been respected.

In the realm of heterosexual relations, when a woman’s ‘no’ is treated as a ‘yes’ and women’s own views are routinely disregarded, the result is women’s

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<sup>25</sup> There’s a distinction between a person being morally responsible generally versus a person being responsible for a particular choice. There is also a distinction between a person being autonomous versus a person’s particular choice being an autonomous one. The difference here is inconsequential for the purposes of this paper so I move back and forth between talking about one or the other depending on what makes the most sense in the context.

widespread vulnerability to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape. The importance to women of having their perspectives, their wants and values, treated with cultural respect is thus crucial to women's well-being. (75)

Friedman argues that the "surest and most plausible" way to justify taking women's choices seriously is by appealing to their agency as autonomous individuals. She maintains that, as a result, we have good reason to choose a content-neutral theory of autonomy over a more restrictive, substantive one.

To sum up, then, on this line of argument it is disrespectful to deny that the *self-confident, self-guiding, oppressed* individual is autonomous because in doing so we are thereby denying their moral agency. Not only does it seem disrespectful to deny that an agent is responsible for her actions when, intuitively, she is responsible, but there is further concern that by denying her agency we are denying that we should respect her avowed preferences and choices. Plausibly, by denying the legitimacy of a person's preferences generally, we are suggesting that it is permissible to treat the person in ways that conflict with what they say they want. Thus, it seems as though more restrictive theories of autonomy provide moral justification for the mistreatment and abuse of women and other oppressed individuals.

#### **4.3.5 Answer 5: Inherently Disrespectful**

A final reason one might think it is disrespectful to deny the autonomy of certain individuals is that it is simply inherently respectful to recognize a person or action as autonomous, and we owe this form of respect to the *self-confident, self-guiding, oppressed* person. In the same way that we seem to show respect to someone when we call them "brave" or "noble," so too do we seem to show them respect when we call them "autonomous." Friedman suggests as much when she notes that "[m]any philosophers

agree that respect is owed to persons simply by virtue of their potential for being autonomous [and] someone's actual manifestation of autonomy may warrant yet another form of respect, also connected to sheer personhood" (22).

In understanding this option, it will be useful to discuss two different kinds of respect as explained by Stephen Darwall in "Two Kinds of Self-Respect." Darwall distinguishes between what he calls *recognition respect*, on the one hand, and *appraisal respect*, on the other. To have appraisal respect for someone is to have "an attitude of positive appraisal of that person either as a person or as engaged in some particular pursuit" (184). Recognition respect, as he defines it, is a disposition to recognize the significance of some thing or some feature of a thing, to give it appropriate weight in one's deliberations, and to act accordingly. Dillon in "Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political" claims that we can have this kind of respect for a mountain when we recognize how dangerous it would be to climb it, or for an agreement that we've made when we appreciate the significance of violating it.

So while having appraisal respect for someone involves having a particular positive attitude toward them, having recognition respect for them involves taking them into consideration in appropriate ways and altering our behavior accordingly. When we sanction paternalistic intervention in someone's life when it is inappropriate to do so, this signals a failure of recognition respect; we ought to have factored that person into our deliberation about how to act in a way that we failed to. The same is true when we place additional burdens on oppressed persons, because we are not appropriately considering the harms they've already suffered. Denying a person's moral agency is also denying them a form of recognition respect since we are failing to appreciate some morally

relevant fact about them and as a result we are failing to alter our behavior towards them in ways that we ought to.

In contrast, when we disrespect someone by overlooking certain of their agential abilities we are failing to give them the appropriate appraisal respect. It seems as though it is appropriate to positively appraise a person when they have the morally significant feature of being a moral agent, so when we deny a person this status we are denying them the appraisal respect that comes with it. It seems to me that this last option, that deeming a person autonomous is inherently respectful, is also appealing to appraisal respect. The idea seems to be that simply in calling someone “autonomous” we are expressing a positive appraisal of them or some feature of them, and in deeming them “non-autonomous” we are denying that they have this positive feature and perhaps even expressing a negative appraisal of them.

The idea that denying someone’s autonomy is disrespectful in this sense is hinted at throughout the literature on autonomy, as authors frequently claim that it is disrespectful to deny someone’s autonomy without giving any explanation of what they mean by that. Benson does this, for example, in his summary of the motivation of many content-neutral theorists: “Theories of autonomy should be as inclusive as they reasonably can be, according to this approach, because this is the best way to ensure that they respect appropriately persons’ authentic voices as realized in their decisions and conduct” (2014, 107). Friedman also does this frequently in motivating her own view, for example: “In practice, someone’s failure to manifest recognizable autonomy... may well promote the conviction in others that she is not really capable of autonomy and, therefore, does not deserve the respect that is premised on a capacity for it” (23).

Of course, someone could maintain that denying that the *self-confident, self-guiding, oppressed* person is autonomous is disrespectful in multiple ways at once. Perhaps it is disrespectful both inherently *and* because it sanctions paternalist intervention in their lives. Or perhaps it is disrespectful in all five of the ways I've discussed at once! Very few who appeal to respect are clear about which of these options they have in mind, but as I will argue, no matter which of these we appeal to it is simply false that denying the autonomy of the *self-confident, self-guiding, oppressed* person is, by itself, disrespectful. Thus, this is not a legitimate objection to substantive theories of autonomy. In the following section I evaluate each of these five interpretations of the "disrespect" objection in turn and argue that none of them is successful.

#### **4.4 Evaluating the Answers to the "Why?" Question**

##### **4.4.1 Answer 1: Sanctioning Paternalism**

On this way of understanding the disrespect that arguably comes with denying the autonomy of certain individuals, if a person is autonomous, then they cannot be subjected to paternalistic interference, and if a person is not autonomous, then they can be subjected to paternalistic interference. Thus, in determining who is and who is not an appropriate subject of paternalistic interference, we will have thereby determined who is and who is not autonomous. To deny autonomy to someone who is not an appropriate subject of paternalistic interference will be disrespectful to that person because we will be sanctioning paternalism when it is inappropriate to do so. Thus, Christman and Friedman conclude that we should choose a theory of autonomy that makes autonomy less difficult to achieve because paternalistic interference is rarely appropriate.



But why should we think that there is a perfect parallel between the degree to which someone is autonomous and the degree to which paternalistic interference in their affairs is appropriate? In order for Christman or Friedman to use this argument to push for a content-neutral theory of autonomy, they first need to convince us that autonomy and paternalism have the relationship they claim it does. However, neither of them does this. Christman stipulates that this is the role he wants autonomy to play in his political theory, so it is plausible that a more substantive theory of autonomy won't play the role he wants autonomy to play in his theory, but this doesn't go any distance toward showing that substantive theories of autonomy are making some kind of mistake. One alternative would just be that Christman's political theory is mistaken, but a more charitable response is that there are multiple conceptions of autonomy, each of which is important in different contexts.

The latter route is the one that Oshana takes, and I follow her in maintaining that there is an important distinction between political and personal autonomy. Oshana describes political autonomy as having to do with "the status of the individual against the state or against institutions of public and civic authority," and "the idea that the justification of political institutions must appeal to considerations recognized as valid by all adult citizens of a society" (2006, 102). But she maintains that a person can be politically autonomous without being personally autonomous, and that political liberalism is meant to allow for a society in which a person can be free to pursue personal autonomy or not. Christman's liberalism is motivated by a concern for respecting different conceptions of the good, so it takes into consideration the perspectives of everyone who meets the requirements for political autonomy. But some of those people will not be

motivated by the value of personal autonomy, and liberalism leaves room for them to live lives of self-sacrifice and subservience in accordance with their values.

It seems to me that the way to understand the difference between these two approaches to autonomy is that political autonomy is concerned with whether a person has the *authority* to govern themselves, while personal autonomy is concerned with whether or not a person *is in fact* governing themselves. And it is quite plausible that it takes less to have the authority to govern oneself than it does to succeed in governing oneself. So we can grant, with Christman and Friedman, that a person should be free from paternalistic intervention and should have the opportunity to contribute to the political process so long as they meet some minimal, content-neutral standards of autonomy while still maintaining that there is a distinct notion of autonomy that better captures what it means for a person to guide oneself.

It is not at all clear, then, why we should assume from the start that the autonomous person just is the person for whom paternalistic intervention is morally inappropriate. Christman has not adequately defended this claim, and it is open to proponents of substantive theories to deny Christman's political theory rather than to deny substantive theories of autonomy. However, a more charitable response, and the response I endorse, is to distinguish between political and personal autonomy. Christman is concerned with political autonomy, since he is concerned with the self-guiding features a person must have in order to have the standing to participate in the democratic process and to remain free of paternalistic interference. In contrast, Oshana, Stoljar, Benson, and others are concerned with personal autonomy, or what it takes for a person to actually be guiding their own choices. The claim that substantive theories of autonomy disrespect the

*self-confident, self-guiding, oppressed* person by denying her autonomy thereby sanction paternalistic interference in her affairs is, as a result, based on a mistaken conflation of political and personal autonomy.

#### **4.4.2 Answer 2: Burdening the Oppressed**

The second line of argument we considered was that it is disrespectful to deny that the *self-confident, self-guiding, oppressed* person is autonomous because in doing so we are placing additional burdens on her, but since she is a victim in this situation these burdens are unfair and perhaps tantamount to victim blaming. The argument from Meyers was that a substantive theory of autonomy would, in deeming these individuals non-autonomous, result in their having a lower moral status than they would on a content-neutral theory of autonomy. In order to match the moral status they would otherwise have had, they must now take on the oppressive structures that undermined their autonomy in the first place. To place the majority of the burden for remedying oppression on the oppressed themselves is unjust. And according to the victim-blaming argument we adapted from Superson, denying the oppressed this higher moral status because they are oppressed is, in some sense, blaming them for their oppression since in taking steps to become more autonomous they would thereby be taking steps to reduce the oppression that undermines their autonomy.

While I do agree with Meyers that being autonomous is a moral good and that failing to be autonomous is something that morality requires us to try to avoid, it does not follow that any time someone fails to achieve autonomy they are blameworthy for it or take on additional moral obligations as a result. In the case of an individual who lacks autonomy on the substantive views because she is oppressed, it will very clearly not be

her fault that she lacks autonomy. She will not have appropriate control over the situation, and she could not reasonably be blamed for the moral failing.

When the Deferential Housewife, for example, chooses to consistently defer to her husband, she does so because she has been socialized to believe that women's preferences count for less than men's preferences do. While she is, I maintain, failing to properly respect herself, she does not have the option to simply step out of the mental framework that shapes the way she conceives of everything in her life and pursue an autonomous life instead. Perhaps over time, with the right social conditions, she could come to have values that are more in line with autonomy, but a person cannot simply choose her beliefs and values in the way that would be necessary to correct the moral failing in this case. As a result, she is not blameworthy for the moral failing, and she does not come to have additional obligations to rectify the situation by taking on the patriarchy.<sup>26</sup>

It is also not true that in denying that this individual is autonomous we are blaming her for her oppression. For while it may be true that if she were simply to shed the oppressive socialization that undermines her autonomy she would thereby be fighting the oppression that caused this socialization, it does not follow that she has caused the oppression. To return to Superson's example, the outfit did not cause the rape even though the rape would not have occurred without it; similarly, the lack of autonomy did not cause the oppression even though the oppression would not have occurred (to the

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<sup>26</sup> Of course we all have a moral obligation to take on the patriarchy, so she has this obligation to the extent that everyone else does, but she does not have any *additional* obligation over and above this in virtue of her lack of autonomy (and there is still room for the privileged in a society to have more of an obligation here).

same degree) without it. Patriarchy—not oppressed women—causes women’s oppression, and maintaining that certain oppressed women lack autonomy does not conflict with that claim. Denying the autonomy of certain oppressed individuals, then, does not place unfair burdens on them or blame them in inappropriate ways, so this cannot be a way in which they are disrespected.

#### **4.4.3 Answer 3: Overlooking Certain Capabilities**

According to Narayan and Friedman, when we deny that the *self-confident, self-guiding, oppressed* person is autonomous, we thereby fail to appreciate any of the significant ways in which she is self-guiding, or any of the important skills she has that allow her to effectively navigate the difficult choices she faces. She may even develop skills that are lacking in those who have more power—and who we may therefore be more inclined to call “autonomous”—because her ability to live in accordance with her values may require her to engage in more self-reflection on what she really cares about and more conscious consideration of the ways in which her set of options might hold her back or help her in various ways. To deny that she is autonomous, according to Narayan and Friedman, is to deny or overlook her possession of these skills, and respecting them requires us to acknowledge and appreciate the value of these skills.

It is not at all clear to me why we should think that denying that an individual is autonomous is overlooking or denying the self-guiding skills they do have. Autonomy is a complicated phenomenon, and any theory of autonomy has multiple requirements that must be met in order for a person to qualify as fully autonomous.<sup>27</sup> For any theory, a

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<sup>27</sup> For simplicity, I have been talking about whether an individual is autonomous or not rather than about whether an individual is *fully* autonomous or not. However, all theories of autonomy that I am familiar with

person may meet some of those requirements but not others and so fail to be fully autonomous. On Friedman's own content-neutral theory, an agent is more autonomous with respect to a choice the more the agent reflectively endorsed the values that motivated that choice. So Friedman would claim that many, if not most, agents are less than fully autonomous, but it does not follow from this that she is ignoring the degree to which they *are* autonomous. Similarly, for Meyers's content-neutral view, being autonomous involves having multiple skills, but there's no reason to think that a person could have some of these skills without having others.

The same is true for substantive theories of autonomy. They contain multiple requirements for an agent to be fully autonomous, but an agent can be more or less autonomous to the degree that they satisfy those requirements. Thus, the stay-at-home-mom will show some degree of autonomy on the basis of her ability to reflect on her choices and act in accordance with the one that will most likely allow her to achieve her goals, but she will lack autonomy to the degree that her goals are shaped by problematic socialization that undermines her sense of self-worth (or whatever other substantive requirement we have in place). Additionally, we have no reason to think that content-neutral theories of autonomy give the result that agents are fully autonomous more frequently than substantive theories do. Friedman claims that "[n]o finite being is thoroughly self-determined" (7), so she denies that *any* agent can be fully autonomous. So if the concern is one about the number of individuals who count as fully autonomous

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leave room for there being degrees of autonomy, and many explicitly state that there are degrees of autonomy (including Stoljar's; see Stoljar 2014).

on a particular theory, then the focus should not be on the division between content-neutral and substantive theories.

To deny that an agent is fully autonomous is not to deny that they meet *any* of the requirements set forth by the relevant theory of autonomy. Content-neutral theorists themselves must accept this claim because they maintain that autonomy comes in degrees and at least some of them deny that *anyone* can be fully autonomous. As a result, they had better not maintain that to deny full autonomy is to deny any autonomy at all and is therefore disrespectful, because this argument could be used against them just as well as it could be used against the proponents of substantive views. Additionally, there's simply no reason to think that in denying full autonomy we necessarily overlook significant self-guiding skills the individual has. Many substantive theorists take care to point out the valuable skills possessed by individuals they claim are not fully autonomous.<sup>28</sup> In the end, while it may be disrespectful to overlook or deny someone's estimable self-guiding skills, denying that they are fully autonomous does not, in itself, do this.

#### **4.4.4 Answer 4: Denying Moral Agency or Moral Worth**

For those who think that autonomy is equivalent to or necessary for moral responsibility, a theory of autonomy that deems many non-autonomous will thereby deem them incapable of moral responsibility (or if it deems many choices non-autonomous it will thereby deem individuals free of responsibility for those many choices). This might be a problem if, intuitively, they are morally responsible and denying that they are would be disrespectful, or it may be a problem if we seem to be denying these individuals the

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Benson, 2014; Oshana, 2006; Stoljar, 2014.

status of a moral agent and so denying that they have certain moral rights. Superson and Friedman have both expressed concern that it would be particularly problematic if our theory of autonomy gave the result that we may deny women's moral rights given the long history of women's moral rights being denied.

Regarding the first concern, that substantive theories don't match up well with our intuitions about who is morally responsible and who is not, I see no reason to assume a priori that autonomy is equivalent to or necessary for moral responsibility. So if we are debating about what autonomy is, I don't see why we should think a particular theory is better than another just because it lines up better with our intuitions about who is morally responsible and who is not. For it could simply turn out that autonomy is not related to moral responsibility in any straightforward way, in which case our intuitions about moral responsibility would be largely irrelevant. It is only once we know what autonomy is (and what moral responsibility is) that we can determine how they are related. For this reason, it seems to me a mistake to appeal to our intuitions about who is morally responsible and who is not in our defense of one theory of autonomy over another.

Regarding the second concern about denying the moral rights of non-autonomous individuals, I would again like to point out that until we have determined what autonomy is, we have no reason to suppose that it has this important connection with moral rights. In fact, when people do talk about who has moral rights and who does not, to the degree that autonomy is relevant at all people seem to think that it is the *capacity* for autonomy that makes it the case that one has moral rights rather than the achievement of



autonomy.<sup>29</sup> In addition, I want to remind us that on most, if not all, theories of autonomy, autonomy comes in degrees. Perhaps there is a threshold one must meet in order to count as autonomous at all, and perhaps this is also the point at which one has any moral rights at all, but this is perfectly consistent with the claim that a person who is not fully autonomous still has certain moral rights and is due a certain amount of respect.

One final point on this topic that is, I think, worth noting, is that the substantive theories of autonomy are motivated by a concern for women and other members of oppressed groups getting the respect they are due. They have an idea of what moral rights we have and how we deserve to be treated in virtue of that, and they take this to be important for autonomy in one way or another. For Benson, we are not autonomous unless we have some understanding of our own status, and for Stoljar we are not autonomous if we have been subjected to oppressive socialization at least in part because this causes us to believe false things about our worth. So it is because the proponents of substantive views are so concerned with the moral worth of members of oppressed groups that they include certain requirements in their theories. For them, to ignore certain ways in which individuals' preferences are overridden and just call them autonomous anyway would suggest that their preferences aren't so important after all. So rather than holding society to a lower standard by denying that women's preferences should be respected, as Friedman claims, these substantive views are holding society to a higher standard by insisting that women's preferences must be respected in spite of all of the ways in which oppression makes this difficult.

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Friedman 2003, 23; Benson 2014, 101.

#### 4.4.5 Answer 5: Inherently Disrespectful

The final reason I've considered for thinking that it is disrespectful to deny that the *self-confident, self-guiding, oppressed* individual is autonomous is that in denying that a person is autonomous we are either failing to have a positive appraisal of them that we ought to have or we are having a negative appraisal of them when we ought not to. The idea is that just as we have a positive appraisal of someone when we deem them "brave" and a negative appraisal of someone when we deem them "cowardly," the same is true for "autonomous" and "non-autonomous." Of course, any theory of autonomy is going to deny the autonomy of some individuals—even content-neutral ones—so the problem can't be that any time we deny that someone is autonomous we are disrespecting them in this way. It is only when it is *inappropriate* to deny their autonomy that we disrespect them by expressing this negative appraisal or lack of positive appraisal.

In section I of this paper, I laid out three possible cases in which it would be inappropriate to deny that someone is autonomous: they are *self-confident, self-guiding, or oppressed* (or some combination of these). The remaining questions, then, are 1) Is it necessarily the case that when we deny that someone is autonomous we express a negative appraisal of them or fail to express a positive appraisal of them? And 2) If so, is it inappropriate to do this with the *self-confident, self-guiding, oppressed* person? In the remainder of this section, I will consider the first question, and I will consider the second question in the next section of the paper. Ultimately, I will argue that while it is implausible that we express a negative appraisal of someone merely by denying that they are autonomous, it is plausible that we express a failure to have a positive appraisal of them in doing so. However, it is perfectly appropriate to fail to have this positive

appraisal of the *self-confident, self-guiding, oppressed* person as autonomous if, in fact, they are not autonomous.

In considering what we express when we claim that someone is not autonomous, it will be helpful to start with an example. This example comes from Stoljar's discussion of women who had abortions after freely engaging in sex with men without using contraception despite its availability (Stoljar 2014). The choice to engage in this risky behavior may seem like an irrational one, but Kristin Luker, in her discussion of these women, argues that in fact their choices were rational given the costs of using contraception that stem from the stigmatization of sexually active women in our society. While Stoljar agrees with Luker that these choices are rational, she argues that they are, nonetheless, non-autonomous; this is because the women interviewed had internalized false norms of feminine sexuality and were motivated by them in their choice to engage in this risky behavior.

It is clear in this case that it is not the women's fault that they internalized these norms and thereby failed to make a fully autonomous choice. They are, in some sense, victims of an unjust system. They are lacking a capacity that they would be better off having because society got in the way of them attaining it. They are certainly not blameworthy for their lack of autonomy in this case, and I hope it is clear that when Stoljar claims that they are not making an autonomous choice, she is not blaming *them*. Instead, she is negatively evaluating the socialization that prevented them from achieving autonomy and the society that continues to bring women up in this way. The majority of the cases that proponents of substantive theories rely on to motivate their views are of this kind; the person who lacks autonomy is not to be blamed for this failure, but instead

some individual(s) in their lives or society more generally is. We might even be impressed with the ways in which they are able to navigate their options given the values that have been imposed on them, so we may positively evaluate them while still maintaining they are not fully autonomous. Clearly, then, it is possible to maintain that someone is not autonomous without having a negative evaluation of that person.

The second option is that in maintaining that someone lacks autonomy, we are failing to have a positive appraisal of them. Here the idea is that deeming someone autonomous and positively appraising them go hand-in-hand, and it seems plausible enough to me that this is so. I assume that anyone who works on autonomy takes autonomy to be a good thing, and while I'm not convinced that we always have a positive attitude toward someone to some degree whenever we deem them autonomous (as appraisal respect, by definition, requires), it seems like a harmless assumption. The remaining question is just whether we ought to have this attitude of positive appraisal that comes only with deeming someone autonomous whenever they are *self-confident*, *self-guiding*, *oppressed*, or some combination of these, and I take this up in the next section.

#### **4.5 Evaluating the Answers to the “Who?” Question**

The self-confident person is the person who believes that she is autonomous, self-guiding, or otherwise in control of the course of her life and the choices she makes. But it is implausible on any approach to autonomy that we owe a person the positive appraisal that comes with deeming them autonomous merely because they believe they are autonomous. Even the proponents of the content-neutral views have objective standards that must be met for a person to count as autonomous, so this cannot be what they have in mind when they claim that substantive theories are disrespectful. Most theories of

autonomy do not even think that believing we are autonomous is on the list of requirements for autonomy. Benson's view is the exception here, as he does require that agents take themselves to be answerable for their choices, but as we noted in the first section, he also requires that this belief is *reasonable*. For the belief to be a reasonable one, they must also meet some objective standards of self-guidance, so the appeal to self-confidence alone will not get us far.

A second possibility is that we owe it to those who meet some specified standards of self-guidance to positively appraise them in the special way that we positively appraise autonomous individuals. The problem here is that we have to figure out which standards of self-guidance a person must meet in order to be due this positive appraisal, and it isn't clear why we shouldn't just go with those standards of self-guidance that qualify one as autonomous. Of course we can positively appraise a non-autonomous person on the basis of her abilities to self-reflect, rationally consider her options, or prioritize various of her values, but I see no reason to think that we owe her the special kind of positive appraisal that we are supposing only comes with deeming someone autonomous unless she is, in fact, autonomous. If this is right, then we should first determine what it takes to be autonomous, and only then will we know whether or not we are disrespecting someone by failing to deem them autonomous.

Perhaps the situation is different if the person has *self-guidance* and *self-confidence*. For in a case like this, she believes she is autonomous and she has some good reason for thinking that she is. Even still, any theory of autonomy will have objective standards, so even a content-neutral theory will have to deem some *self-confident*, *self-guiding* people non-autonomous. This is because, while the individual may meet *some*

plausible standards of autonomy, they may not meet the standards that the proponent of the relevant view endorses. While there is a disagreement here between the *self-confident*, *self-guiding* individual and the proponent of the relevant theory of autonomy, I see no reason to think there is anything disrespectful going on. The case seems parallel to a case of someone writing about the wrongness of meat-eating, all the while there are meat-eaters out there who take themselves to be doing nothing wrong. There is disagreement, but there need not be any disrespect.

The third possibility is that we owe it to oppressed individuals to positively appraise them as autonomous so long as it is features of their oppression that seem to us to undermine their autonomy. This might initially seem plausible because it is not their fault that they fail to meet the requirements that we have in mind, but we must remember that a lack of a positive appraisal is not the same as a negative appraisal. We can recognize that it is not their fault that they do not meet the relevant standards, and we can positively appraise them for all kinds of other skills and praiseworthy attributes they may have.

Rather than thinking that denying autonomy in a case like this is disrespectful, it seems to me that this is what properly respecting the person requires. Her access to a moral good is being blocked by unjust institutions, and to ignore that injustice and pretend she has all the self-guidance a person could want for the sake of being nice seems patronizing and counter-productive. As Oshana says of an oppressed woman from her examples, “[w]e can call [her] whatever we want, but doing so will make no difference if her social situation and the institutions that support that situation continue to undermine autonomy” (2006, 101). Calling the *oppressed* individual “autonomous” won’t fix

anything, but perhaps acknowledging the degree of self-guidance she ought to have access to but lacks will go some distance toward remedying the injustice and strengthening her sense of self-worth.

In spite of the prevalence of the appeal to “disrespect” as an objection to substantive theories of autonomy, it is rare for those who wield this objection to make clear what they have in mind. In an attempt to determine what the substance of this objection is, I have looked for possible answers to the following questions: 1) What features must persons have in order for respect to require us to deem them autonomous? And 2) Why is it that excluding people with these features is disrespectful? Based on claims made throughout the literature, the possible answers to the first question seemed to be: *self-confidence*, *self-guidance*, or *oppression*. However, in considering a number of different reasons for thinking that it would be disrespectful to deny that a person with all three of these qualities is autonomous, I argued that none of them is plausible except, perhaps, that denying that this person is autonomous is intrinsically disrespectful.

In the end, though, I argued that we only have good reason to think that it is disrespectful to deny the autonomy of someone who *is* autonomous. As a result, rather than starting by determining who we would disrespect by denying their autonomy and building our theory of autonomy based on those results, we should instead start by determining what autonomy is. Once we have a set of criteria for determining who is autonomous, we can use that same set of criteria to determine who, on the basis of respect, we should deem autonomous. And to the extent that respecting the oppressed is relevant to our theories of autonomy, it seems to me that substantive theories of

autonomy do a better job than content-neutral ones of capturing what it would take for our society to properly respect the autonomy of oppressed individuals.



**CHAPTER 5**  
**A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO DEFINING THE EXTERNAL CONDITIONS**  
**FOR AUTONOMY**

**5.1 Introduction**

Autonomy is often discussed as though it is something that we have or lack on the basis of our psychology. It is sometimes thought that as long as our beliefs, desires, values, etc., and the choices that result from them meet certain conditions—like being in the right relationship with one another, having the right kind of history, or having the right kind of content—then we count as autonomous.<sup>30</sup> But some autonomy theorists have argued that it is not just what’s going on *inside* our minds that matters, but also what’s going on *external* to us.<sup>31</sup> These thinkers maintain that if we don’t have the right kind of options available to us, then no matter what our psychology is like, we still lack autonomy. After all, they ask, how can we be understood as guiding the course of our lives if we lack a significant range of options or if other people have significant control over what we are able to do?

If we decide in response to these considerations to include external conditions on autonomy in our theory of autonomy, then we face a number of difficult problems that arise because of the apparently competing desiderata for such a theory. For example, on the one hand, we want an account of autonomy that will be compatible with the fact that all of us depend on others in various ways and have done so for all of our lives. Human

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Frankfurt, 1988; Friedman, 2003; Benson, 2005; Stoljar, 2000; Meyers, 1989.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Oshana, 2006 and Joseph Raz, 1988.

beings are inherently social, and our identities and opportunities are shaped by those around us. Similarly, we often give up certain important opportunities to provide care and support to others, but we take this to be consistent with our autonomy. On the other hand, though, we want our theory of autonomy to be able to explain when and why various dependencies on others, external effects on our development, and voluntary losses of opportunities interfere with our ability to guide our own lives. Call this tension between the ways in which interdependency does and does not seem to undermine autonomy the *Interdependency Puzzle* (IP).

Another desideratum that we have for our theory of autonomy is that it leave space for people from various cultures and regions to be fully autonomous, regardless of the level of wealth or technological development present in their society. This is important in order to avoid a kind of cultural chauvinism according to which those who do not have the specific kinds of opportunities *we* happen to have are thereby worse off in spite of their ability to flourish. At the same time, though, lacking choices does sometimes undermine autonomy, and if our theory of autonomy were unable to capture this fact it would be wholly deficient. So how do we determine which or how many options must be available to us in order for us to be autonomous? Call this the *Range of Options Puzzle* (ROP).

In this paper, I provide a solution to both of these puzzles that ultimately appeals to the ways in which others must be appropriately moved by us in order for us to be autonomous. After laying out the competing desiderata and the puzzles that result from them in more detail in Section I, I move on to my proposal which has two main parts. The first of these involves focusing on cases in which a person's options are restricted by non-

persons rather than persons, which I do in Section II. I begin by distinguishing between the ways in which non-personal forces *shape* our options generally, versus the ways in which non-personal forces *drastically change* our options. In talking about the ways in which non-personal forces shape our options, I am referring to the fact that we all have a certain set of options available to us from the moment we are capable of any degree of self-guidance based on things like the climate, our physical surroundings, the way our bodies function, our physical needs, etc. These differ from person to person, even within societies, as some people are disabled in various ways, some can run faster than others or lift more than others, some can reproduce and some cannot, etc. I argue that neither the shaping of our options nor drastic changes in our options by non-personal forces undermine our autonomy directly, and that this is a necessary component of a naturalistic and inclusive approach to autonomy. However, these things may undermine our autonomy *indirectly* by making it difficult for us to have psychological autonomy. This allows for a fair amount of flexibility in the theory, since two people might have the same options available but those options might undermine one person's psychological autonomy while being compatible with the psychological autonomy of the other.

I then move on in Section III to discussing cases in which other persons are affecting the shape of our options or causing drastic shifts in our options. While there are important parallels between the non-personal case and the personal case, there are differences as well. For example, we are social beings who are necessarily shaped by those around us, and what options we have depends on the choices made by others in our society. For this reason, I argue that the mere shaping of our options by others is not sufficient to undermine autonomy—if it were, then none of us would be autonomous.

However, there are cases in which the ways that others shape our options undermine our ability to guide the course of our lives. These arise when the best explanation for our set of options is a lack of respect for us from those doing the shaping. This is because, in order for us to effectively guide the course of our lives, our decisions, preferences, etc. must have the appropriate effect on others. So, for example, if I am unable to carry out my plans because others have not been appropriately moved by my choice to do so, then I am lacking self-guidance because whether or not I can carry out my plans depends on the whims of others. Of course, my autonomy does not depend on others doing *whatever I want them to*. It just depends on their respecting my personhood. When their lack of respect for my personhood impacts my options, they thereby undermine my autonomy. In any case in which my options are affected in this way, I argue that my autonomy is undermined regardless of whether my psychological autonomy is affected.

## **5.2 Motivating Considerations**

The purpose of this section is to lay out some reasons that a theory of external autonomy might be important, why it is difficult to construct a satisfying one, and what a satisfying one would look like. I begin by summarizing what psychological autonomy is and what conditions must be met on my account for us to count as having psychological autonomy. I then describe in a bit more detail why a focus on psychological autonomy alone might feel unsatisfying as an account of what it takes to be guiding one's life, and I explain some of the difficulties we face when we try to broaden our understanding of what is required for autonomy by including external constraints as well. I end the section by laying out some of the desiderata that I maintain a theory of external autonomy must meet in order to be plausible.

Before beginning, I should make a quick note on terminology. In this paper, I will assume that in order to be autonomous, it is not enough that our minds meet certain requirements but that the world around us must meet certain requirements as well. These requirements that our minds must meet I will refer to as psychological constraints on autonomy, and for convenience I will talk about whether or not we satisfy these constraints as whether or not we have psychological autonomy. The requirements on what the world must be like for us to be autonomous I will call external constraints on autonomy, and for convenience I will talk about whether or not we satisfy these constraints as whether or not we have external autonomy. In addition, I should note that I take it that autonomy comes in degrees, so that some beings are not autonomous at all, some beings have some autonomy, and others have even more autonomy. The degree of autonomy we have depends on whether we have a tendency to make autonomous choices. When we have a strong tendency to make autonomous choices, then we have a high degree of autonomy, and we lack autonomy to the degree that we tend not to make autonomous choices. To complicate things further, I take it that each individual choice can be more or less autonomous as well. This is because there are various requirements that must be met for a choice to be fully autonomous, and we can satisfy some of these without satisfying others. We can also satisfy the requirements more or less fully in ways that should become clearer throughout the paper.

### **5.2.1 Psychological Autonomy**

When I discuss psychological autonomy, I am concerned primarily with what our choices need to be like in order for them to be autonomous, where I am understanding a choice as a mental act. My view is that our choices lack autonomy to the degree that they

are best explained by our failure to respect ourselves as persons. Respecting ourselves as persons has three components, which correspond to the three features of ourselves that deserve respect. We must respect ourselves as moral equals to other persons, as rational agents capable of practical reasoning, and as the particular individuals we are. If a choice is best explained by a failure to respect ourselves in one of these three ways, then that choice lacks autonomy.

I would lack autonomy, for example, if I were to choose to have a child merely because my partner wanted one and without thoroughly considering the ways in which doing so might interfere with my own goals in life. This is because my choice is best explained, in part, by a failure to take seriously the fact that my own goals and preferences count for just as much as my partner's do, and by a failure to care sufficiently about having good reasons for making important choices. I would also lack autonomy if I were to act without proper regard for my values, even if those values are morally neutral (e.g. my love of gardening), or if I were to lose my faith in my own ability to effectively guide the course of my life and so depend on others to do it for me.

The world around us affects our capacity for psychological autonomy in various ways. One of the most impactful ways it does this is through socialization. We're taught about our worth by parents, friends, television advertisers, politicians, and others, both implicitly and explicitly. The expectations people have for us and the standards they hold us to influence our beliefs about whether we matter as much as others, whether we are as capable of guiding our lives as they are, and whether our goals and values are actually worth pursuing. And the situation we're in might influence our beliefs about our worth without any person saying or doing anything at all; perhaps if we try and fail at

something enough times, we will come to doubt our own worth or the value of our goals regardless of whether anyone else even knows about it.

But it is a further question whether the world can affect our autonomy directly, without impacting our psychological autonomy. Consider, for example, cases in which certain people are not allowed to vote based on their skin color or their sex, or in which a person is enslaved or imprisoned. More commonly in our society today, we might see cases in which a person is stuck in a relationship for financial reasons, or feels forced to work a job they hate. We might be inclined to think that the people in these cases lack autonomy in some sense *even if* their psychological autonomy remains unaffected by their circumstances, perhaps because they lack a sufficiently wide range of options, or because they don't have the opportunity to pursue what they most care about.

If this is right, then there are some external constraints on autonomy in addition to the psychological constraints, and the world around us can undermine our autonomy directly. But establishing a satisfying theory of external autonomy is extraordinarily difficult. In what follows, I lay out two general puzzles that arise when we try to lay out these external constraints on autonomy—the Interdependency Puzzle and the Range of Options Puzzle—and I then propose some desiderata for or theory of external autonomy that seem to become apparent when we consider these puzzles.

### **5.2.2 Puzzles for Establishing External Constraints on Autonomy**

The Interdependency Puzzle (IP) arises because of the ways in which interdependency seems to sometimes undermine our autonomy but at other times to be perfectly consistent with it. One example of this has to do with our giving up certain options for ourselves because another person has become dependent upon us. In some

cases, this appears to be autonomy undermining. Consider, for example, the case of a woman who decides to marry knowing that her husband will expect to have complete control over when then they have sex, or a parent who must give up their goal of learning to play the violin because all of their time and resources have to go to paying for their child's lifesaving medical treatment. Both of these cases intuitively involve a lack of autonomy resulting from an individual's options being reduced because someone else is dependent on them for something.

On the other hand, consider a case in which a woman decides to become a single parent through in vitro fertilization; although having the child will significantly reduce the number of options available to her and the range of things she will be able to do for at least the next ten or so years, she seems to be a paradigm of autonomy in that she has made her choice and overcome the obstacles she faced in reaching her goal. She has guided the course of her life effectively, though doing so has reduced her options because another being will become utterly dependent on her alone and she will be responsible for caring for them. So a loss of options resulting from someone else's becoming dependent upon us does not always seem to undermine our autonomy. In addition, whether or not we anticipated or planned this loss of options does not explain its effect on our autonomy because the loss of options was anticipated in both the marriage case and in the reproduction case.

An alternative suggestion for when this kind of interdependency does and does not undermine autonomy comes from Marina Oshana, who has argued at length for the claim that having external conditions on autonomy is crucial if we are to have a plausible, feminist account of autonomy. She claims that "The individual is not required to take



responsibility for another's needs, expectations, and failings unless doing so is reasonably expected of the individual in light of a particular function" (2006, 87), and that having this responsibility when it is not reasonably expected in light of their function is autonomy undermining. But it isn't clear what it means for it to be reasonable to expect someone to be responsible for another person. After all, it seems reasonable to expect a parent to be responsible for their child's needs, but it still seems like the parent lacks autonomy to some degree when they have to give up a hobby they love for their child's sake—especially when they were not expecting to have to make that sacrifice and it caused a disturbance or interruption in their life. So it seems to me that a particular sacrifice can be a reasonable one to expect of a person, but that their making it can still interfere with their ability to guide the course of their life in important ways. As a result, we'll need to look elsewhere for our explanation of when this kind of interdependency is autonomy undermining.

A second way in which interdependency sometimes seems to undermine autonomy and sometimes seems not to is that our own dependency on others can sometimes limit the options that we have. This kind of dependency seems to be autonomy undermining, for example, in a case in which a wife is financially dependent on her husband and so lacks the option to leave the marriage. It also seems autonomy undermining in a case in which an employee is forced to work in inhumane conditions but is unable to quit because he is financially dependent on the job. Oshana has said that this financial dependence on others is in itself autonomy undermining (2006, 87), but it is important to note that financial dependence on others can take different forms. For example, individual women in developing countries might want to start a business but be

unable to do so on their own. In contributing their respective talents to a shared goal, they might be able to create an income stream they would not otherwise have had, but they may remain financially dependent on one another as the business will be unsuccessful without all of them continuing to contribute. In addition, they will lack the option to leave the business in a similar way in which the financially dependent wife would lack the option to leave her marriage. But in spite of this similarity, it seems as though the women who started the business are in stark contrast with the financially dependent wife because they seem to be quite autonomous. After consideration of cases such as these, it seems as though financial dependence itself cannot explain why the wife or the exploited employee lack autonomy.

A final component of the IP that I will consider here has to do with the way in which another person's control over our options sometimes seems to undermine our autonomy and sometimes does not. Consider a case in which I have a principled opposition to wearing shoes, and as a result I am unable to eat at restaurants, shop at grocery stores, etc. Contrast this with a case in which I am outspoken on certain political issues and have been banned from certain restaurants and grocery stores in response. Suppose that in both cases I could change my ways and thereby come to be allowed in these places again. Intuitively, I do not lack autonomy in the first case, whereas in the latter case I do. But why should this be? According to Oshana, "We cannot sensibly claim a person is autonomous if she is party to social relations or institutions that would enfeeble her ability to determine how she will live if it were the will of others that they do so" (2006, 83), but both of these cases involve the will of others interfering with my

ability to live my life how I want to. It seems, then, that an alternative explanation of what has undermined my autonomy in the second case is in order.

Joseph Raz raises a related issue when he argues that the presence of coercion undermines our autonomy regardless of the range of options that remains available to us. “That is why slaves are thought to lack autonomy even if they enjoy a range of options which, were they free, would have been deemed sufficient.” (377-8). But we need some explanation of why the mere fact that someone else is limiting our options in this way is relevant to our autonomy rather than just the range of options themselves. How do the intentions of another person have such a powerful effect on our ability to guide our lives, even in cases in which they have no impact on what options we have available to us?

This concern regarding how another’s intentions can limit our autonomy without altering what options are available to us leads directly to the Range of Options Puzzle (ROP), which has to do with the difficulty of determining with any precision what our range of options must be like in order for us to be autonomous. First, how many options must we have, and how do we determine their adequacy? As Raz points out, “No one can control all aspects of his life. How much control is required for the life to be autonomous, and what counts as an adequate exercise of control (as opposed to being forced by circumstances, or deceived by one's own ignorance, or governed by one's weaknesses) is an enormously difficult problem” (373). And while Oshana claims that “There is some fact about the extent to which a person can suffer restricted options and still maintain her autonomy,” (Personal Autonomy in Society, 85) she doesn’t tell us what that fact is.

In an attempt to begin addressing this problem, Raz claims that “The autonomous person must have options which will enable him to develop all his abilities, as well as to

concentrate on some of them. One is not autonomous if one cannot choose a life of self-realization, nor is one autonomous if one cannot reject this ideal.” (376) But if this is right, then it seems that only really, really rich people in recent history will be autonomous, since having the opportunity to develop all of our abilities is extraordinarily rare. We have good reason to avoid a classist conception of autonomy, though, and should look instead for a way of defining autonomy that allows for autonomy to be attainable to many, if not most of us.

Raz’s way of thinking about this seems to be ableist as well. He claims that “Some of the capacities with which the human species is genetically endowed come coupled with innate drives for their use. We have innate drives to move around, to exercise our bodies, to stimulate our senses, to engage our imagination and our affection, to occupy our mind.” In addition, he claims that in order to be autonomous, a person must “have options which enable him to sustain throughout his life activities which, taken together, exercise all the capacities human beings have an innate drive to exercise, as well as to decline to develop any of them” (375). But it seems important to appreciate a person’s ability to guide the course of their lives regardless of whether they can exercise their bodies, for example, which gives us another reason to reject Raz’s way of defining a range of options that is consistent with autonomy.

Another question we might ask about what our range of options must be like in order for us to be autonomous is whether we should weigh options more heavily when they matter to us more, or whether a range of options can be adequate if it is broad enough even if it excludes the option to pursue what matters most to us. Oshana argues that our range of options *must* include those things that matter most to us if it is to be

consistent with our autonomy. “Because self-governance is governance over matters of central importance to human life, the options available must be relevant to the development of a person’s life and they must be ones a person can genuinely hope to achieve.” (2006, 85).

And while Raz reaffirms this idea, he also suggests that the options that matter less to us are *just as important* for our autonomy. “It is intolerable that we should have no influence over the choice of our occupation or of our friends. But it is equally unacceptable that we should not be able to decide on trivia such as when to wash or when to comb our hair. This aspect of the requirement of adequate choice is necessary to make sure that our control extends to all aspects of our lives. This is clearly required by the basic idea of being the author of one's life.” (Raz, 374) But some people—in developing countries, for instance—don’t have the option of when to wash or when to comb their hair, and they seem autonomous, nonetheless. Still, Raz seems right that if we were to lose control over that part of our lives, we would thereby become less autonomous. So what account of autonomy can we give that will be consistent with both of these intuitions?

Yet another question that relates to this puzzle is whether another person can undermine our autonomy by *increasing* our options. For example, imagine that someone is applying for a job, and the hiring committee is leaning strongly against their application but is open to reconsidering them if someone they trust vouches for the applicant. Then someone the committee trusts offers to the applicant their support, so long as the applicant will perform certain sexual favors for them. In this situation, the applicant lacked the option to get the job, and the friend of the committee is making an

option available to them that they would not otherwise have had. But we might feel nonetheless like the autonomy of the applicant is undermined when they are faced with this difficult choice that they did not previously face. The same kind of thing seems to be going on in cases in which an impoverished society is suddenly given the option to work in a sweatshop, or a group of people without access to medications is given the option to be in a clinical trial.

A final question about what our range of options must be like in order for us to be autonomous has to do with whether we should treat options to do morally bad things in just the same way that we treat options to do morally good or morally neutral things. One question related to this issue is whether our autonomy is reduced when we are unable to do morally bad things. On the one hand, Oshana makes the following intuitive claim: “The [autonomous] individual can have, and can pursue, values, interests, and goals different from those who have influence and authority over her, without risk of reprisal sufficient to deter her in this pursuit.” (87). But what if the thing we want to do is morally bad? Does it reduce our autonomy when governments, for example, don’t let us harm others? The intuitive answer here, I think, is “no,” but why should this be, especially given the very plausible point just noted from Oshana?

In the following two sections I will lay out my own account of what is required for us to have external autonomy, and in the conclusion I will explain how this account can allow us to respond to the various puzzles raised in this section. I begin in Section II by giving a general outline of what is required for external autonomy when other agents are not involved in shaping our options. In Section III I consider when and why the shaping of our options by others is autonomy undermining and when it is consistent with

our full autonomy. Here I argue that other agents undermine our external autonomy when they shape our options in ways that conflict with a proper recognition of our personhood.

### **5.2.3 Resulting Desiderata for a Theory of External Autonomy**

In thinking about these puzzles, some desiderata for a theory of external autonomy seem to become apparent. I will list some of these here and provide reasons in favor of thinking that they are important, but I will not argue extensively for them. I take them to be quite intuitive, and I am content with the result that those who do not find them appealing will be unconvinced by some of the arguments that come later in the paper. The first desiderata I will propose is that a theory of external autonomy (or autonomy more generally) must be such that a reasonably high degree of autonomy is attainable by many (or perhaps even most) persons. I take it that we need not get the result that anyone is completely autonomous; after all, while the most fortunate of us seem to have quite a lot of control over the course of our lives, there will always be things that are of great importance to us that are out of our control.

Perhaps many of our particular choices should be able to count as completely autonomous, but surely we should accept that all of us sometimes make choices that lack autonomy to some degree and so that no person is completely autonomous. Still, many of us should count as having a very high degree of autonomy; for a theory of autonomy which makes it out of our reach entirely seems to be the wrong theory of autonomy for persons. I take it that some of us do, for the most part, effectively guide the course of our lives, and our theory of autonomy should explain what that means and what is going wrong when we are *not* effectively guiding the course of our lives.

A second desiderata of our theory of autonomy is that it must be inclusive, that is, not classist, ableist, sexist, etc. We don't want to make the mistake of thinking that only those with precisely the same opportunities and social structures that we have can be autonomous. We must recognize that a person can guide the course of their lives effectively even without the wealth, education, or career choices that we have. This also relates to the previous desiderata, that many persons count as having a high degree of autonomy. This is because we live in a time and place that is quite different from what most of the world has been like for most of human history. If the precise range of options we have now were required for autonomy, then most persons throughout history would not have been autonomous. In addition, a person need not be able to do the precise things we are able to do with our bodies in order to be autonomous. So when people with physical disabilities say that they are effectively guiding the course of their lives, we should take that as very strong evidence that they are.

Still, it is important for our theory to be able to appreciate the ways in which things like poverty and social injustice *can* undermine autonomy. This is the third desiderata for our theory. As Oshana insists in her writing on this topic, "We cannot sensibly claim a person is autonomous if she is party to social relations or institutions that would enfeeble her ability to determine how she will live if it were the will of others that they do so." (83) If a person has a physical disability, this need not undermine their ability to guide the course of their lives in itself, but if all of the buildings in a society are constructed such that they cannot enter them, then this will very likely interfere with the person's autonomy. Similarly, if a person has very little wealth, this can be consistent with their autonomy depending on their values and the way their society works. But if a



person's lack of wealth prevents them from pursuing the life they want, this may undermine their autonomy; this is especially true in cases in which they are entitled, in some sense, to more than they have. So it seems that autonomy is relevant in some ways to justice since it is sometimes not the options that are available to us *themselves* that are relevant to our autonomy, but instead the relationship between the options we have and the options we *ought* to have. Our theory of autonomy should be able to explain this.

The final desiderata for our theory of external autonomy I will address here is that it must be consistent with the fact that humans are social and dependent on one another in various ways. None of us is self-creating, and all of us came to be who we are in part because of the influence that others have had on us. We depend on one another in our various pursuits, and we have the preferences and goals we do in part because of the values held by our families, friends, and societies more generally. As a result, our theory of autonomy cannot give us the result that we lack autonomy whenever we depend on someone else; after all, we all depend on others in various ways, and our theory of autonomy is supposed to make it possible for many of us to be largely autonomous. It also cannot give us the result that we lack autonomy whenever we are influenced to have the values or preferences we have by the world around us. Again, we are all influenced in these ways, yet many of us have a high degree of autonomy. In addition, it is important that our theory can appreciate that our relationships with others are what make it possible for us to be autonomous at all. So not only do these relationships *not undermine* autonomy, but they also facilitate and often strengthen it.

In what follows, I propose an account of external autonomy that can respond to the various puzzles described above while also satisfying the desiderata I have laid out in

this section. In Section II, I focus on the impact that non-personal forces have on our autonomy, arguing that they only affect our autonomy when they affect our *psychological* autonomy, and in Section III I discuss the various ways that other persons can affect our autonomy. I argue that persons can undermine our autonomy directly, without influencing psychological autonomy, though they do, of course, also often have effects on psychological autonomy. Persons undermine autonomy directly, I will argue, when they shape the options that are available to us without properly respecting us as persons with the particular goals and values we have.

### **5.3 When Our Options Are Not Shaped by Persons**

In this section I will argue that non-personal forces never undermine our autonomy directly. What I mean by this is that these external forces do not violate external constraints on autonomy. However, they can undermine our autonomy by undermining our psychological autonomy. This means that there is no rule regarding what options must be available to us in order for us to be autonomous, or how many options we must have, or how drastically or frequently our options can change. Instead, these things can only undermine our autonomy to the degree that they undermine our psychological autonomy. And since each person will be psychologically affected in different ways by these factors, there will be significant variation from person to person with respect to the impact these factors have on autonomy.

#### **5.3.1 Why Non-Personal Forces Never Undermine Autonomy Directly**

One noteworthy distinction is between the ways in which non-personal forces *shape* our options generally, versus the ways in which non-personal forces *drastically change* our options. We each come into existence in a particular body with certain

limitations, in a particular area with a given landscape and climate, and in a particular universe with certain laws of nature. These are some of the general ways in which non-personal forces shape our options. We cannot fly or breathe underwater or lick our elbows, and we must eat and sleep and give ourselves time to recover when we are sick or injured. Many of us are free to run and jump, but some are not; many of us can bear children, but many cannot; and some of us have the time and resources to enjoy art and music, but many do not. These are some of the ways in which non-personal forces outside of us shape the options that are available to us.

But sometimes we start with one set of options, and those options change. This can happen expectedly or unexpectedly, gradually or suddenly. Those of us who can bear children know that a day will come when we no longer can. Many of us expect that, over time, we will lose the ability to do some of the things we currently do with our bodies, like run and jump, and some people lose these abilities quickly as a result of an accident or a sudden illness. And sometimes we find ourselves quickly going from having the time and resources to pursue hobbies to suddenly having to spend all of our time and resources just to get by. Having a restricted set of options, then, and having those options change from one moment to the next, is a part of life for all human persons, and I maintain that it is a part of life that does not directly undermine our autonomy to any degree at all.

This claim might seem implausible when we consider some of the cases Raz proposes, like the Man in the Pit or the Hounded Woman. The Man in the Pit falls into a deep pit and is trapped in it for the rest of his life; he has the resources he needs to get by without suffering, but “His choices are confined to whether to eat now or a little later, whether to sleep now or a little later, whether to scratch his left ear or not.” (374) The

Hounded Woman is on an island alone with a carnivorous creature that spends all of its time hunting her, so she must spend all of her time avoiding it. Avoiding the creature is an extraordinarily difficult task, and she has no opportunity to do (or even think about doing) anything but escape.

Raz quite plausibly claims that these individuals lack autonomy. The Man in the Pit is said to lack autonomy because he has only trivial choices to make, and he does not have the opportunity to make any significant choices. The Hounded Woman, on the other hand, is said to lack autonomy because even though her choices are of great significance, they do not offer her enough range since one misstep would result in her death. It follows from these explanations of why these individuals lack autonomy that in order to be autonomous we must have a wide range of options available to us and at least some of those options should be important. But it is still not clear how wide the range of options must be, how significant they must be, or how many significant options there must be.

In his attempt to address this problem, Raz makes various claims about what our options must be like in order for us to be autonomous that violate at least one of the desiderata laid out in Section I. For example, he claims that “To be autonomous and to have an autonomous life, a person must have options which enable him to sustain throughout his life activities which, taken together, exercise all the capacities human beings have an innate drive to exercise, as well as to decline to develop any of them,” (375) where he claims that we have an innate drive to “move around, to exercise our bodies, to stimulate our senses, to engage our imagination and our affection, to occupy our mind,” and so on. Of course, we do not have to *actually* exercise all of these capacities, but we must have the *opportunity* to exercise all of them. But this requirement

seems to be ableist, at the very least, and perhaps also classist or exclusionary in other ways.

While I cannot consider all of the possible requirements a person might propose for a range of options to be compatible with autonomy, I suspect that any clear, concrete requirements will be exclusionary in some problematic way and make it too difficult for many or most persons to be autonomous. After all, if The Man in the Pit knew no other life and was happy with his modest range of options, it seems to me reasonable to think of him as guiding the course of his life. So perhaps just having the choice of when to eat and when to sleep can be sufficient for autonomy in certain situations. As a result, it seems to me that an inclusive theory of autonomy must allow that there is no specific set of requirements that a range of options must meet in order for it to be compatible with a person's autonomy.

### **5.3.2 How Non-Personal Forces Can Undermine Psychological Autonomy**

One might object that, in spite of what I have said, it still seems to be the case that Raz's Man in the Pit and Hounded Woman are less autonomous than you or I. I think that this is likely right, but not because they lack *external* autonomy. Instead, I think that their psychological autonomy is damaged by their circumstances. To remind us, on the view that I propose, psychological autonomy is self-respecting self-guidance. This means that we must take ourselves to have as much moral worth as other persons, to have worthwhile reasoning abilities that allow us to guide our lives, and to have goals and values that are worth having. Being in the situations Raz describes would make it difficult, I suspect, to maintain these attitudes about oneself and one's abilities.

Consider first the requirement that to be psychologically autonomous we must be guided by respect for ourselves as moral equals to those around us. Having a restricted set of options available to us can make this difficult in various ways. First, it seems plausible that being around others who treat us as having a certain moral status makes it easier for us to see that we have that status. Without others providing us with this evidence, it may be difficult to come to have the appropriate beliefs. In addition, if we are consistently unable to achieve our goals or live in accordance with our values, this might also cause us to come to doubt our moral importance; even if there is no agent preventing us from achieving our goals, it can be difficult to trust in our worth when we feel like a failure or, alternatively, feel like the world is working against us. For these reasons, the Man in the Pit or the Hounded Woman might lack respect for themselves as moral equals to other persons, and if this were to contribute to their motivation for making certain choices (e.g. in thinking that the loss of their lives would be insignificant, or that they're better off alone anyway because they don't have the standing to have meaningful interactions with others), then it would be autonomy undermining.

Next, consider the requirement that to be psychologically autonomous we must be guided by respect for ourselves as rational agents with valuable practical reasoning abilities. It may be difficult to believe that these reasoning abilities are valuable if we lack the opportunity to use them, or if we are consistently unable to reach our goals even when we do use them. So while I suspect that the Hounded Woman would value her practical reasoning abilities because she depends on them to stay alive, the Man in the Pit may not value his because he has little use for them. If this lack of appreciation of the value of his rational abilities plays a role in the choices he makes (e.g. by choosing not to bother to

develop them or to consider his options carefully), then the resulting choices would thereby lack autonomy.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the kinds of cases under consideration here, consider the requirement that to be psychologically autonomous we must be guided by respect for ourselves as the particular individuals we are. Respecting ourselves in this way involves appreciating that being a person always involves being some *particular* person, and that those particularities are part of what make us the valuable beings we are. We must have some particular goals and value particular things, and respecting this about ourselves means not only attempting to have goals and values that are worthy of us, but also living with integrity by pursuing those goals and living in accordance with those values. As Robin Dillon puts it in her discussion of this form of self-respect, “Her commitment to being a worthy person living a worthy life means that it matters very much to her that the person she is or is becoming and the life she is leading are genuinely worthy, genuinely congruent with and expressive of her dignity as a person” (2004, 52). While there is no determinative list of activities that are worthy of pursuit in this way, the crucial point is that the self-respecting person *cares* about living in this way and *actively tries* to live this way.

But the Hounded Woman will likely feel as though she does not have the opportunity to cultivate a life that is in line with her dignity as a person. It seems plausible that she will feel as though she has little control over where the course of her life takes her, and as a result she might feel that any of her goals or values are irrelevant are unattainable. Perhaps it is possible for her to continue caring about living a worthy life and thinking about ways she might do this, but I suspect that it would be difficult to

maintain this attitude over time in the circumstances she is in. Furthermore, reflecting on her goals and values in a situation in which she cannot pursue them for reasons outside of her control might make it difficult to go on respecting herself as a moral equal to other persons; she may start feeling like her life is insignificant since she lacks the opportunity to pursue things of value.

The Man in the Pit will likely face similar problems in that he lacks the opportunity to pursue worthwhile goals, though for different reasons than the Hounded Woman does. In his case, he has time to think and reflect on what a worthy life would look like and what values he should have and live in accordance with, but he has little opportunity to pursue any of those goals or act on those values. There may be things he can do from inside the pit that will reflect his values—like create art, garden, think deeply about important problems, and so on—but many things he may take to be worthwhile will simply be out of his grasp. This situation would likely be disheartening and cause one to feel that one's life does not truly express one's values. It's hard to be motivated to live in accordance with one's values when one feels (for good reason) that this is largely impossible. But of course, whether this is possible from inside the pit will depend on the person. Depending on one's goals and values, perhaps a life in the pit is perfectly consistent with living a life that expresses one's dignity. For this reason, it is not the circumstances themselves that undermine autonomy; instead, it is the way in which the circumstances affect the individual's ability to have psychological autonomy, and this will vary from person to person.

These same general considerations also explain why autonomy can be undermined by things like physical disabilities, lack of educational or career



opportunities, or living in an area that does not allow for various activities like browsing art galleries, climbing mountains, or surfing. These things may not affect autonomy at all in some individuals, but may undermine it to more or less of a degree in others depending on how much of an impact it has on their ability to guide their lives as self-respecting individuals. If a person's identity is wrapped up in their athletic ability, then becoming physically disabled may undermine their psychological autonomy in significant ways, but someone who is able to live a fulfilling and meaningful life with a disability may feel as though it does not decrease their autonomy to any degree at all (though perhaps a lack of accessible buildings, discrimination in employment, etc., does—these issues will be taken up in the next section). And someone who loves the work they do as, say, a farmer, may feel perfectly autonomous even if they lack the opportunity to do anything else, but someone who wishes to become a poet or an engineer may have their autonomy undermined when their only option is to work as a farmer.

In this section I have argued that it will be extraordinarily difficult to construct a theory of autonomy that has requirements regarding how many options we must have or what the quality of those options must be like without at the same time violating the desiderata of inclusiveness. This is because a certain range of options that appears very limited to many people may be perfectly adequate for others, and concluding that they lack autonomy because they lack the options we'd like to have is a kind of cultural chauvinism, ableism, or other exclusionary stance that it would be best to avoid. However, we can still appreciate the ways in which a very limited range of options *can* undermine autonomy of certain people by undermining their psychological autonomy. This is because lacking opportunities that matter to us or losing control over something

we used to control can make it difficult for us to maintain our sense of self-worth either as a moral equal to other persons, as a rational agent whose reasoning abilities matter, or as the particular individual we are whose goals and values are worth pursuing. In this way, we can have an inclusive account of autonomy that still appreciates the ways in which our range of options does matter for our autonomy.

#### **5.4 When Our Options Are Shaped by Persons**

Although our range of options can only undermine our autonomy by affecting our psychological autonomy, I will argue in this section that other persons can undermine our autonomy *directly*, without necessarily having any effect on our psychological autonomy. Being autonomous, or effectively guiding the course of one's life, requires us to be able to have an impact on the world around us. We cannot guide our lives if our desires and plans have no influence on the world. But there are, of course, significant limits on the kind of influence we need to be able to have. I have argued that there is no particular way the world must be set up for us to be autonomous, in that there is no set number of options we must have available to us and we can lack some significant options while retaining autonomy in many cases. However, all of us have an important kind of power over the world around us that is necessary for autonomy. We can move things around, anticipate various consequences of our actions with some amount of reliability, and plan for the future. This minimal kind of influence on the world can be, I have argued, sufficient for autonomy.

But now the question is what kind of influence we must have on other persons in order to be autonomous. Presumably our plans and desires should have some impact on them, but we need not have complete control over others in order to guide our own lives.

To return to some of the examples from Section I, it seems that I lack autonomy if I'm forbidden from shopping at certain stores because of the color of my skin or my religion, but it does not seem as though my autonomy is undermined when I am forbidden from entering because I refuse to wear shoes. And an individual who is stuck in an unwanted relationship for financial reasons seems to lack autonomy, but at the same time it does not seem as though autonomy requires us to have the power to extract money from others whenever we need it. So what kind of influence do our desires and values need to have on others in order for us to be autonomous?

I propose that our autonomy depends on others properly respecting us as persons—that is, they must respect us as moral equals, as rational agents, and as the particular individuals we are. What it will take to properly respect us in these ways will vary depending on the circumstances and the relationship we have with the person, but whenever their lack of respect for us is part of the best explanation for the options we have available, then our autonomy is undermined. There is, I take it, a fact of the matter about what kind of influence it is appropriate for us to have over others, and this is in virtue of the respect we are owed; thus, if we fail to have this influence over others because they fail to give us the respect we are due, then we lack an important kind of control over the course our lives take.

The relevant kind of respect that others owe us is the same kind of respect we owe ourselves, namely, what Stephen Darwall (1995) calls recognition respect. Being deserving of recognition respect means that deliberators ought to appreciate the facts about us that are relevant to the situation and weigh them appropriately in their deliberations about what to do. On my view of psychological autonomy, having

psychological autonomy requires us to have recognition respect for *ourselves*, and here I am arguing that in order for us to have external autonomy, others must have this kind of respect for us as well.

To illustrate what this means in practice, return again to the example of being barred from entering a store on the basis on one's skin color. It seems clear in this case that anyone who is refusing someone entry into a store on the basis of their skin color is not properly respecting them. The person who wishes to shop at the store has desires and plans that deserve to be taken seriously, and they are not being taken seriously in this situation. They also have an equal moral status to other persons with different skin colors, and this is not factoring into the shop owner's policies in the way it ought to. However, if an individual is being refused access to the store because they will not wear shoes, then refusing them access to the store can be consistent with properly respecting them. The store owner may appreciate that their desire to shop at the store is one that deserves to be taken seriously and that they are moral equals with other patrons, but still refuse them entry for health reasons or in order to follow a law that they reasonable take to be legitimate.

Regarding the person who is trapped in an unhealthy relationship because they are financially dependent on another, it seems likely that they are not being properly respected either by their partner or by society more broadly. The details will matter here, but financial dependence often arises when one partner is expected to tend to the home and children, while another makes money. In a case like this, it seems that the person in charge of the home may be disrespected by their partner, perhaps because their desire to work was never taken sufficiently seriously, or because their contribution to the

wellbeing of the family is not being appreciated and appropriately compensated. If this is the case, then the financial dependence is best explained in part by the partner's lack of respect for them. They may also live in a society that does not have proper respect for their wellbeing. In a case like this, society as a whole might undermine their autonomy by failing to appreciate the relevant facts about them and weigh them appropriately in their deliberations about how to vote, for example, or how to spend their money.

Of course, this account depends heavily on our having some intuitive understanding of what it would mean for others to properly respect us, but making determinations about what this respect requires will not always be so easy. For example, I take it that there can be reasonable disagreement regarding whether voting in particular ways shows proper respect to certain individuals, or regarding how much of our resources we should be willing to share with others in order to properly respect them. But it seems to me that this is a fine feature of the view I'm proposing, as it would be too much to expect from a theory that it can tell us what, exactly, properly respecting others always involves in any possible situation. There will be hard cases. Nonetheless, I maintain that whenever a lack of respect from others is part of the best explanation for the range of options we have, then we thereby lack autonomy. This theory of autonomy will be available to anyone who thinks that we owe others respect in virtue of our personhood, and is compatible with different ways of spelling out exactly what this respect involves.

I have so far argued that when others fail to properly respect us as persons, and this lack of respect for us in part determines what our range of options is, then we thereby lack autonomy to some degree. This is so even if our psychological autonomy is not affected by our options or by this lack of respect. So, for example, if I am not able to

pursue math because I live in a sexist society that does not allow women to pursue careers in math, but I didn't want to be a mathematician anyway and so this has no effect on me, my autonomy is still undermined. This is because, as Oshana puts it, "We cannot sensibly claim a person is autonomous if she is party to social relations or institutions that would enfeeble her ability to determine how she will live if it were the will of others that they do so" (83). The idea is that if others have power over us to influence the course of our lives in ways that are inappropriate, then we lack control over the course of our lives that it would be appropriate for us to have. This is the case even if it does not affect our psychology.

In addition to this, it is worth appreciating that other persons can undermine our psychological autonomy, and this can happen in cases in which they fail to properly respect us or in cases in which they are properly respecting us. So, for example, if I cannot pursue math because my society is sexist, this undermines my external autonomy, but it may undermine my psychological autonomy as well by causing me to feel that I am not a moral equal to others, that I lack certain rational capacities, or that my own goals and values don't matter as much as those of others. But return to the case in which I am not permitted to enter grocery stores because I will not wear shoes. If I have a principled reason for not wearing shoes, then I may feel many of the same things that the woman in the sexist society may feel. Even though the store owner's refusal to allow me shop there without shoes may be consistent with properly respecting me, I may still feel as though my goals and values do not matter as much as others' do. So other people can undermine our psychological autonomy without disrespecting us and without violating our external autonomy.

## 5.5 Conclusion

I have argued that there is no determinate feature our range of options must have in order for it to be consistent with our external autonomy. We need not have any particular number or options, nor need we have options available to us that are particularly important. This is because different people need different things in order to be able to guide the course of their lives effectively, and any attempt to spell out in detail what that will involve for one person will end up excluding another person, even if they take themselves to be guiding the course of their lives. This will end up being exclusionary in various problematic ways, like by being classist and ableist. However, the shape of our options can undermine our psychological autonomy, so in this way we can appreciate that our options are importantly relevant to autonomy while also allowing for differences in what is required for autonomy from person to person.

I've also argued that other persons can undermine our external autonomy by having an effect on our options in a way that fails to properly respect us as persons with equal moral standing to other persons, with valuable rational abilities, and with value as the particular individuals we are. This is because being self-guiding involves being able to have a certain kind of impact on the world around you, and this includes being able to have an impact on other persons as well. In particular, if others are not properly responsive to the features of us that ought to factor into their decision-making, then we lack a kind of power over the world that we need to guide our lives effectively. In closing, I explain how the account of autonomy I've proposed allows us to respond to the two puzzles described earlier in satisfying ways.

The Interdependency Puzzle (IP) arose when we considered the cases in which interdependency sometimes seems to undermine autonomy along those cases in which interdependency seems perfectly consistent with and even necessary for autonomy. The first example of this we considered involved giving up certain options for the sake of someone else who is dependent upon us, like the wife who, in getting married, knowingly gives up control over when she will have sex, or the parent who must give up their hobbies to save for their child's life-saving medication, or the single woman who decides to become pregnant through in vitro fertilization. While the former two seem to lack autonomy, the latter seems to be quite autonomous.

The explanation for the lack of autonomy in the first case is that the husband is not properly respecting the wife if her preferences regarding when to have sex are not factoring into his decision-making. Additionally, consistently having sex that one does not want to have will, plausibly, undermine their conception of themselves as moral equals to others whose preferences matter as much as those of others, and this will undermine the wife's psychological autonomy as well. And in the case of the parent who must give up their hobby, their psychological autonomy may also be undermined since they value playing music and are being forced, in some sense, to stop pursuing that value. We may also think that society is not properly respecting parents of sick children if it allows for the costs of the life-saving treatment of those children to bankrupt the parents, but this is perhaps debatable. But in the case of the single-parent using IVF, while her range of options shrinks when she chooses to have a child, this does not undermine autonomy. And she will likely have strong psychological autonomy since she is successfully pursuing those things that she values in spite of the obstacles she faces.



A second version of the IP involved our *own* dependency on others. Remember, for example, in the wife who is financially dependent on her husband (who intuitively lacks autonomy), versus the women who collectively form a business and are now financially dependent on one another (and intuitively do *not* lack autonomy). Here the explanation is straightforward: the wife is not properly respected by her husband, whereas the women who work together to create a business do not disrespect one another. Additionally, of course, the husband's failure to properly respect his wife by taking her contributions to their well-being sufficiently seriously may also undermine her ability to have psychological autonomy by causing her to lose self-respect in one form or another.

A final version of the IP we considered had to do with one person having control over another's options. Here we contrasted the shop keeper who refuses service to someone on the basis of skin color versus one who refuses service to someone on the basis of their refusal to wear shoes. As I noted above, this is because, in the former case, the shop keeper lacks proper respect for the prospective customer and that disrespect contributes to the shaping of their options, but in the latter case the shop keeper does not disrespect the prospective customer. Raz claims that coercion itself undermines autonomy even when it does not affect the range of options available to us; this is a claim that is intuitive in some ways, yet hard to find a good explanation for. On my account, it is not quite right. Coercion only undermines autonomy when it involves a failure of respect. But when you coerce someone without shoes on not to come into your store, you need not be undermining their autonomy after all.

The second puzzle we considered was the Range of Options Puzzle (ROP), which has to do with the difficulty of determining with any precision what our range of options

must be like in order for us to be autonomous. While Raz and Oshana claim that there is some range of options we must have to be autonomous, I have argued that this approach should be rejected because it will almost certainly lead to a problematically exclusive theory. Oshana has claimed that we need to have control over things that are of central importance to us, and my view can account for this in that lacking control over things that are of central importance to us will likely undermine our psychological autonomy in some way. However, I maintain that it does not *directly* undermine autonomy by undermining external autonomy. Raz has claimed that having control over things that are insignificant is just as important, and while I have argued that this is sometimes, but not always true, my account can explain why this is so. If a person doesn't care about whether they have control over when to wash their hair and they lack this control simply because of their environment, then their lack of control over this will not affect their psychological autonomy. Thus, they will not lack autonomy at all. However, if another person prevents them from having this control for reasons that involve a failure of respect, then they will lack autonomy after all, on my view. And if they come to lack this control, either because of the disrespect of another person or simply through happenstance, then their psychological autonomy may be undermined if losing this control is important to them and their conception of themselves.

A second version of the ROP had to do with whether autonomy could be undermined when our options are *increased*, for example, in a case of offering a job in exchange for sexual favors, offering sweatshop work to impoverished people with no alternatives, or offering access to a clinical trial to those without access to medical care. On my account, these things *can* undermine autonomy to some degree by reducing

psychological autonomy, by reducing external autonomy, or both. They can reduce external autonomy when the option is provided to the person out of a failure to properly respect that person. This is clearly the case in the former cases involving offering a job for sexual favors or putting people to work in sweatshops. It may also be occurring in the clinical trials case, but plausibly it need not be. But the undermining of psychological autonomy can be occurring in all three of these cases as well. Being offered a job in exchange for sexual favors, working in a sweatshop, or having medications you need dangled in front of you but ultimately refused you (or alternatively, being used like a lab rat) are all things that could reasonably damage a person's respect for themselves and thereby damage their psychological autonomy.

The final version of the ROP we considered asked whether our autonomy is reduced when we are not permitted to do morally bad things. While intuitively it is not, it wasn't obvious why this should be so, since external autonomy seems to require that we can pursue values and goals that differ from those with power and influence, as Oshana argues. But we can now see that we need not be free to act immorally in order to be autonomous because others can properly respect us while refusing to allow us to act immorally. So while it is true that being autonomous will require the ability to pursue a wide range of values, some values can respectfully be condemned by those in power and in these cases, this condemnation will not undermine our autonomy unless it negatively affects our psychological autonomy.

My account of external autonomy maintains that there is no range of options that must be available to us in order for us to have external autonomy; instead, external autonomy is only undermined when (part of) the best explanation for the options

available to us is a lack of respect from others. Still, our range of options can affect our autonomy by undermining our psychological autonomy. This allows for a degree of flexibility in our theory that is crucial for it to be sufficiently inclusive while still allowing it to explain why social injustices, etc., can and does undermine autonomy. In this way, the account can explain away all of the puzzles described in Section I, and it can do so while still satisfying the desiderata set out at the end of the section.

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