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THE LIMITS OF 'AUTONOMY' FOR FEMINIST THEORY

By

Sonya Marie Charles

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ABSTRACT

THE LIMITS OF 'AUTONOMY' FOR FEMINIST THEORY

By

Sonya Marie Charles

Feminist attempts to reconceive a philosophical conception of autonomy are successful in many ways, but these revised theories cannot avoid some problematic aspects of autonomy theory because they are part of our conception of autonomy. Autonomy theorists emphasize critical or self-reflection and control over our actions and decisions (this is what makes autonomy self-government). The need for critical or self-reflection means theorists must value reason (over emotion and the affective aspects of self) because it is impossible to critically reflect on unconscious and unarticulated desires and emotions. The need for critical or self-reflection also assumes a relatively transparent and unified self. In addition, the need for control over our actions and decisions makes self-government a form of self-regulation. Each of these assumptions are part of our philosophical conception of autonomy. To rid 'autonomy' of these aspects would mean we were no longer discussing a theory of autonomy. Therefore, it is impossible to reconceive autonomy in a way that is useful for feminist theory.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mom—my first feminist role model.

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Chapter One
Setting the Stage

> *My argument is that even while the concept of law is subject to expansion and revision, the very word, and hence the concept also, remains tainted by its political and theological origins. An interest in order rather than law could imply far-reaching changes in our conception of science.*

Evelyn Fox Keller

I am interested in how we account for agency under oppression. Sometimes feminist theory seems to imply that oppression is inescapable. Theories of social construction, in particular, can have a very determinist feel to them. After all, if a woman is socialized to do X, can she do otherwise? If yes, then what is the force of socialization? Thus, I am interested in the possibility of constructing a theory that can adequately account for the force of oppression but also still account for women's agency.

In considering approaches to this problem, I was drawn to the debate in feminist theory over our conception of autonomy. At first, autonomy appears to be the opposite of oppression. Autonomous people have control over their own lives, something oppressed people do not. Therefore, it is easy to see why some feminists are drawn to autonomy theory. In this project, I analyze the relationship between a philosophical conception of autonomy and the goals of feminist theory. Ultimately, I argue that autonomy theory and feminist theory are not as compatible as they may first seem.

Just as Evelyn Fox Keller argues against relying on a tainted conception of law in science, I argue that feminists should avoid using a tainted conception of autonomy. The

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primary focus of my project is to show the historical and theoretical baggage inherent to a philosophical conception of autonomy and resistant to feminist reconceptions. As such, the majority of my dissertation will focus on a detailed critique of a philosophical conception of autonomy. However, if we are to give up our addiction to this concept and the type of theory it inevitably leads to, we need some alternative. Therefore, I also begin to introduce some alternative approaches to the question of agency under oppression. I use these throughout the dissertation to show the problems with autonomy theory. Before beginning a more detailed analysis of a philosophical conception of autonomy, it is important to understand the general questions, problems, and context for both the feminist debate and our philosophical conception of autonomy.

The Feminist Debate

Many feminists believe autonomy theory is important because the basic values summarized by a conception of autonomy are also important to feminism. The values these feminists are interested in include self-determination (or control over the direction of your own life) and respect for personal preferences (or the uniqueness of individuals). Trudy Govier summarizes a feminist commitment to some conception of autonomy in the following way:

> Inside and outside feminist movements, thousands—perhaps millions—of women have struggled to assert their self-worth, dignity, and capacity for independent action. They have worked to preserve a sense of themselves as individual people with their own feelings, values, identities, capacities, and goals, often in contexts in which conventional values would have them disappear into derivative relational identities such as daughter, wife, or mother. These struggles are naturally interpreted as women's quests for

greater autonomy. (Govier 1993, 104)

Govier summarizes the value many feminists see in using some conception of autonomy—if women have traditionally been considered emotional, irrational, or otherwise less than full human agents, asserting their autonomy appears to be one way to reassert their human dignity. Similarly, Carol Hay argues that the idea of autonomy is useful for feminists because self-governance and respect for personal choice are important for women: "I think it's hard to see autonomy's core ideal of self-government as anything other than a laudable moral aim for women, particularly given that one of the greatest harms of sexist oppression is its restriction of the quality and quantity of choices that are open to women" (Hay 2005, 98). Despite this potential value, many feminists have also been very critical of traditional conceptions of autonomy.

Feminists critiques of the concept of autonomy are multifacited, but they generally focus on questions about individualism, self-sufficiency, and the nature of rational deliberation. In their edited collection, *Relational Autonomy*, Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar summarize feminist criticisms in the following way:

> Crudely stated, the charge is that the concept of autonomy is inherently masculinist, that it is inextricably bound up with masculine character ideals, with assumptions about selfhood and agency that are metaphysically, epistemologically, and ethically problematic from a feminist perspective, and with political traditions that historically have been hostile to women's interests and freedom. What lies at the heart of these charges is the conviction that the notion of individual autonomy is fundamentally individualistic and rationalistic. (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 3)

In sum, feminists generally argue that the concept of autonomy is too individualistic, overly rational, and reliant on masculine norms, but specific feminist criticisms can be

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outlined in a number of ways.

For example, Marilyn Friedman breaks these criticisms down into four categories (Friedman 1997). First, feminists argue that our conception of autonomy elevates reason over emotion, desire, and embodiment. Autonomy theorists often argue or imply that rational aspects of the self are the authentic aspects of the self. Second, and related, feminists argue that autonomy theorists assume an unrealistic level of transparency of the self. The conditions for autonomy require that the individual reflect on her preferences and reflection requires that desires be conscious and articulated. Psychoanalytic theories call into question the transparency of self necessary for personal autonomy thus construed; they question whether all significant personal preferences can be made conscious and articulated. Third, feminists argue that autonomy theorists require a coherent, unified subject that remains stable over time. Various feminist approaches question the stability and unity of self necessary for autonomy. Friedman mentions postmodern theorists such as Judith Butler (Butler 1990), but other examples can be found in the work of women of color such as María Lugones (Lugones 2003). Although their critiques are very different, both Butler and Lugones are questioning the idea of one core or true self that serves as the foundation for individual autonomy. Fourth, feminists argue that autonomy theorists ignore the social aspects of self or that they value independence and self-sufficiency over interpersonal relationships.

As we can see from this brief introduction, the feminist debate is really a compilation of many debates (some more directly related to what we would call theories of autonomy than others). To understand the debate over a philosophical conception of

autonomy, one of the first things we must do is clarify the object(s) of feminist criticism. I argue that there are at least two aspects of the feminist debate over a philosophical conception of autonomy that lead to confusion. First, instead of focusing on specific theories of personal autonomy, feminist critiques of a philosophical conception of autonomy often take an indirect approach. Second, "the" feminist debate relates to various "types" of autonomy (such as political, economic, and personal).

As Friedman points out, many feminists are actually criticizing the conception of self assumed by autonomy theorists rather than analyzing a specific theory of autonomy. For example, in *What Can She Know?*, Lorraine Code critiques traditional theories of epistemology. However, within that critique, she discusses the ideal of autonomy that she believes is lurking behind traditional approaches to epistemology and ethics (Code 1991, esp. chapters 3-4). Similarly, in *Reflections on Gender and Science*, Evelyn Fox Keller criticizes the notion of an "Ideal Observer" assumed by scientific methodology. Yet, like Code, she includes an analysis of the conception of autonomy she sees underlying it. In fact, Keller offers an alternative conception of autonomy (what she calls dynamic autonomy) that could form the basis of a new approach to scientific research (Keller 1985, esp. chapters 4-6). These general criticisms of epistemology and scientific method are often used as examples of feminist charges that autonomy theory is too individualistic and overly rational.

As we can see, the specific feminists listed in summaries of critiques of a philosophical conception of autonomy are often only indirectly attacking autonomy

theory.[1] Both Code and Keller are criticizing a general "ideal of autonomy" (and the

conception of self this ideal implies) rather than any specific theory of autonomy.[2] Since

many feminist critiques of a philosophical conception of autonomy focus on an "ideal" of

autonomy or other philosophical theories (such as theories of epistemology) used by

autonomy theorists, clarifying the specific problems with philosophical theories *of*

autonomy is difficult. If the feminist critiques avoid discussing any specific theory of

autonomy, then we must extrapolate which parts of these indirect critiques of autonomy

apply to any specific theory. To be clear, I do not mean to undermine the work of these

feminist theorists. Their analyses have made a significant contribution to feminist

philosophy and toward making philosophical inquiry more inclusive and representative.

However, to pinpoint the problems with philosophical theories of autonomy, we need to

focus more direct attention on those specific theories.

Another confusing aspect of the feminist debate is that feminists critique various

types of autonomy theory such as political, moral, and personal autonomy. Yet these

various critiques are often lumped together as a general feminist critique of autonomy.

Admittedly, there are many similarities between these feminist critiques, but if we are

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[1]For summaries of feminist criticisms of a philosophical conception of autonomy
see, for example, Marilyn Friedman's *Autonomy, Gender, and Politics* (Friedman 2003,
chapters 2 & 4); John Christman's "Feminism and Autonomy" (Christman 1995); Trudy
Govier's "Self-Trust, Autonomy, and Self-Esteem" (Govier 1993); and Catriona
Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar's "Introduction: Autonomy Refigured" (MacKenzie and
Stoljar 2000).

[2]Code does include a discussion of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill and does
occasionally reference contemporary ethical theories; however, her primary concern is the
ideal of autonomy implied by these theorists (and the conception of self it assumes) rather
than any specific theory of personal autonomy.

interested in assessing how useful a philosophical conception of autonomy is (or no) for various feminist analyses, it is useful to separate these types of autonomy theory. I am primarily interested in personal autonomy so I will briefly discuss how it fits within these overlapping debates.

Feminist critiques of political autonomy focus on an analysis of social justice.[3] Political autonomy theorists assume that individuals have (autonomous) personal preferences and give justifications for respecting and protecting the individual's right to express those preferences (autonomy as a right). In other words, they assume some theory of personal autonomy which explains how individual's make preferences "their own" or come to have autonomous preferences.[4] Therefore, critiques of political autonomy are related to critiques of personal autonomy, but have a different focus and, thus, proceed in a different way.

There is also a general ambiguity about the supposed difference (or no) between moral and personal autonomy. I discuss the ambiguities between moral and personal autonomy in more detail at the end of this chapter. For now, I simply point out that theories of care ethics are used to challenge both moral and personal autonomy. The

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[3]Here we do see feminists focusing on specific theories of autonomy. See for example the work of Susan Moller Okin and Iris Marion Young (Okin 1989; Young 1990).

[4]Similarly, in the bioethics literature, the concept of autonomy is often associated with informed consent and a patient's right to refuse treatment. In other words, it is equated with respecting the patient's preferences (in other words, autonomy as a right) not necessarily in analyzing how the patient came to have those preferences (in other words, a theory of personal autonomy). The obvious exception would be discussions about what counts as paternalism or coercion—which are very similar to discussions about the conditions necessary for personal autonomy.

conception of self and personal development articulated by care ethicists undermines

traditional autonomy theorists assumptions about self-sufficiency and independence. Part

of the debate here seems to be over the "goal" or "value" of autonomy. Should autonomy

preserve relationships or foster independence? How much attention should we give to the

social context and personal relationships in a theory of autonomy? As we will see, the

relationship between an individual and her relationships (to both society and other

individuals) will be a major issue for feminists attempting to develop more inclusive

theories of autonomy.

A Brief History

In this section, I place my project into the broader historical context by identifying

some general trends in the philosophical literature that serve as the background for

contemporary theories of personal autonomy. Historically, the broad range of theories

that relate to the debate over free will and determinism sets the general context for

contemporary discussions of autonomy. It was Immanuel Kant's contribution to the

debate over free will that led theorists to apply the concept of autonomy to individuals.

Although not directly associated with the free will debate, John Stuart Mill also shaped

current autonomy theories with his strong defense of individuality and personal choice.

Free Will and Determinism

Free will theorists often start with observations about everyday personal

experience. Many theorists argue that despite the seemingly irrefutable "truth" of

physical (or causal) determinism, it is impossible for us to proceed in our everyday lives without some belief in free will. This intuition is defended in a number of ways. One common approach is to point out that it is impossible for us to treat others as if they bear no responsibility for their actions. Also, we appear to generally agree (at least in some cases) about when it is appropriate to hold people accountable for their actions.

Free will theorists are motivated by a perceived connection between freedom and responsibility.[5] Theorists assume that if determinism is true, then we cannot be responsible for our thoughts or actions. Therefore, a connection between freedom and (moral) responsibility motivates the debate over free will. This also explains the overlap between theories of free will and ethics. If free will is impossible, then so is morality (or so it would seem). This accounts for why so many theorists are apt to discuss "moral agency" instead of "agency" (more generally)—namely, the two are interwoven because of what motivates the overall debate.

Similar to the way theorists blur the distinction between moral agency and agency in general, theorists also blur the distinction between personal and moral responsibility. By personal responsibility, theorists generally mean whether a person can be held responsible for *any* of her actions (or choices). By moral responsibility theorists can mean *either* whether a person can be praised or blamed for her actions (very similar to personal responsibility) *or* whether a person adheres to a specific moral theory. Most free will theorists would emphasize the first, but not always (Kant being an obvious

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[5]There are numerous ambiguities in terminology here. Often theorists consider this a general debate about freedom; therefore, theorists use a variety of specific concepts such as agency, free agency, free action, freedom, as well as free will.

exception).

The discussion of moral responsibility or agency and personal responsibility or agency also relates to the discussion of moral and personal autonomy. In general, moral autonomy relates to our ability to adhere to certain moral standards and be responsible moral agents. In other words, it relates to some type of normative competence. In contrast, personal autonomy is usually taken to be a broader category. It applies to decisions we would not necessarily consider normative such as picking a career or choosing a hobby. However, as many feminists have pointed out, there is not always a clear line between moral decisions or actions and nonmoral ones.

The assumed relationship between free will and responsibility further blurs this distinction. Whether theorists are primarily interested in moral autonomy or personal autonomy, they will give similar accounts of when we can hold a person responsible for her decisions or actions. To clarify the connections and subtle distinctions between moral and personal autonomy, I focus on two influential theorists who appear to have most directly shaped the current debate: Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill.

Kant and Moral Autonomy

In *The Invention of Autonomy*, J.B. Schneewind details the historical context that led to Kant's theory of autonomy. There were two parallel trends—political upheaval and corruption in the church—and, because of these trends, men wanted more personal involvement in both realms. Eventually, the traditional power structures broke down in both areas and new ones needed to be constructed and supported by theory. In politics,

this led to theories about the equality of man and support for more democratic structures of government. In religion and morality, there was a shift from morality as obedience (or natural law) to morality as self-governance (or autonomy). Kant's theory of autonomy is mostly a response to this later trend, but was also influenced by the former (Schneewind 1997).[6]

To help facilitate a change in our understanding of morality from obedience to God (and other more enlightened superiors) to self-governance, Kant wanted to explain how all men could have equal access to the moral law. Of course, this does not mean all men will be equally good or moral, but he wanted to show how all are equally *capable* of morality. For Kant, autonomy is a property of all sane, mature adults, because it is a property of the human will.[7] This property allows humans to have access to the moral law and to live a moral life.

For Kant, reason or a certain rational nature is the key element of human nature. A will founded on reason is what separates humans from other creatures, and, by using reason, all humans can deduce the moral law. According to Kant, a person recognizes (through reason) that he is a rational creature. This means that he is capable of making certain decisions and choices for himself. Once he recognizes this about himself, he must recognize that other people are also rational creatures. Therefore, he must respect their

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[6]Other theorists were also responding to this trend (for example, Rousseau and Hume); however, I focus on Kant because of the lasting influence of his use of language—namely, a philosophical conception of autonomy applied to individuals.

[7]I discuss Kant's theory as applying to all humans, although we know historically this was not the case. However, these details are not relevant to the specific point I want to make here.

ability to make choices for themselves. In this way, reason gives every human access to

the moral law (the categorical imperative)—"*So act that you use humanity, whether in*

your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never

merely as a means" (Emphasis in original. Gregor 1996, 80).[8] In this way, reason—for

Kant—gives us a special kind of self-knowledge. Specifically, it allows us to discern

what is unique about ourselves, as humans, as well as allowing us to be motivated by and

live according to the moral law. Therefore, one important theme in Kant is the

connection between reason and self-knowledge.

Also notice that reason has a certain telos for Kant. Rational nature is separated

from the rest of nature because it chooses ends,[9] and, therefore, it must also be respected

as an end-in-itself (Gregor 1996, 86-87). Thus, humans (because they are capable of

using reason) must be respected as ends-in-themselves or as beings capable of choosing

ends. Reason is the source of human value and must be respected, but Kant's analysis

also implies that the purpose of reason is to choose ends.[10]

Reason is also closely intertwined with Kant's conception of the human will.

Here it is best to let Kant describe the connection himself.

> Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being
> has the capacity to act *in accordance with the representation of laws*, that

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[8] All references are taken from *Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals* in the *Practical Philosophy* volume of the Cambridge series.

[9] I will not critique Kant's conception of reason and rational nature here. It has been done thoroughly enough elsewhere.

[10] Kant believes reason has other purposes or uses as well, but this use of reason is the most relevant to our current discussion.

is, in accordance with principles, or has a *will*. Since *reason* is required for the derivation of actions from laws, *the will is nothing other than practical reason.* If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions of such a being that are cognized as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary, that is, the will is a capacity to choose *only that* which reason independently of inclination cognizes as practically necessary, that is, as good. (Emphasis in original and added. Gregor 1996, 66)

Reason allows us to discern the moral law. Therefore, to be moral, the human will must follow the dictates of reason. This is a "free will" or, as Kant would put it, a "good will." We can now understand Kant's conception of autonomy.

Autonomy is the ability to govern ourselves (our actions) through self-chosen laws. Specifically, we use reason to discern the universal moral law and direct our will accordingly. As the above description shows, the will of every rational being is a will giving universal law. There are two possible ways to explain this. The will gives the categorical imperative (one universal moral law) or the will gives maxims that conform to the categorical imperative (many particular universal laws). Either way, autonomy consists of using reason to discern universal laws to which the will conforms (Gregor 1996, 81-82). To summarize:

Autonomy of the will is the property of the will by which it is a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition). The principle of autonomy is, therefore: to choose only in such a way that the maxims of your choice are also included as universal law in the same volition. (Gregor 1996, 89)

Notice, also, we do not get universal law from anywhere else, but give it to ourselves. This is what makes autonomy *self*-governance.

Not only do humans deduce the moral law using reason, but we must also be

motivated by reason. Kant's theory is, in part, a reaction to Hume (who believed humans were motivated to be moral by sympathy). David Hume argued that the "passions" should be tempered with reason, but he still believed that sympathy was the motivation for morality (not reason). Kant thought this was too subjective. Human desires are too unpredictable and malleable to be the basis for morality. Only reason can give us the universality necessary for moral law. Therefore, Kant believed that reason must be the foundation and motivation for morality.

Again we see that reason is central to Kant's theory. To be autonomous (self-governing), we must—in some sense—give the moral laws to ourselves. In other words, for our will to be free, it must result from some kind of internal motivation. However, for morality to be morality, according to Kant, it must be universal. It cannot be subjective, but must apply equally to all persons. Therefore, we must use reason to deduce (and motivate) the moral law because human emotions are too subjective. To rely on inclinations (such as emotions or desires) for motivation or to deduce the moral law is heteronomy, not autonomy.

Notice also that Kant has an interesting take on "internal" and "external" motivation. The reason heteronomy counts as relying on "external" influences to deduce the moral law is because it goes beyond the human will. If you are relying on inclinations or contingent goals (hypothetical imperatives), then you are considering "objects" outside the will or extra motivations. Kant explains it like so:

> For example, [a hypothetical imperative] says: I ought not to lie if I will to keep my reputation; but the [categorical imperative] says: I ought not to lie even though it would not bring me the least discredit. The latter must

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therefore abstract from all objects to this extent: that they have no
influence at all on the will, so that practical reason (the will) may not
merely administer an interest not belonging to it, but may simply show its
own commanding authority as supreme lawgiving. (Emphasis in original.
Gregor 1996, 89-90)

To be moral, we must be motivated by "practical reason (the will)" and not specific

(subjective) desires or inclinations (such as our personal reputation). If we do not lie

because we fear losing our reputation, then we may be tempted to lie when we are certain

we will not be caught. However, if we do not lie because reason demands it (that is we

could not make our action of lying universal), then we will not lie in *any* circumstance.

Only the categorical imperative or being motivated by practical reason (the will) gives us

the universality necessary for morality. For Kant, "internal" motivation means being

motivated purely by our rational (universalizable) will and not by any particular

(subjective) inclination or contingent goal.

We can now see the key components of Kant's theory that will be relevant to

current theories of personal autonomy: reason or rationality, will or volition, internal and

external influences, and self-knowledge. It is important to understand the connection

between Kant and contemporary theorists, even if contemporary theorist use these themes

in a very different way. As Thomas Hill points out:

The term 'autonomy' appears frequently in philosophical theories of quite
different sorts, and recently it has become a favorite term in practical
disputes about politics, education, developmental psychology, and
feminism. . . . Kant's conception of autonomy may well have inspired
some of these contemporary notions, but in important ways they have been
cut loose from their Kantian roots. (Hill 1989, 92)

I agree with Hill that contemporary theorists use the concept of autonomy very differently

from the way Kant used it. However, I also believe that they are indebted to Kant not only for the language of autonomy, but also for the themes listed above. Contemporary theorists may have a different understanding of how these themes work in their conception of autonomy, but the fact that they take up these same themes (reason, volition, internal versus external influences, and self-knowledge) is, at least partly, because of Kant's influence in shaping our philosophical understanding of a conception of autonomy. For this reason, I consider Kant a significant historical influence in shaping the current debate over a philosophical conception of autonomy. However, the motivation behind contemporary theories of autonomy has much more in common with the work of John Stuart Mill.

Mill and Personal Autonomy

Some may wonder why I include a discussion of Mill in a discussion of the history of a philosophical conception of autonomy. After all, he states clearly in his introduction to *On Liberty*, "The subject of this Essay is not the so-called Liberty of the Will, so unfortunately opposed to the misnamed doctrine of Philosophical Necessity" (Williams 1993, 69).[11] While he may not be interested in a debate over free will, his analysis of individuality and freedom of choice has much in common with current discussions of personal autonomy.[12] Similar to Kant, Mill believes rational deliberation

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[11]All references to *On Liberty* are taken from the reprint included in "The Everyman Library" series.

[12]I was lead to this connection between Mill and a philosophical conception of autonomy by the work of Candice Cummins Gauthier and Onora O'Neill (Gauthier 1993;

and the ability to choose are unique human faculties that should be respected and nurtured. Unlike Kant, Mill puts more emphasis on personal autonomy than moral autonomy. In other words, he develops an argument about why each person should be allowed to pursue their own personal inclinations.

On Liberty is primarily an account of political autonomy or autonomy as a right. As such, Mill gives an argument explaining when it is okay to interfere with personal decisions or the development of individuality. In this account, he is concerned with both social and governmental interference. In general, Mill argues that we are not allowed to restrict individual thoughts and actions unless they harm other people. Any thought or action that concerns only the individual must be allowed—even if the action will harm the individual. To clarify this general principle, Mill devotes a lot of his argument to explicating what it means to harm another individual.

He argues that actions that interfere with another's rights (such as rights to personal property and freedom from physical harm) should be restricted by laws. It is the government's duty to protect individual rights; therefore, the government is justified in restricting any actions that interfere with another's rights (Williams 1993, 143). Beyond political rights, Mill also discusses social harms such as failing to provide for your family. Mill believes these are matters of morality and should not be covered under the law. However, we are allowed, as individuals and as a society, to show our disapproval

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O'Neill 2002).

(Williams 1993, 149).[13]

There is more that could be said about Mill's general principle and how he describes its application; however, I restrict my comments to how Mill's theory relates to personal autonomy. First, Mill argues that personal autonomy is only allowed within limits. Specifically, individuality is given free reign until it has the potential to harm others. We could interpret this as saying that personal autonomy is limited by moral autonomy. In other words, we must abide by morality, but after that personal choice is allowed. Second, Mill introduces the idea that social influences play a role in shaping individual actions. Indeed, he is very concerned about the role of social influences in restricting personal choice.

To explain the appropriate role of social influences, Mill tries to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable social influences. He believes we can try to persuade others of the error of their ways and we have a right to disassociate from those we disagree with (or believe to be acting immorally), but we cannot forbid actions simply because we disagree with them (Williams 1993, 144-145). In general, acceptable forms of social influence include rational debate and personal disassociation or condemnation (Williams 1993, 144 and 146, respectively). However, stronger forms of social control are unacceptable. For example, he denounces general intolerance of individuality and

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[13]Mill eventually equivocates a bit on this public/private distinction. He later argues that it is the government's duty to look out for the next generation; therefore, the government would be justified in forcing families to educate their children. In this way, Mill seems to realize that the public/private distinction is not as clear as he would like it to be, but he never fully explores the ambiguity here. For a more complete discussion of Mill's account of when government or social authority is appropriate see chapter four (Williams 1993, 143-162).

what he calls the "despotism of custom" (Williams 1993, 137-139). By "despotism of custom," Mill means a society where appeal to custom is all that is needed for justification. He contrasts this to societies where ideas are openly debated and people give arguments in support of their opinions. It is unclear exactly where Mill wants to draw the line on social influence, but he seems to be concerned about the general attitude of society. In a society that has a commitment to individual expression, it is okay for individuals or certain groups to disassociate from others or condemn certain actions. However, a society that primarily uses appeals to custom as justification for actions undermines the development of individuality by discouraging free thought and the development of human faculties.

Mill's argument for respecting individuality rests on a particular view of human nature. Specifically, he believes that human faculties such as reason and the ability to choose should be respected and developed. Mill acknowledges that humans are influenced by culture, but he believes we can use reason and inclination to develop individuality. Indeed, it is very important to Mill that we understand the reasons for our opinions because it strengthens our attachment to them and allows us to defend them to others (Williams 1993, 103-108). Mill states that it is the "proper condition of a human being" to make (reasoned) choices (Williams 1993, 126) and making these choices both contributes to individuality and develops various human faculties.

> The human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference are exercised only in making a choice. . . . He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and

when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision. (Williams 1993, 126)

In other words, we have unique human abilities, we use these abilities to make choices, and making these choices cultivates individuality.

Mill further argues that cultivating these faculties contributes to human well-being. Exercising our ability to make choices and be individuals contributes to human development and happiness.

> It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it, and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation . . . . In proportion to the development of his individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is therefore capable of being more valuable to others. (Williams 1993, 130-131)

In this way, Mill argues that the ability to make choices and cultivate individuality contributes to human dignity.

Conversely, to not use your human faculties and cultivate individuality undermines human dignity. According to Mill, if a person follows custom simply because it is a custom, then this person "does not educate or develop in him[self] any of the qualities which are the distinctive endowment of a human being" (Williams 1993, 126). Or, in another instance, Mill argues:

> A person whose desires and impulses are his own – are the expression of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own culture – is said to have a character. One whose desires and impulses are not his own, has no character, no more than a steam-engine has a character. (Williams 1993, 128)

Mill claims that circumstances in which humans are denied individuality and choice treat

humans like machines or sheep (Williams 1993, 127 and 135 respectively). He also

believes that cultures that are too devoted to tradition and custom have halted their

growth as civilizations.[14] In sum, the value of respect for individuality (or autonomy) is

the basis of human dignity and well-being.

Again, we see many themes in Mill's theory that are taken up by current theorists.

First, an emphasis on reason and the ability to choose. This is considered a unique human

trait that should be respected and cultivated. Second, and related, a respect for the value

of individuality. Allowing people to make their own choices respects the uniqueness of

individuals. In this way, Mill and current theorists respect individuality by allowing

people control over their lives and choices. However, this control is not unlimited. A

third theme in the work of Mill and current theorists is that it is acceptable to limit the

autonomy of one person when it interferes with the autonomy of another person. Thus,

one of the goals of any theory of autonomy is to distinguish between acceptable and

unacceptable limits on decisions and actions. In trying to articulate this distinction, both

Mill and contemporary theorists show concern about the role social influences play in

shaping individual choices and the faculties necessary for making an individual choice.

Moral Versus Personal Autonomy

It is impossible to draw a sharp line between moral and personal autonomy;

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[14]His argument here is primarily aimed at eastern countries such as China and is obviously ethnocentric. For a recent account of the prejudices in Mill's account of "civilization" see "John Stuart Mill and 'The Negro Question': Race, Colonialism, and the Ladder of Civilization" by Anthony Bogues (Bogues 2005).

however, I will try to point out a general distinction while also showing how the two

relate to each other. According to Gerald Dworkin, in theories of moral autonomy "the

argument is about the necessity or desirability of individuals choosing or willing or

accepting their own moral code" whereas theories of personal autonomy are concerned

with "the ways in which the nonpolitical institutions of a society affect the values,

attitudes, and beliefs of the members of society" (Dworkin 1988, 10-11). Dworkin's

interpretation parallels the discussions by Kant and Mill. Kant is interested in showing

how humans are capable of giving moral laws to themselves. In other words, he wants to

prove the necessity and desirability of individuals accepting their own moral code. In

contrast, Mill is interested in liberty or the ability to choose and act free of undue social

pressures. As mentioned earlier, Mill is particularly interested in how society influences

personal preferences beyond moral and legal restrictions.

Using this general description, we can draw a tentative distinction between moral

and personal autonomy. Moral autonomy has to do with living by your own moral code

while personal autonomy has to do with decisions or actions that are not necessarily

moral. As we can see, the obvious problem with this distinction is where to draw the line

between what counts as a moral and a nonmoral decision or action. Some will draw this

line narrowly while others interpret morality very broadly. Also, some decisions or

actions could become moral depending on the context in which they are made. Despite

these problems, many theorists wish to keep some distinction between moral and political

autonomy.

Nevertheless, that the distinction between the moral and the personal

cannot be rigorously drawn does not entail that there is no distinction to be made. We condemn some actions as foolish, others as wrong. . . . [P]eople do not hold one another morally responsible for all of their decisions, and the decisions that people do not hold one another morally responsible for are personal. (Meyers 1989, 16)

Even though the line is not always clear, we do seem to have a general intuition that some decisions are moral decisions and some are not.

Another way theorists try to show the relationship between moral and personal autonomy, but still keep some distinction is by arguing that personal autonomy is "bound by" morality. In other words, morality creates obligations and a realm of permissible actions while personal autonomy applies to any "other" decisions.[15] For example, personal autonomy could apply to picking a hobby or deciding what to wear today (assuming these decisions do not violate any moral obligations). Most of the theorists I discuss in the rest of the dissertation are similar to Mill. They are interested in decisions that go "beyond" moral decisions, but also feel that personal autonomy is constrained by morality. In other words, they ask: Once we establish what is moral (however we do that), then within morality how do individuals decide what to do? More importantly, how do we assess these individual decisions? What makes some personal decisions more worthy of respect or more "authentic" than others?

Despite attempts to distinguish between these two types of theory, autonomy theorists often blur the distinction between moral and personal autonomy in a number of ways. First, most personal autonomy theorists are interested in allowing a person to

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[15]For an explicit discussion of this connection see Diana Meyers's *Self, Society, and Personal Choice* (Meyers 1989, 14-15).

choose her own version of "the good" which includes her own moral code as well as a general "life plan." To put it another way, personal autonomy theorists are interested in personal preferences, but they define personal preferences very broadly to include wishes, desires, values, and beliefs. Wouldn't values and beliefs begin to move us into the realm of moral autonomy? Second, both personal and moral autonomy theorists are interested in when we can hold people responsible for their decisions or actions, and this perceived connection between autonomy and responsibility further blurs the distinction between moral and personal autonomy. Theorists generally believe that a person can only be held responsible for actions that are autonomous or "free." For these theorists, accountability (moral or otherwise) is directly related to autonomy. More importantly, the descriptions or theories they put forth to articulate moral and personal responsibility are similar. Therefore, discussions of moral and personal autonomy are often combined in the literature.[16]

Parting Thoughts

The stage is now set for our analysis of a philosophical conception of autonomy. I have outlined the various criticisms of a philosophical conception of autonomy made by some feminist theorists and the value of a philosophical conception of autonomy defended by other feminist theorists. I also pointed out the various ambiguities and

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[16]For example, edited collections of essays about theories of autonomy include essays that discuss personal autonomy alongside essays that are interested in moral responsibility or the ability to be a moral agent (Christman 1989; Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000).

confusions within this debate. "The" feminist debate over a philosophical conception of autonomy consists of many overlapping but different feminist debates. For this reason, I believe "the" feminist debate over a philosophical conception of autonomy cannot proceed until we clear up the conceptual confusion surrounding this (these) debate(s).

I began this clarification by outlining various trends in the history of philosophy that are direct precursors for the contemporary debate over personal autonomy. These earlier theories set the context for our current discussion. I turn now to contemporary theories of personal autonomy to further clarify which aspects of the feminist debate interest me.

Chapter Two
Clarifying a Philosophical Conception of Personal or Individual Autonomy

Now Granny said Sonny stick to your guns
if you believe in something no matter what
'cause it's better to be hated for who you are
than loved for who you're not.

Van Zant

In *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*, Gerald Dworkin gives an overview of

the numerous confusions surrounding the term autonomy. According to Dworkin, a

philosophical conception of autonomy has been used as a placeholder for liberty, freedom

of the will, and self-rule or sovereignty. It has also been equated with dignity, integrity,

individuality, independence, responsibility, and self-knowledge (Dworkin 1988, 6).

Dworkin claims that 'autonomy' is not a distinct concept. Instead it is a placeholder for

various intuitions we have about the nature of being human and what we value as

humans. For these reasons, Dworkin further argues that we cannot "define" a

philosophical conception of autonomy, but can only "characterize" it.

> Autonomy is a term of art introduced by a theorist in an attempt to make
> sense of a tangled net of intuitions, conceptual and empirical issues, and
> normative claims. What one needs, therefore, is a study of how the term is
> connected with other notions, what role it plays in justifying various
> normative claims, how the notion is supposed to ground ascriptions of
> value, and so on—in short, a theory. (Dworkin 1988, 7)

If we want to discuss how useful a concept of autonomy is for feminist theory, then we

need to begin by clarifying what we mean by a conception of autonomy. To facilitate a

useful conversation about philosophical conceptions of autonomy, I begin by clarifying

the type of autonomy that interests me and some important categories used by theorists

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interested in this type of autonomy.

I believe theories of personal or individual autonomy are most relevant to the feminist debate over a philosophical conception of autonomy.[17] I am primarily concerned with a particular approach to personal or individual autonomy that considers autonomy in relation to socialization. Thomas Hill and John Christman identify this approach to autonomy as a psychological conception of autonomy. According to Hill, these theorists view autonomy as a "psychological trait"—namely, a type of "psychological maturity" or "independence of judgment" (Hill 1989, 92). Christman defines this version of autonomy as "a psychological capacity for something that amounts to self-government" or the "ability to critically evaluate my desires and choices" (Christman 1989, 6). Some versions of psychological autonomy are also referred to as "relational autonomy" because these theorists take account of the actual relationships of individuals (as opposed to relying on some version of abstract individualism).

A main concern of personal autonomy theorists is how we can have personal preferences that are in some sense "our own." As the Van Zant song illustrates, we respect people who are confident and follow their own path; conversely, we often look down on people who are overly conformist or too easily swayed by others' opinions. Given theories of social construction and psychological development, the question for autonomy theorists is how do we know which preferences are "our own." Feminist autonomy theorists are also worried about the harms of oppression. They ask how

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[17]Other types of autonomy are moral, political, legal, and economic. For a more complete discussion of these distinctions see part 1 in *Self, Society, and Personal Choice* (Meyers 1989).

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oppressive socialization, in particular, influences the development of self and shapes preferences.

To help clarify the feminist debate over a philosophical conception of autonomy, I focus on the distinction between procedural and substantive accounts of autonomy.[18] On the most general level, a theory is procedural if it does not *a priori* rule out any specific decisions or preferences. In other words, as long as you follow the given "procedure" to come to a decision, whatever decision you make is considered autonomous. In contrast, substantive theories tend to make more "substantive" requirements such as requiring a sufficient amount of self-respect or self-worth (Dillon 1992; Benson 1994) or requiring specific content of beliefs or preferences such as knowing the difference between right and wrong (Wolf 1980). In the following discussion, I explain how these categories are currently understood and highlight some ambiguities in the current understanding. Clarifying the distinction between these types of theories and the debate between proponents of these different approaches to personal autonomy will help clarify what is at stake in the feminist debate over autonomy.

Procedural Autonomy

Procedural autonomy theorists believe autonomy has to do with how people make

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[18]For examples of feminist discussions about the pros and cons of procedural versus substantive theories of autonomy see *Relational Autonomy* (especially the introduction and chapter 4) edited by Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar; *Autonomy, Gender and Politics* by Marilyn Friedman, *Gender in the Mirror* (chapter one) by Diana Meyers, and various articles by Paul Benson (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000; Friedman 2003; Meyers 2002; Benson 1987; Benson 1991; Benson 1994).

decisions rather than the specific content of the decisions or of the beliefs and values involved in the process of making decisions.[19] For this reason, procedural theories are considered "content-neutral." In the introduction to *Relational Autonomy*, Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar give the following description of procedural theories.

> On procedural, or content-neutral, accounts, the *content* of a person's desires, values, beliefs, and emotional attitudes is irrelevant to the issue of whether the person is autonomous with respect to those aspects of her motivational structure and the actions that flow from them. What matters for autonomy is whether the agent has subjected her motivations and actions to the appropriate kind of critical reflection. (Emphasis in original. MacKenzie and Stoljar 2000, 13-14)

As Mackenzie and Stoljar note, the varying definitions of autonomy given by these theorists emphasize the need for critical (or self-) reflection.

In general, an agent uses critical (or self-) reflection to learn about herself (increase self-knowledge). Specifically, the autonomous individual will reflect on her personal preferences (including desires, beliefs, values, and goals). Through this process of reflection, she will identify with some preferences and reject others. This is how she makes preferences "her own" or creates an authentic self. Autonomous decisions or actions will be those that are in keeping with her self-chosen preferences or her authentic self. In this way, the autonomous individual "rules" herself by acting in accord with her self-chosen preferences. I refer to any such process of reflection as the general procedure for autonomous decision making; however, the specifics of this general procedure are filled out differently by different theorists.

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[19]An sample of procedural autonomy theorists includes: Harry Frankfurt, Gerald Dworkin, John Christman, Marilyn Friedman, and Diana Meyers (Frankfurt 1988; Dworkin 1988; Christman 1991; Friedman 2003; Meyers 1989).

Although he generally refuses to define autonomy, Dworkin characterizes autonomy in the following ways:

> Putting the various pieces together, autonomy is conceived of as a second-order capacity of persons *to reflect critically upon* their first-order preferences, desires, wishes, and so forth and the capacity to accept or attempt to change these in light of higher-order preferences and values. By exercising such a capacity, persons *define their nature, give meaning and coherence to their lives, and take responsibility for the kind of person they are.* (Emphasis added. Dworkin 1988, 20)

> The full formula for autonomy, then, is *authenticity plus procedural independence.* A person is autonomous if he *identifies with* his desires, goals, and values, and such identification is not itself influenced in ways which make the process of identification in some way alien to the individual. Spelling out the conditions of procedural independence involves distinguishing those ways of influencing people's *reflective and critical faculties* which subvert them from those which promote and improve them. (Emphasis added. Dworkin 1989, 61)

According to Dworkin, if a person's preferences are to be autonomous, she must review her desires and make sure her first-order desires are in harmony with her second-order desires. This gives both "meaning and coherence" to her life. It gives meaning because it is through accepting or rejecting values that she identifies with them or makes them "her own." In this way, she creates an authentic self (through identification with specific preferences) and takes "responsibility for the kind of person" she is. This process of reflection and identification also gives coherence to her life. By eliminating conflicts between first order and second order desires, she produces internal coherence between her preferences. Also, it is the *process* (procedural independence) that is important, not the specific preferences or desires she chooses. For Dworkin this coherence between and identification with preferences is what it means for people to have an authentic self (or

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"define their nature"). Presumably, autonomous decisions will be those that reflect this authentic self.

Notice that procedural autonomy theorists propose a direct relationship between autonomous choices and the authentic self. Autonomy consists in creating an authentic self through a process of reflection and identification, and autonomous choices are those that are in keeping with this authentic self. Creating an authentic self and making choices that accord with it is what procedural autonomy theorists mean by a philosophical conception of autonomy.

We see both these elements in Marilyn Friedman's account of autonomy.

> [C]hoices and actions can be autonomous only if they are *self-reflective in two senses* .... First, they must be self-reflective in being partly *caused by the actor's reflective consideration of her own wants and values*, where reflective consideration may be cognitive in a narrow sense or also affective or volitional and cognitive in a broad sense. Second, they must be *self-reflective in mirroring those of her wants and values that she has reflectively endorsed*. ... Thus, autonomous choices and actions are those that mirror wants or values that an acting person has reflectively reaffirmed and that are important to her. (Emphasis added. Friedman 2003, 14)

According to Friedman, if a person's choices and actions are to be autonomous, she must reflect on her wants and values—choosing to endorse some and, presumably, reject others. Also, her decisions should reflect those wants and values she has endorsed (or what is important to her). Although Friedman does not use the language of authenticity here, she is advocating the general procedure for autonomous decision making I introduced earlier. Also, Friedman, like other procedural theorists, emphasizes content neutrality (Friedman 2003, 19-25).

In "Autonomy and Personal History," John Christman offers us a slightly different version of procedural autonomy. Rather than reflect on specific preferences, Christman argues that, for autonomy, the individual must reflect on the *process of preference formation*. He believes that personal autonomy requires a person to attend to the formation of desires instead of trying to spell out the conditions for identification with any specific desire at a specific time. As such, he develops the following conditions for autonomy:

(i)   A person P is autonomous relative to some desire D if it is the case that P did not resist the development of D when attending to this process of development, or P *would not have* resisted that development had P attended to the process;

(ii)   The lack of resistance to the development of D did not take place (or would not have) under the influence of factors that inhibit self-reflection;

and

(iii)   The self-reflection involved in condition (i) is (minimally) rational and involves no self-deception. (Emphasis in original. Christman 1991, 11)

As we can see, Christman still relies on a process of self-reflection; however, the reflection involves acceptance of (or resistance to) the *formation* of desires instead of identification with a specific desire at this point in time. In this way, Christman takes a historical approach instead of what he calls a "time slice" approach. He believes focusing on whether a person approves (or would approve) of how she came to have certain desires is a better way to judge how autonomous these preferences are than focusing on whether a person currently identifies with them. Similar to other procedural theorists, Christman

also endorses content neutrality.

Despite their differences, these theorists share a general understanding of autonomy. All rely on some process of critical reflection to develop an authentic self. Hence the autonomy they theorize is "procedural." Critical reflection means that a person must reflect (or at least be willing to reflect) on her preferences. Through this process, she makes these preferences "her own." Once a person identifies with specific preferences, they become part of her authentic self and she must then act in accord with these preferences (or her authentic self).[20] Developing preferences that are "our own" and living in harmony with them is what it means to be autonomous (self-government). In this way, procedural theorists claim that autonomy has to do with *how* a decision is made not *what* decision is made. With this overview, we can see that procedural autonomy theorists emphasize critical reflection, authenticity, and content neutrality. I will consider these (along with the general procedure for autonomous decision making) to be the key components of a procedural approach to autonomy theory.

Substantive Autonomy

As we turn our attention to substantive approaches to autonomy, things become more complicated. Just as there is much confusion over a philosophical conception of autonomy (in general), I believe the current understanding of "substantive" theories is

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[20]Even though Christman claims he does not require identification with specific desires, it seems to me that he does. He simply requires a different process of reflection. In other words, as long as a person does not (or would not) reject the formation of a specific desires or preference, then wouldn't that be a kind of identification with or endorsement of that preference?

also confused. As I explain how substantive theories are currently interpreted, I also offer

alternative categories for understanding the distinctions between various theories.

Currently, theorists separate autonomy theories into three categories—procedural, weak

substantive, and strong substantive. I will argue that it would be more accurate to

categorize them as procedural, procedural plus, and nonsubjective theories.

While a procedural approach to autonomy emphasizes critical reflection,

authenticity, and content neutrality, a substantive approach to autonomy emphasizes other

self-reflexive attitudes (such as self-worth and self-respect) and the context in which

decisions are made. This shift in focus is characterized as adding more "substantive"

requirements (as opposed to a formal procedure) to theories of autonomy. As Mackenzie

and Stoljar explain, these requirements can take at least two different forms.

> We call those theories that maintain that procedural accounts must be
> supplemented by some nonneutral condition *substantive* theories. There
> are two basic categories of substantive accounts: *strong substantive* and
> *weak substantive*. The former reject the content neutrality of procedural
> theories by requiring specific contents of the autonomous preferences of
> agents. The latter reject content neutrality by suggesting further necessary
> conditions on autonomy that operate as constraints on the contents of the
> desires or preferences capable of being held by autonomous agents. Both
> kinds of accounts, in different ways, are responding to objections to
> procedural accounts that derive from socialization. (Emphasis in original.
> MacKenzie and Stoljar 2000, 19)

Instead of relying on the general procedure for autonomous decision making like

procedural autonomy theorists, substantive theorists use a wider variety of approaches.[21]

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[21]Some examples of weak substantive approaches include the work of Trudy
Govier and Carolyn McLeod (Govier 1993; McLeod 2002). Some examples of strong
substantive approaches include the work of Susan Wolf and Susan Babbitt (Wolf 1980;
Babbitt 1996).

As such, it is more difficult to summarize the key components of substantive theories. In general, I argue that weak substantive theories are "supplemental"—they add additional requirements to the procedure for autonomous decision making. In contrast, strong substantive theories go "beyond" the subjective perspective that procedural theorists insist on. Instead of relying on an internal (subjective) procedure for autonomous decision making, strong substantive theorists argue that autonomy requires specific non-substantive or "external" criteria.

"Weak Substantive" or Procedural Plus Theories

In general, weak substantive theorists are in basic agreement with procedural theorists. The only difference is that they want to add additional conditions for the procedure to count as autonomous. These conditions usually refer to some self-reflexive attitude such as self-trust or self-respect. The argument of weak substantive theorists is that the procedure for autonomous decision making can only truly yield autonomous decisions if the individual has the necessary attitude toward herself and her capabilities—such as an adequate amount of self-trust or self-respect. For example, Trudy Govier defends Diana Meyers's theory of procedural autonomy and believes her discussion of self-trust adds to Meyers's account. "I find [Meyers's] account of autonomy attractive and plausible. It is, I think, consistent with my account of the nature and value of self-trust. I hope to show that procedural autonomy, as articulated by Meyers, requires self-trust in the sense I will explain here" (Govier 1993, 103). Govier is literally adding her requirement to Meyers's procedural account.

In keeping with MacKenzie and Stoljar's definition of a weak substantive theory,

Govier is "suggesting further necessary conditions on autonomy." Specifically, Govier

argues that women must not only use the procedure for autonomous decision making, but

must also have adequate self-trust.

> To reflect on one's beliefs and desires, to workout a resolution in cases in
> which they conflict, it is necessary to view oneself as having worthy
> desires, competently founded beliefs, and the cognitive and moral capacity
> to make good judgments and implement decisions. This is simply to say
> that it is necessary to trust oneself—to believe that one can do these things
> reliably and dependably and need not abdicate one's judgmental and
> decisions-making powers to others. (Govier 1993, 108)

According to Govier, without this basic trust in herself and her abilities, the procedure for

autonomous decision making will not be successful.

Using Govier's theory as an example, we can now take a closer look at the

"substantive" component of weak substantive theories. Mackenzie and Stoljar's

definition states that weak substantive theories "reject content neutrality by suggesting

constraints on the content of the desires or preferences capable of being held by

autonomous agents" (Emphasis added.). Govier's requirement for self-trust does not

directly limit the content of preferences or desires—instead it requires a specific attitude

which may (or may not) indirectly limit the content of preferences.

In "Free agency and Self-Worth," Paul Benson makes an argument similar to

Govier's.[22] In addition to the procedure for autonomous decision making, Benson argues

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[22]The natural progression of Benson's theory includes at least two stages. His
earlier work develops a strong substantive theory often referred to as "strong normative
competence." Later, he rejects these stronger requirements and develops a weak
substantive theory referred to as "weak normative competence." However, for clarity, I
refer to his stronger substantive theory as a theory of "normative competence" and his

that a person must appreciate her self-worth. By this, Benson means she must have a

sense "of her own status as a worthy agent" and "trust herself to govern her conduct

competently" (Benson 1994, 657). To clarify his position, Benson states very clearly how

he does and does not violate the content neutrality of procedural theories.

> The requirement that free agents have a sense of their competence to
> answer for their conduct *does not require that they accept certain
> propositions*. This sense of competence could be realized through a
> variety of beliefs. *Nor does this condition restrict the content of agents'
> desires, values, or plans*, for it only addresses their sense of worthiness to
> answer for their conduct, irrespective of what matters most to them.
> Nevertheless, this condition is not genuinely content neutral, since holding
> certain attitudes would preclude the necessary sense of worth
> (psychologically, if not logically). (Emphasis added. Benson 1994, 664)

In other words, requiring specific self-reflexive attitudes may indirectly limit preferences,

but weak substantive theorists maintain a general commitment to content neutrality. They

too wish to allow as much diversity as possible in personal decisions and preferences.

Since weak substantive theorists refuse "to restrict substantively persons' desires, values,

[and] life plans" (Benson 1994, 665), I believe it is more accurate to call them

"procedural plus" theories.[23]

"Strong Substantive" or Nonsubjective Theories

   To understand "strong substantive" theories, it is best to begin with an example. I

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weaker substantive theory as his "self-worth" requirement.

   [23]I have a sense that some theories currently considered weak substantive theories
would more directly restrict preferences if taken to their logical conclusion. For example,
could a person with adequate self-worth "autonomously" choose to be subservient?
Would the decision itself show a lack of self-worth? I think Benson hints at this in his
quote. However, I do not have the space to fully articulate this argument here.

use Paul Benson's theory of normative competence. "On this new conception, free agency requires *normative competence*, an array of abilities to be aware of applicable normative standards, to appreciate those standards, and to bring them competently to bear in one's evaluations of open courses of action" (Emphasis in original. Benson 1990, 54).[24] In sum, normative competence is the ability to understand relevant norms, how those norms relate to potential courses of action, and how one's actions will be viewed in relation to those norms.

Benson wants to account for how an individual's group identification and relation to social structures can undermine her ability to act in ways that ways have nothing to with the procedure for decision making. A person can be limited in her autonomy while maintaining her faculties for critical reasoning and her ability to act on her decisions. According to Benson, to be autonomous, a person must be aware of social norms and how they will be used to evaluate her actions.

> Whereas previously the task of augmenting freedom was oriented around
> the articulation of rigid boundaries between motivating considerations
> which are really one's own and those which are threatening and "other,"
> and the establishment of a certain dominance of the former over the latter,
> focus on normative competence brings to the fore the tasks of recognizing
> and gaining appreciation of the normative standpoints at work in our
> relationships with others. (Benson 1990, 56)

The procedure for autonomous decision making allows a person to sift through her preferences and make some "her own" through this process of identification. In this way, she creates boundaries between motivating considerations, and those that are really her

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[24]Benson often uses free agency instead of autonomy. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, theories of autonomy developed out of the debate over free will and determinism; therefore, theorists use a variety of concepts.

own (authentic) count as autonomous. Instead, Benson shifts our focus to *the interaction between individuals*. Instead of focusing on the ability to make preferences "our own," Benson emphasizes what is necessary for others to understand a person's actions or a person's ability to express herself. Since the norms used to interpret our actions can make a huge difference in our ability to express our autonomy, Benson argues that some competence in recognizing and understanding those norms is necessary for autonomy.[25]

At this point, there are two things to notice about Benson's theory. First, he requires specific knowledge—namely, about the norms being applied to your actions. Second, his emphasis on "normative competence" focuses our attention on the *interactive* nature of agency. Normative competence "has us think about what we must be able to recognize and understand in order to be known by other persons who bring particular interests and values to their encounters with us" (Benson 1990, 57). In this way, Benson goes "beyond" the subjective perspective in assessing personal autonomy. He requires that we assess the *context* the person is in and how specific relationships (within that context) will influence her agency. Thus, he goes "beyond" the procedure for autonomous decision making and uses other criteria for assessing agency.

The current understanding of strong substantive theories is that they rule out specific decisions or preferences as autonomous. We have already seen that Mackenzie and Stoljar believe that strong substantive theories require "specific contents of the autonomous preferences of agents." Similarly, Friedman argues that "a substantive

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[25]Benson does not argue that normative competence requires a person to *accept* mainstream or traditional norms. Indeed, we will see shortly that part of normative competence includes being able to critically evaluate norms.

conception of autonomy adds to [a] content-neutral conception a requirement pertaining to *the contents of what a person chooses*" (Emphasis added. Friedman 2003, 190). Finally, Diana Meyers explains, "restrictive, value-saturated accounts of autonomy, such as Susan Babbitt's and Paul Benson's, insist on the need to distinguish real from apparent desires and authentic values from spurious ones. They draw these distinctions *by placing constraints on what people can autonomously choose*" (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 13). How exactly do substantive theories restrain or limit what people can choose? And what "choices" do they rule out? To answer these questions, I return to Benson's theory of normative competence.

In "Autonomy and Oppressive Socialization," Benson uses the example of feminine beauty norms to argue that feminine socialization causes women to internalize oppressive norms—namely, the idea that women should make themselves physically appealing to men. He further argues that these norms undermine autonomy. Normative competence requires that a person understand and evaluate the norms applied to her decisions and actions. Benson argues that feminine socialization undermines autonomy because it causes women to internalize false beliefs (such as their worth is tied to their attractiveness to men) and keeps them from being able to "critically evaluate" these false beliefs.

> In leading women to internalize gravely mistaken conceptions of themselves from a very early age, such socialization *systematically prevents many women from recognizing more adequate views of their real strength and value*; it renders them unable to take seriously reasons there are for them to regard their appearance differently. It can have this effect without necessarily assaulting women's intelligence or debilitating their powers of autonomous agency altogether. (Emphasis added. Benson 1991,

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As we can see here, Benson does not automatically rule out specific *preferences* or

choices. What he rules out are specific *beliefs*.

Let us return to the charges made by procedural theorists against strong

substantive theorists. What preferences do procedural theorists believe strong substantive

theorists are saying cannot be autonomous? Friedman argues that strong substantive

theorists require a commitment to autonomy itself that would rule out certain preferences.

> According to the substantive conception, someone realizes autonomy only
> if she makes choices which, in their *substance* or *contents*, are consistent
> with the value of autonomy itself. A choice, for example, to live in a
> thoroughly subordinated, servile, or slavish manner is, on this approach, a
> choice that fails substantively to accord with the value of autonomy and is,
> therefore, not genuinely autonomous even if it meets all content-neutral
> criteria. (Emphasis in original. Friedman 2003, 190)

Meyers also argues that substantive theories (or "value-saturated" as she calls them)

"deindividualize" autonomy by restricting the choices women can autonomously make.

However, as we have seen, Benson is placing restrictions on beliefs (or reasons for

action) rather than ruling out specific preferences. In this way, Benson does not explicitly

say women cannot autonomously do X. What he says is that women cannot

autonomously do X, *for reason Y*. The belief or reasons for the preference are more

important to Benson than the preference itself. What Benson finds objectionable is not

that any particular woman may choose to shave her legs or wear make-up, but that she has

internalized a belief that her worth (as a person) is tied to her attractiveness to men. In

this way, the charge that strong substantive theories "require specific contents of the

autonomous preferences of agents" is misleading.[26]

In addition to worrying about the constraints on preferences, procedural autonomy

theorists also accuse strong substantive theorists of undervaluing or ignoring the agency

women have in oppressive situations. Friedman states:

> Women abiding by norms of traditional feminine servility and deference
> might have narrowed their preferences to what they can obtain without
> serious harm and given up on what they might otherwise have valued or
> sought. Does this adaptation of preferences to limiting circumstances
> make autonomous choice and action impossible? No. Everyone lives
> under circumstances that are limited in some way or other. No one has
> access to every imaginable option. (Friedman 2003, 25)

Similarly, Meyers argues that strong substantive theories "are troubling because they

promiscuously stigmatize women as victims" and "overlook the agentic capacities that

women exercise despite oppression" (Meyers 2002, 16). I find these critiques baffling.[27]

Benson clearly does not argue that oppression erases women's agency. As the earlier

quote shows, Benson believes women may well continue to exercise autonomy in relation

to other decisions such as choosing a career, while simultaneously making a

nonautonomous decision to pursue feminine beauty norms.[28]

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[26]In "Personal Autonomy and Society," Mariana Oshana does explicitly rule out some preferences or decisions as autonomous (Oshana 1998). However, Oshana distinguishes between what she calls "internalist" and "externalist" theories of autonomy. The distinction she makes captures something important about the disagreement between procedural and substantive theorists (namely the use of "external"—as opposed to strictly "internal" or subjective—criteria to judge autonomy), but her categories do not seem to precisely map on to the ones I am using here.

[27]Indeed, in a footnote Meyers admits that Benson does not "rule out autonomy in all aspects of the victim's life" (Meyers 2002, 193n3).

[28]Benson also differentiates between women who abide by feminine beauty norms but recognize they are coercive, and women who embrace feminine beauty norms

In fact, Benson believes his theory is better suited to show agency under oppression than other theories.

> Since the theory stresses that an agent's freedom may fare very differently as we move from one normative domain to another, it makes room for the recognition that, even under social, economic, and psychological oppression, women have realized considerable power as free agents in relation to normative standpoints which were accorded little social visibility. (Benson 1990, 60)

For an example, Benson uses Angela Davis's account of slave women caring for their families. From the slaveowner's normative framework slaves were property with no rights or freedoms, and it is because of this normative standard that slave women's actions were meaningful. In a system that views people as objects, the nurturing work of taking care of a family and raising children is an act of resistance. From the viewpoint of slave owning society, slave women caring for their families was simply something slave women were expected to do in a patriarchal society. From the viewpoint of the oppressed, slave women were making an important contribution—"securing the survival of the oppressed" (Benson 1990, 60-61).[29]

If strong substantive theories are not doing what procedural theorists accuse them of, why all this animosity? I believe Christman best articulates what so confounds procedural theorists about strong substantive autonomy theories. For autonomy to be

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(Benson 1991, 387-388). Again, the issue isn't necessarily the specific behavior, but whether women believe their worth is tied to their attractiveness to men.

[29]By showing the potential for resistance and the agency involved in slave women caring for their families, I do not mean to belittle the oppressive nature of this additional workload or to romanticize the role of slave women in the family. I, like Benson, am simply using this as an example of how we can use alternative normative frameworks to evaluate agency.

self-governance it must be committed to the subjective perspective. "So while the descriptions of the various processes by which we come to have a desire are in some sense 'objective' (for example, cognitive scientists might be able to tell us how they operate), the judgment concerning the acceptance or resistance of those processes is *subjective*" (Emphasis in original. Christman 1991, 21). What the procedural theorists call "substantive" criteria could more accurately be called "external" or nonsubjective criteria—in other words, at least part of the criteria for evaluating whether a decision is autonomous does not come from and is not located "in" the individual herself.

To illustrate what counts as "internal" and subjective as opposed to "external" and nonsubjective, I compare Christman's discussion of rationality to Benson's discussion of false beliefs. Christman argues that self-reflection must only be minimally rational because he does not want to include "externalist rationality conditions."

> I would defend the claim that only minimal 'internal' conditions for rationality (like consistency of beliefs and desires) would be plausible as conditions for autonomy. For to demand more—for example, that one's beliefs (upon which conditional desires rest) be confirmed by objectively relevant evidence—would make the property of autonomy divergent from the idea of *self*-government that provides its intuitive base. Requiring an 'externalist' rationality condition for autonomy implies that people will not be considered autonomous (and therefore not free) even if they are acting on well-formed, considered, and consistent reasons for action. (Emphasis in original. Christman 1991, 14)

Christman rejects nonsubjective criteria because it undermines the notion of self-government implicit in a philosophical conception of autonomy. We make preferences "our own" through reflection and identification. If we add "external" or nonsubjective requirements to this process, it is no longer *self*-government or respect for the individual's

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preferences.[30]

In contrast, Benson is clearly adding nonsubjective criteria to the process of reflection and decision making. Benson's argument that women who embrace feminine beauty norms have internalized false beliefs includes "external" or nonsubjective criteria to show why these beliefs are false. Specifically, Benson takes it as a given that women's worth (as persons) should not be tied to their attractiveness to men. Part of what makes internalized oppression so insidious is that women endorse it—it is in keeping with their subjective perspective. Thus, theorists must go "beyond" the subjective perspective to identify internalized oppression. For this reason, I claim it is more accurate to call strong substantive theories "nonsubjective" theories.

To clarify, nonsubjective theorists do not focus on the general procedure for autonomous decision making nor do they emphasize the authentic self created through this procedure.[31] Instead, they focus on the individual's understanding of herself and her situation. In other words, nonsubjective theorists build into "autonomy" elements of the *context* in which decisions are made (instead of solely relying on subjective processes of decision making). They try to articulate what options individuals realistically have open

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[30]In chapter six I will continue this argument and show how procedural autonomy theorists are also committed to liberal political theory. It is part of why they feel so strongly about content neutrality and these more "substantive" or "external" criteria for autonomy.

[31]I believe nonsubjective theorists are interested in a type of authenticity. However, they would define this concept differently from procedural theorists. For example, the kind of authenticity they are interested in is what Susan Babbitt calls having a self or a sense of human flourishing (Babbitt 1996), not the narrow definition of authenticity based on reflective endorsement.

to them by articulating the *interactive* component of agency. By focusing on the context in which decisions are made, nonsubjective theorists raise questions about how to understand the relationship between oppressive socialization and personal autonomy.

Stoljar's Challenge

In "Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition," Natalie Stoljar asks whether a procedural or a nonsubjective ("substantive") approach to autonomy is best for addressing feminist concerns. Stoljar understands why some feminist theorists are drawn to a procedural approach. One feminist criticism of traditional autonomy theories is that these theories seem to require substantive independence and other "masculine" norms. In contrast, feminists want a theory of autonomy that can capture the relational aspects of people's everyday lives and can accommodate a wide range of preferences. For these reasons, many feminists find an approach to autonomy that does not rule out any specific preferences (the content neutrality of procedural theories) very attractive.

Given feminist work on social construction, feminist autonomy theorists also want to develop a theory that can rule out as autonomous preferences that are the result of harmful forms of socialization. Feminists who defend procedural theories believe they can adequately account for "pernicious" aspects of socialization in the procedure itself; thereby, addressing feminist concerns but also keeping the content neutrality they cherish. Stoljar is skeptical about this approach.

> Despite the apparent advantages, however, feminists should be cautious
> about adopting a purely procedural account of autonomy. In certain cases,
> even preferences satisfying the standards of critical reflection that are

required by procedural accounts would still be regarded as nonautonomous by many feminists. This is because such preferences are influenced by *pernicious aspects of the oppressive context*. They therefore attract what I call *the feminist intuition*, which claims that *preferences influenced by oppressive norms of femininity cannot be autonomous*. (Emphasis in original and added. Stoljar 2000, 95)

Stoljar questions whether the "pernicious aspects of [an] oppressive context" can be adequately captured and filtered out by a formal procedure. She believes that many feminists rightly question the autonomy of some decisions even if they appear to be in keeping with preferences that were reflectively endorsed. She calls this skepticism "the feminist intuition"—the idea that "preferences influenced by oppressive norms" cannot be autonomous. Therefore, Stoljar argues that the only way to adequately address the problem of internalized oppression is to adopt a nonsubjective approach to autonomy theory.

Let us begin to clarify the problem Stoljar raises by considering Friedman's analysis of romantic love. In her discussion of love, Friedman admits women are subject to social pressures that devalue women's autonomy, belittle women's aspirations that do not include caring for others, and encourage women to subsume their values and beliefs to love relationships regardless of whether that is their primary concern (Friedman 2003, 132). She further acknowledges that (because of these social pressures) heterosexual romantic love poses a greater threat to women's autonomy than men's autonomy. Yet, Friedman claims that as long as a woman has made the relationship her self-defining value, then sustaining that relationship *is* an expression of autonomy for her.

The relationship is now, by definition, the woman's overriding concern for which she will sacrifice other important values. As such, it is a self-

defining commitment for her. By acting in accord with that commitment, a woman does not actually give up autonomy; instead she shows a significant *degree* of it. Thus a woman who values her relationships more than she values autonomy, and who acts to maintain her romantic relationship, becomes autonomous after all. (Emphasis in original. Friedman 2003, 137)

If the love relationship is this woman's self-defining commitment and a reflection of her autonomy, then we must assume (by Friedman's own definition of autonomy) that this value had to be put through some process of self-reflection that was "relatively unimpeded by conditions, such as coercion, deception, and manipulation" (Friedman 2003, 14). Do the social pressures Friedman acknowledged add up to "coercion, deception, and manipulation"?

Stoljar claims feminists will question whether "preferences influenced by oppressive norms of femininity" can be autonomous. In her procedural account of autonomy, Friedman acknowledges the influence of feminine socialization on personal preferences, but does not go on to explain how the procedure for autonomous decision making can rule out preferences developed through oppressive socialization as autonomous.[32] For example, do oppressive social influences skew the process of critical reflection?

To be clear, I am not arguing that women can never autonomously choose to enter a heterosexual love relationship. I am arguing that Friedman's procedural theory fails to

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[32]Friedman does go on to add that a woman can autonomously choose to make the relationship her self-defining commitment "so long as her efforts to maintain it do not themselves involve sacrifices of her autonomy in other ways" (Friedman 2003, 137-138). Specifically, the woman must have and periodically use some autonomy skills. At this point we could ask whether Friedman is sneaking nonsubjective requirements into her procedural theory. To avoid confusion, I will not pursue this question here.

account for the oppressive social influences that often lead women to place romantic relationships above other commitments or values. Part of the problem with Friedman's approach is that she refuses to analyze the formation of desires. As Friedman points out, feminine socialization trains women to put relationships above other values or commitments. Therefore, it seems disingenuous for Friedman to claim that once the relationship becomes a woman's overriding commitment then sustaining that relationship is an expression of her autonomy. To remedy this problem with procedural theories, Christman suggests a historical approach that focuses on the formation of desires.

Instead of focusing on whether a person identifies with a specific desire at a particular time, Christman argues it is more important (for autonomy) that a person approve of (or at least would not resist) the process by which she came to have the desire. A person's preference is autonomous (according to Christman), "if it is the case that [she] did not resist the development of [the preference] when attending to this process of development, or [she] *would not have* resisted that development had [she] attended to the process" (Emphasis in original. Christman 1991, 11). By "attending to" the process, Christman means a type of critical or self-reflection. Christman, however, shifts the focus of this reflection from identification with a specific desire, to the process from which this desire developed. Does the shift in focus proposed by Christman address Stoljar's concerns?

The hypothetical (would have resisted) or counterfactual component of Christman's theory appears to account for the feminist intuition. After all, who would approve of a process of oppressive socialization? However, Christman argues that the

evaluation of the process of desire formation must be *subjective*, that is it relies on the

subject's own reflective evaluation.

> My contention that the formation of desires is what is crucial to their
> authenticity is similar to the claim that since one's social and cultural
> history is the determining factor in one's perspective on the world, one can
> only judge oneself in light of that history and its effect on one's
> development as a person. However, my view remains 'atomist' in that the
> fulcrum of the determination of autonomy remains *the point of view of the
> agent herself.*[33] (Emphasis added. Christman 1991, 23-24)

If we must judge the process of desire formation from the point of view of the subject

herself, this seems to rule out (or at least greatly reduce) the chances that the individual

will reject norms influenced by oppressive socialization.

The problem here is that if we only use subjective criteria to evaluate the process

of preference formation, then the individual will be using norms *influenced* by oppressive

socialization to *analyze the process* of oppressive socialization. In his critique of

Christman's theory, Benson points out the problem with analyzing preferences only from

the subjective perspective.

> [A] woman who has learned from her earliest years to gauge her personal
> value largely according to men's reactions to her can acquire the further
> belief that she came to understand her personal worth in those terms as a
> result of socialization which serves men's interests and can preserve the
> coherence of her self-conception without having to modify her
> identification with male-oriented motives. (Benson 1991, 394)

Indeed, Christman admits "one implication of this theory is that people could turn out to

be autonomous despite having desires for subservient, demeaning, or even evil things and

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[33]Christman goes on to say he rejects "attempts to give a thoroughly externalist or objective account of individual autonomy" (Christman 1991, 24). Also, he endorses the content neutrality of procedural theories (Christman 1991, 22).

lifestyles" (Christman 1991, 22). For this reason, Christman's theory does not seem to be much of an improvement over Friedman's in addressing the problem raised by Stoljar—namely, how do we rule out as autonomous preferences that are the result of oppressive socialization.[34]

The procedure for autonomous decision making assesses how autonomous a particular decision or preference is from the *subjective* perspective. In contrast, Benson and Stoljar point out that we cannot articulate what is wrong (or nonautonomous) about some preferences without stepping outside of the subjective perspective. They argue that the belief that women's worth is based on their attractiveness to men is a false belief, but we can only see this as a false belief if we move beyond the subjective perspective. Thus, Stoljar and Benson add "external" or "nonsubjective" criteria to their theories of autonomy. Procedural theorists find this criteria threatening because their "content neutrality" is also a commitment to value neutrality.

Benson and Stoljar add nonsubjective requirements by arguing that women have internalized false beliefs (and that by internalizing these false beliefs they are also unable to criticize them). However, at this point, I would like to push Stoljar and Benson's view a step further. The problem with these beliefs is not just that they are "false," but that they *subordinate women to men*. I believe this is what really sparks the feminist intuition. However, now we are not just using nonsubjective criteria to assess autonomy, we are

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[34]I should point out that I believe Christman is on the right track by shifting our focus to the process of preference formation instead of identification with current desires. However, he undermines the potential of his approach by refusing to move beyond the subjective viewpoint.

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also making value judgments about certain social relationships. I believe this is what procedural theorists find so objectionable about nonsubjective theories of autonomy, and, as my discussion shows, even nonsubjective theorists often fail to fully appreciate this implication of their theories.

According to Stoljar, the feminist intuition "claims that preferences influenced by oppressive norms of femininity cannot be autonomous." How do we define "oppressive norms"? I would argue that we cannot identify oppressive norms without some definition of "oppression," and that definition will include some value judgments about certain social relationships. More importantly, we cannot identify oppressive norms without relying on some nonsubjective criteria for evaluation.[35] Therefore, procedural theories will be unable to account for the feminist intuition because they assess how autonomous preferences are from the subjective perspective.[36]

A Philosophical Conception of Autonomy

I began with some comments on the conceptual confusion surrounding autonomy, then showed how the debate between procedural and nonsubjective autonomy theorists exacerbates this conceptual confusion. I will now argue that we should only apply the concept of autonomy to procedural theories because nonsubjective theories have a more

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[35]In chapter six, I will return to the question of the feminist intuition and explore this distinction in more detail.

[36]We could also ask whether procedural theorists are as "value neutral" as they claim. In chapters four and five, I argue that procedural theorists privilege a specific conception of self.

ambiguous relationship to historical theorists such as Kant and Mill.

To summarize, procedural theories of autonomy rely on what I call the general procedure for autonomous decision making. This procedure uses a process of critical or self-reflection to identify with preferences and, thereby, create an authentic self. Autonomous decisions or action then become those that are in keeping with this self-chosen authentic self. Based on this general procedure for autonomous decision making. I claim that the key components of a procedural autonomy theory are critical or self-reflection, authenticity, and content neutrality. If we return to the brief historical analysis I gave in the previous chapter, we can see how current theorists who use a procedural approach to autonomy take up many of the themes introduced by Kant and Mill.

Both Kant and Mill emphasize the use of reason or rationality. Similarly, contemporary theorists emphasize the need for "critical" reflection or minimal rationality in the process of reflection and identification that makes preferences "our own." Kant also emphasizes self-knowledge or recognition of ourselves as rational creatures. Contemporary theorists also emphasize self-knowledge, but in a different way. Contemporary theorists require a level of self-awareness or a transparency of self that allows a person to reflect on her preferences and motivations. The procedure for autonomous decision making requires that a person be able to recognize her preferences, articulate her preferences, and be aware of her feelings toward these preferences.[37]

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[37]I acknowledge that some theorists do not require conscious articulation of preferences or, in Christman's case, even conscious reflection on the formation of those preferences; however, these theorists do require some knowledge about our relationship to those preferences.

Contemporary theorists also argue that a person develops greater self-knowledge through the process of reflection and identification.

Mill does not talk as explicitly about self-knowledge, but he does emphasize the need to take responsibility for our decisions and actions. His arguments about why it is important for the individual to act on desires or impulses that are "his own," are similar to procedural theorists' arguments about how we make preferences "our own" (or the creation of an authentic self). Mill also wants to respect the value of individuality by allowing for as much diversity as possible. Procedural theorists echo this concern in their insistence on content neutrality. Finally, both Mill and contemporary procedural autonomy theorists are concerned about the role social influences play in shaping preferences.

Aside from a shared concern about the role of social influences in preference formation, nonsubjective theorists do not emphasize the same themes as those we found in the work of Kant and Mill.[38] Instead, nonsubjective theorists are more interested in an ability to act and a sense of "human flourishing." In general, they are interested in how relationships (either specific personal relationships or the relationship of the individual to society as a whole) shape personal desires and the actual options open to a person. For example, instead of focusing on how a person makes preferences "her own," nonsubjective theorists focus on what makes it possible for a person to *act on certain choices* or *see certain options* as viable. In this way, I believe nonsubjective theorists are

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[38]Again, I believe nonsubjective theorists are also interested in a *type* of authenticity, but I believe their understanding of this term varies greatly from the way procedural theorists use it.

interested in a different set of basic human needs (such as "flourishing" instead of a narrowly defined authenticity or some conception of "self-government") and values (such as concern about how the decisions and actions of some affect the decision and actions of others instead of maximizing the possible choices of any particular individual).[39]

Given that procedural theories of autonomy are more in keeping with the historical precursors to contemporary autonomy theories, I argue that procedural theories are most representative of a philosophical conception of autonomy. I further argue that nonsubjective theories of "autonomy" (theories that do not emphasize the general procedure for autonomous decision making), should not be considered theories of autonomy at all. These theorists may occasionally use the term autonomy (although some do not), but I am *defining them out of the category of autonomy theories*. I believe considering nonsubjective theories as a type of autonomy theory contributes to our confusion over the concept of autonomy.

Even though nonsubjective theorists may be asking some of the same questions and joining the same discussion (for example they are included in anthologies on "autonomy"), they take a very different approach to "autonomy" than both the historical precursors and contemporary theorists. In general, nonsubjective theorists have been considered autonomy theorists because they put themselves in conversation with other autonomy theorists. For example, Benson tries to show why his theory is better than Harry Frankfurt's, Marilyn Friedman's, and John Christman's. In this way, some of the

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[39] I elaborate on the different in motivations between procedural and nonsubjective theorists in chapter six.

theorists I want avoid calling autonomy theorists consider *themselves* autonomy theorists. However, when I return to this issue in chapter six, I hope to show that they actually have more in common with other feminist theorists that are explicitly not constructing theories of autonomy such as María Lugones and Sarah Hoagland (Lugones 2003; Hoagland 1988).

In the next chapter, I turn to a more thorough analysis of our philosophical conception of autonomy in an attempt to explain why I believe it cannot be adequately reconceived. Most of the analysis that follows is devoted to examining the work of Diana Meyers. Meyers comes closer than any other theorists I have studied to making the notion of autonomy "work" in a way that is useful for feminists; however, I argue that her reconception ultimately fails. In my analysis, I will show how various assumptions are intrinsic to the notion of autonomy, and it is these assumptions that undermine Meyers's project. After a detailed review of Meyers's theory (chapters three through five), I return to the distinctions introduced here to show why autonomy theory has limited value for feminist theorists.

Chapter Three
Meyers's Theory of Autonomy

Meyers's interest in a philosophical conception of autonomy began with a seminar

in liberal feminism in which a conundrum emerged.

> If women's professed desires are products of their inferior position, should
> we give credence to these desires? If so, we seem to be capitulating to
> institutionalized injustice by gratifying warped desires. If not, we seem to
> be perpetrating injustice by showing disrespect for these individuals.
> Frustrated in my attempts to resolve this vexing paradox, I concluded that I
> needed to understand why some human desires are to be taken more
> seriously than others. (Meyers 1989, xi)

In other words, Meyers wants to understand how feminist work on social construction

and internalized oppression relates to our judgments and intuitions about specific desires.

As Meyers understands it, this paradox leads to a question about human desires.

Specifically, why some desires should be respected while others should be considered

suspect. Meyers often frames this as a question about what people "really" want.

Since the question arose in a class on liberal theories, it is not surprising that

Meyers decides to look for an answer in theories of autonomy. In *Self, Society, and*

Personal Choice, Meyers considers some recent theories of autonomy.[40] According to

Meyers, the main questions motivating these theorists are: Given the profound influence

of socialization, how can people have "traits, beliefs, or capabilities" of their own? If we

cannot identify any "authentic" traits or otherwise distance ourselves from socialization,

are all our lives merely "an outcropping of acculturation" (Meyers 1989, 25)? Meyers

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[40]This book was written in the 1989, so these theories are not as "recent" anymore.
However, many people still draw on these theories and propose similar versions.

shares the concerns of these theorists, but she disagrees with their solutions. She believes

these theorists are trying to find a free agent that somehow transcends socialization—an

impossible task. Instead, she offers a theory of autonomy that does not oppose

"authenticity" to "socialization."

Not only does Meyers believe these attempts to transcend socialization will fail,

she also believes they are misguided. Meyers claims that theorists who are trying to rid

the self of socialization are ultimately trying to develop an account of free will. Any

account of free will requires a free agent and this free agent will be the part of the self

untouched by socialization. However, Meyers believes this free agent is an impoverished

account of an authentic self. She clarifies her critique by referring to these free will

accounts of autonomy as "ontological" theories.

> Construing autonomy as a form of free will implies that the problem of
> autonomy is primarily an ontological question that raises subsidiary
> procedural questions. On this understanding, autonomy will be
> unintelligible unless a free agent can be found. With respect to personal
> autonomy, a free agent must be one untainted by socialization. Since these
> theories take the [authentic] self of the autonomous individual to be a
> socialization-transcending agent, the procedures they commend for
> achieving autonomy are designed to cleanse the individual of the stain of
> socialization.[41] (Meyers 1989, 42)

Meyers believes the need to "cleanse" the self of socialization in an attempt to discover

an authentic self introduces two problems for autonomy theorists. One, it is impossible to

completely (or even adequately) rid oneself of the influence of socialization. Two, if the

authentic self is equated with a free agent that is merely discovered, then it rules out the

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[41]Meyers uses the terms true self, core self, and authentic self interchangeably.
For clarity, I will use authentic self (especially since this tends to be her preferred term).

possibility for self-definition or changes in the self. Meyers argues that, since foreclosing the possibility of self-definition undermines a key value of autonomy, we should avoid these approaches to personal autonomy.[42]

In contrast, Meyers wants to give a more adequate theory of autonomy—specifically, she wants to give a theory of autonomy that adequately addresses the influence of socialization. By explaining how socialization influences autonomy, she believes her theory is more compatible with psychological reality and is a more accurate account of lived autonomy.

Autonomy as Autonomy Competency

Meyers believes autonomy consists of at least three components—self-knowledge, self-definition, and self-direction,[43] and to develop these components of autonomy requires various skills. In general, a person needs a disposition toward and an ability to consult the self. She must ask, "What do I really want?" She must also be able to act on the answer. If a person adequately develops these skills, she will eventually develop a "competency" in this area of her life. Meyers calls this "autonomy competency." Autonomy competency is similar to other competencies. In order to have culinary competency, a person must possess certain culinary skills. Similarly, if a person develops

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[42]I am not thoroughly convinced that these theories completely rule out self-definition. In fact, Harry Frankfurt's theory in particular seems to rely heavily on a type of self-definition through identification.

[43]At this point in her theory, Meyers actually refers to self-knowledge as self-discovery. Also, she sometimes uses self-understanding. For consistency, I will use self-knowledge. I believe this most accurately reflects Meyers use of these various terms.

appropriate skills in self-knowledge, self-definition, and self-direction, she will have autonomy competency.

One way to think about Meyers's overall theory is that it presents autonomy as a type of psychological equilibrium. Autonomy competency creates an equilibrium between self-knowledge, self-definition, and self-direction, and the various skills necessary for autonomy competency are skills necessary to do this. While Meyers never puts her theory in exactly this way, she does discuss the "reciprocal relationship" between these various components as well as other specific requirements for autonomy competency. I include it here as a way to clarify how she sees her conception of the authentic self as a more dynamic conception than the earlier theories and to help clarify the general direction of Meyers's theory of autonomy.

One of the problems Meyers has with ontological accounts of autonomy is their conception of an authentic self. She argues that conceiving of the authentic self as a free agent untouched by socialization fossilizes the authentic self. If we simply *discover* the authentic self, we cannot change it. However, Meyers believes her procedural account allows for self-definition or the *creation* of an authentic self. She argues that specific behaviors or actions lead us to develop certain personality traits. For example, if John decides to become childcare worker at a daycare center, he will have to develop patience and a sensitivity to children's needs and feelings. He will either become more nurturing in his work (enhancing certain personality traits), or he will have to pick a new career (change in decision or goals). In this way, autonomous decisions lead people to develop certain personality traits over others. Eventually, these traits make up the authentic self.

The authentic self "emerges" through the exercise of autonomy competency. Thus, Meyers tries to show how an authentic self develops out of our everyday decisions and activities rather than by trying to "cleanse" the self of socialization. This description and theory allows Meyers to develop a more dynamic conception of the authentic self—one that is open to self-definition.

Only Certain "Personality Structures" Count as Autonomous

Meyers claims that every competency must have an overarching function. For example, the goal of carpentry (the competency) is to construct wooden objects or buildings (the overarching function). Similarly, the goal of cooking (the competency) is to prepare tasty and nourishing dishes or meals (the overarching function) (Meyers 1989, 58). The overarching function is the end result or purpose of the competency. To understand the end result or purpose of autonomy, I briefly return to Meyers's general description of personal autonomy.

As Meyers explains, "of course" the overarching function of autonomy competency is self-governance—"controlling one's life by ascertaining what one really wants to do and by acting accordingly" (Meyers 1989, 59). Notice that self-governance requires a person *know* what she "really" wants. Thus, self-governance includes some conception of an authentic self. For Meyers, this connection is explicit: "the self-governance constitutive of personal autonomy cannot be reduced to negative liberty or, for that matter, to negative liberty coupled with a socially sanctioned form of success. It requires living in harmony with one's self" (Meyers 1989, 19). Meyers goes on to argue

that the personality type most conducive to self-governance or autonomy competency is

an integrated personality. Therefore, an "integrated personality" is also the overarching

function of autonomy.[44]

To understand why an integrated personality is important to autonomy we must

also understand the importance of reasons for action.

> [Autonomous] people are not simply driven to behave one way or another.
> They *act in accordance with their own reasons*. Fractured personalities
> are incapable of autonomy to the extent that they are incapable of
> sustaining reasons, and they are incapable of sustaining reasons to the
> extent that they are fractured. (Emphasis added. Meyers 1989, 69)

Meyers implies many things here, but I will focus on what she means by "acting in

accordance with their own reasons" and why this is so important for her.

In brief, Meyers's argues that the overarching function (goal) of autonomy

competency is self-governance. Self-governance means controlling your life by knowing

what you really want to do and acting accordingly. Once a desire, goal, or preference has

become part of the authentic self, then it also becomes a reason for action. The "reason"

we (autonomously) do something is because it is in harmony with our authentic self.

Although Meyers believes we can make certain changes to the authentic self, these

changes will not be random. More importantly, reasons need to be consistent and avoid

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[44]Meyers's description of how self-government and an integrated personality are both part of the overarching function of autonomy is confusing; therefore, I introduce it in steps. However, Meyers clearly includes both: "That function, of course, is self-governance—controlling one's life by ascertaining what one really wants to do and by acting accordingly. But, since the nature of self-governance is itself mysterious, this characterization of the function of autonomy competency is unedifying, and the question immediately arises as to what more definite aim this competency could have that could be shown to support self-governance. I shall urge that the overarching function of the competency of autonomy is to secure an integrated personality" (Meyers 1989, 59).

contradiction. Thus, Meyers argues that the authentic self must also be consistent and avoid contradiction. We must avoid conflict in our beliefs, desires, and preferences and strive for consistency. This consistency of responses and lack of conflict is what Meyers's means by an integrated personality.[45]

In what follows, I flesh out the definitions and connections introduced in this brief overview. What does Meyers mean by self-governance? How is it related to an authentic self? Why is an integrated personality so important? And how does the authentic self give us reasons for action?

Let us start with Meyers's conception of self-governance. On the surface, it seems obvious that this would be the overarching function of autonomy competency. After all, the word autonomy literally means "self-government" or "self-rule." But when this term is applied to a person and not a government, some explanation is necessary. For Meyers, self-governance means control over your life or directing your life in a certain way.[46] Meyers articulates at least three ways a person can have control over her life.

First, self-governance means a person gives an overall direction to her life through life plans. Meyers conceives of life plans very broadly. A life plan can be commitment to a person, project, or value. The important thing is that it gives some overall direction. Thus, one way self-governance gives control over one's life is by giving life an overall direction or purpose. Also choosing a life plan is "ascertaining what one really wants to

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[45]Meyers's admits that sometimes we will be conflicted and this conflict can be useful for determining what we really want. However, the goal is to resolve conflicts and work toward consistency.

[46]Meyers often uses self-governance and self-direction almost interchangeably.

do." Thus, self-governance means a person directs or controls her life by choosing a life plan.

Second, self-governance means a person acts in accord with that she really wants. Here Meyers means both acting in harmony with a life plan, but also acting in harmony with the authentic self (as described by various values, beliefs, and preferences that may or may not be broad enough to constitute a life plan). As Meyers puts it, autonomous people "match their conduct to their selves" (Meyers 1989, 46). Thus, self-governance also means a person controls her actions to bring them in line with her life plans and authentic self.

Third, self-governance means changing the authentic self if necessary. Implicit in any life plan is also a conception of what we consider a desirable personality. In other words, when a person chooses what she "really" wants, she also has some notion of who she "really" wants to be. There is a reciprocal relationship between life plans and the personality. Different decisions or actions will reinforce or undermine various personality traits, so the individual must have some notion of the kind of person she wants to be when making these decisions. If the direction she takes conflicts with her ideals, then either the direction or the ideals will need to change. Meyers gives the example of James—a person who overloads his schedule and, thereby, reinforces a tendency toward superficiality. If James dislikes this trait, he will need to take steps to try and change it. For instance, he might try to arrange his schedule such that he can focus on a few projects in more depth (Meyers 1989, 60-61). What exactly he does is unimportant, the point is that he "govern" himself. To do this, he needs to take some responsibility for the person

he is or is becoming. "Autonomous people—people who command the skills of autonomy competency—cannot disclaim responsibility for their selves" (Meyers 1989, 60). Therefore, control over the development of self (or creation of an authentic self) is another way people can have control over their lives.[47]

This description of self-governance and personality traits directly relates to the idea of an equilibrium introduced in my general description of Meyers's theory of autonomy. Remember Meyers envisions a type of equilibrium between self-knowledge, self-definition, and self-direction. We can now show how this relates to self-governance. Self-knowledge is being aware of the traits you are developing and your reaction to those traits—your self-referential responses. Self-definition relates to your personal ideals or the kind of person you want to be. Self-direction is the choices you make or actions you take. Here deciding on or acting in accord with a life plan. The reciprocal relationship among these aspects of self is what it means to be self-governing.

We now have a better sense of what Meyers means by self-governance and how it relates to the authentic self. Self-governance means controlling your life so that you do what you "really" want to do. However, doing what you "really" want to do requires knowing your authentic self, and this authentic self provides the reasons for your actions. To better understand why, let me show how personal autonomy relates to Meyers's conception of moral autonomy.

Meyers's theory of personal autonomy closely parallels her initial description of

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[47]Meyers admits that sometimes personality traits are tenacious, but that *some* reflection on the relationship between personal standards and choices is necessary for autonomy (Meyers 1989, 61).

moral autonomy. Using Kant, Meyers argues that there are two necessary features for any account of moral autonomy.

> First, morally autonomous people are self-regulating. The grounds of morality are within them, and they are capable of discovering for themselves what morality requires. Second, however they go about arriving at moral solutions, morally autonomous people regard their conclusions as obligations. (Meyers 1989, 14)

We can make a direct parallel between these features of moral autonomy and Meyers's conception of personal autonomy. Morally autonomous people are "self-regulating"; personally autonomous people are "self-governing." Morally autonomous people are "capable of discovering for themselves what morality requires"; personally autonomous people choose their own life plans and otherwise give direction to their own lives. Morally autonomous people "regard their conclusions as obligations"; personally autonomous people regard their conclusions as reasons for actions. In other words, directing their lives such that their conduct matches their selves gives autonomous people compelling reasons for action. Similar to morality, the reasons for action given by autonomous people must be consistent. Hence the authentic self that these reasons are based on must also be consistent. Although the authentic self is dynamic and can change over time, it cannot change randomly or solely in reaction to changing circumstances. This would undermine the control that is a necessary element of self-governance.

Now we can also see the connection between self-governance and an integrated personality. Directing or controlling one's life through self-governance will influence the developing personality and vice versa. For this reason, Meyers believes some personality types are more conducive to autonomy than others.

> Since measuring up to an ideal tailored to one's own dispositions,
> capabilities, and values is central to autonomy, it is necessary to ask
> whether there are any restrictions on the form or content of personal ideals.
> I shall argue that there are such restrictions and that autonomy is possible
> in part because of *the structure of the autonomous personality*. (Emphasis
> added. Meyers 1989, 62)

Developing a life plan requires that one take account of her own capabilities, dispositions, and values. This is how self-governance relates to doing what she "really" wants.

However, if the personality has conflicting traits or goals, it is hard to know how to match conduct to a conflicted self. Therefore, as Meyers puts it, "successful exercise of autonomy competency brings about an integrated personality" (Meyers 1989, 62). To better understand why this is the case, let's take a closer look at how integrated this personality must be and what is wrong with personalities that are not integrated.

In order to accommodate the flexibility needed to deal with various circumstances and still retain the integration needed for autonomy, Meyers develops a notion of what she calls characterological strands or dominant qualities.

> These strands can be stylistic qualities (vivacity or melancholy), virtues
> (patience), vices (arrogance), or foibles (excitability); they can be ways of
> processing experience (careful sifting of accumulated evidence or quick
> intuition); they can be ardently held principles ("the environment must be
> saved from the ravages of toxic waste"); they can be commitments to a
> role (community leader), to a career (film director), or to other people
> (one's children). (Meyers 1989, 70)

What Meyers is trying to capture here is the uniqueness of a personality. We commonly say things such as: "that doesn't sound like Jamie" or "Ann isn't herself today." What do we mean by such comments? We mean that we have some notion of what a person is like, so much so that we give our understanding of a person a predictive quality. I believe

this is what Meyers is trying to capture with her notion of characterological strands.

Also, the metaphor of "strands" is meant to capture the dynamic nature of this unique self. We have a variety of personality traits that we express in different ways at different times. Imagine an intricately woven tapestry. No single thread is present throughout the entire tapestry. If we consider the colors or patterns of the tapestry, there will be parts where some colors or patterns are completely absent, but, to be aesthetically pleasing, the tapestry cannot have colors or patterns that are completely disjointed or that clash with one another. In this way, the tapestry has an overall unity or coherence, while still expressing diversity. Similarly, a self can express radically different qualities when responding to different situations. However, if there is no consistency or logic to these reactions, this person will lack coherence. An extreme example of this would be people who have multiple personalities. It is the radically different nature of the person we confront that leads us to suspect something is wrong. Keep this metaphor of "threads" in mind, but I will now use the more accessible language of dominant qualities in place of Meyers's term characterological strands.

Meyers gives a list of requirements for an integrated personality in relation to its dominant qualities. A person with an integrated personality must have a distinct personality, she cannot "simply adapt to variable circumstances." She must have reasons for her actions (and, presumably, these reasons will stem from her distinct personality). Yet, she is flexible enough to react to different situations or to "act appropriately in a wide range of circumstances without betraying [herself]—that is, to control [her life] by projecting [her] own beliefs, desires, values, and so forth in suitable ways" (Meyers 1989,

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73). Finally, a person with an integrated personality is satisfied with her personality

traits. She does not feel they are alien or otherwise dislike them. Again, I think Meyers

means to capture our everyday notion of what it means to have a unique personality.

Consider the following excerpt from Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club*:

> My mother once told me why I was so confused all the time. She said I
> was without wood. Born without wood so that I listened to too many
> people. She knew this, because once she had almost become this way.
>
> "A girl is like a young tree," she said. "You must stand tall and listen to
> your mother standing next to you. That is the only way to grow strong and
> straight. But if you bend to listen to other people, you will grow crooked
> and weak. You will fall to the ground with the first strong wind. And
> then you will be like a weed, growing wild in any direction, running along
> the ground until someone pulls you out and throws you away." (Tan 1989,
> 213)

In this way, we have a commonsense notion of what it means to be your own person.

Although we rarely use the concept of heteronomy in everyday discourse, we do tend to

look down on chameleon-like people who dramatically shift their personality just to

please others. I believe this everyday conception of autonomy is what Meyers intends to

capture with her description of self-governance and an integrated personality.

To summarize, the overarching function (purpose or goal) of autonomy is self-

governance. Self-governance requires that a person control her life by discovering what

she "really" wants to do and acting accordingly. For a person to know what she "really"

wants to do, she must have an authentic self. The authentic self validates reasons for

action—it sanctions those that are in harmony with the authentic self. Self-governance

(or controlling one's life) is easier if the self (personality) is integrated. This gives

consistent reasons for actions and makes it easier to create a harmony with life plans (the

direction self-governance provides) and personal ideals (the authentic self a person must act in accordance with).

Admits Degrees of Success

Autonomy competency, like any competency, admits of degrees. A person can be a "competent" cook, preparing basic nutritional meals for his family, or a master chef, preparing gourmet meals at her four star restaurant. Similarly, people can be more or less proficient at autonomy. According to Meyers, minimally autonomous people have some disposition to consult the self and act on their own beliefs whereas fully autonomous people possess "a complete repertory of well developed and well coordinated autonomy skills coupled with many and varied [facts and skills]" (Meyers 1989, 170).[48] Medially autonomous people fall somewhere in between these two extremes.[49]

The degrees of autonomy competency—minimal, medial, and full—are related to the development of autonomy skills. The more developed and varied a person's autonomy skills are, then the more proficient she is at autonomy. I discuss the specific skills that comprise autonomy competency in more detail in the next chapter. However,

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[48]Here Meyers introduces the term independent competencies. Independent competencies are both knowledge of empirical facts (such as knowing that raw bacon can make you sick) and specific skills (such as the ability to dice tomatoes without cutting your fingers). Therefore, independent competencies relate to knowledge, experiences, and capabilities. However, I will avoid using this concept because it is too similar to autonomy competency and may lead to confusion.

[49]Meyers does not believe we can draw sharp lines between these categories. She is simply using them as guidelines to illustrate how autonomy can be a matter of degree. Ultimately, she admits that only the individual can measure her own autonomy (Meyers 1989, 82).

we can get a sense of how Meyers understands these degrees of autonomy through her

distinction between episodic and programmatic autonomy.

Meyers claims that a "central feature of autonomous living" is that "people direct

their lives *episodically* and *programmatically*." She goes on to explain:

> [Episodic autonomy] occurs when a person confronts a situation, asks
> what he or she can do with respect to it . . . and what he or she really wants
> to do with respect to it, and then executes the decision this deliberation
> yields. [Programmatic autonomy] has a broad sweep. Instead of posing
> the question "What do I really want to do now?" this form of autonomy
> addresses a question like "How do I really want to live my life?"[50] (Meyers
> 1989, 48)

In short, programmatic autonomy relates to the development of life plans (self-definition

and self-direction) while episodic autonomy relates to particular decisions or actions. For

example, Jill could decide to not eat meat at dinner tonight. Assuming she makes this

decision autonomously, this would be an example of episodic autonomy. However,

suppose Jill decides that, starting tonight, she will become a vegetarian. This would be an

instance of programmatic autonomy. The difference between episodic and programmatic

autonomy is one of scope that relies heavily on the individual's own interpretation

(Meyers 1989, 264-265n1).[51]

Also, life plans relate to the overall direction of a person's life; therefore,

programmatic autonomy means having some overarching commitment and being able to

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[50]The original language Meyers's used was "autonomous episodic self-direction" and "autonomous programmatic self-direction." While this language is useful because it ties autonomy back to self-direction or self-governance, I changed them here for clarity and consistency.

[51]Meyers also makes a distinction between "narrow" and "global" programmatic autonomy. I explain this distinction in chapter four.

act in accord with this commitment. For example, a life plan could be a career choice, a

decision about whether to marry, a commitment to social justice, or a combination of

these decisions and others. The key is that the life plan gives direction to a person's life.

Thus, Jill's decision to become a vegetarian is at least part of a life plan. It lends

direction to her life or sets a policy for future actions. In contrast, episodic autonomy is

less far reaching in scope because it is situational. It requires that a person ask what she

(really) wants to do in a given situation and then act on that decision (Meyers 1989, 48-

49).[52]

Returning to Meyers's understanding of how autonomy admits of degrees, we find

that programmatic autonomy is necessary for full autonomy, and programmatic autonomy

requires the individual to have an autonomous life plan. Meyers believes that people can

express episodic autonomy without having programmatic autonomy. In such instances, a

person may have "pockets of autonomy—particular actions—and threads of

autonomy—policies addressing specific problems—in a person's life" (Meyers 1989,

162). Her example is an artist who is clinically insane. He does not have control over

much of his life or even many of his everyday activities; yet, he exhibits autonomy in the

expression of his art. His life has a "thread" of autonomy—his artistic creations.

Given that people can exhibit "serial episodic autonomy," Meyers addresses the

question of whether this can lead to a *kind of* programmatic autonomy—a life plan

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[52]Programmatic autonomy and episodic autonomy are both forms of self-
government. Meyers is using this distinction to clarify variations in scope. Since self-
government is the overarching function of autonomy competency, the broader the scope
(programmatic autonomy) the more well developed the competency (full autonomy).

implicit in the particular actions. Ultimately, her answer to this question is no.

> The problem here is that people are supposed to move from situation to situation consulting their authentic selves, yet they are never supposed to examine the big picture in light of their authentic selves. But obviously, people can be satisfied with their conduct considered in this fragmentary way and nevertheless reject it decisively once they have an overview of it. . . . Episodic autonomy, then, is no guarantee of programmatic autonomy; doing particular actions as one really wants does not translate into doing that which one really wants. *Until a person's life plans have been subjected to autonomous scrutiny, they cannot be presumed to be autonomous.* (Emphasis added. Meyers 1989, 164-165)

A person may consult her self-referential responses and make particular decisions that accord with her authentic self. However, unless she reflects on the overall direction of her life (her life plan), she cannot have programmatic autonomy—a requirement for full autonomy.

We now have a basic understanding of Meyer's theory of autonomy. Autonomy, for Meyers, is a competency. Like other competencies, it depends on various skills and admits of degrees. The skills that make up autonomy competency help a person create an equilibrium between self-knowledge, self-definition, and self-direction. In other words, they help individuals create an authentic self and act accordingly. Therefore, the goal or function of autonomy competency is self-government (and an integrated personality).

As this introduction shows, Meyers gives a very detailed description of her philosophical conception of autonomy. However, her theory still relies on the basic procedure for autonomous decision making introduced in the previous chapter. Meyers's theory is a very rich description of the process of reflection and identification advocated by all autonomy theorists. I turn now to a more thorough analysis of Meyers's theory and

how she believes it can be useful for feminists.

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Chapter Four
Is a philosophical conception of autonomy inherently masculine?

A major criticism feminist theorists make against a philosophical conception of autonomy is that it assumes traditionally masculine characteristics such as independence and self-sufficiency. As Margaret Urban Walker summarizes:

> Feminist critics, for example, have noticed a convergence between features associated with autonomy—independence from external guidance, acting under one's own direction, being able to control and to express oneself, self-assertiveness, choice guided by one's own values and interests rather than social expectations or pressures—and those associated with traditional social norms for masculine, but not feminine personality.
> (Walker 1999, 98)

I will argue that Meyers incorporates many of these masculines characteristics identified by feminist critics into her theory of autonomy.[53] Meyers cannot avoid these problems because they are part of the "baggage" a philosophical conception of autonomy carries with it.

In developing her theory, Meyers considers how various issues of interest to feminist theorists relate to autonomy. Taking seriously the idea that people must develop autonomy, Meyers discusses how feminine socialization affects the development of the skills necessary for autonomy. Meyers also acknowledges that cultural imagery and norms can influence the development of personal identity and preference formation.

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[53]In her discussion of the value of autonomy, Meyers acknowledges that many feminists question the value of a philosophical conception of autonomy because they believe it is "characteristically masculine." Instead of considering why feminists believe a philosophical conception of autonomy is masculine and defending her conception against these charges, Meyers argues that autonomy is necessary for self-respect and that self-respect is not "a masculine or perfectionist value" (Meyers 1989, 208).

Drawing on psychoanalytic theory and other feminist work, Meyers shows how pronatalist discourse inhibits women's ability to make autonomous decisions about having children. Despite her attention to the details of women's lives, the procedure for autonomous decision making is still a key component of her theory of autonomy.

As I mentioned in chapter two, autonomy theorists are interested in how decisions are made, not what decision is made. For this reason, the procedure for autonomous decision making is a key component of any autonomy theory. The procedure for autonomous decision making is how a person separates out preferences that are "her own" and then makes decisions that are in keeping with them. However, this process of reflection, identification, and making sure subsequent decisions accord with these reflectively endorsed preferences is what feminist critics mean by a need for self-control or self-regulation, developing a unified life, and valuing reason over emotion. Thus, no matter how nuanced Meyers's theory becomes she will not be able to create a theory of autonomy that does not include these characteristics. To show how Meyers continues to incorporate these traditionally masculine characteristics in her theory, I turn to her analysis of how feminine socialization undermines autonomy competency and how cultural imagery undermines women's ability to make autonomous decisions about motherhood.

Feminine Socialization and Autonomy Competency

In her discussion of feminine socialization, Meyers addresses two related questions. First, what specific threats does feminine socialization pose to women's

autonomy? Second, does feminine socialization make autonomy impossible for women?

Meyers uses Simone de Beauvoir's critique of feminine socialization in *The Second Sex*

as a starting point. She agrees with Beauvior that feminine socialization encourages

narcissism and altruism in women and that this is a threat to women's autonomy.[54]

> Recent research[55] supports de Beauvoir's thesis that, compared to men,
> women are insecure about their own abilities and worth and that they are
> less well prepared to function outside the home. Women are more
> sensitive to others' opinions of them; they are less self-confident and more
> easily influenced than men; they have less self-esteem than men; their fear
> of success may help to confine them to traditional feminine occupations;
> their identities and life plans are dependent on their husbands. (Meyers
> 1989, 151-152)

Feminine socialization is more harmful than masculine socialization because it makes

women less confident, less assertive, and more dependent. To understand why these

character traits are a threat to autonomy, we need to relate them to specific skills

necessary for autonomy competency.

Meyers avoids giving a definitive list of autonomy skills because she wants her

account to remain open enough to accommodate the complexity of autonomy, but she

does give a tentative list that presents a good overview of the range skills she has in

mind.[56]

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[54]Meyers's discussion of feminine socialization seems to presume a privileged upbringing—a full-time stay-at-home mother with a daughter raised to fulfill this same role. I ignore this bias to focus on her analysis of the relationship between socialization and autonomy.

[55]This discussion is taken from *Self, Society, and Personal Choice* published in 1989.

[56]I take this list from *Gender in the Mirror*. In that book, Meyers calls these "agentic skills."

❖ *Introspection skills* that sensitize individuals to their own feelings and desires, that enable them to interpret their subjective experience, and that help them judge how good a likeness a self-[concept] is

❖ *Communication skills* that enable individuals to get the benefit of others' perceptions, background knowledge, insights, advice, and support

❖ *Memory skills* that enable individuals to recall relevant experiences—not only from their own lives, but also those that associates have recounted or that they have encountered in literature or other art forms

❖ *Imagination skills* that enable individuals to envisage feasible options—to audition a range of self-[concepts] they might adopt and to preview a variety of plot lines their lives might follow

❖ *Analytical skills* and reasoning skills that enable individuals to assess the relative merits of different visions of what they could be like and precis for future episodes in their life stories

❖ *Self-nurturing skills* that enable individuals to secure their physical and psychological equilibrium despite missteps and setbacks—that enable them to appreciate the overall worthiness of their self-[concept] . . . assure themselves of their capacity to carry on when they find their self-[concepts] wanting . . . and sustain their self-respect if they need to correct their self-[concepts]

❖ *Volitional skills* that enable individuals to resist pressure to capitulate to convention and enable them to maintain their commitment to the self-[concept] and to the continuations of their autobiographies that they consider genuinely their own

❖ *Interpersonal skills* that enable individuals to join forces to challenge and change cultural regimes and institutional arrangements that pathologize or marginalize their priorities and projects, that deprive them of accredited discursive means to represent themselves to themselves and to others as flourishing, self-respecting, valuable individuals, and that close off their

opportunities to enact their self-[concepts][57] (Emphasis added. Meyers 1989, 20-21)

By comparing the summary of feminine socialization given above to this list of skills, we begin to see why Meyers believes feminine socialization is a threat to women's autonomy. Specifically, she claims women are "less self-confident and more easily influenced." These characteristics undermine women's volitional skills that "enable individuals to resist pressure to capitulate to convention and enable them to maintain their commitment to [their] self-[concept]." A lack of volitional skills will also undermine interpersonal skills that are used to "challenge and change cultural regimes." If it is true that women have less self-esteem than men, this would be a threat to the self-nurturing skills that "enable them to appreciate the overall worthiness of their self-[concepts]." This is how Meyers believes certain character traits acquired through socialization can undermine the development of skills required for autonomy competency.

Although her focus is on feminine socialization, Meyers also sees some problems with masculine socialization and the development of autonomy (Meyers 1989, 152). She cites studies and anecdotes that illustrate how difficult it is for men to discuss their feelings which makes men less able to consult themselves and more distrustful of relationships. Again, to understand the relationship between these character traits and autonomy competency, we must look at what specific skills are threatened. Introspective skills "sensitize individuals to their own feelings," and communication skills "enable individuals to get the benefit of others' perceptions." If men are less in touch with their

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[57]Meyers uses a variety of terms—self-image, self-portrait, self-narrative and later self-concept. For consistency and clarity, I changed them all to self-concept.

own feelings and less able to discuss their feelings with others, that would undermine the development of both of these skills. Therefore, it seems that masculine socialization also undermines the development of some skills; yet, Meyers does not consider it as great a threat to autonomy competency as feminine socialization.[58] Why?

Meyers argues that feminine socialization is a greater threat to personal autonomy than masculine socialization for four reasons: (1) women are taught to identify with fewer "programmatic choices" than men; (2) women have less opportunity to develop skills necessary for "episodic autonomy" than men; (3) women have less "independence of mind" which may prevent them from acting in accord with their authentic selves; and (4) women are more self-effacing and less assertive (Meyers 1989, 166-167).

Meyers argues that feminine socialization undermines women's ability to develop both programmatic and episodic autonomy. She believes women's programmatic choices are more limited than men's because boys are encouraged to participate in the public realm "while girls are traditionally reared to assume one narrow, privatized, subordinate role" (Meyers 1989, 166). Thus, men are allowed and/or recognize more diversity of options when choosing life plans than women. Similarly, Meyers argues that "men have had more opportunities to piggyback autonomy skills with their [knowledge and experiences] to produce episodic autonomy" (Meyers 1989, 166). In both of these points, Meyers is referring to social development that encourages boys to be more independent,

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[58]Meyers admits that, in general, men have less self-knowledge than women and this can diminish their overall autonomy. For this reason, she argues that the answer to increasing women's autonomy is not to simply socialize them in the same way men are socialized. However, despite this drawback to male socialization, she still argues that overall men have a greater degree of autonomy than women.

exploratory, adventurous, and experimental, but encourages girls to be more passive,

dependent, and conventional.

In addition, Meyers claims that women have less "independence of mind" because

they are more vulnerable to others' influence and more concerned with others' opinions.

Thus, women will be less likely to act in accord with their authentic selves when this

action does not fit with social expectations.

> Women may be more sensitive to their inner lives, but their vulnerability
> to others' influence and their concern with others' opinions of them
> prevent them from consistently acting on what they know about
> themselves when their self-[concepts] do not comfortably fit with social
> expectations.[59] (Meyers 1989, 166-167)

Meyers argues that women have less "independence of mind" because they are more self-

effacing and less assertive—which may lead women to back down when faced with

pressure to conform.

Therefore, Meyers believes masculine socialization is more conducive to full

autonomy than feminine socialization. Meyers claims:

> Social psychological studies suggest that, whereas women are most likely
> to rank in the area of medial autonomy closest to minimal autonomy and
> are more likely than men to be minimally autonomous, men are most
> likely to rank well within the bounds of medial autonomy and are more
> likely than women to be fully autonomous. (Meyers 1989, 170)

Meyers agrees with Beauvoir that feminine socialization is a threat to autonomy, but

disagrees with her over whether it eliminates women's autonomy. Instead, Meyers argues

that women are still capable of some level of autonomy.

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[59]The original quote used self-portraits, I changed it to self-concept for
consistency.

A Philosophical Conception of Autonomy and the Career Self

If we consider the general criticisms feminists make against theories of autonomy (such as they promote self-sufficiency, independence, and do not account for personal relationships), then Meyers's theory of autonomy is a vast improvement. In her theory, Meyers takes seriously the relational nature of everyday life. Instead of starting with fully grown autonomous individuals, she shows how childhood socialization can influence the development of autonomy. Also, the skills necessary for autonomy competency include communication skills, memory skills, and interpersonal skills, and Meyers's definition of each of these skills emphasizes interdependence. To fully develop communication and memory skills we need to take account of feedback from others. Memory skills and imagination skills are both influenced by cultural imagery. Interpersonal skills require the ability to form coalitions with others (emphasizing the interdependence of individuals) to change social forces or norms that undermine a particular group's autonomy (emphasizing connection to a culture). In this way, Meyers develops a rich conception of autonomy that does not valorize self-sufficiency or independence and takes seriously the idea that humans are embedded in a social context and a web of relationships.

Also, Meyers's makes her description of programmatic autonomy (or potential life goals) as broad as possible. For Meyers, a life plan does not have to include commitment to a public career. Traditional feminine roles are compatible with autonomy *as long as a person uses autonomy competency to choose this life course*. However, herein lies the problem. The *procedure* necessary for autonomy builds in the very masculine norms that feminists are criticizing. Even though Meyers includes a variety of skills, the procedure

for autonomous decision making includes critical-reflection, self-governance (or self-regulation), and self-chosen life plans. All of these requirements are exactly what feminist critics are referring to when they claim that a philosophical conception of autonomy requires "acting under one's own direction, being able to control and to express oneself, self-assertiveness, [and] choice guided by ones own values."

Compare the four reasons Meyers gave for why feminist socialization is a greater threat to autonomy than masculine socialization to Walker's summary of feminist criticisms of the notion of autonomy. Meyers claims that women are taught to have less "independence of mind" and to be less assertive. According to Walker, feminist critics claim that our philosophical conception of autonomy as traditionally conceived encourages "independence from external guidance" and "self-assertiveness." Meyers claims that women are more vulnerable to social pressures to conform. Walker's feminist critics claim that a masculine feature of autonomy is "choice guided by one's own values and interests rather than social expectations or pressures." These are the values inherent in what Walker describes as the career self, and this is why a career self model of autonomy is a problem for feminist theorists. I argue that any attempt to reconceive autonomy will fail or slide off into another terrain because a philosophical conception of autonomy is *by definition* self-governance (which requires regulation and control).[60]

Walker claims that autonomy is a central value of modern moral and political theory and that our philosophical conception of autonomy assumes a career self that

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[60]I also believe Meyers's theory is overly rational, but I save that critique for the second part of this chapter.

emphasizes personal responsibility, productivity, and independence. Even though she is

looking at moral and political theory instead of specific theories of personal autonomy,

Walker (and the theorists she critiques) have a similar understanding of autonomy. As

Walker explains, she is talking about a psychological conception of autonomy in the

sense of "one's being under control of the rational parts of one's self, or the parts of

oneself one most identifies with, or the parts of oneself that best stand up to critical

review, or the skills for the relevant kinds of review itself" (Walker 1998, 124). Thus,

Walker's analysis is relevant to our current discussion.[61]

By a career self, Walker means a linear, goal oriented self. She explains the ideal

of a career self by highlighting key themes found in various influential moral theories

such as John Rawls's life plans, Bernard Williams's constitutive projects, and Charles

Taylor's life as a "quest." Walker explains how these components of moral theory relate

to our philosophical conception of autonomy.

> What is revealing in these otherwise ethically diverse views is the
> repetition of the idea of an individual's life as *a self-consciously controlled
> career*. It *binds a whole life or lifetime together in a unified way* for
> which the individual is accountable. . . . The imagery in each case recycles
> the cultural theme of autonomous agency, with its self-conscious
> individual enterprise. (Emphasis added. Walker 1999, 102-103)

Walker argues that the ideal of a career self "lurks behind" a philosophical conception of

autonomy. Walker further argues that the career self idealizes traits associated with a

particular group of people—middle-class white men living in Western industrialized

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[61]Also, I should point out that Walker is mainly interested in moral philosophy
and developing a framework for feminist ethics. However, as I mentioned earlier, there is
a lot of overlap in discussions of moral and personal autonomy. I try to separate them as
much as possible, but occasional overlap is unavoidable.

societies.

Walker shows how the ideal of internalized self-control and a unified, goal

oriented life grew out of the Enlightenment era. These traits were necessary for "the

economic and political institutions of modern life"—namely, a democratic, capitalist

society.[62] For this reason, Walker argues that these ideals reflect a gender and class bias.

> Autonomy, for example, has long been defined concretely in ways at odds
> with the social demands for appropriate feminine behavior in women. It
> has also been elaborated in ways that reflect middle-class expectations of
> stability and control. . . . Independence and executive control are linked to
> higher social status. (Walker 1999, 100)

In contrast to this concept of autonomy, Walker argues that "individually and robustly

planned lives could not, for example, have made sense to very many people in Western

societies several hundred years ago" (Walker 1998, 137). In this way, the career self ideal

"lurking behind" a philosophical conception of autonomy is masculine, modern, and

capitalist.

Again, I want to reiterate that Meyers avoids many of these problems. Her

conception of autonomy does not require that individuals forsake personal relationships

or interdependence for public careers, self-sufficiency, and substantive independence.

Also, since her theory allows for degrees of autonomy, Meyers can show how certain

restrictions on groups of individuals do not rule out the possibility of autonomy all

together. In other words, she shows how various lifestyles exhibit varying degrees of

autonomy. However, her conception of autonomy still incorporates two key components

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[62]I should point out Kant developed his theory of autonomy (at least in part) in
reaction to the democratization of Europe (see chapter one).

of a masculine and capitalist conception of autonomy—internalized self-regulation and a unified "whole-life narrative."

Self-government, Self-regulation, and Internalized Self-control

Meyers claims that the overarching function of autonomy is self-governance by which she means creating an authentic self and making decisions that are in keeping with your authentic self.

> I shall understand autonomy to mean self-governance or self-determination. More specifically, to be *autonomous* is (1) to figure out what your personal values and goals are—what really matters to you as an individual and what you as an individual really want out of life; (2) to figure out how you can fulfill those self-chosen values and goals; and (3) to act in ways that are congruent with those self-chosen values and goals. (Emphasis in original. Meyers 2004, 258)

Self-government means taking responsibility for your life by creating an authentic self (through a process of reflection and identification) and then living in accord with that authentic self. I argue that self-governance is a type of internalized self-control or self-regulation (making decisions that accord with your authentic self) similar to that required by theorists who assume the career self.

In the previous chapter, I outlined the various ways a person can "govern" herself. For Meyers, self-government means having control over your life in at least three ways. One, a person gives her life an overall direction by choosing life plans. Two, a person controls her actions making sure they are in harmony with her authentic self and life plans. Third, a person takes responsibility for the person she is becoming which means paying attention to the traits she is developing and working to change them when

necessary. This process of self-government (and the integrated personality that results) is

what Walker means by internalized self-control, self-regulation, and a "whole life

narrative."

Compare Meyers's theory of autonomy to Walker's summary of problems with

theories that rely on the career self.

> But Rawls, Williams, and Taylor seem particularly insistent on having
> [people] account for their life's work of *reflective self-monitoring itself*,
> for that seems to be really what their required plans, projects and plots
> show about them. (Emphasis in original. Walker 1998, 150)

> I think Rawls, Williams, and Taylor each impose a test on persons . . . of a
> whole life under *conscientiously conscious self-superintendence* of a
> verifiable kind. (Emphasis in original. Walker 1998, 151)

Meyers's understanding of self-governance and programmatic autonomy also emphasize

a need for reflective self-monitoring and conscious self-superintendence.[63]

Meyers argues that one of the things wrong with feminine socialization is that it

undermines women's ability to develop the skills necessary for self-governance. "We

have seen that traditional feminine socialization funnels [girls] into a dependent mindset

which curtails their control over their lives" (Meyers 1989, 207). The specific "control"

they lack is the ability to self-regulate their lives. Women are deprived of control over

their lives because they are more self-effacing or influenced by the opinion of others. In

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[63]Both Meyers and Rawls admit that we do not have to consciously review and
debate every decision we make: "Thus, exercise of autonomy competency can be largely a
background phenomenon—an ongoing sensitivity to one's self and a willingness coupled
with an ability to deal with symptoms of discord within one's self" (Meyers 1989, 55).
"The planning itself sounds strenuous and difficult, but Rawls emphasizes that the
characterization of the planned life is 'hypothetical' and does not imply that one should
be 'continually planning and calculating'; planning activities, too, are to be fitted into a
rational plan of life in ways that make sense" (Walker 1998, 136).

other words, they lack the self-governance necessary to choose life plans that accord with their authentic selves and to make decisions in keeping with that life plan.

Global Programmatic Autonomy and a Unified "Whole-life" Narrative

In addition to internalized self-control and self-regulation, Walker discusses the related trait of having a unified life or a "whole-life narrative." Again, Walker points out this is an overarching theme in each of the specific theories she discusses (and is related to the emphasis on self-control).

> I find in their otherwise diverse views in (and on) moral philosophy a kind of convergence, an insistence on the theme of a person's mastering the structure of his or her "whole life." (Walker 1998, 150)

> The individual's ability to account for this life—to bring forward its plan, project, or narrative plot—testifies to the individual's *self*-control. (Emphasis in original. Walker 1999, 103)

In the theories Walker analyzes, it is a career that "binds a whole life or lifetime together in a unified way." Obviously, Meyers allows for a greater diversity of life plans which include commitments to relationships and personal values. However, as Meyers understands them, the life plans necessary for programmatic autonomy give overall direction to a person's life.

> Programmatically autonomous people have autonomous life plans. A life plan is a *comprehensive projection of intent*, a conception of what a person wants to do in life. Any life plan must include at least one activity that the agent consciously wants to pursue or a value that the agent consciously wants to advance or an emotional bond that the agent consciously wants to sustain. (Emphasis added. Meyers 1989, 49)

For this reason, I argue that Meyers's conception of programmatic autonomy (especially

the global programmatic autonomy necessary for full autonomy) also emphasizes a

"whole life narrative."

According to Walker, the unity implied by the ideal of a career self is a need to

give structure to one's "whole life." Similarly, Meyers claims that life plans give

direction by ordering a person's life.

> Life plans are dynamic. Yet, by introducing some degree of order into
> people's lives, life plans enable people to want more and to satisfy a
> greater number of their desires than random satisfaction-seeking possibly
> could. (Meyers 1989, 49)

> Most life plans presume the desirability of order and are then organized
> around a group of values, goals, emotional ties, and the like. (Meyers
> 1989, 66)

By introducing "some degree of order into people's lives," life plans give structure to a

person's life. Programmatic autonomy gives direction to a person's life and sets policies

for future action, in this way it "unifies" a person's life by commitment to a

"comprehensive projection of intent."

As I explained in the previous chapter, Meyers argues that exercising episodic

autonomy (situational autonomy or making immediate decisions that are in accord with

the authentic self) is no guarantee of programmatic autonomy (having autonomous life

plans): "Until a person's life plans have been subjected to autonomous scrutiny, they

cannot be presumed to be autonomous. . . . episodic autonomy without a background of

programmatic autonomy does not warrant the inference that people's life plans are in

harmony with their true selves" (Meyers 1989, 165). In this chapter, we see that narrow

programmatic autonomy only assures minimal autonomy, and global programmatic

autonomy is necessary for medial and full autonomy.

Programmatic autonomy relates to the development of life plans or commitment to some belief, value, or project. A person can have either "narrow" or "global" programmatic autonomy. Global programmatic autonomy means a person has an "autonomous comprehensive life plans" or "control over the basic direction of one's life" (Meyers 1989, 264n1 and 161 respectively). Narrow programmatic autonomy means a person can still "make plans for [herself] or set policies to which [she] will adhere regarding specific questions" (Meyers 1989, 264n1) that are "threads" of programmatic autonomy rather than a comprehensive life plan. It is unclear exactly where to draw the line, but Meyers means something like the following. If a person autonomously chooses the direction of most areas of her life (work, school, family, and hobbies), this would count as a comprehensive life plan or global programmatic autonomy. If a person has significant areas of her life that she did not or could not autonomously choose, but still has some areas that are autonomous, this would be narrow programmatic autonomy. For example, suppose a woman had no choice whether to have a child, but the way she raises the child is a reflection of her authentic self, this might be an example of narrow programmatic autonomy (Meyers 1989, 162). The greater the scope of control a person has over her life, the greater her degree of autonomy. As Meyers explains, people with minimal autonomy only have "narrow" programmatic autonomy whereas medial and fully autonomous people have "global" programmatic autonomy.

Meyers believes women's programmatic choices are limited in two ways. First, women are encouraged to be more passive and restricted in the life plans they choose.

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> . . . since boys are traditionally reared to take up various roles in the public sphere and a dominant role in the private sphere while girls are traditionally reared to assume one narrow, privatized, subordinate role, men's programmatic choices have been less constrained . . . . (Meyers 1989, 166)

Second, women are more self-effacing or willing to adapt their life plans to coincide with the wishes of others. For example, Meyers points to studies that show women are more likely to "postpone career commitments and decisions about broad life plans until they know whom they will marry and what preferences and expectations their husbands will have" (Meyers 1989, 151). Thus, women's autonomy is limited in scope because they are offered, or can recognize, fewer options and are encouraged to make their decisions compatible with others.

Given this description, we can see how global and narrow programmatic autonomy relate to degrees of autonomy. A minimally autonomous person may have narrow programmatic autonomy, but for medial and full autonomy a person must also have global programmatic autonomy.[64] In the end, we are left with a slightly modified assessment of how feminine socialization undermines autonomy.

> The difference between men and women with respect to personal autonomy, then, is best understood as a difference of degree coupled with a difference with respect to the orbits in which autonomy skills are activated, rather than as a difference between having and lacking a

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[64]I am not sure Meyers ever explicitly states that global programmatic autonomy is necessary for full autonomy, but it seems clear from her discussion. For example, she argues that for full autonomy people must "develop their potential as much as they can" (Meyers 1989, 183). Also fully autonomous people can only lack control over their lives if it is "a result of inevitable human limitation or if their lack of control contributes to a psychic economy that is programmatically autonomous" (Meyers 1989, 185). (By the latter, Meyers means forms of self-deception that allow people to avoid a debilitating loss of self-esteem and continue pursuing their goals.)

competency. (Meyers 1989, 166)

We can now see why feminine socialization is more of a threat to autonomy than masculine socialization. Both undermine the development of some skills necessary for autonomy competency. However, the skills undermined by feminine socialization (such as volitional skills and analytic skills) lead women to develop more circumscribed life plans or narrow programmatic autonomy. If global programmatic autonomy is necessary for medial and full autonomy (as Meyers claims), then women will be more likely to have minimal autonomy.

Meyers's explanation of global programmatic autonomy is similar to Walker's description of a unified life or a whole life narrative. As Walker explains it, the whole life narrative gives structure to the individual's life; it "binds" the "whole life" together in relation to a specific project or plan. As Meyers explains a life plan is a "comprehensive project of intent" that gives some order (or structure) to a person's life. The more comprehensive the life plan is (the more areas of a person's life it covers), the more autonomy a person has.

Walker also points out that the whole life narrative is directly related to internalized self-control. The individual's ability to develop a life plan and work toward it "testifies to the individual's self-control." As Meyers explains it, women are less likely to have global programmatic autonomy because they lack internalized self-control—they are more easily swayed by others opinions. (I provide an extended quote from Meyers to show the flow of her argument.)

> . . . because minimally autonomous people use the repertory of autonomy

skills awkwardly, their self-probing is cruder than the medially autonomous individual's, and their commitment to their own desires and standards is shaky. Lacking facility in reasoning critically about practical issues and ingenuity in imagining workable options, minimally autonomous people are prone to recoil from seemingly abnormal priorities. Often enough, the result is that their conduct expresses their authentic selves only approximately. Moreover, since minimal autonomy typically operates episodically or within the confines of narrowly programmatic issues, minimally autonomous people do not have globally autonomous life plans. They are not in control of the overall direction of their lives. (Meyers 1989, 206)

Minimally autonomous people lack the skills necessary for self-government. This means

they lack skills that improve self-regulation and allow them to develop more

comprehensive life plans.

Cultural Norms, Cultural Imagery, and Self-Knowledge

In *Gender in the Mirror*, Meyers continues to explore the themes introduced in

her earlier work. Instead of exploring which autonomy skills are fostered or neglected by

childrearing norms, she looks at the connection between cultural norms and agency. To

explain this connection, Meyers turns to "feminist voice theory" or theories that try to

flesh out what it means to speak in one's own voice or lead one's own life. She believes

that what these theories lack is an adequate epistemology of what it means to speak in

your own voice (Meyers 2002, 5). Meyers calls this "the problem of voice

authentication" and claims this is an epistemological problem because the issue is

"getting in touch with yourself" or a problem of self-knowledge (Meyers 2002, 17-18).

By arguing that we need an epistemology of self-knowledge, Meyers relates her

discussion here back to her theory of autonomy.

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To set out the agentic skills needed to provide feminist voice theory with a credible epistemology is to articulate an implicit theory of autonomy. A theory of how one can differentiate one's own desires, values, and goals from the clamor of subordinating discourses and overwhelming social demands and how one can articulate and enact one's own desires, values, and goals is a theory of self-determination. (Meyers 2002, 20)

For Meyers, autonomy is living in harmony with your authentic self. Although she drops much of the language of autonomy in this book, "speaking in one's own voice" is equivalent to the authentic self described in her earlier theory. With her epistemology of self-knowledge, Meyers tries to discern which desires are authentic and how a person develops an accurate self-concept. Also, "agentic skills" necessary for voice theory parallel the "autonomy skills" in her earlier theory. Finally, Meyers explicitly links self-determination with autonomy. She uses 'self-determination' and 'autonomy' interchangeably and defines self-determination as "an ongoing process of exercising a repertoire of agentic skills" (Meyers 2002, 5).[65]

If we recall her earlier triad, Meyers claimed that autonomy consists in an equilibrium between self-knowledge, self-definition, and self-determination. Now Meyers adds the terms self-portrait, self-concept, and self-narrative to emphasize the importance of imagery and tropes for both self-knowledge and self-definition.[66] Images

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[65]This definition of self-determination parallels her earlier definitions of autonomy: "autonomous people conduct their lives using a repertory of skills that enable them to engage in self-discovery, self-definition, and self-direction" (Meyers 1989, 98); "To have autonomy competency, a person must use the repertory of autonomy skills enough to become and to remain proficient" (Meyers 1989, 91).

[66]A person's self-definition can be both current and future looking or relate to how she currently sees ("defines") herself as well as how she wants to be. A person's self-concept works in a similar way.

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and tropes influence self-knowledge by focusing our attention in specific ways and self-definition by facilitating or thwarting our ability to emotionally invest in some options.

Meyers explains how cultural imagery and tropes provide schemas for understanding experience. "A schema is a small-scale theory that explicates a category. People have schemas for the major components of experience, including one's self, other persons, events and social roles" (Meyers 2002, 169). Schemas are like stereotypes, but do not always have negative connotations. For example, we might expect someone from Texas to be "larger than life." Suppose we see a Texan women telling a joke at a party and laughing out loud. Because we read her as a Texan, through this schema, we are likely to remember her as being very loud and boisterous even if her behavior was not any louder or more extravagant than the other party goers.

We also place our self-concept into schemas, and, once we connect our self-concept to a particular schema, it will color our experiences and our interpretation of those experiences. For example, suppose Mary has been told that she has "quite a temper"—so much so that others fear her. One day a colleague is thirty minutes late for an appointment with Mary. She does not yell at him or otherwise lose her cool, but she does matter-of-factly state her disapproval and refuse to excuse his actions. If Mary has internalized the view of herself as having a quick temper, she may later reflect on the encounter and wonder if she was too harsh or overreacted. In this way, schemas learned through "gendered tropes structure perception and imagination" (Meyers 2002, 59). Meyers is particularly worried about how the cultural imagery that romanticizes motherhood shapes women's perception and imagination.

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To Be or Not To Be a Mother

Meyers argues that a major obstacle to women's ability to make an autonomous decision about motherhood is what she calls "matrigyno-idoltry." She uses this term instead of the more common "pronatalist discourse" because she wants to emphasize the way this discourse binds motherhood to womanhood "in a single ideal," the reverence that this ideology inspires, and the "sinisterness" of this reverence (Meyers 2002, 47, 197n17). However, Meyers is referring to what we generally think of as pronatalist discourse that has been detailed by many feminist theorists. In short, the cultural imagery that romanticizes mothers and demonizes childless women.

Meyers explains how matrigyno-idoltry interferes with self-knowledge by training women to automatically identify with maternal imagery or the idea of becoming a mother. This imagery works as an "intellectual filtration system" that shapes perception and causes women to misread their own feelings. Specifically, it "rigs" the way women consider the pros and cons of becoming a mother.

> One reason this discourse is objectionable is that it obfuscates women's motivations concerning motherhood. As a result, women commonly lack the self-knowledge that is necessary for autonomous decision making. Matrigynist figurations frame women's introspection. *They render promaternity feelings and inclinations vivid and compelling, while eclipsing doubts, misgivings, worries, and fears.* (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 51)

We know that people filter sensations and experience through predetermined expectations. Here Meyers argues that women filter their self-referential responses (such as feelings of joy or repulsion) through matrigyno-idoltry which causes them to give more weight to pronatalist feelings and to dismiss feelings that conflict with this imagery.

Yet, this is only one way that matrigyno-idoltry undermines women's autonomy. Gender schemas structure imagination as well as perception. A lack of diverse imagery limits the alternatives one will consider. Meyers argues that the connection between womanhood and motherhood is so strong that it is almost impossible to disentangle this connection. It "binds" motherhood to womanhood making it very difficult to extricate 'mother' from 'woman' or for a woman to develop a self-concept that does not include "motherhood." Even if a woman does consider a non-traditional alternative (such as voluntary childlessness), it is likely to be difficult for her to reconcile herself to this decision. Since most current imagery of childless women is very negative, many women find it difficult to relate to the idea of not having children. If a woman cannot emotionally invest in an alternative, then she cannot incorporate this decision into her self-concept. Thus, a lack of positive, alternative imagery limits women's ability to choose a childless life.

Meyers tries to account for both the cognitive and affective aspects of identity formation. Since our connection to cultural imagery is emotionally infused, a woman will only be able to incorporate an image into her self-concept if she can emotionally invest in it (Meyers 2002, 55). The preeminence of matrigyno-idoltry and the negative interpretation of childless women make it difficult for many women to emotionally invest in a self-concept that includes voluntary childlessness. Another way to think about this problem is the relationship between affective and rational aspects of decision making. Even though a woman may be aware on a rational level of the way patriarchal culture manipulates images of women and encourages maternity, unless she can emotionally

connect with or invest in an alternate option, it will be very difficult for her to choose that

option. In this way, Meyers tries to give a rich description of autonomous decision

making and the relationship between major life decisions and identity formation.

In spite of this gloomy picture, Meyers claims that some women do make

autonomous decisions about whether to have children. To more fully explain Meyers's

theory, I compare the three types of women that Meyers believes are not making

autonomous decisions about childbearing to the few examples of women she believes are

making autonomous decisions about childbearing.[67] Summarizing interviews with

women about their decision whether to have children, Meyers identifies three types of

women: those who always want to have children, those who adamantly do not want to

have children, and those who indefinitely postpone having children. She argues that these

three positions represent nonautonomous decisions about whether to have children.[68]

Meyers identifies two types of what she calls "early articulators"—women who

either always want to have children or never want to have children. Women who always

want to have children can either be women who see having children as inevitable or

women who aggressively pursue having children. The definitive aspect is that these

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[67]Meyers is primarily talking about a woman's decision to have children through
pregnancy and birth. She believes imagery leads women to favor this option over others
such as adoption. Therefore, she does not look at research on decisions about whether to
adopt.

[68]Meyers admits that she does not have enough information to judge the autonomy
of particular decisions made by the actual women in the interviews. Instead, she
identifies themes in the women's comments that imply a lack of autonomy. Using these
themes, Meyers develops her picture of three general responses to motherhood that
exemplify a lack of autonomy.

women see having children as one of the most important things in their lives and find the idea of not having children devastating. In contrast, women who never want to have children, according to Meyers, often find the notion of having children repulsive and reject the idea that there could be any potential benefits. For Meyers, the defining theme of both these positions is that women have these feelings from a very early age and do not reconsider them later in life. Meyers argues that these decisions are not autonomous—in part—because the women's views are not open to reflection or revision (Meyers 2002, 37).

The "postponers" are more ambivalent about their decision to have children. They assume they want to have children and that someday they will have children, but no particular time seems to be the right time. In this way, they postpone making a final decision about childbearing. Meyers argues that these women are not autonomous because they are deluding themselves in one of two ways. Perhaps they really do not want to have children, but they cannot disentangle potential motherhood from their identity. This speaks to the intensity of the bond between womanhood and motherhood. Meyers considers this type of delusion incompatible with autonomy because the women cannot reconcile their self-concepts (as a potential mothers) with their self-knowledge (their desire to not have children). On the other hand, these women may really want to have children, but they cannot reconcile it with other goals. This type of delusion is also incompatible with autonomy because the women are not acknowledging that they have an incommensurable conflict in desires and are "missing out on something that matters deeply to them" (Meyers 2002, 52). In both cases, the women have implicitly decided to

forego motherhood in favor of other goals; however, they have not reconciled this decision with their self-concept as potential mothers.

Meyers contrasts the early articulators and postponers to women who appear to make autonomous decisions about motherhood. For example, Meyers argues that many lesbian couples are forced to make a conscious choice about motherhood and that there is evidence many "examine their motives for having children and that they think through their plans for raising their children before they become parents" (Meyers 2002, 40). Meyers is similarly impressed with memoirs by women who struggled with their decision whether to become mothers. Most of these are by women who ultimately decided against having children. Also, many of these women develop alternative imagery to bolster their self-concept. For example, a woman who decided to focus on her career as a photographer instead of having children sees herself as a midwife to younger photographers through her mentoring of their talents (Meyers 2002, 54).[69] What is important in each of these cases is that the women have open-mindedly reflected on their decision whether to have children and have created individualized self-concepts that reflect their decisions.

The Need for "Conscious, Open-minded Reflection"

Although she tries to accommodate both, Meyers ends up valuing the conscious,

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[69]Meyers notes the potential problems with using mother imagery for these goals. On the one hand it can be positive because women often do not associate maternal imagery with these other talents. On the other hand, it still connects womanhood to motherhood through imagery. She admits it is probably better to develop other metaphors and imagery.

rational aspects of self over the unconscious and affective aspects. Meyers's *description* of autonomous decision making includes affect. She is especially worried about the ability to emotionally invest in various alternatives. However a closer look at her *analysis* of autonomous versus nonautonomous decisions shows that it is the conscious, rational aspects that make a difference. I illustrate this bias by exploring what Meyers means by a need for "conscious, open-minded reflection."

In her discussion about motherhood decisions, Meyers implies that conscious reflection is a necessary requirement for autonomous decision making. Consider Meyers's general description of the autonomous person: "a subject who *fashions* her self-[concept] and *shapes* her self-[concept] through *a process* of skillful self-[knowledge], self-definition, and self-direction" (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 22).[70] Notice the language here is very active. This is because an individual "fashions" and "shapes" her self-concept through a process of critical reflection. Thus, reflection must be conscious to be part of the procedure for autonomous decision making.

Consider also her discussion of women who know from an early age that they want or do not want children. In her earlier work, Meyers argued that a person does not have to consciously reflect on every belief or value for it to be autonomous. This would be too rigorous a theory and, ultimately, a person following its prescription for autonomy would be paralyzed by it rather than helped. As long as we are attuned to self-referential responses, we can, in some sense, function on autopilot (Meyers 1989). But, now,

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[70]For consistency, I changed self-portrait and self-narrative to self-concept and self-discovery to self-knowledge.

Meyers's explanation why these decisions are not autonomous seems to require conscious reflection.

> The early formation of these desires would pose no obstacle to self-determination *if women used their agentic skills later to consider whether to act on these desires*. But most women experience desires about motherhood as psychic postulates that govern the course of their adult lives. Thus, desires about motherhood are generally formed well before women are equipped to make autonomous decisions, and, implacable as these desires are, they are subsequently *insulated from open-minded reflection and modification*. (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 36-37)

This description implies the need for conscious reflection because Meyers does not seem to leave room for what I call the nonreflective authentic conformist, that is, a woman who feels no discord over her role as a mother or nonmother. A woman may have incorporated this imagery into her self-concept at an early age, but, unless she has some affective aversion to this self-concept that she is ignoring, she appears to be authentic and, therefore, autonomous. Yet, for Meyers, nonreflective life plans cannot be autonomous. "A nonautonomous life plan is a life plan that one pursues *without assessing whether or not it matches one's authentic self*, most likely a conventionally expected and automatically accepted life direction" (Emphasis added. Meyers 1989, 163). Since Meyers requires (conscious) reflection for autonomy, the affective aspects of self seem to be less important than she earlier implied. Now it seems that a person can (and should) consider affective responses in her reflection, but they are not the necessary component in the procedure for autonomous decision making.

Indeed, Meyers opens her discussion of lesbian couples by pointing out that they "cannot avoid making a *conscious* choice, and there is evidence that their choices are

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often *carefully considered*" (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 40).[71] Similarly, in her

discussion of other women who have made autonomous decisions about motherhood,

Meyers emphasizes the creativity the women put into developing personalized self-

concepts as opposed to nonautonomous women. "All too often, women voice self-

conceptions that are beholden to matrigyno-idoltry and *never articulate richly*

individualized self-[concepts]" (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 52).[72] She further argues

that in order to assess the "aptness and propitiousness" of self-concepts, women must

"master the art of imaginatively trying on tropes" (Meyers 2002, 55). Here we see why

the *active* language implies *conscious* reflection. Without consciously imagining

alternatives and considering options, a women cannot be sure her self-concept is

"apt"—she cannot "authenticate" it. Again, conscious reflection is necessary for the

procedure for autonomous decision making, and the procedure for autonomous decision

making requires critical (or rational) reflection.[73]

Next, let us consider what Meyers means by "open-minded reflection." In

general, Meyers is saying that values, beliefs, and desires are nonautonomous to the

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[71]Interestingly, women who use various assisted reproduction technologies also must make a conscious choice. However, Meyers views these decisions as "the rigid, obdurate character of a compulsion" (Meyers 2002, 36). In contrast to Meyers's characterization, there is evidence that many of these women have also carefully considered their motivations and choices (Berg 1995).

[72]In the original quote, Meyers uses self-portrait. For consistency, I changed it to self-concept.

[73]Remember that part of the goal of critical or self-reflection is coherence among desires and an integrated (unified) self. This is why I argue that critical or self-reflection is tied to rationality—we use our rational capacities to create this coherence and integration.

degree that they are immune from criticism.

> What is so pernicious about pronatalist discourse, in my view, is that it harnesses highly directive enculturation to unconscious processes and *protects the resulting psychic structures from change* by *codifying and consecrating them* in standard-issue self-[concepts].[74] (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 47)

This explains why she is so concerned about the early articulators' refusal to revisit their decisions later in life. The decision to have or not to have children (for these women) appears to be immune to criticism (or critical/rational reflection). Again, I am worried about this line of argument. There are many values, beliefs, and desires people have that they will not open-mindedly reflect upon. However, this does not *automatically* make these desires, beliefs, and preferences "inauthentic."[75]

The need for "open minded reflection" is closely tied to the need for conscious (rational) reflection. If a desire, belief, or preference is unconscious, then we cannot articulate it. It is, by default, immune from criticism.[76] Yet, we could ask, as some theorists do, why conscious desires are automatically more authentic than unconscious

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[74]The original quote says, "self-portraits and self-narratives." For consistency, I changed it to self-concept.

[75]When I use scare quotes around the word authentic I mean to complicate the meaning of that word. I do believe there can be some character traits or aspects of self that are more "authentic" in a more colloquial sense of that word. However, what I am calling "authentic" often would not fit the way autonomy theorists use that word (for example, self-chosen values, beliefs, and preferences).

[76]Notice there are at least two ways values, beliefs, or preferences can be immune to criticism. One, if they are unconscious or unintelligible, then a person is *unable* to submit them to criticism. Two, they could be conscious, articulated preferences that a person is *unwilling* to submit to criticism. Autonomy theorists worry about both of these.

ones. As Irving Thalberg points out in his critique of hierarchical theories of autonomy:

> Perhaps we value our disposition toward "cool and non-self-deceptive" moral thinking and life-planning more than we value our primitive urges and fantasies. But that is too circular to prove that the real self is the valuing self, that we "most want" things we value. Even if our valuing self were our most priceless asset, nothing would follow about its ontological superiority, nor about the comparative reality of our values over workaday desires. (Thalberg 1989, 135)

I am arguing that the process of reflection and identification proposed by autonomy theorists requires them to consider conscious desires more authentic because they can be subjected to criticism (or critical/"open minded"/rational reflection) in a way that unconscious desires cannot. How do you "criticize" an unconscious motivation? This can only be done by making it conscious, intelligible, and often propositional. Thus, Meyers values rational deliberation over unconscious motivations because only the unconscious motivations that can be brought under conscious, "open minded" reflection can relate to self-knowledge and authenticity. Other unintelligible or unarticulated desires, aversions, and feelings are assumed inauthentic or at least suspect as a source of self-knowledge.[77]

Ultimately, Meyers's values conscious, open-minded, rational reflection over unconscious and affective aspects of self because they are necessary for her theory of autonomy. If autonomy is self-determination, then to be autonomous a person must have control over her decisions and actions. They must reflect her authentic preferences. If critical reflection is what makes preferences our own, then any preference that is not

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[77]As we have seen, the process of rational deliberation will still be partly shaped by unconscious, affective influences (for example, the ability to emotionally invest in alternatives), but Meyers believes this is the best we can do.

available for conscious, "open minded," rational reflection is suspect.

In this way, autonomy theorists are forced to value rational deliberation over any unconscious or unarticulated aspects of the self. If a desire or inclination is unconscious or unintelligible or even just for some reason unarticulated, then it is—in some sense—beyond autonomy theory. In other words, the process necessary for autonomous decision making cannot assess the authenticity of these feelings. However, this presents a serious problem for autonomy theorists because if we are asking what is most "authentic" (a valuing of individual expression), then there is no reason to automatically consider conscious, rational aspects of self more "authentic" than affect and unconscious motivations.[78]

Self-government or Self-domination?

As we can see, the reason Meyers incorporates traditionally masculine characteristics (such as self-control, a unified life, and valuing reason over emotion) into her theory is because she is developing a theory of autonomy. Walker points out that "rationality and autonomy . . . are strongly identified with being able to adopt a plan of life and carry it out" (Walker 1998, 134), and we see this connection in Meyers's theory. I have shown how the general procedure for autonomous decision making emphasizes the type of internalized self-control and self-regulation associated with the career self and elevates rationality (critical reflection) over the affective aspects of self. We have also

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[78]I do not have the space to defend it here, but we could argue that sometimes unconscious and unintelligible experiences identify what is most "authentic" or truly our own.

seen how global programmatic autonomy requires a "whole-life narrative." I argue that

any theory of autonomy will include these (problematic) masculine and capitalist traits.

To better understand why these masculine and capitalist traits are part of the

"baggage" a philosophical conception of autonomy carries with it, I turn now to a brief

analysis of the reigning metaphor of autonomy—"self-government." To "govern" people

is to have a certain power or control over them. Similarly to "govern" one's self is to

have a certain power or control over the self. In addition to constructing an authentic self

and making decisions in keeping with that authentic self, the autonomous person chooses

life plans or "sets policies to which [she] will adhere regarding specific questions"

(Meyers 1989, 264n1). In this way, the autonomous individual's authentic preferences

and life plans are like the laws of the autonomous state. The ability to govern ourselves is

the ability to direct our lives through reflective choices. I call this a "lawgiver" mentality.

This "lawgiver" mentality is a mentality of domination—self-government (autonomy) is

to exercise power over the self.

As mentioned in chapter one, Kant's theory of autonomy was influenced by

political changes taking place in Europe. Part of Kant's motivation was to develop a

theory of morality as self-governance to replace the understanding of morality as

obedience. Thus, Kant's theory of autonomy coincided with political theories of equality

and man's right to govern himself (as opposed to divine right of kings or other less

democratic political structures). Here we see a direct connection between a political

conception of autonomy and a personal one—to have dominion over others, we must first

have dominion over ourselves.

For Kant, what makes us able (and worthy) to govern ourselves is our rational nature. Our ability to reason is what sets us apart from the rest of nature and what allows us to choose our own ends. It is what makes us (and our choices) worthy of respect. Like Kant, Meyers claims that a person must be self-governing (in the sense described earlier) to be worthy of respect. Our "worth as a person" is tied to our ability to set policies for ourselves (be lawgivers).

In her discussion of self-respect, Meyers ties our worth as persons to our ability to make choices which (she argues) separates us from other creatures.[79] We may marvel at the ant's ability to lift huge weights, but we do not *respect* it.

> Similarly, absorbing and following a socially enforced code manifests a natural capacity comparable to the ant's ability to transport heavy loads. When self-respect is based on this sort of adaptability rather than on a capacity for reflection and choice, self-respect is directed at a natural capability rather than at one's distinctive capacities as an agent. Thus, this respect is unwarranted . . . . (Meyers 1989, 226)

As I argued earlier, Meyers's understanding of the "reflection and choice" necessary for autonomy requires critical (rational) reflection. In this way, Meyers also ties one's worth as a person to her abilities to reason: "Whoever warrants respect does so in virtue of his or her dignity as an agent or, in other words, in virtue of capacities to choose reflectively and to cultivate desirable dispositions to choose as opposed to natural endowments" (Meyers 1989, 226). In other words, a person's worth is tied to her ability to make

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[79] The following quotes are taken from her analysis of theories of self-respect. Meyers argues that moral autonomy is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for "uncompromised" self-respect. A person also needs personal autonomy. The specific quotes I use here are part of Meyers's summary of Stephen Darwall's moral account of self-respect.

autonomous choices. But the kind of choice necessary for autonomy (choices made using the procedure for autonomous decision making) require self-government (or power over the self).

Our discussion has now come full circle. Feminists criticize autonomy as it is traditionally conceived because it requires self-control, a unified life, and values reason over emotion. The reason feminists associate these traits with masculinity is because these traits assume a certain social position—namely, the social position occupied by modern, capitalist men. This "career self" model of autonomy grew out of Enlightenment philosophy and the understanding of the subject associated with it. To be self-governing is to have power (control) over the self. Like other feminists, I argue that this "lawgiver" mentality is a false sense of control linked to a psychology of domination.[80] We see here how this problematic metaphor of self-government is inextricably tied to the history of a philosophical conception of autonomy. Therefore, to reconceive autonomy in a way that is acceptable to feminist critics would be to develop a conception of autonomy that does not include self-government—a contradictory goal.

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[80]I give a more detailed explanation of the connection between the control necessary for autonomy and domination in the second part of chapter five.

Chapter Five
Agency Under Oppression: The Ontology of Self

I am 32 flavors and them some.

Ani DiFranco

Using Friedman's categories, I earlier outlined the general critiques feminists make against a philosophical conception of autonomy. In sum, feminists argue that a philosophical conception of autonomy elevates reason over emotion, assumes an unrealistic transparency of self, requires a coherent unified subject, and ignores the social aspects of self. In the previous chapter, I showed how Meyers's theory of autonomy includes the social aspects of self, but still elevates reason over emotion and requires a coherent, unified subject. In this chapter, I continue to explain why Meyers's theory requires a coherent, unified subject. I also show how her theory relies on an unrealistic transparency of self. Ultimately, I argue that using a theory of autonomy requires theorists to assume an unrealistic conception of self that also leads to a problematic understanding of agency under oppression.

As we have seen, Meyers tries to move away from the concept of an atomistic individual by including an analysis of how cultural influences and specific relationships affect the individual's understanding of herself. Throughout her work, Meyers develops a rich description of the interconnections between the individual and various social influences. She discusses how childrearing practices influence the development of self, how cultural imagery and tropes influence the construction of personal identity and help shape desires, and how relationships with others can enhance the process of self-

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knowledge, self-definition, and self-direction. Still, I argue that by using a theory of autonomy Meyers is led to assume a problematic conception of self. No matter how many social interactions are *added* to her theory, the she is still committed to an internal procedure that depends on a relatively transparent, unified, atomistic, and lawgiving subject.

To explain how Meyers's commitment to a philosophical conception of autonomy leads her to these assumptions and to better explain why this is a problem for theorizing agency under oppression, I compare Meyers's approach to two other theorists. In the first section, I revisit the issue of women's decisions to have children. Focusing on Meyers's discussion of how women can resist cultural norms and develop a more authentic self-concept, I compare the conception of self implicit in Meyers's account to the conception of self articulated by Susan Babbitt. Even though Meyers includes cultural analysis and acknowledges embodied values, I argue that she still fails to fully appreciate how social contexts shape personal identity and the decision making process. In sum, Meyers assumes an unrealistic transparency of self by failing to fully appreciate how an individual's understanding of herself and her desires is intertwined with social meanings. In the second section, I build on this analysis by considering the conception of self implicit in Meyers's analysis of fragmentation and the integration or unity necessary for an authentic self. Here I compare Meyers's analysis to María Lugones's description of curdling and multiple selves. Again, I argue that Meyers assumes an unrealistic separation of self from a particular environment and an unrealistic unity within the self.

Transparency of Self and Possibilities for Change

In *Gender in the Mirror*, Meyers claims, "the question of how women can resist internalized oppression and increase their self-determination is the principal concern of this book." She goes on to say she will analyze how cultural imagery impedes self-determination and "the ways this cultural noise pollution eats away at women's agentic health" (Meyers 2002, 28). Turning her attention to cultural imagery and its relation to personal identity, Meyers provides a general analysis of how internalized norms shape an individual's perception and imagination that is very useful to feminists. However, her commitment to a theory of autonomy leads Meyers to assume an unrealistic transparency of self and this undermines her ability to give an accurate picture of resistance to internalized oppression.

Meyers explains that norms embedded in cultural imagery are internalized and these internalized norms can make people complicit in their own oppression. Despite Meyers's acknowledgment of the insidiousness of internalized oppression, her analysis and suggested solutions appear to ignore this same insight. Greater diversity of ideals and increased analytic skills may help, but—if oppressive norms are internalized (as she admits they are)—these solutions will have limited effectiveness.

On the one hand, Meyers recognizes how deeply internalized norms influence our perception and imagination. Here she describes what is necessary to fully incorporate a new self-concept into a person's authentic self.

> Those figurations that survive this vetting must become embedded in the cognitive, emotional, and corporeal structures that *shape agency* and that *function as criteria of self-appraisal*. To agentically integrate dissident

self-figurations, women must command skills that enable them to invest emotionally in these tropes and to *reconfigure their embodied values as well as their patterns of thought and volition* in accordance with them. (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 55)

On the other hand, Meyers description of how a persons screens her self-concept for "aptness and propitiousness" seems to ignore this same insight. In considering any particular self-concept, women . . .

> . . . must master the art of *imaginatively trying on tropes*. They must *anticipate what it would be like* to inhabit a proposed figuration by constructing scenarios in which the figuration guides their conduct and by *viscerally imagining themselves* acting out those scenarios.[81] (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 55)

This process seems to imply some distance between the individual and the material she is reflecting on. How can a woman "imagine" tropes or scenarios and "anticipate" their consequences unless she can gain some critical distance from these potential scenarios and her current situation? As Meyers herself has noted, the problem with many oppressive norms is that they are *internalized* (and are part of the process of reflection).

Given Meyers's own description of how internalized norms are encoded in a current self-concept, it is difficult to see how a woman can screen her self-concept for "aptness and propitiousness." How does a woman distance herself from her *current* self-concept which is already an "embodied value" and "pattern of thought" that "shapes agency" and "functions as a criteria of self-appraisal"? How does she "*reconfigure* embodied values" and "patterns of thought"? Meyers admits that cultural imagery shapes perception and imagination; yet, her description of how a person develops a more

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[81]The original quote used self-figurations. I changed it to self-concept for consistency.

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accurate self-concept continues to rely on a process of self-reflection that assumes a

person can distance herself from cultural imagery and her current self-concept.

To explain why "reconfiguring" one's self-concept would be so difficult, I

compare Meyers's account of women making decisions about motherhood to Susan

Babbitt's discussion of the Deferential Wife.[82] Using Thomas Hill's example, Babbitt

discusses a wife who is "utterly devoted to and derives happiness from deferring to her

husband" (Babbitt 1993, 249).

> In order for it to be rational for her to desire autonomy in the sense that
> rules out her habitual servility, her *actual sense of self would have to be*
> *transformed so that habitual servility is not what defines it*. But defining a
> person's objective interest in terms of a perspective the person might have
> but in fact does not is just what the liberal view rules out. (Emphasis
> added. Babbitt 1993, 250)

Here Babbitt argues that being servile is part of the wife's authentic self—it is central to

her self-concept. Thus, acting on this self-concept *is* autonomy for her. If some aspect of

internalized oppression is so internalized that it has become part of a person's self-

concept or authentic self, then it will also shape her agency and function as a criterion for

self-appraisal. As Babbitt's description illustrates, the Deferential Wife cannot critically

evaluate her self-concept because her reflection will be influenced by the very oppressive

norms she is supposed to be evaluating. The Deferential Wife's self-referential responses

are in harmony with her servile disposition—being servile is *an embodied value and*

pattern of thought. Self-reflection cannot lead her to have more interest in her own

flourishing or self-worth; she cannot choose a more independent or autonomous life

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[82]Meyers explicitly rejects what she calls Babbitt's "value saturated" (what I call
nonsubjective) approach to autonomy (Meyers 2002, 13-16).

based on her current self-concept and standards for deliberation.

In Meyers's account, a woman must consider herself in relation to cultural norms. By considering her feelings and self-referential responses, she can assess her relation to these norms and create an authentic self. In this way, a woman's self-concept is "screened for aptness and propitiousness." However, resisting internalized oppression goes beyond assessing your own self-referential responses. A person cannot adequately assess internalized oppressive norms unless she comes to see them *as oppressive* and, to do this, she must also change her background beliefs. In other words, she must change her entire worldview, not just her self-concept. Babbitt calls this type of change a transformative or conversion experience.

> [I]n some cases, like that of the Deferential Wife, a person's rational interests—or at least what we might intuitively think to be in her individual rational interests—depend precisely upon the kinds of personal and political transformation experiences the liberal accounts want to rule out. In fact, it sometimes looks as though *the disruption of a person's secure sense of self* is just what is required to make a full state of flourishing individually rational for a person. (Emphasis added. Babbitt 1993, 251)

Along with Babbitt, I argue that a person cannot disrupt her secure sense of self through reflection alone. The kind of transformation Babbitt describes has to do with experiences that disrupt the process of reflection and lead a person to change her assumptions about herself and her world. I believe Meyers resists this view because it means sometimes whether a person can achieve autonomy is—to some degree—beyond the individual's control. More importantly, it would mean that *liberating* changes (or at least their initiation) can come from "outside" the individual.

To better explain the difference between Meyers and Babbitt, consider the following account of resisting internalized oppression. In "Development of a Positive Professional Identity: Liberating Oneself from the Oppressor Within," Susan Jo Roberts describes various stages of personal change necessary to recognize and resist internalized oppression and develop a more positive self-image.[83]

In the first stage, a person's self-concept is intertwined with oppressive norms and standards.

> The first stage, *Passive Acceptance*, describes the woman who is unaware of any individual, institutional, or cultural discrimination against her or other women. There is an acceptance of the traditional role of women and a view that there are distinct advantages to their subordinate role.
> (Emphasis in original. Roberts 2000, 73)

Obviously, the Deferential Wife (as we have described her) is in this first stage. Both Meyers and Babbitt are trying to explain how a person can move from this stage to a more positive self-image. In Meyers's account a woman must search her self-referential responses for signs of discord. However, there are two problems with this account. One, she may not have feelings of discord if these norms are sufficiently embedded in her self-concept. Two, she may not be able to accurately diagnose these feelings even if she does recognize them. Babbitt's theory explains these potential problems. A person who has internalized oppressive norms cannot use those same norms to choose a more autonomous or independent life—being servile is part of the Deferential Wife's self-

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[83]Roberts begins with the Cross model which posits five stages of development for Black liberation: preencounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, internalization-commitment. Paralleling this approach, Roberts posits five stages for women's liberation (and then applies these to nurses): passive acceptance, revelation, embeddedness-emanation, synthesis, active commitment.

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concept.

According to Roberts change is usually initiated by some catalyst that creates a crisis or otherwise raises awareness of a problem not seen before.

> The second stage, *Revelation*, occurs with a realization of discrimination against women precipitated by reading, taking a class, therapy, a divorce, or an instance of discrimination that cannot be denied (eg, denial of credit, loss of promotion or a job opportunity). (Emphasis in original. Roberts 2000, 74)

In this stage, the woman is "catalyzed by a series of crises, resulting in questioning of self and roles and feelings of anger and guilt" (Roberts 2000, 74). These responses are reactions to a specific circumstance or experience—not reflection on personal preferences or a particular self-concept. A person is confronted with a situation that seems to *conflict with* her current standards and beliefs (or her *current* authentic self). In other words, her normal process of deliberation breaks down or otherwise fails her, and *this* "causes a change in the way the person interprets the world" (Roberts 2000, 73).

Applying this description to our earlier discussion, the Deferential Wife cannot choose a more independent or autonomous life based on her current self-concept and standards for deliberation. She needs some experience or catalyst to initiate change. Consider Roberts's example of reading or taking a class. This type of catalyst appears to be in keeping with Meyers's theory. It is possible that a woman taking a class that addresses feminist issues will consider (reflect on) this new information in relation to her current situation. Yet, this reflection will not change the woman unless she is *moved* by it in a certain way. We all know people who refuse to hear feminist arguments unless something happens that opens them to hearing this information. For this reason, I believe

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women who are changed by reading or classes go through Babbitt's transformative experience not Meyers's process of self-reflection. It is not information *per se* that motivates women to change their self-concept. These women are moved—they experience a shift in how they view the world and their place within it, and *this* leads them to revise their self-concepts.

The type of shift in perspective required to resist internalized oppression is similar to paradigm shifts in science. "Philosophers of Science have observed that in order to overthrow well-established beliefs and expectations, we need to pursue an alternative conceptual framework, a unifying perspective. We need to tell some story on the basis of which what was not expected previously becomes plausible" (Babbitt 2001, xii). This is why Babbitt's transformative experience is different from Meyers description of self-reflection. Babbitt is not talking about a type of reflection or deliberation. She is talking about an *experience* that brings about a different understanding of your world. As Roberts puts it, experiences that confront a woman with problems in her current world view or sense of self may cause her to question "her assumptions about the world" (Roberts 2000, 73) which may *also* lead her to develop a new authentic self with corresponding new interests.[84] These experiences change the woman's world like a kaleidoscope—everything falls into different patterns and different relationships.[85] The

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[84]The argument here is that certain experiences *may* lead to a change in self. Part of the problem is that we never know what experiences will or will not lead to this sort of change. Individual variety precludes a formula here. However, Babbitt and Roberts are trying to articulate what seems to happen in individuals that come to recognize and resists some forms of internalized oppression.

[85]I thank Marilyn Frye for suggesting the image of a kaleidoscope here.

procedure for autonomous decision making cannot lead the Deferential Wife to have more interest in her own flourishing or self-worth because she cannot control when and how she has these experiences.

Roberts's final stage of liberation emphasizes this change in self. Roberts describes a process through which the person develops and consolidates a "new identity." As Roberts explains, "*Synthesis* . . . involves the integration of the new identity and world view into the life of the woman" (Emphasis in original. Roberts 2000, 75). A person in Roberts's final stage has not uncovered her real desire and then modified her self-concept to accommodate it. She has been transformed and this transformation makes the new desire possible. Returning to the case of the Deferential Wife, Babbitt makes a similar argument:

> [S]he may really have as part of her self-concept the feature of being inferior to her husband. However, it is likely that if the Deferential Wife were to act in certain ways or even were compelled to act in certain ways by circumstances or forceful persuasion, she would *acquire* desires and interests that would change her position and provide her with a different interpretive background. (Emphasis in original. Babbitt 1993, 252)

In this process, a person is not discovering what she "really" wants, but is *changing* what she "really" wants. Overcoming internalized oppression is not a process of discovering your real desires, but a matter of changing desires.

I believe this is what Babbitt means by a transformative experience, and it differs considerably from Meyers's account of self-knowledge and autonomy. In Meyers's account, a woman must consider herself in relation to cultural norms. By considering her feelings and self-referential responses, she can assess her relation to these norms and

create an authentic self. Alternately, Babbitt emphasizes how internalized norms shape

the entire process of reflection and deliberation. Babbitt's transformative experiences are

a type of paradigm shift that allows a person to see (and feel) things differently. A person

cannot bring about this type of change through reflection alone. It requires certain

experiences. In other words, change is (at least in part) dependent on circumstances

beyond the individual's control.

> The challenge of such a view is that it suggests that we make a mistake
> when we expect the process of acquiring understanding to be one in which
> one always maintains, or ought to maintain, control, even of oneself. The
> idea is that we learn about the world, in part, as a result of being acted
> upon by the world. (Babbitt 2001, 21)

This means we must acknowledge that sometimes change from without or "external"

influences can be a good thing.[86]

For autonomy theorists, this is a threatening conclusion. A philosophical

conception of autonomy assumes self-government or self-control. If positive change

depends on "external" influences, this threatens our understanding of autonomy.

> This notion of the process of understanding, however, has initially
> disturbing aspects, as least in relation to liberal views of the self, and
> especially as regards some feminist views. It suggests that it is sometimes
> a good thing to be controlled by the world, or perhaps even by others.
> Liberal philosophy suggests that acting autonomously consists, roughly, in
> the capacity to live one's life according to one's settled preferences and
> interests, with true beliefs. One's autonomy is interfered with, on this

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[86]I also recognize that this type of change can be a bad thing. I do not mean to
negate the problems of paternalism, brainwashing, and other pernicious types of thought
control that autonomy theorists are often worried about. However, I do want to point out
that not all "external" influences are negative and *sometimes* it can be a good thing to
allow social circumstances and relationships to shape us. In other words, I am arguing
that *sometimes* opening ourselves to "external" influences and being profoundly changed
by processes that are not deliberative can change us for the better.

view, if one is coerced, psychologically or otherwise, into living according to values that one has not endorsed. (Babbitt 2001, 22)

A transformative experience cannot be brought about by using "agentic skills" and, therefore, does not count as *self*-determination.

Autonomy theorists need a certain distance from or transparency of self for the process of reflection, and the process of reflection is what makes change autonomous. Self-reflection is how a person makes preferences "her own" because this type of endorsement means that—in some sense—change comes from the individual herself (*self*-determination/ government/ definition). The process of change described by Babbitt and Roberts shows that positive change can sometimes be *imposed* on an individual or "come from without," but, if change is not (in some sense) internally motivated, then it is not autonomous.

By Meyers's own account, the idea that liberating change can be externally imposed threatens both the subjective and objective value of autonomy.

> Subjectively, then, the value of autonomy stems from the fascination of self-discovery and the *gratification of self-determination*. Objectively, it rests on the dignity of the distinctive individual and the wondrous diversity of the lives individuals may *fashion for themselves*. (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 12)

If we admit that transformative experiences can lead to a new "authentic" self, this undermines the "gratification of self-determination" and our respect for "the lives individuals may fashion for themselves." As mentioned in chapter two, autonomy theorists privilege the subjective perspective—in part *by respecting individual choice*. Meyers states, "Members of subordinated groups should not stake their future on

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serendipity. The compass of authentic individual identity is needed to guide individuals' choices" (Meyers 2004, 34). Autonomy theorists find Babbitt and Roberts's understanding of how we resist internalized oppression threatening because it undermines the possibility of individual choice in relation to internalized oppressive norms. A person cannot simply *choose* to have a transformative experience.

Fragmentation and Integration Versus Multiplicity and Curdling

As we saw in the previous section, Meyers's conception of self seems to imply an unrealistic level of transparency and distance. In this section, I continue that critique but also look at Meyers's analysis of fragmentation and integration. Using Meyers's analysis of intersectional identity, I argue that the self-governance (self-control) and integration that Meyers proposes is itself a form of domination. It reflects what María Lugones calls the "logic of purity" which creates fragmentation in the first place. Lugones proposes that our goal should be disruption of the logic of purity and acceptance of multiplicitous/curdled selves.

In her article "Opposites Attract!," Meyers turns her attention to the problem of "psychic fragmentation" and whether it precludes autonomy. Using the conception of intersectional identity developed by feminist and critical race theorists, Meyers examines "how autonomy is possible for individuals whose identities are shaped by structures of domination and subordination" (Meyers 2004, 15). As Meyers (and others) understand it, intersectional identity "emphasizes that people are categorized according to gender, sexual orientation, race, class, and ethnicity and that these multiple ascriptions

interact—sometimes compounding one another's effects and sometimes creating inner

divisions and conflicts" (Meyers 2004, 15). Like her analysis of internalized oppression,

Meyers's analysis of intersectional identity is paradoxical.

Again, she understands the force of these social circumstances and how they

undermine individual possibilities.

> In a society that is historically divided along harsh, unyielding axes of
> dominance and subordination, individuals cannot escape the influence of
> cultural stereotypes and other prescriptive representations of the groups
> they belong to, nor can they escape the influence of the social and
> economic advantages and disadvantages that institutions confer on these
> groups. (Meyers 2004, 20)

Here Meyers recognizes the way oppressive norms shape the individual's understanding

of herself and limit the individual's ability to make herself intelligible to others. On the

other hand, Meyers's commitment to a theory of autonomy leads her to look for solutions

from within the individual herself. Meyers argues that intersectional identity threatens

autonomy because it threatens self-knowledge (a person may not be aware of her

intersectional identity) and self-definition (a person may have unreflectively internalized

group norms). The procedure of autonomy (reflection and identification) leads Meyers to

turn her attention to the individual and her decision making process.

According to Meyers, intersectional identity threatens the construction of an

authentic self that is necessary for autonomy. In response, Meyers argues that

"individuals who seek autonomy are well advised to candidly appraise where they stand

in society's hierarchies and to make as complete an inventory as they can of what they

have internalized as a result of being assigned to certain social groups" (Meyers 2004,

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22). The goal of this process is "maximum transparency of group-identity determinants" (Meyers 2004, 26). Inevitably, this process will illuminate tensions between various group norms and loyalties. Meyers believes that these tensions provide individuals with a critical perspective that allows for *individual* reflection and choice.

> The light social interpretation sheds on seemingly personal conduct makes room for autonomous self-definition—thoughtful clarification or reshaping of one's desires, personal traits, values, interests, and goals—and thus for autonomous self-direction—plotting a course of action that enacts those attributes as fully as possible. (Meyers 2004, 29)

The assumption here is that the individual can gain enough distance from her social circumstances to reflect on how social influences have shaped her personal preferences.[87] This self is relatively transparent—the individual has a type of self-knowledge that allows her to know which preferences are "her own." This self is atomistic—the individual must consider herself in relation to social interpretations but it is still possible to separate from social norms and gain autonomous self-definition. This self is unified—the individual has one transcendent self that she must find a way to enact as fully as possible.

The assumption of a transparent, atomistic, and transcendent self that relies on reflection and identification to be autonomous leads Meyers to view intersectional identity as a form of conflicting desires. Consider Meyers's analysis of how a person should relate to her victimization. According to Meyers, if a person fully identifies with her victimization, it could lead to a paralyzing self-doubt. Yet, if a person completely denies her victimization, it could undermine the self-knowledge necessary for autonomy competency (Meyers 2004, 36). Thus, Meyers argues that the best course of action is for

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[87]This also assumes we can distinguish desires from their context.

a person to remain "ambivalent" about her victimization. Here Meyers treats

victimization as an attribute or trait that may conflict with other desires or goals.

According to Meyers, the oppressed individual must decide whether to accept ("identify

with" or "authenticate") aspects of her intersectional identity or reject them.

In response, I ask why would an individual want to "identify" with her

victimization at all? As a matter of survival, it is important that she recognize how others

view her and how social structures may limit her options, but that is not part of her

"authentic" self. Understanding her victimization is part of how she navigates the world,

but it is not an attribute that she identifies with or a value that guides her actions. Thus,

Meyers's analysis of self-knowledge (especially in relation to intersectional identity)

leads her to misinterpret certain types of self-understanding. As Meyers correctly noted,

those who belong to oppressed groups are often subjected to "unyielding axes of

dominance and subordination." She is also correct that it can be very useful for

individuals in these groups to understand how these structures of domination and

subordination limit their possibilities. However, since Meyers explains this

understanding as a type of self-knowledge needed to create an authentic self, she

misinterprets these aspects of subordination (such as victimhood) by treating them as

personal attributes.

Meyers's analysis of self-direction is similarly problematic. Consider her

description of how autonomous people negotiate their intersectional identities.

> [A]ccepting intersectional identity as a feature of one's authentic self . . .
> entails *analyzing* the social significance of one's community of origin,
> *disclosing to oneself* the ways in which associated norms have become

embedded in one's own cognitive and motivational structure, appreciating how entrenched they are, and *assuming responsibility for* the ways in which one may enact them. (Emphasis added. Meyers 2000, 22)

This summary illustrates at least two problems with Meyers's analysis of the relationship between intersectional identity and autonomy. First, she fails to distinguish between social positions. Those in positions of power will have a different relationship to their intersectional identity than those who are members of disadvantaged groups. As Meyers points out, people who occupy privileged positions in society may not even be aware of their intersectional identity (Meyers 2004, 20). Thus, they *should* be called upon to recognize their intersectional identity and take responsibility for it. However, as Kimberlé Crenshaw illustrates, those who are subordinated in the social hierarchy *cannot* ignore their intersectional identity. Crenshaw uses intersectional identity to explain why anti-discrimination law cannot adequately address the experience of Black women, and her analysis shows how the law *forces* Black women to separate their "gender" from their "race"—an impossible task (Crenshaw 1994). These are not "pure" parts of one's identity; the meaning of each is affected by the other. It is a feature of the oppression they face that Black women are asked to fragment themselves into "sections" or exclusive categories.[88]

Second, and related, Meyers's emphasis on self-direction (autonomy as self-governance, self-control as taking responsibility for self) is problematic from the perspective of the oppressed. In Meyers's interpretation an individual must take responsibility for her intersectional identity. It is up to *her* to reflect on various aspects of

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[88]I will say more about this when I introduce Lugones.

her intersectional identity by "analyzing" their social significance, "disclosing" how she has internalized them, and "assuming responsibility" for how she enacts them. The problem is within the individual, not in the social structures that construct her in this way. Therefore, the solution is a form of self-direction and self-governance—the individual must "take responsibility" for herself by constructing an authentic self. Yet, Meyers's earlier description of intersectional identity admitted that "individuals cannot escape the influence of cultural stereotypes and other prescriptive representations of the groups they belong to" (Meyers 2004, 20).

Meyers appears to be stuck in a paradox. On the one hand, cultural stereotypes and structures of domination and subordination are inescapable. It is the nature of oppression. In other words, if oppression were easily avoidable, then it would not be so harmful. On the other hand, Meyers needs to articulate *some* account of autonomy even within oppression. Feminist theorists, including Meyers, do not want to erase what agency victims of oppression have, but it is hard to articulate this agency using Meyers's current theory. Using Lugones, I argue that Meyers is lead to this contradiction because she relies on a transcendent, unified self.

To summarize, according to Meyers, individuals use a process of reflection to draw attributes "into the orbit of the authentic self" and to "authenticate" the self-concept that develops out of this "collocation of attributes." Through this process of reflection, the individual works toward "maximum transparency of group-identity determinants" then uses the skills of autonomy competency to work through the tensions that arise and take responsibility for her intersectional self. After the process of reflection and

identification, the individual "come[s] to have a special feeling" about certain attributes; they are now part of her authentic self. Eventually this leads to a "consolidation of authentic identity."[89]

Meyers acknowledges that we will never be absolutely integrated and that we must recognize the construction of an authentic self as an on-going process, but a type of unity is still the goal. She compares her version of authenticity to the performance of an orchestra.

> A tune sets the themes of the performance. But the rendition is not preplanned, nor will it ever be repeated in quite the same way. Still, the qualities of the instruments in the ensemble, the musicians' idiosyncratic playing styles, and the melody coalesce into *a discernible logic*—an integrated dynamic, if you will. Moreover, although the group will never duplicate a performance, their sound—their musical identity—*will be recognizable whenever they play* together. (Emphasis added. Meyers 2004, 39)

The authentic self is similar to a musical performance. The person (or tune) will have an overall logic or unity that makes her recognizable regardless of individual idiosyncracies or different social situations. In sum, the authentic self has a certain level of integration

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[89]Here are the full statements from which I take the above excerpts: "Exposure to the concept of intersectional identity itself might precipitate a consolidation of authentic identity. . . . Still, it must be emphasized that these advances are gains in authenticity, not because some core trait has been disclosed and not because the individual's priorities have been decisively set, but rather because exercising autonomy skills has drawn these attributes into the orbit of the authentic self and 'authenticated' this self-portrait. It might seem that what happens when people exercise these skills well is that they come to have a special feeling about the attributes they include in their self-portrait" (Meyers 2004, 40). "The authentic self is nothing but the evolving collocation of attributes—analogous to a musical ensemble's sound—that issues from ongoing exercise of this repertory of skills. And an authentic self-portrait is an interpretation of that evolving collocation—analogous to an astute band member's commentary on the group's performance career" (Meyers 2004, 39).

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or a recognizable unity (harmony)—it does not contain contradiction (or discordant notes).

In contrast, Lugones rejects the idea that a person will exhibit "a discernible logic" or "be recognizable whenever [she] plays" (or wherever she is). Lugones is not interested in "autonomy" or "authenticity" as defined by autonomy theorists. "In this project, I reject the tendency to think of any set of behaviors, character and personality traits, desires, and beliefs as constituting a 'true' self" (Lugones 2003, 37n6). Lugones is interested in what she calls "active subjectivity" or various forms of resistance.

> The understanding of agency that I propose, which I call "active subjectivity" and which I contrast with the influential understanding of agency of late modernity, is highly attenuated. It does not presuppose the individual subject. . . . It is a sense of intentionality that we can reinforce and sense as lively in paying attention to people and to the enormously variegated ways of connection among people without privileging the word or a monological understanding of sense. We can reinforce and influence the direction of intention in small ways by sensing/understanding the movement of desires, beliefs, and signs among people. (Lugones 2003, 6)

Rather than starting with a conception of autonomy and analyzing barriers or obstacles to it, Lugones starts from the perspective of the oppressed individual and theorizes how this individual enacts various types of resistance and agency. This difference in motivation and focus leads Lugones to a very different conception of self. Specifically, she rejects the concept of a transcendent, unified self in favor of a conception of multiple selves. By multiple selves Lugones is trying to capture the fluidity and plurality of self and personal identity that we can see if we take seriously the social embeddedness of individuals.

Consider how the self changes (or no) from situation to situation. Jennifer is a loving mother and wife, but also a ruthless attorney. Meyers argues that Jennifer

represents an unacceptable level of fragmentation. Meyers assumes that a person can

exhibit different personality traits in different circumstances, but she cannot radically

switch to meet every new circumstance (she must stay true to her authentic self). Meyers

interprets Jennifer as changing her behavior simply to accommodate circumstances, and

this represents a lack of autonomy because Jennifer is not acting accord with her authentic

self. Returning to the metaphor of an orchestra, Meyers seems to be arguing that Jennifer

is not "recognizable whenever [she] plays."

Lugones, on the other hand, has a very different interpretation of how people

negotiate various situations. She agrees that people may exhibit radically different

behaviors and styles in different circumstances; however, she does not interpret this as a

violation of some authentic self. Instead, Lugones believes that people actually *are*

radically different selves in different circumstances. For example, Lugones ponders

whether she is a "playful" person. Many of her friends agree that she is and she feels that

she is; however, many of her immediate colleagues are adamant that she is not and

Lugones also feels that she is not. Lugones ultimately decides that she both is and is not a

playful person. With her friends she is playful, but in her academic "world" she is not

playful.[90] Lugones admits that whether she has this attribute relates to how "at ease" she

feels in different "worlds," but having (or not having) this attribute does *not* (she argues)

relate to any underlying authentic self.

To the extent that the attribute is an important ingredient of the self she is

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[90]Lugones puts "worlds" in quotes because she does not mean some utopia or
thought experiment. Instead she means actual individuals in their particular concrete
circumstances.

in that "world" (i.e., to the extent that there is a particularly good fit between that "world" and her having that attribute in it, and to the extent that the attribute is personality or character central, *that "world" would have to be changed if she is to be playful in it*). It is not the case that if she could come to be at ease in it, she would be her own playful self. Because the attribute is personality or character central and there is such a good fit between that "world" and her being constructed with that attribute as central, *she* cannot become playful, she is unplayful. (Emphasis in original. Lugones 2003, 92-93)

To be clear, Lugones is not arguing that she simply plays different roles in different areas of her life. She argues that she literally *is* different selves in different "worlds" or circumstances. She is making an argument about the interconnection between environments/relationships and identity/self that challenges autonomy theorists notion of "authenticity" based on self-knowledge and the unity and transparency of self. Indeed, Lugones is challenging the atomistic nature of individuals that autonomy theory is based on.

To better understand what Lugones means by multiple selves, let me say a few words about reasons for actions. Part of Meyers's worry about fragmentation is its relation to reasons for action. For a decision or action to count as autonomous, it must be reflective of the authentic self. In this way, the authentic self (made up of values, beliefs, and desires) gives people reasons for action. The more integrated the authentic self (or the less conflict between values, beliefs, and desires) then the more coherent people's reasons for action. Meyers worries about fragmented persons because they do not "recognize the continuum of circumstances from one situation to another or from one time to another" or respond "in similar ways to the similar circumstances threaded through their lives." In sum, "fractured personalities are incapable of autonomy to the

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extent that they are incapable of sustaining reasons, and they are incapable of sustaining

reasons to the extent that they are fractured" (Meyers 1989, 69). Returning to the

orchestra metaphor, this description explains what Meyers means by a "discernable logic"

or coherence between reasons and actions.

In contrast, Lugones argues that multiple selves operate in different logics in

different situations. In fact, it is impossible to think some things in one "world" because

it does not fit the logic of that "world." Lugones discusses Aristotle's practical syllogism

which she understands as reasoning that results in action. She argues:

> These cases [bicultural people] provide me with examples of people who
> are very familiar with experiencing themselves as more than one: having
> desires, character, and personality traits that are different in one reality
> than in the other, and acting, enacting, animating their bodies, having
> thoughts, feeling the emotions, in ways that are different in one reality than
> in the other. *The practical syllogisms that they go through in one reality
> are not possible for them in the other, given that they are such different
> people in the two realities, given that the realities hold such different
> possibilities for them.* (Emphasis added. Lugones 2003, 57)

Again, Lugones is not arguing that we simply put on various masks or enact different

roles. Her argument is that different realities create different selves. We carry ourselves

differently; we speak differently; we *reason* differently.

Let us return to the case of Jennifer. Meyers understands Jennifer to be ignoring

consistent reasons for action. "Jennifer systematically ignores, for example, the

emotional needs of her subordinates while caring deeply for those of her family

members" (Meyers 1989, 69). In other words, if caring about the emotional needs of

others is a reason for action (reflects her authentic self), then Jennifer cannot ignore this

aspect of herself and still act autonomously. However, if we view Jennifer under

Lugones's interpretation, this may simply cease to be an attribute she possesses in *that* "world." Indeed, if Jennifer were to pay attention to the emotional needs of her colleagues, her actions may very well be unintelligible to her colleagues.[91] They would likely read her actions as a sign of weakness that undermines her abilities as a lawyer. In this way, it may simply be impossible for Jennifer to think certain practical syllogisms in some realities or situations. Jennifer may be multiple selves that do not relate to any underlying, unified, singular self of the sort that autonomy theorists require. Her actions have no (singular) discernable logic from one "world" to the next.

Another way to think about the distinction Lugones is making with her conception of practical syllogisms and multiple "worlds" is the way we consider framing relevant to a question or issue. What counts as an acceptable justification for a position depends on how the question is framed or what underlying assumptions are presumed in the discussion. For example, heterosexuals often ask homosexuals when they knew they were homosexual, but if homosexuals reverse the question and ask heterosexuals when they knew they were heterosexual, many heterosexuals find this question unintelligible. The dominant logic presumes heterosexuality; therefore, it is not something people should be asked to account for (under that logic). Similarly, there have been many debates between Greens and Democrats over whether or not third parties "steal" votes from the established parties. To ask this question presumes that the established party candidate is somehow entitled to those votes. Alternately, Greens argue that it is *every*

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[91]I mean "unintelligible" in the sense that they will not interpret her actions in the way she intends. In some sense, they will understand what she is doing, but it will be misunderstood and shape their conception of her in ways she does not intend.

candidate's job to *earn* votes. Therefore, it is true that some people may vote for a third

party candidate that would otherwise have voted for a Democratic candidate (if the third

party candidate had not offered them an alternative option), but the third party candidate

did not "steal" anything. This subtle distinction is unintelligible to those working under

the established logic.

This type of a shift in logic is what Lugones is trying to capture. Lugones

explains how we can think of the world as being structured by various logics or

"connection among meanings" (Lugones 2003, 29)—specifically, the difference between

a logic of domination/purity and a logic of resistance/curdling. Under the logic of purity,

a person must carve herself up into distinct sections or "fragments," whereas a logic of

curdling recognizes the blended nature of various influences.

> I think of the attempt at control exercised by those who possess both
> power and the categorial eye and who attempt to split everything impure,
> breaking it down into pure elements (as in egg white and egg yolk) for the
> purposes of control. (Lugones 2003, 123)

The logic of purity is a form of domination motivated by a need to control ambiguity and

difference. In contrast, Lugones believes we need to understand ourselves as "impure" or

"curdled" beings. Thus, the logic of curdling is a form of resistance to the logic of purity.

Let us briefly return to Crenshaw's conception of intersectional identity. In

Crenshaw's analysis, the U.S. legal system cannot handle cases in which people argue

that they were discriminated against based on multiple categories. The claim is

unintelligible. For example, Crenshaw recounts a case where Black women claimed

discrimination based on race and sex and, therefore sued as *Black women*. The court

refused to recognize Black woman as a "special class" potentially subject to

discrimination and instead claimed the Black women must prove discrimination based

either on sex or race (Crenshaw 1994, 41). Thus, the argument that Black women can

suffer discrimination as *Black women* appears as chaos under the logic of purity used by

the U.S. legal system. In contrast, Lugones describes the lived experience of Black

women as curdled beings.

> Black women are fighting for their understanding of social relations, their
> personal possibilities, their particular sense of history, their mode of
> reasoning and values and expressive styles being understood as neither
> reducible to anything else nor as outside the meaning of being black and of
> being women. Black and women are thus conceived as plural,
> multiplicitous, without fragmentation. (Lugones 2003, 140)

The logic of purity forces people to fragment themselves into distinct categories whereas

the logic of curdling thrives on ambiguity.

We can now see the deep problems with Meyers's commitment to a theory of

autonomy. Her conception of a transcendent, unified self is not only unrealistic, but is

itself a form of domination. The conception of a transcendent, unified self stems from the

logic of purity. To increase autonomy, an individual must rid herself of contradictions in

favor of unity, whereas Lugones argues that the process of unification *causes*

fragmentation and split separation.

> The urge to control the multiplicity of people and things attains
> satisfaction through exercises in split separation. The urge to control
> multiplicity is expressed in modern political theory and ethics in an
> understanding of reason as reducing multiplicity to unity through
> abstraction and categorization, from a particular vantage point. I consider
> this reduction expressive of the urge to control because of the logical fit
> between it and the creation of the fragmented individual. (Lugones 2003,
> 127-128)

People are multiplicitous, ambiguous, and filled with contradictions. To try and rid people of these aspects of personhood is to ask people to separate from the "anomalous parts" of themselves—an act of split separation. Only the logic of purity asks people to separate from "parts" of themselves in favor of unity because only the logic of purity can see these ambiguities as "parts."

In her discussion of intersectional identity, Meyers argues that the authentic self necessary for autonomy requires a type of integration. She admits that an individual will never be fully integrated and that "hyperintegration impedes self-direction" (Meyers 2004, 48n56). She also admits that "there is nothing troubling about an authentic self that harbors ambivalence about some matters and unresolved tensions between some identity constituents" (Meyers 2004, 41). She goes on to argue that these internal tensions can be useful for self-definition and authenticity (for example, earlier she discussed how internal tension between identity constituents can lead to *individual* reflection). However, Meyers still argues that a type of integration is necessary and is what the autonomous individual will be moving toward. As Meyers explains, "the concept of integration functions as a beacon for self-definition" (Meyers 2004, 48n56), and autonomous individuals experience a "sense of wholeness" (Meyers 2004, 41). Also, in her earlier description, the authentic self as an orchestra performance has "a discernible logic—an integrated dynamic" (Meyers 2004, 39). In contrast, Lugones argues that to restrict an individual to *a* discernible logic is an act of domination meant to control multiplicity. The only way for a person to be integrated is through a process of split-separation or by fragmenting herself into "pure" parts and ignoring some.

Again, I consider the example of Jennifer—a loving mother and ruthless lawyer. Meyers argues that Jennifer is fragmented (and thus less autonomous) because she does not have consistent reasons for actions. Either caring about the feelings of others is an attribute of her authentic self or it is not. If it is, then when Jennifer ignores this attribute at work, she is not expressing her authentic self. However, we could ask why Jennifer must choose. Is it really so hard to imagine that Jennifer enjoys *both* the nurturing warmth of her family and the competitive aggressiveness of her work? Couldn't these *both* be "authentic" attributes of herself? Why must she reject one for the sake of integration and unity? In this way, the need for integration and unity is an example of the logic of purity or domination. It asks a person to ignore (and reject) her multiplicity.

The logic of purity is also tied to a need for control.[92] In the previous chapter, I argued that self-government (autonomy) is a type of self-control or power over the self. This control over the self consists in creating an authentic self and making decisions that are in harmony with that authentic self. The process of reflection and identification that creates an authentic self is a type of boundary setting. These attributes or preferences will count as authentic and these others will not. As we can see, the self-government (self-control) necessary for autonomy follows the logic of purity and this is a logic of domination. We "control" our multiplicity through split-separation. Perceived unity and integration can only be accomplished by denying multiplicity. As Lugones explains, the

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[92]In addition to the self-control necessary for autonomy, the logic of purity and domination is tied to control over one social group, by another. One way powerful social groups control or oppress other social groups is through defining categories and setting boundaries to decide what is in or out of a given category.

fundamental assumption of the logic of purity is that there is a unity underlying

multiplicity (Lugones 2003, 126). As Meyers understands it, the authentic self may never

be fully integrated, but it creates a discernable logic and strives for integration.

We can also see the connection between a need for integration and fragmentation

if we compare Lugones's account of the logic of purity to the language Meyers uses:

"maximum transparency of group-identity determinants"

"make as complete an inventory as they can of what they have
internalized"

"reshaping of one's desires, personal traits, values, interests, and goals"

"draw attributes into the orbit of the authentic self"

authentic self as "collocation of attributes"[93]

In each of these quotations, it sounds as if a person can separate out parts of herself

(accepting some and jettisoning others) and then arrange them appropriately to construct

an authentic (integrated and unified) self. This is exactly the kind of split separation or

fragmentation that Lugones is worried about. "My aim is to distinguish between

multiplicity (mestizaje) and fragmentation and to explain connections that I see between

the terms of this distinction and the logics of curdling (impurity) and of splitting (purity).

Fragmentation follows the logic of purity. Multiplicity follows the logic of curdling"

(Lugones 2003, 126). Thus, the conception of self assumed by autonomy theorists (as

well as the requirements for autonomy related to that conception) is itself a form of

domination because it relies on the logic of purity.

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[93]Each of these excerpts are taken from quotations of Meyers used earlier in this
chapter.

Admittedly, in their discussions of fragmentation or the fragmented self, both Meyers and Lugones are trying to articulate how limiting expression of individual particularity can be a harm. Meyers correctly points out that sometimes people are not allowed to express aspects of themselves and this can be a harm that fragments the self. A similar example would be Lugones's discussion of how people are often required to separate their "Mexican cultural self" from their "American cultural self" and only express certain "parts" at certain times. In this way, both theorists are trying to articulate a harm of oppression. However, Lugones argues (correctly I believe) that a commitment to eliminating contradiction and working toward unity/integration is a commitment to the logic of purity. It is the logic of purity that creates fragmentation; therefore, we cannot use it to eliminate fragmentation. Contradiction may be the result of oppression, but it may also be the result of multiplicity. From our current vantage point, it is difficult to visualize what a nonoppressive world would look like. Regardless, the move toward transcendence and unity will not get us there.

Autonomy, Authenticity, and the Enlightenment Subject

Meyers compares her conception of the authentic self to an orchestra to argue that her authentic self is an integrated dynamic. By emphasizing the "dynamic" part, Meyers believes that she has overcome the problems with the conception of self assumed in earlier theories of autonomy. In chapter three, I explain how Meyers believes her "epistemological" theory of autonomy is an improvement over "ontological" theories of autonomy because it allows for self-definition and change over time. In her discussion of

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intersectional identity, Meyers also acknowledges that the individual will never have a settled or finished self (a person will continue to grow and change throughout her life) and the individual will never be fully integrated (a person will remain ambivalent and conflicted about some aspects of herself). In this way, she believes her integrated *dynamic* is an improvement over earlier conceptions of the authentic self.[94] Meyers also denies that her theory relies on "the unitary Enlightenment subject" assumed by free will theorists (Meyers 1992, 124-125). However, my analysis of her theory in the last chapter and this chapter shows that Meyers's theory of autonomy continues (in many ways) assume a unitary Enlightenment subject.

In this chapter, I have shown how Meyers assumes an unrealistic transparency of self and an ideal of unity in her theory of autonomy. I have argued that this leads her to various problems. One, she cannot adequately explain the kind of change necessary to see and resist internalized oppression. Two, she stays within the logic of purity which is a logic of domination. In the previous chapter, I showed how Meyers's theory emphasizes a need for self-control or self-regulation, a unified "whole life" narrative, and conscious, rational reflection. I argued that requiring a self that relies on these characteristics is problematic because it encourages a "lawgiver" mentality or a mentality of domination. Self-government only makes sense within the logic of purity—a logic of domination.

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[94]In the chapter on intersectional identity, Meyers compares her understanding of integration and authenticity to Harry Frankfurt's. The problem she sees with Frankfurt's conception is that (according to her) it requires the individual to develop one, settled integration of desires. In other words, he does not allow for change over time or the "dynamic" nature of self.

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My analysis in the preceding chapter and this chapter shows that Meyers is led to these problematic assumptions because she is committed to a theory of autonomy. Autonomy theorists believe what makes a decision autonomous is how it is made; therefore, a key component of any theory of autonomy is the procedure for autonomous decision making. However, it is the procedure for autonomous decision making (what is required to make some decisions "our own") that leads autonomy theorists to remain committed to these problematic aspects of the Enlightenment subject—an emphasis on self-control, unity, transparency, and rationality.

Chapter Six
The Value of Autonomy Theory

> *To the extent that individuality is assumed to consist in living one's life "from the inside" with true beliefs, any attempt to bring about the changes to norms and values required for the pursuit of real autonomy by most social members is already regarded as a threat to autonomy. The practical danger of the kind of view of individual rationality and interests I have been discussing and criticizing is that the right sorts of questions regarding autonomy—questions about moral vision, its discovery and development—cannot even be raised.*

> Susan Babbitt

In the previous two chapters, I have looked at whether Diana Meyers's conception of autonomy avoids specific feminist criticisms of earlier conceptions. In this chapter, I look at the value of autonomy theory, in general. In other words, how is autonomy theory useful to feminist theorists? I consider the value of autonomy in three parts. First, I revisit Stoljar's challenge to autonomy theorists. Can a theory of autonomy address Stoljar's concerns? Second, I consider what value feminist theorists see in a philosophical conception of autonomy. Why are so many feminists committed to defending some conception of autonomy? Third, I look at the "skills" associated with developing autonomy. I agree with autonomy theorists that many of these skills can be useful for oppressed groups, but the value does not lie in their relation to autonomy. More importantly, we can explain the value of these skills without relying on a theory of autonomy.

In reviewing the value of autonomy theory for feminists, I also return to the distinctions I introduced in chapter two. There I argued that procedural theories of

autonomy most accurately represent a philosophical conception of autonomy. In contrast, I argued that nonsubjective theories should not be called theories of autonomy at all—I define them out of the category of autonomy theories. Here, I elaborate on the difference I see between these two approaches and why I believe nonsubjective theories are not really theories of "autonomy."

One way to understand the difference between autonomy theories and nonsubjective theories is to ask what role social relationships play in each type of theory. In other words, we could ask how "individual" is the individual? As I argued before, autonomy theorists acknowledge the role of social relationships in developing autonomy skills, but remain committed to the subjective (individual) perspective. As we have seen, the procedure for autonomous decision making requires a certain separation or distance between the individual and her beliefs, values, and goals (or the material she is reflecting on). In other words, for autonomy to be *self*-government, there must be some way to distinguish "one's own" personal preferences from social influences. Social relationships influence the development of autonomy skills and give the individual a background from which to create her own authentic self, but the "work" of autonomy is "internal" to the individual herself—the procedure for autonomous decision making. To this extent, autonomy theories remain "individualistic."

In contrast, nonsubjective theorists emphasize the interactive nature of agency or the individual's connection to her social context. Benson's theory of normative competence, Babbitt's discussion of transformative experiences, and Lugones's explanation of multiple "worlds," all illustrate how a person's understanding of herself

and her preferences is *inextricably* bound up with her social relationships. This understanding does not erase agency, but it does make "self-government" impossible. For example, Lugones argues that we cannot understand individual intentions or what is possible for an individual without considering the "world" the individual is in. Some practical syllogisms or actions will be unthinkable in some "worlds." Thus, we cannot understand individual intentions or agency without considering the relational context in which those intentions and acts of agency take place.

In sum, I am arguing that autonomy theorists and nonsubjective theorists have a fundamental difference in how they understand the individual and the individual's relationship to society. For this reason, I argue that to develop a theory of autonomy that adequately addresses the concerns of feminist theorists (especially more radical critiques of oppression and power) would no longer be a theory of autonomy (self-government). I believe this is why many feminists wish to discard the concept of autonomy.

In each of the following three sections, I review the value of autonomy theory for feminist theorists. In each section we see that what undermines the value of autonomy theory for feminist theorists is that autonomy theorists remain committed to the individual, subjective perspective or otherwise try to disentangle the individual from her social environment. To adequately address feminist concerns about oppression and power and to understand the nature of agency in these situations, we must conceive of the individual as inextricably connected to her social environment. In this way, we must always remember the interactive nature of agency.

Stoljar's Challenge Revisited

Stoljar argues that any theory of autonomy, to be acceptable to feminists, must be able to explain why "preferences influenced by oppressive norms of femininity cannot be autonomous" (Stoljar 2000, 95). While feminists argue that it is important to respect women's right to make decisions for themselves, most feminist theorists would find it odd to call choices that are the result of internalized oppression "autonomous." Thus, preferences influenced by oppressive socialization raise "the feminist intuition."

Stoljar argues (and I agree) that we cannot "filter out" preferences "influenced by pernicious aspects of the oppressive context" using the procedure for autonomous decision making. First, to identify oppressive norms or internalized oppression, we must go "beyond" the procedure for autonomous decision making and add nonsubjective criteria to the theory. Second, oppressive and nonoppressive norms can disrupt the procedure for autonomous decision making *in the same way*. In other words, oppressive and nonoppressive norms are internalized in the same way and can function the same way in the individual's reflection and deliberation. Again, we can only understand the difference between preferences that are the result of oppressive or non-oppressive socialization by looking at how these norms position the individual in society. In other words, to explain the feminist intuition, we cannot separate the individual from her social world.

Autonomy theorists are committed to content neutrality or the idea that (theoretically) any preference can be autonomous. What matters is the procedure used to make a decision (reflective endorsement), not the actual decision made. Yet, to rule out

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preferences influenced by oppressive socialization we need some definition of oppression or oppressive socialization. Once we give a definition of oppression, we go "beyond" the procedure for autonomous decision making and include nonsubjective criteria for deciding what counts as autonomous. In other words, we violate content neutrality by making value judgments about certain social relations (and, thereby, indirectly making value judgments about specific preferences).

For example, Meyers argues that autonomy is compatible with socialization. What we should worry about is not socialization *per se*, but harmful forms of socialization. Using Bartky, Meyers argues that "to internalize material is to incorporate it into the structure of the self, that is, into the modes of perception and self-perception that enable one to distinguish oneself from other selves and from other things" (Meyers 2002, 7). Internalization is a normal part of socialization and does not automatically threaten autonomy. However, Meyers distinguishes between benign and oppressive internalization.

> Internalization is inevitable and can be innocuous. But to internalize oppression is to incorporate *inferiorizing material* into the structure of the self—to see oneself as objectified, *to value and desire what befits a subordinated individual*, and to feel competent and empowered by *skills that reinforce one's subordination*. (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 8)

Meyers recognizes that she cannot analyze internalized oppression without differentiating between benign and oppressive internalized norms. However, to define internalized oppression she must incorporate nonsubjective criteria into her analysis. As she explains, one of the harms of internalized oppression is that it makes a woman "desire what befits a subordinated individual" and "feel . . . empowered by skills that reinforce one's

subordination." Yet, in giving these definitions, Meyers moves "outside" the procedure for autonomous decision making or the subjective perspective. Indeed, to define internalized oppression as valuing or desiring "what befits a subordinated individual" appears to violate content neutrality. After all, isn't she ruling out these desires as autonomous?

Meyers not only incorporates nonsubjective criteria into her theory by giving a definition of internalized oppression, but her definition also illustrates the interactive nature of agency. To be subordinated implies a relationship—subordinated to something else. In this way, we cannot explain oppression without explaining relationships between people. Therefore, we also cannot identify preferences "influenced by pernicious aspects of the *oppressive* context" without explaining relationships between people.

In chapter two, I emphasized the first part of my argument—to deal with the feminist intuition, autonomy theorists need a definition of oppression, and this definition will be nonsubjective. In this section, I elaborate on the argument that we need nonsubjective criteria to rule out as autonomous preferences influenced by oppressive socialization by showing why the procedure for autonomous decision making cannot "filter out" these preferences. I continue to use Diana Meyers's theory as my representative example here for two reasons. First, Meyers has devoted the most sustained attention to the question of internalized oppression (See Meyers 2002). Second, as I argued earlier, Meyers has the most nuanced theory of autonomy and most directly engages the feminist literature. In other words, if Meyers's attempt to create a theory of autonomy that can adequately address the problem of internalized oppression fails, then I

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have little hope that any other feminist theory of autonomy will succeed. In the rest of this section, I argue that (nonoppressive) masculine gender norms skew the procedure for autonomous decision making *in the same way* as (oppressive) feminine gender norms. If I am correct, then autonomy theorists cannot adequately rule out preferences that are the result of oppressive socialization (which decreases the value of a philosophical conception of autonomy for feminist theory).

Instead of admitting that we need nonsubjective criteria to rule out preferences influenced by oppressive socialization, autonomy theorists try to show how oppressive socialization skews the procedure for autonomous decision making thus compromising or undermining autonomy. For example, Meyers argues that feminine narcissism shapes perception and imagination in a way that obscures self-knowledge and inhibits self-definition and that the way feminine narcissism thwarts development of an authentic self with a personalized life plan causes women to be unhappy with themselves (Meyers 2002, chapter five).[95] Yet, masculine gender norms influence men's self-concepts and decision making *in the same ways*. Thus, using the procedure for autonomous decision making, Meyers cannot explain why feminine narcissism undermines autonomy *as a form of internalized oppression*. There is not a purely procedural difference between the way oppressive and nonoppressive norms are internalized and function in the individual's

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[95]To be fair, Meyers discusses a lot of things in her chapter on feminine narcissism. For clarity, I have distilled her argument down to the parts that relate to the procedure for autonomous decision making. As I argue later, Meyers's theory ends up being a bit paradoxical. Since she is in conversation with other feminists, she often discuses nonsubjective aspects of internalized oppression. However, she still continues to relate her analysis back to her theory of autonomy.

reflection and deliberation.

We could make an analogy here between the procedure for autonomous decision making and cooking chicken and dumplings. Autonomy theorists admit that individuals are embedded in a social context and, as a result, will internalized a variety of social norms. Similarly, I begin the process of cooking chicken and dumplings by combining a variety of ingredients together—vegetables, chicken, broth, and spices. After combining the ingredients, I let them simmer so that the various flavors mingle and infuse each other. Allowing my dish to simmer is similar to the process of reflection used by autonomy theorists. The individual considers various desires, beliefs, and values, but only from within her social context. Her social context and personal history (the ingredients put into the mix) will influence the process of reflection. Also her various desires, beliefs, and values will influence each other (in the way various ingredients infuse each other with their distinct flavors). After simmering for awhile, I must strain out bones and other unwanted "bits." In this way, I keep what I want in the dish, but get rid of what I do not want. Similarly, the procedure for autonomous decision making uses reflection and identification to create an authentic self. In this way, the individual "strains out" unwanted desires, beliefs, and values while solidifying her commitment to the ones that are left.

Returning to the problem of oppressive versus nonoppressive norms, my argument is that they function the same way in the procedure for autonomous decision making. The process of reflection and identification proceeds the same way for every internalized norm just like the process of making chicken and dumplings will proceed in the same way

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(combining ingredients, simmering, and straining the final product) no matter what ingredients are put in. However, I can make the dish inedible by adding poison—for example, arsenic. The arsenic does not disrupt the *process* of making chicken and dumplings, but it makes the final dish inedible. In addition, to understand why I should not add this ingredient to my dish, I have to understand the relationship between certain substances and human metabolism, not the mechanics of simmering and straining broths. I need to know something "outside" of the recipe or my understanding of how to prepare this dish. Similarly, we cannot strain or filter out oppressive norms using the procedure for autonomous decision making. To understand what feminists find problematic about oppressive norms (or why they should not be considered "autonomous"), we have to understand their relationship to other norms and how they position the individual in her social context. In other words, we need nonsubjective criteria.

To show how oppressive and nonoppressive norms function the same way in the procedure for autonomous decision making, I compare the oppressive feminine norms identified by Meyers to nonoppressive masculine norms. Cultural imagery that binds 'man' to 'breadwinner' is similar to cultural imagery that binds 'woman' to 'mother.' Also, cultural imagery and norms that tie career ideals to masculine narcissism are just as pervasive and monolithic as ones that tie beauty ideals to feminine narcissism. Using this comparison, I explore whether cultural norms that tie a man's self-concept to being a "breadwinner" and have "career" undermine men's autonomy in the same way that feminine narcissism undermines women's autonomy. As the following discussion will show, based on the procedure for autonomous decision making, these feminine and

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masculine norms undermine women and men's autonomy *in the same way*. Yet, most feminists would argue that feminine norms are oppressive whereas masculine norms are not.[96]

Does cultural imagery that ties men's self-concept to the need to have a successful career and support his family shape men's perception and imagination? I believe it does. A man's identity is intertwined with his career in the same way that a woman's identity is intertwined with her physical appearance. He (and others) will constantly assess how well he lives up to the norm of having a "successful" career, and the requirements of a successful career are as monolithic as ideals of feminine beauty. The more money a man makes and the more power he has, then the more successful his career is.[97]

This cultural norm is also "impossible to resist." It is very difficult for men to consider a self-concept that does not include a desire to have a career. How many men would entertain the idea of being a stay at home father? And, for the rare few that do, how many could "emotionally invest" in this alternative? I believe most men find it as difficult to extricate career ideals from their self-concept as women find it to extricate beauty ideals from theirs.

The inability to extricate these norms from their self-concepts causes men who fail to realize masculine norms to be just as unhappy as women who fail to live up to

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[96]Feminist may (and often do) argue that there are other problems with masculine norms, but they are not considered an example of oppression.

[97]I recognize that these ideals will vary within classes and communities. However, Meyers focuses on the hegemonic cultural ideals so I focus on this imagery as well.

feminine norms. Meyers believes that autonomous people cannot be dissatisfied with

who they are. They can be unhappy with their situation, but not themselves.

> An integrated personality *is not self-condemnatory*; that is, such persons do not *detect traits in themselves which they abhor but which they cannot expunge*, and they are not dejected by the ways in which their traits are expressed in action. (Emphasis added. Meyers 1989, 72)

> People can be unhappy with themselves, or they can be unhappy with their position in the world (or both). *Unhappiness with one's self is incompatible with autonomy.* For such unhappiness stems either from one's failure to become the sort of person one wants to be (failure with respect to self-definition) or from one's failure to act in accordance with one's authentic self (failure with respect to self-direction). But since *autonomous people do not suffer from chronic regret*, this type of unhappiness is ruled out. (Emphasis added. Meyers 1989, 74)

Meyers explains that one of the main problems with feminine narcissism is the way it

leads to just this sort of unhappiness with oneself.

> [A]s Bartky observes, "guilt, shame, and obsessional states of consciousness" are the price many women pay for trying to satisfy their narcissistic needs. Since they can never succeed in satisfying them in the present social and economic context, they will always have *reason to chide themselves for not doing enough*, and they will be moved to multiply their self-beautification efforts. (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 122)

> [N]arrow and exclusionary beauty ideals [defeat] authentic narcissistic agency, for when these ideals govern narcissistic agency, it is driven by fear of ostracism and loneliness or by *hatred of one's own distinctive physical qualities* instead of by self-love and a desire to care for oneself. Fueled by such anxieties, narcissistic concerns easily degenerate into obsessions—devouring, taunting desires that war with self-determination. (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 144-145)

According to Meyers, an autonomous person is able to adjust her preferences to coincide

with her realistic (and authentic) abilities and values. Feminine narcissism, as a form of

internalized oppression, interferes with this process.

Yet, men who fail to live up to masculine gender norms are also unhappy with themselves, not the situation. In *Stiffed*, Susan Faludi documents these (and other) masculine anxieties. Consider the following two examples. Don Motta had a longstanding, successful career with McDonnell Douglas until he was laid off. After his lay off, his self-esteem plummeted.

> There is no way you can feel like a man. You can't. It's the fact that I'm not capable of supporting my family. . . . When you've been very successful in buying a house, a car, and could pay for your daughter to go to college, though she didn't want to, you have a sense of success and people see it. I haven't been able to support my daughter. I haven't been able to support my wife. I'll be very frank with you . . . I. Feel. I've. Been. Castrated. (Faludi 1999, 65)

Faludi's analysis of the Promise Keepers organization also shows how breadwinner and career are bound to manhood. Many of the men who join Promise Keepers have lost their jobs and fear losing their families as well. One participant graphically expresses these anxieties.

> It's okay when you have a job, but when I don't have a job, boy, I just panic like crazy. I can't get myself to go look, I can't stand up, I can't sit down. . . . Just the *thought* of not having a job. (Emphasis in original. Faludi 1999, 238-239)

As we can see, narrow interpretations of masculine narcissism undermine men's autonomy *in they same* way narrow interpretations of feminine narcissism undermine women's autonomy.

If cultural imagery and norms influence men's self-concepts and decisions in the same way as women's, then we cannot filter out preferences influenced by oppressive socialization using a procedure for autonomous decision making. We have to include

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some analysis of subordination or oppression and this analysis will use nonsubjective criteria. For example, Meyers defines internalized oppression as "incorporating inferiorizing material into the self" and "desiring what befits a subordinated individual" (Meyers 2002, 8). She further defines internalized patriarchal oppression as "the selection of culturally certified concepts and interpretive schemas together with the repertoires of culturally favored and disfavored agentic skills that recruit women into self-subordination" (Meyers 2002, 24). Based on these definitions, the difference between benign and oppressive internalization is *not* how the internalized material influences the decision making process, but what *counts as* "inferiorizing material" or "self-subordination," and we cannot explain this without considering the relationship between the individual and her social context.

Part of my argument here is that autonomy theorists' commitment to content neutrality and the subjective perspective makes it impossible for them to explain what is "pernicious" about internalized oppression. To a certain degree, theorists like Meyers recognize that the problem is subordination based on identification with a group. Yet, Meyers tries to explain the harm of "desiring what befits a subordinated individual" by showing how it undermines autonomy (as she understands it). But—as we can see—the harm of feminine narcissism (as a form of internalized oppression) is not captured by showing how it undermines the procedure for autonomous decision making. Many types of socialization can undermine the procedure for autonomous decision making. What makes feminine narcissism "pernicious" is the way it recruits women into perpetuating their own oppression. Returning to the idea of the feminist intuition, we cannot

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distinguish oppressive norms of femininity from (nonoppressive) norms of masculinity using the procedure for autonomous decision making.

Internalized oppression may skew personal preferences in a way that undermines autonomy, but so may other internalized norms. What makes internalization *oppressive* is how these internalized norms function in society.

> Just as the cultivation of character and capabilities is an approved form of masculine self-definition, so self-beautification is an approved form of feminine self-definition. But whereas men augment their self-determination in this way, it is far from clear that what I shall term women's psychic/*psyché* economy is compatible with women's self-determination. Indeed, I shall argue that, although it makes women more alluring commodities on the principal erotic attraction exchange—the heterosexual market—it confounds authentic agency. (Emphasis in original. Meyers 2002, 115)

Although Meyers is still trying to connect her analysis of feminine narcissism to her theory of autonomy (by arguing that feminine narcissism is harmful because it inhibits self-determination), in this quote she accurately identifies the harm of feminine narcissism or internalized oppression and it is not directly related to autonomy or "authentic agency." What is pernicious about feminine narcissism is the way responding to the demand that women make themselves attractive to heterosexual men positions women in social relations. Thus, women internalize self-subordination in at least two related ways. First, being physically attractive to heterosexual men becomes a central goal regardless of any other goals or projects women wish to pursue. Second, if feminine narcissism requires women to be physically attractive to heterosexual men, then men will be the judges of how well women accomplish this goal (which enhances men's power to dominate women).

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In this way, gender socialization orients men to social roles as dominators (for example, women must be physically pleasing to men and men are the judge of whether women are pleasing to them) and women to social roles as subordinates (for example, women must make themselves physically pleasing to men and, in doing so, submit themselves to men's judgement). Thus, whether an *individual* woman's decision to invest narcissistic energy into her physical appearance reflects her "authentic" desires is the wrong question to ask. If we want to understand the harms of feminine narcissism *as a form of internalized oppression*, we must analyze how norms of feminine narcissism function in a particular cultural context—not the individual options available to a particular woman. More importantly we must move "beyond" the subjective perspective of reflection and identification to make judgments about social relations.

This analysis illustrates one way that autonomy is of limited use for feminist theorists. Gender socialization can lead both women and men to make nonautonomous decisions or to have "inauthentic" desires. However, if we look at the different norms internalized by women and men, we see that feminine gender socialization recruits women into subordination while masculine gender socialization trains men to be dominators. Thus, the difference between innocuous and oppressive internalization has to do with how internalized norms perpetuate social roles that reinforce domination and subordination, not whether internalized norms are autonomous.

I have argued that autonomy theorists cannot effectively rule out as autonomous preferences influenced by oppressive socialization because oppressive and nonoppressive norms function the same way in the procedure for autonomous decision making. In other

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words, the procedure for autonomous decision making does not allow us to identify the oppressive norms of femininity or explain why they are harmful in a way that the nonoppressive norms of masculinity are not. As Friedman points out, "A content neutral conception of autonomy is not useful for [cultural critique that calls for reconstructing our gendered selves] and *might tend to distract us from it*" (Emphasis added. Friedman 2003, 93). In other words, there are now two problems with autonomy theory. First, if it remains content-neutral or committed to the subjective perspective, then it will potentially categorize preferences decisively influenced by oppressive norms as autonomous. Many feminist theorists will have a problem with this outcome, and, therefore, will have a problem with autonomy theory. Second, autonomy theory can potentially distract us from a cultural critique of gender norms. Although Friedman does not fully articulate what she means by this comment, I believe my earlier discussion implicitly shows why using a content-neutral conception of autonomy might distract us from a cultural critique of gender norms.[98]

Procedural autonomy theory defines autonomy as a process of reflection and identification. If what makes a decision autonomous is the procedure for autonomous decision making, then what autonomy theorists need to do is articulate how the procedure for autonomous decision making proceeds. As we have seen in Meyers's analysis of feminine narcissism, procedural autonomy theorists try to show how internalized

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[98]Friedman makes this comment while defending autonomy theory against critics who argue that it promotes substantive independence and other masculine norms. She argues that a content-neutral autonomy theory does not promote *any* specific norms. However, she also admits that many feminist critics are questioning the content neutrality of autonomy theory because it does not allow for critiques of gender norms.

oppression undermines autonomy by showing how internalized oppression thwarts the procedure for autonomous decision making. In other words, procedural autonomy theorists remain focused on internal psychological and cognitive processes of critical or self-reflection. In this way, they are distracted from a more adequate analysis of group dynamics or the structural aspects of oppression. They only consider these structural issues in relation to the process of reflection and identification. Meyers's reliance on the procedure for autonomous decision making leads to a confusion in her theory. On the one hand, she uses nonsubjective criteria to identify internalized oppression. On the other hand, she tries to explain why her theory is still content-neutral by showing how this internalization skews the process of reflection and identification. For Friedman (and many nonfeminist autonomy theorists) relying on the procedure for autonomous decision making leads her to avoid a full analysis of how cultural norms influence preference formation and how preferences play into an individual's positioning in the social order. Concerned that an analysis of structural issues will undermine their commitment to content neutrality by incorporating nonsubjective criteria, autonomy theorists avoid fully analyzing what makes some social relations oppressive and some not (see Friedman's analysis of romantic love in chapter two). In contrast, I believe analysis of social relations is more useful for feminist theory than analysis of how "autonomous" (or "authentic") any *particular* preference or decision is.

Autonomy as a Right Versus Personal Autonomy Theory

In "The Kantian Conception of Autonomy," Thomas Hill distinguishes between

what he calls "autonomy as a right" and a "psychological conception of autonomy." A psychological conception of autonomy means that a person "has a kind of independence of judgment which young children and unthinking conformists lack" (Hill 1989, 92). I have argued that this conception of autonomy is the one articulated by personal (procedural) autonomy theorists. Hill distinguishes this conception of autonomy ("as an empirical trait") from what he calls autonomy as a right: "To be an autonomous person, on this view, is to have a moral right to make certain decisions for oneself, to control certain aspects of one's life without interference. The working analogy here, apparently, is with autonomous states, which are such not because they are governed in a particularly effective or high-minded way but because they have a right that other nations not interfere in their internal affairs" (Hill 1989, 93). In their rush to defend a philosophical conception of autonomy, I believe many feminist theorists have conflated these two senses of autonomy. Consider the following examples.

In "Whether to Ignore Them and Spin," Carol Hay says the following in defense of a philosophical conception of autonomy.

> I think it's hard to see autonomy's core ideal of self-government as
> anything other than a laudable moral aim for women, particularly given
> that one of the greatest harms of sexist oppression is its restriction of the
> quality and quantity of choices that are open to women. We can recognize
> many of the points made by those who are critical of the liberal tradition . .
> . without giving up on the liberal idea that it's important that, ultimately,
> people be free to make their own choices and promote their self-interest.
> (Hay 2005, 98)

Hay points out that one harm of oppression is that women are not permitted to make decisions for themselves and the options available to women are severely limited. In

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response, she (correctly) argues that women should be "free to make their own choices and promote their self-interest." However, to argue that women should be allowed "to make their own choices" is to argue for autonomy as a right. In contrast, we have seen that the "core ideal of self-government" is tied to a philosophical conception of personal autonomy or autonomy as an empirical trait.

In "Reconceiving Autonomy," Jennifer Nedelsky makes a similar connection between the value of autonomy, freedom, and the type of self-control I associated with the career self.

> For all of us raised in liberal societies, our deep attachment to freedom takes its meaning and value from the *presupposition of our self-determining, self-making nature: that is what freedom is for*, the exercise of that capacity. No one among the feminists or communitarians is prepared to abandon freedom as a value, nor, therefore, can any of us completely abandon the notion of a human capacity for making one's own life and self. (Emphasis added. Nedelsky 1989, 8)

Arguing for "freedom as a value" is to argue for autonomy as a right. As Nedelsky points out our commitment to freedom as a value rests on our conception of human nature, and, historically, this conception has been tied to "our self-determining, self-making nature." However, we could make an argument in favor of autonomy as a right (showing how other political arrangements are more harmful or detrimental in some way) without being committed to "the notion of a human capacity for making one's own life and self."

Even though her analysis also ties autonomy as a right to a theory of personal autonomy, Marilyn Friedman indirectly acknowledges that these two do not have to be connected. To understand the value of personal autonomy, Friedman shows its connection to moral autonomy. As Friedman correctly notes, we can defend a right to

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moral autonomy without committing ourselves to any specific theory of morality.

> Challenging [the presumption that women lack moral competence]
> requires, in turn, defending the contradictory presumption that women *are*
> competent moral agents, or, at least, defending the notion that women
> should no more have to prove their moral competence than do men, that
> women should be *presumed* to be at least as capable as men of grasping
> what morality requires and of being motivated to act accordingly. Putting
> the case this way allows us to remain (for the time) agnostic about just
> what morality requires and what the source of moral motivation is.
> (Emphasis in original. Friedman 2003, 65)

In other words, arguing that women are as morally autonomous as men does not require a

commitment to any particular theory of moral autonomy. I am making a similar point

about personal autonomy. Arguing that women should have autonomy as a right (by

which I mean being allowed to fully participate in political and social systems and being

allowed to make certain decisions about their own lives) does not require that I commit

myself to a specific theory of personal autonomy. I can remain "agnostic" about what

personal autonomy actually requires.

Yet, Friedman continues to explicitly connect autonomy as a right to a theory of

personal autonomy.

> My argument, to repeat, is this: Personal autonomy seems to be a
> necessary condition for moral autonomy; moral autonomy is a necessary
> condition for full moral competence; moral competence is a necessary
> condition for being entitled to live free of domination by others; therefore,
> personal autonomy seems to be a necessary condition for being entitled to
> live free of domination by others. (Friedman 2003, 68)

According to this line of reasoning, if we cannot articulate some theory of personal

autonomy, then we cannot justify why people have a right "to live free of domination by

others." In contrast, we could argue that justice requires that people not be "dominated

by others" based on group affiliation. In other words, women (and other subordinated groups) should be permitted the same control over their lives as affluent white men. As Friedman acknowledges, everyone lives under circumstances that are limited in one way or another (Friedman 2003, 25). To argue for autonomy as a right is to argue that similar groups should face similar limits. Autonomy as a right could also mean that women (and other subordinated groups) should be allowed to participate equally in the *institution* of limits (such as laws and customs).

Arguing that justice demands all groups subject to laws and customs be allowed to participate equally in creating laws and customs raises questions about political autonomy. How do we justify this claim? And what does it mean to participate equally? How we answer these questions will depend—in part—on our understanding of human nature and the conception of self it implies. In the rest of this section, I argue that feminist who defend a philosophical conception of autonomy are committed to liberal political theory, and this commitment (partially) explains why they tie autonomy as a right to personal autonomy theory. In contrast, many of the nonsubjective theorists are critical of liberal political theory and the conception of self and social relations it assumes.

Using the work of Jerome Schneewind, Friedman reminds us that Kant developed his conception of autonomy (in part) to defend a view of morality as self-governance as opposed to morality as obedience. As Friedman correctly notes Kant's theory was part of a movement to make political structures more egalitarian and democratic (Friedman 2003, 63-64). In this way, the history of autonomy is tied to liberal political theory. Like

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Kant, Friedman believes she must articulate some theory of personal autonomy to defend liberal political theory (or democratic political structures). John Christman also highlights the connection between a specific theory of personal autonomy and a liberal political theory.

> In a wide array of liberal theories, it is assumed that the person so conceived be able to reflect rationally on her desires, character, values, and commitments, and revise them in light of such reflection. That is, the paradigmatic "self" of liberal theory is an autonomous agent. This has placed the concept of autonomy, then, at the center of these controversies, since for a variety of liberal views, the fundamental value to be assumed and protected in a just society is the autonomy of the person, in particular this capacity to rationally reflect and revise aspects of the self that form one's identity and commitments. (Christman 2001, 185)

According to Christman, liberal theory assumes an autonomous agent or a person who can reflect on and revise her preferences. Furthermore, liberal political theory assumes that the "fundamental value" protected by a just society is the ability to be autonomous (personal autonomy or autonomy as an empirical trait).[99] In this way, there is a direct relationship between what counts as justice in a political theory and the conception of self assumed by that theory (and vice versa). Thus, how we understand "autonomy" will influence how we understand justice (and vice versa).

As the epigraph by Susan Babbitt points out, tying a theory of personal autonomy (self-government) to a theory of justice (or, as Friedman puts it, why people deserve to live free of domination) makes it impossible to articulate what is necessary for some people to have adequate agency. The view of personal autonomy we have been

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[99]As our earlier discussion illustrated, autonomy theorists also tie our worth as persons to our ability to make choices about our lives or autonomy as an empirical trait (see the end of chapter four).

discussing is directly tied to a view of state neutrality (and this connection is why

procedural autonomy theorists are so committed to "content neutrality" in their

theories).[100] This view of personal autonomy and liberal political theory ignores the fact

that the state cannot be neutral about the participation of various groups in the

construction of laws and norms. If justice demands that similar groups participate equally

in constructing the laws and customs (the potential limits on choice and action), then the

state must secure the equal participation of these groups. Acknowledging the need for

equal participation leads to a conclusion that is very threatening to the fundamental value

of liberal theory (noninterference): To make it possible for some people to have effective

agency, we may need to restrict the agency of others.[101] I believe part of the argument

between feminists over a philosophical conception of autonomy is also an argument over

liberal feminism versus other types of feminism.[102] As we have seen here, feminists who

defend a philosophical conception of autonomy often confuse their defense of autonomy

as a right with a defense of personal autonomy theory. They do this (in part) because they

are also committed to liberal political theory. Just as liberal political theorists are

threatened by communitarian critiques of agency and selfhood, autonomy theorists reject

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[100]Babbitt also points out that the state is not neutral and any theory that argues for
it to "remain" neutral ignores this point (Babbitt 1996, 83-85).

[101]As Nedelsky notes, liberal theories do not totally ignore this point. For
example, if freedom and autonomy is equated with property holders, then the state will
need to protect private property. To do this, the state will have to restrict certain forms of
agency such as stealing or destroying property (Nedelsky 1989).

[102]I am not sure how to categorize some of the nonsubjective theorists. They are
obviously not liberal, but some do not clearly fit in another category such as "radical" or
"socialist" feminism. Thus, I simply refer to them as "nonliberal" theories.

nonsubjective theories because they threaten the liberal conception of self (see chapter five).

As Alison Jaggar explains, traditional liberal theorists assume "abstract individualism"—the belief that (in theory) individuals and their desires can be considered distinct from their social circumstances. "The assumption in this case is that human individuals are ontologically prior to society; in other words, human individuals are the basic constituents out of which social groups are composed" (Jaggar 1983, 28-29). As we have seen, liberal feminists moderate this conception of self by explaining gender socialization and the influence of gender norms on personal identity. However, liberal, feminist, autonomy theorists remain committed to abstract individualism in as much as they remain committed to the subjective perspective. The belief that we can make preferences "our own" through the procedure for autonomous decision making draws a line between individual preferences (desires, beliefs, and values) and the social context that shapes these preferences.

In contrast, other feminists argue that we cannot effectively draw this line or make preferences "our own" in this way. Social relationships do more than give us a pool of values and norms to choose from, they also shape our very understanding of those norms.[103] For example, Naomi Scheman argues that the "objects of psychology" (such as emotions and beliefs) are not individualistic.

What we take to be our emotion, our belief, our desire is a bundle of

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[103]Admittedly, Meyers (mostly) recognizes this point, and, for this reason, I do not consider her theory to be a strictly liberal approach. Yet she still believes she can make the procedure for autonomous decision making work—a paradox of her approach.

introspectible states and behavior, unless we are simply assuming that some one thing underlies them all. . . . What we need to know in order to identify *them* is how to group together introspectible states and behavior and how to interpret it all. The question is one of meaning, not just at the level of what to call it, but at the level of there being an "it" at all. And questions of meaning and interpretation cannot be answered in abstraction from a social setting.[104] (Emphasis in original. Scheman 1983, 229)

If our ability to identify and understand various emotions and beliefs is inextricable from their social meaning of those emotions and beliefs, then the procedure for autonomous decision making cannot make sense from a purely subjective perspective. If we assume Scheman's understanding of self, then "self-government" (personal autonomy) is impossible.

Another way to think about the distinction I am making between liberal feminists who are committed to a philosophical conception of autonomy and other feminists who construct nonsubjective theories of agency is to think about how we understand "self-determination" and "self-definition." For example, in *Gender in the Mirror*, Meyers claims that what she calls feminist voice theory is an attempt to articulate some theory of personal autonomy.

> What motivates feminist voice theory is the fact that women are systematically denied the opportunity to discover themselves for themselves, to interpret themselves as they think fit, and to live their lives according to their own lights. These are the very same problems that animate autonomy theory—namely, *self-determination and the role of self-knowledge and self-definition in securing self-determination.* (Emphasis added. Meyers 2002, 17)

In her discussion of feminist voice theory, Meyers cites Marilyn Frye's work on

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[104]For similar accounts of how emotions are social (not something just "in" the individual), see Sarah Hoagland and Marilyn Frye's discussions of anger (Hoagland 1988, 178-179; Frye 1983, 84-94).

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separation and power. On the page Meyers cites, Frye says:

> When our feminist acts or practices have an aspect of separation, we are
> assuming power by controlling access and simultaneously by undertaking
> definition. The slave who excludes the master from her hut thereby
> declares herself *not a slave*. And *definition* is another face of power.
> (Emphasis in original. Frye 1983, 105)

By this, Frye does not mean a project of self-definition (or self-determination) as deciding

on an "apt" self-concept through a process of self-reflection and identification. Frye is

not interested in autonomy as self-government or a procedure for autonomous decision

making. Instead she is worried about power dynamics and how certain social structures

and relationships perpetuate those power dynamics. When Frye talks about definition as

a form of power, she is talking about how certain people in society have the ability to

define categories and assign people to them. The ability to control the definition of

categories shapes how the people in these categories (and their actions) will be

understood.[105] In this way, Frye is mainly trying to articulate a form of domination and

exploitation.

To return to our earlier distinction, Frye is arguing for autonomy as a right

(although she would not frame it in this way), not a theory of personal autonomy. She is

arguing that women should be allowed to participate in the construction of cultural norms

that define who they are and how their actions will be interpreted and, in some cases,

women may in fact do this *without* permission. Yet, Frye makes her argument without

relying on the "core ideal of self-government" or the procedure for autonomous decision

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[105]This part of Frye's discussion is similar to Meyers's discussion of matrigyno-
idoltry and feminine narcissism.

making. Meyers also argues that women should be allowed to participate in the creation of cultural norms and claims we need a "feminist discursive politics" (Meyers 2002, especially chapter seven). However, we have also seen how she ties her argument to a theory of personal autonomy.

Again, we see that a real difference between autonomy theorists and nonsubjective theorists is how each type of theorist understands the individual and her relationship to her social context. Autonomy theorists believe we can consider how the individual understands herself and her preferences separate (to a certain degree) from her social context or immediate circumstances. In other words, we can develop some conception of self-government, and a person's capacity for self-government justifies autonomy as a right. In contrast, nonsubjective theorists understand that how the individual understands herself and her preferences is inextricably constructed by and locates her in her social context and immediate circumstances. Nonsubjective theorists also argue for autonomy as a right or the right to make certain choices for yourself and participate in certain decisions and power structures. However, they do not tie this argument to a project of self-government. If anything, the harm of domination itself justifies a right to live free of it. Returning to my earlier analysis of self-government, nonsubjective theorists do not believe we have to prove our ability to dominate ourselves before we can argue that others should not dominate us.

Values and Energies

Defenders of a philosophical conception of autonomy also argue that autonomy

theory is useful for feminists because the skills needed to develop autonomy also enhance women's ability to resist oppression (Christman 1995; Friedman 2003). I agree that many of the skills articulated by autonomy theorists can be useful for those trying to resist oppression. However, I believe we can explain why these skills are valuable without tying them to a theory of autonomy.

At the end of chapter two, I suggested that nonsubjective theorists are interested in a different set of basic human needs (such as "flourishing" instead of a narrowly defined authenticity or some conception of "self-government") and values (such as concern about how the decisions and actions of some affect the decision and actions of others instead of maximizing the possible choices of any particular individual). In this section and the next, I further explain this distinction.

In distinguishing her theory from modernism and postmodernism, Lugones articulates a key difference between autonomy theorists's approach and nonsubjective theorists. "It is important to problematize the singularity of 'social world' and the distinction between social world and individual" (Lugones 2003, 146n4). In this way, Lugones wants to complicate our conception of the subject in a way very similar to postmodern conceptions—namely, that we cannot understand subjects (along with their desires, beliefs, and intentions) separate from their social context. Or more precisely, Lugones argues that you cannot separate intentions from the interactive experience in which they are performed. However, Lugones does not want to erase "agency" or

subjectivity.[106] She believes the subject is still active, but her actions do not originate from some distinct "I" separate from her social context (Lugones 2003, 210-211). I believe this sense of agency within interaction is a key component of nonsubjective theories. A conception of interactive agency is part of how nonsubjective theorists go "beyond" the subjective experience and the procedure for autonomous decision making. A conception of interactive agency also allows these theorists to articulate skills or strategies for resistance and liberation (similar to those articulated by autonomy theorists) without connecting them to any project of "self-government."

Nonsubjective theorists place more value on understanding the actual options available to individuals. Since they understand that individuals cannot be separated from their social context, nonsubjective theorists focus their energy on explaining how agency proceeds from an intersubjective point of view. Their "goal" is not to discover or preserve the authentic (autonomous) self, but to explain the complicated give and take of agency under oppression. These theories are more useful to feminist theorists because they better explain both the harms of oppressive contexts (such as how "choice" can be limited in ways that are not easily recognized by autonomy theorists) and previously unrecognized forms of agency and resistance.

In the rest of this section, I illustrate how nonsubjective theorists problematize "the distinction between the social world and individual." Even though they are not

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[106]Lugones wants to distance herself not only from the concept of autonomy but also from the concept of agency. She believes it, too, is loaded with modern philosophical baggage. Hence her use of "active subjectivity" instead of agency or autonomy.

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directly engaging each other, I present each theorist as a progression toward a more complicated and accurate understanding of "the" self. I picture these theorists as nested dolls—each one encompassing insights from the previous one but also adding another layer. Benson questions the distinction between social world and individual by raising the issue of intelligibility. He questions autonomy theorists' view of self by showing the relational nature of both how the individual understands herself and how others understand her. Babbitt raises questions about intelligibility, but also questions the transparency and stability of self. Her analysis of transformative experiences reinforces Benson's point that self-understanding and self-expression are inherently relational. However, Babbitt also emphasizes how the possibilities for change are both relational and (sometimes) out of our control. Finally, Lugones further problematizes the distinction between "the" individual and her social world with her conception of ontological plurality. For Lugones, there is no such thing as "the" individual or "the" social world.

Benson

Benson argues that free agency requires normative competence.[107] For normative competence a person must understand the relevant norms, how they apply to her actions, and what that means for how her actions will be interpreted. In this way, Benson adds nonsubjective criteria to his theory of agency or goes "beyond" the procedure for

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[107]In "Freedom and Value," Benson claims that for an action to be free it must be intentional, show that the agent has normative competence, and be a *potential* vehicle of self-disclosure or a *potential* instance for others to normatively assess us. Benson emphasizes the normative disclosure aspect of agency because he is primarily interested in questions of moral responsibility and agency (Benson 1987).

autonomous decision making. Instead of focusing on a need for reflection and identification, Benson emphasizes how our actions "reveal who we are" and raises questions about intelligibility.

> [A]n agent's social situation becomes very important once we recognize that her ability to comprehend others' evaluative reactions to her actions affects the potential disclosive power of her acts and, therefore, affects her freedom. . . . At the heart of free agency is the power of our actions to reveal who we are, *both to ourselves and to others*, in the context of potential normative assessments of what we do. Our level of awareness and understanding of the standards expressed in those assessments is as crucial to our freedom as our ability to control what we do. (Emphasis added. Benson 1990, 54-55)

Here Benson claims that our ability to understand how normative frameworks will influence our ability to express our agency is a central component of freedom or free agency.

By focusing on how "our actions reveal who we are," Benson introduces a question about intelligibility or whether a person and her actions can be understood by others in the way she intends. Benson claims that normative competence "has us think about what we must be able to recognize and understand in order to be known by other persons who bring particular interests and values to their encounters with us" (Benson 1990, 57). Understanding how various norms shape how others see us and how our actions will be understood is very useful to understanding various kinds of oppression.[108]

In this way, Benson wants to account for how an individual's group identification and relation to social structures can undermine her ability to act in ways that ways have

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[108]Benson does not argue that normative competence requires a person to *accept* mainstream or traditional norms. Indeed, we will see shortly that part of normative competence includes being able to critically evaluate norms.

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nothing to with the procedure for autonomous decision making. For example, Charlotte

Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* are both

examples of women whose desires were unintelligible in their social context. In these

contexts, a woman who wanted to devote herself to a career or the arts instead of her

family was "unnatural." Thus, in this context, a woman could not make others

understand how she could have these "unnatural" desires. Any actions she took to pursue

these options would be taken as evidence of her mental instability. Benson also talks

about how the social context can make a person's desires unintelligible to herself. If a

woman has "unnatural" desires, she will not be able to (fully) understand them without

developing an alternative normative framework. Thus, these desires will be "crazy-

making."[109]

By emphasizing the interdependency between social norms and intelligibility,

Benson shifts our focus to the *interaction between individuals*. The question of

intelligibility emphasizes the need for mutual understanding. Normative competence

requires us to ask what normative framework the individual is using to understand her

desires and actions (what is she trying to "reveal" about herself) and what normative

framework others are using to interpret her professed desires and actions. In other words,

what norms do various people bring to their interaction with each other and how do those

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[109]Benson often ties this discussion of "crazy-making" desires to the individual's understanding of herself as a moral agent or her "worthiness to act." Unlike Babbitt and Lugones, Benson does not have as much to say about how the social environment shapes the development of specific desires. For this reason, it is unclear how far Benson deviates from the stable, unified self even though he obviously wants to question the inadequate understanding of personal choice posed by autonomy theorists.

norms influence our expectations of each other. Some normative frameworks will privilege some groups over others and make some behaviors, feelings, and values either unintelligible or invisible.

If normative competence includes assessing our ability to "reveal who we are" to others, then we must have some understanding of who we are or who we want to be. Thus, normative competence will require many of the skills included in autonomy competency. For example, a person will need introspection skills that "sensitize individuals to their own feelings and desires" and communication skills that "enable individuals to get the benefit of others' perceptions" (Meyers 2002, 20). Yet, Benson does not feel the need to attach these skills to a project of self-government or a need for self-control. Instead he argues that normative competence helps explain the importance of a key feminist tool—consciousness raising.

As Benson explains, normative competence facilitates consciousness raising in at least three ways. First, by directing our attention to the norms applied to us and how they shape our ability to make certain actions intelligible, normative competence helps "to predict and explain the phenomenology of women's oppression" (Benson 1990, 59). For example, if a woman turns her attention to social norms and realizes that the norms applied to her are contradictory and contribute to her self-subordination, then she can understand why she feels alienated from certain decisions. As Benson points out, "it can help people to locate the source of this conflicted consciousness not in some psychological pathology but in society's moral madness" (Benson 1990, 59).

Second, by directing our attention to how agency can be understood differently

under different normative frameworks, normative competence can direct our attention to previously unrecognized normative frameworks (that explain previously unrecognized acts of resistance and agency). Consider the example of a slave who breaks the farming equipment to slow down the pace of the work. From the slave master's perspective, her actions signal her incompetence. From her perspective (and her fellow slaves), her actions are a subtle act of resistance.

Third, "focusing on normative competence encourages us to complement the search through the resources of women's own lives with the intentional creation of practices and forms of relationship which may give rise to new opportunities for normative self-disclosure" (Benson 1990, 61). Once a woman understands how a particular normative framework makes certain desires and actions unintelligible to herself and others, she *may* withdraw from that framework as much as possible and join with others to create new normative frameworks that makes sense of her actions. This type of redirecting one's energy is what Frye was talking about in her essay on separation and power cited by Meyers.[110]

Benson's description of how normative competence facilitates consciousness raising reinforces the interactive nature of agency and highlights other "autonomy" skills. The ability to recognize previously ignored normative frameworks and develop new normative frameworks requires imagination skills that "enable individuals to envisage feasible options," and analytical skills that "enable individuals to assess the relative

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[110]Another example of this would be Sarah Hoagland's discussion of lesbian communities in *Lesbian Ethics* (Hoagland 1988).

merits of different visions" (Meyers 2002, 20). Constructing new communities with new

values and normative frameworks will require volitional skills that "enable individuals to

resist pressure to capitulate to convention" and interpersonal skills that "enable

individuals to join forces to challenge and change cultural regimes" (Meyers 2002, 20).

Again, Benson articulates why these skills can be useful in resisting oppression without

tying them to a need for self-government or the procedure for autonomous decision

making.

Babbitt

Previously I have discussed Susan Babbitt's description of transformative or

conversion experiences and why I believe they more accurately depict how some people

learn to resist some aspects of internalized oppression. Here I want to emphasize the

parallels between Babbitt's understanding of agency and Benson's theory of normative

competence. Like Benson, Babbitt also emphasizes the interactive nature of agency. She

argues that certain social understandings (what Benson calls normative frameworks)

make it impossible for some people to have the sense of self necessary for effective

agency.

> [S]ometimes questions about identity—especially the adequacy of identity
> are not primarily questions about the individuals or groups whose
> identities are at issue; instead, they are questions about the structure of the
> institutions or the society, even the global context, in which individuals
> with interests in real human flourishing have to act and *be* in specific ways
> to proceed as human beings at all. (Emphasis in original. Babbitt 1996, 35)

Similar to her discussion of conversion experiences, here Babbitt emphasizes how social

relations can make it impossible to have certain values or desires. Specifically, how it can be difficult for some individuals to have an interest in what she calls "human flourishing" or their "objective" or "real" interests.

By discussing "objective" or "real" interests, Babbitt does not mean an authentic self as autonomy theorists understand it. Instead she discusses human flourishing in relation to self-worth, human dignity, and self-respect (Babbitt 1996, 115). She also talks about "paths of development" and understanding human flourishing in relation to specific injustices and the structures of society that perpetuate them (Babbitt 1996, 153). Benson discusses what normative frameworks are necessary for certain actions to be understood or "reveal who we are." Similarly, Babbitt discusses what is necessary for some individuals to recognize their full humanity and claim their human worth to others (Babbitt 1996, 197).

Babbitt argues that because of their group identification (and the oppressive structures of society), some people have difficultly being seen *as* individuals. They cannot make themselves or their actions intelligible to others because the social norms do not recognize their full humanity and, thus, cannot interpret their *individual* actions. For example, Babbitt relates a story about an elderly African-American woman who was shot to death while being evicted from her apartment. Scared and angry, she pulled a knife on the police. Although there were six armed, adult males and one elderly sick woman, the police felt threatened enough to shoot to kill. According to Babbitt, these white policemen were unable to see her as a sick and frightened elderly woman. All they could see was a violent African-American wielding a weapon (Babbitt 1996, 108-109). In other

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words, this woman cannot express certain individual choices or decisions because others do not see her *as an individual*.[111]

In addition to seeing people in their particularity, Babbitt talks about the ability to make alternative values intelligible—values that acknowledge previously unseen injustices such as sexual harassment or date rape. "Sexual harassment becomes identifiable as a form of human behavior in part because people look for ways to understand their personal feelings of discomfort and disgust as non-crazy: They construct personal stories that can more adequately account for feelings that would, according to a dominant conceptual framework, be meaningless or even crazy" (Babbitt 1996, 171). Like Benson, Babbitt is talking about creating alternative normative frameworks or alternative social understandings that make certain behaviors, feelings, and *values* intelligible.

Like Benson, Babbitt not only presents a theory that shows how agency is interactive, but her theory also highlights the need for various "autonomy" skills. Understanding how social structures shape individual actions and defending a particular understanding of values and actions will require analytic and volitional skills (respectively). Developing alternative understandings to make sense of personal feelings or experiences will require imaginative skills and introspection skills (respectively). Also, like Benson, Babbitt does not tie these skills to a project of self-government or self-control. As we have seen, Babbitt emphatically argues that the procedure for autonomous

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[111]Admittedly, this is a somewhat problematic example, but I believe it nicely captures the way subordinated groups are stereotyped and homogenized.

decision making cannot bring about this change in perspective, values, and understanding

of self in relation to society.

Again, Babbitt emphasizes the interactive nature of agency in a way that questions

the efficacy of the procedure for autonomous decision making.

> One's self-concept, that which explains the course of one's choices and
> actions, is not always adequate for effective agency, for choices and
> actions that constitute the pursuit of one's real interests in human
> flourishing. (Babbitt 1996, 8)

> . . . individual rationality is not best understood as a question about what
> can be done or chosen but rather as a question about what the individual
> can be. (Babbitt 1996, 169)

For example, Babbitt discusses "a member of a marginalized group" choosing a career.

He has the talent to be and would enjoy being a research physician. However, he knows

that if he chooses this career path he will face constant challenges to his competence. He

will have to work twice as hard to get as far as everyone else and will have to constantly

defend his abilities to others. On the other hand, if he decides to become a pharmacist he

can still make a decent living and spare himself constant harassment and job

discrimination (Babbitt 1996, 46-47). Babbitt uses this example to show why some

choices that appear irrational to liberal theorists are, in fact, rational. I use this example

to emphasize Babbitt's understanding of how agency (and personal possibilities) are

interactive. By emphasizing the social ("external") obstacles this man will face, Babbitt

shifts the focus from a question of "authenticity" ("internal") to a question about how

possibilities are shaped by social relations.

To summarize and clarify, Benson and Babbitt understand agency as interactive,

but only to a point. They both argue that how the individual understands herself and what desires and "choices" are possible for her will be dependent on her social context and personal relationships. The individual's intelligibility to herself and others is interdependent. In this way, Babbitt and Benson reject the "atomistic" view of the individual assumed by autonomy theorists. However, they do not adopt the ontological plurality or conception of multiple selves proposed by Lugones.

Lugones

Lugones describes her account of agency as "active subjectivity" which she contrasts to the understanding of agency expressed by autonomy theorists.

> Valorizing single authorship, individual responsibility, individual accountability, and self-determination, freedom is lived as this efficacy of individual agency. (Lugones 2003, 210)

> To make clear the possibility of resistance and its conditions, I introduce the concept of "active subjectivity." Though resisters are not agents, they are active subjects. The liberatory possibilities of active subjectivity depend on both an alternative sociality and a tactical strategic stance.[112] (Lugones 2003, 211)

There are two key things going on in Lugones's introduction of what she calls active subjectivity. First, she wants to emphasize the interactive nature of agency. Second, she believes active subjectivity or a conception of the interactive nature of agency is the only way to understand the possibility of liberation in oppressive contexts. To understand each of these points, I return to Lugones's discussion of multiple selves.

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[112]Again, Lugones wants to distance herself from a conception of agency as well as autonomy. However, I continue to use the concept of agency in the following discussion.

As we saw in the last chapter, Lugones understands the subject as multiple—an ontological plurality that comes from inhabiting different "worlds." Using a version of Aristotle's practical syllogism, Lugones explains that in some "worlds" certain actions or behaviors will be unthinkable. If we bring these components together, we can see how Lugones explains the interactive nature of agency and the importance of self-knowledge and other "autonomy" skills.

Again, "worlds" are connections among meanings. Benson would call them normative frameworks and Babbitt would understand them as evaluative frameworks or social understandings. The social structures that create these "worlds" consist of institutions, traditions, relationships among groups, relationships among individuals, and memories of certain histories. Lugones explains that these (social) structures give individuals "emotions, beliefs, norms, desires, and intentions that are their own" (Lugones 2003, 60). In this way, Lugones argues that intentionality (a type of agency) does not reside "inside" the individual herself. Instead we must understand "intentionality as lying *between rather than in subjects*" (Emphasis in original. Lugones 2003). Thus, the subject has agency, but this agency does not make sense if you extract the subject from her context or relationships.

Since these different "worlds" shape beliefs, emotions, and intentions, some actions and behaviors will be unthinkable in some "worlds." Failing to recognize that individuals inhabit different "worlds" is why some feminist accounts make oppression sound inescapable. The "worlds" in which a person is oppressed construct the individual in a way that *does* make oppression inescapable. However, the individual exists in other

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"worlds" beyond the oppressive ones. This multiplicity makes (resistant) agency possible. "So, the connection between the practical syllogism, ontological plurality, and liberatory oppression theory lies in the fact that the oppressed know themselves in realities in which they are able to form intentions that are not among the alternatives that are possible in the world in which they are brutalized and oppressed" (Lugones 2003, 59). Thus, one reason Lugones rejects unity is that multiplicity makes resistance impossible. If we do not acknowledge ontological plurality or the multiplicity of selves, then we cannot see how liberatory change is possible. For a unitary oppressed self, liberatory change *would* be impossible.

In relation to "autonomy" skills, Lugones's understanding of selves as multiple and resistant agency relies on a type of self-knowledge and, like Benson, an understanding of how an individual's actions will be understood in different contexts. "Other worlds provide one with syllogisms that one can attempt to make actual in the worlds in which one is oppressed given one's critical understanding of each world" (Lugones 2003, 59). Lugones also talks about paying close attention to when we shift between "worlds." Attention to the shifts increases our understanding of ourselves as multiple beings and provides us with different syllogisms. "One understands oneself in every world in which one remembers oneself and to the extent that one understands that world" (Lugones 2003, 59). Although she would not interpret them in the same way as Meyers does, Lugones's theory relies on introspection skills and analytical skills. Lugones understanding of agency also emphasizes memory skills that "enable individuals to recall relevant experiences" and self-nurturing skills that "enable individuals to . . .

sustain their self-respect." Finally, like our other theorists, Lugones's theory also shows the value of interpersonal skills that "enable individuals to join forces" (Meyers 2002, 20).

Yet, Lugones shows why these skills are valuable without tying them to any project of self-government or individualism. Lugones rejects the tendency to think of any set of behaviors as the "true" self (Lugones 2003, 37n6). In contrast to autonomy theorists use of self-reflection as a way to create an authentic self, Lugones argues that both self-knowledge and self-change are *interactive* (Lugones 2003, 74). To be intelligible (to myself and others) requires mutual understanding and that I *be* a multiple self.

Engagement and Disengagement

I have argued that autonomy theorists cannot adequately address feminist criticisms of autonomy theory because the aspects of autonomy theory that feminists criticize are part of the "baggage" of a philosophical conception of autonomy. More importantly, for autonomy theory to be sensitive to feminist concerns about power and oppression, we would need to include nonsubjective criteria into the theory. But, as we have seen, incorporating nonsubjective criteria into autonomy theory is a contradiction—'autonomy' is no longer *self*-government. For this reason, I argue that nonsubjective theories are more useful for feminist theory.

Throughout my dissertation, I have shown how nonsubjective theories have a more realistic understanding of the relationship between the individual and her social

context. In the "values and energies" section, I reinforced this point by clarifying why the metaphysical and ontological understanding of nonsubjective theorists is more accurate. In this final section, I argue that nonsubjective theorists are also engaged in more useful political projects.

Of the nonsubjective theorists reviewed so far, Benson is the least revolutionary. He is mainly interested in questions about moral responsibility—how one comes to see herself as a moral agent and how she justifies her actions (or makes them intelligible) to others. Still I believe his work is important for two related reasons. One, he begins to incorporate feminist insights into his theory of agency. Two, he does this while continuing to engage autonomy theorists. In this way, his main project seems to be to get autonomy theorists to adopt a more adequate conception of self. There can be a certain usefulness in trying to show why traditional theorists are wrong and trying to point them in a more useful direction, but as long as he continues to engage traditional theories (and remains relatively committed to their framework and project), his theory will be limited. For these reasons, Benson's theory is useful, but has limited political implications. Therefore, I will not spend much time on it here.[113] Instead, I focus on Babbitt and Lugones.

Babbitt

We have seen how Babbitt tries to articulate (realistic) possibilities for change on

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[113]I will say a bit more about why Benson's approach is useful in the section on Babbitt.

the individual level by questioning liberal interpretations of rationality and deliberation. Babbitt also analyzes the possibilities for change on the political level by questioning liberal understandings of freedom and democracy. Her political argument parallels her personal argument—in both she argues that certain things cannot be understood (or even seen) without a shift in perspective that brings them to light.

In her discussion of internalized oppression and the potential for change, Babbitt argued that certain desires and conceptions of self are not possible without a change in self that creates a new epistemic framework or paradigm. In her political discussion, Babbitt argues that certain questions cannot even be asked without a shift in perspective that allows us to see the problems that raise these questions. Specifically, Babbitt argues that liberal conceptions of freedom and individuality make it impossible to ask what is necessary for (real) human flourishing.

Considering the difference in standard of living between the worlds richest countries and the world's poorest countries, Babbitt asks what "grotesque logic" allows us to ignore so much human suffering.[114] She concludes that it is the liberal conception of freedom and individuality that makes this human suffering invisible or at least keeps us from being moved by it.

> The "grotesque logic" that makes invisible, philosophically as well as politically, 80 percent of the world's population, probably involves liberal philosophical conceptions of freedom and individuality. . . . We have to

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[114]Babbitt takes this phrase "grotesque logic" from Italian journalist Gianni Miná who, according to Babbitt, asks "what sort of 'grotesque logic' allows us to keep talking about the failures of Communism, when even Pope John Paul II recognized that the twentieth century saw much more damage done by capitalism, on most of the planet, than was ever done by Communism" (Babbitt 2005, 160).

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imagine, and expect, that the world could be organized differently, if it is to make sense to ask why we accept conceptions of who we are and could be, humanly, that make invisible 80 percent of the world's population. . . . As long as we think we already know what political freedom means, there can be no question about why we think the way we do, and how we might have got things so wrong. (Babbitt 2005, 161-162)

According to Babbitt, one way that liberal political philosophers get things wrong is through their interpretation of and over-valuing of individual choice.

For example, by focusing on individual deliberation and rational choice, autonomy theorists confuse "causes" for "explanations."[115] Using Marilyn Frye's example of the birdcage, Babbitt argues that we can see that the bird causes her own actions—we can see the intentionality of her actions. However, this is only the direct cause of her actions. In an important way, we cannot adequately explain the bird's actions unless we see the cage. "It is true that the bird's desires and preferences *cause* the actions of the bird. But it is not clear that they *explain* the bird's actions, that is, it is not clear that the desires and preferences of the bird provide the relevant understanding of the bird's actions" (Emphasis in original. Babbitt 2005, 146). In other words, what counts as an adequate justification or explanation depends on the question we are trying to answer. If we are trying to understand how a person "authenticates" preferences, we will focus on the "causes" of her actions. However, if we want to understand how certain structural barriers inhibit the options available to a person (and inhibit them in a particularly harmful way), we need to focus on the "explanation" of her actions (or the cage).

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[115]Babbitt is focusing on liberal political theory in general; however, to tie this back to the overall theme of this chapter, I periodically reinforce the connection between autonomy theory and liberal political theory.

Most importantly, Babbitt argues that we cannot understand *how* we have gotten things wrong until we understand *that* we have gotten things wrong. As Babbitt points out, the fact that 80 percent of the world lives in poverty is well-known, but we cannot understand the explanatory significance of these facts until we until we change our conceptual framework. Specifically, we need to understand how liberal conceptions of freedom and individuality make it impossible for us to imagine real social justice. "My point is that the need for moral imagination also applies to how we conceive of individual choice and interests. Unless we do the work of asking what might be meant by such concepts if the world really were humanely organized, it will not make sense to ask why we accept liberal conceptions that lack explanatory capacity as regards social justice" (Babbitt 2005, 159). Liberal conceptions of freedom and individuality give primacy to individual choice. These theorists believe that individual choice enhances human well-being (see the discussion of Mill in the first chapter) and, therefore, is the primary value that should be protected by the state. However, their understanding of choice as rooted in settled desires and preferences shifts their focus from the way institutions and cultural understandings shape choice or the options individuals see as viable.

Babbitt further argues that the work of feminist theorists challenges the liberal conception of freedom and individuality in at least two ways. First, we cannot assume that valorizing and protecting individual choice will promote individual well-being. If the self is already shaped and harmed by oppressive forces, her "choices" will not necessarily reflect her "own" interests or promote her flourishing (see the discussion of internalized oppression in chapter five). Second, feminist work on epistemology

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questions the transparency of self and liberal theorists' understanding of deliberation.
How a person understands herself and her situation is inextricably tied to her social
environment. Both of these aspects of feminist theory question the "primacy of choice"
in liberal political theory.

> Conceptualization of the self and knowledge in feminist social philosophy
> requires reformulating certain fundamental philosophical questions, such
> as questions about autonomy or individualism, which ought to have to do
> with institutions. For instance, such conceptualization implies that
> questions about autonomy and individualism must be questions about the
> moral status of institutions, principally about whether or not institutions
> are humane. (Babbitt 2005, 155-156)

In other words, if we take seriously the implications of feminist theory, we will shift our
focus from the bird to the cage.[116]

Thus, Babbitt's reconception of self, choice, and deliberation relates to a political
project that questions the liberal approach to social justice. For real social justice, we
need a better understanding of human flourishing or a different understanding of freedom
and democracy. However, to articulate this different version of social justice two things
must happen. First, we must understand how the liberal understanding of freedom and
individuality is wrong. Second, and related, we must be able to imagine that a different
world is possible; we must be able to envision a different understanding of social justice.

In the beginning of this section I argued that Benson remains engaged with
traditional theories of autonomy. His project is to show why autonomy theorists need a

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[116]I should note that Babbitt does not deny "the significance of individual choices
and preferences to a person's well-being," but she does believe we need a radically
different understanding of individual choice and how it relates to personal well-being
(Babbitt 2005, 155).

more adequate conception of self and a more accurate understanding of deliberation. Babbitt's early work is very similar to Benson's. She critiques liberal theories of rational deliberation to show how they misinterpret the nature of choice and an individual's understanding of herself and social relations. In her later work, she moves beyond this critique to begin to develop a more positive theory of agency by focusing on what she calls "moral imagination." She is primarily interested in how certain alternative understandings come about or are made possible. We can now see that Benson's project and Babbitt's earlier work remain important. Just as we cannot develop a more adequate theory of agency until we understand how the conception of self used by autonomy theorists is wrong, we also cannot develop a more adequate understanding of social justice until we understand how liberal theorists misinterpret freedom and individuality. Thus, trying to explain how autonomy theorists and liberal political theorists "get things wrong" is an important project.

However, remaining engaged with autonomy theorists and liberal political theorists also limits our ability to move forward or develop more adequate understandings and theories. Even though Benson's conception of self is more reflective of feminists theories, the political ramifications of his approach are limited. In contrast, once Babbitt disengages from liberal political theory, she can (and does) turn her attention to developing a more adequate theory of the possibilities for liberation. Yet she is still interested in disrupting liberal political theories stronghold on philosophical theories of social justice. In this way, Babbitt is a kind of middle ground. She both remains engaged with traditional theory, but also strategically disengages from traditional theory. As we

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will see, Lugones more fully disengages from traditional theories of autonomy and liberal political theory which leads her to a different political project than either Benson or Babbitt.

Lugones

As I mentioned in chapter five, part of Lugones' political project is to give a realistic account of agency under oppression. By incorporating ontological plurality or the conception of multiple selves, Lugones accomplishes at least two goals. First, she shows how agency and resistance are possible even though the structures of oppression appear inescapable. If we understand the world as constructed by various logics, we can understand the force of oppression, but still leave room for resistance and agency. Second, and related, Lugones illustrates acts of resistance that are ignored or downplayed by traditional theories. For example, a person who simply remembers herself in other "worlds" escapes the totalizing force of the logic of purity. Autonomy theorists cannot fully appreciate the significance of this type of self-understanding.

In addition to developing a more accurate theory of agency and resistance, Lugones is interested in identifying the potential for coalitions among diverse people that may be useful for both self-understanding and resistance. Lugones recognizes that (for the foreseeable future) our ability to effect real change through national politics or theories of social justice will be (at best) very limited. Instead, she shifts her attention to engage local movements of people. In this way, Lugones is interested in developing communities of resistance and giving oppressed people strategies for survival.

As stated in her subtitle, Lugones is interested in theorizing coalition against multiple oppressions or theorizing the possibility of coalition (against oppression) among diverse groups and people. Explaining how these coalitions are possible is a significant point of her book (Lugones 2003, 84). To form coalitions across difference, we must be able to connect with each other in a nonoppressive way. Lugones explains this possibility as what she calls "world-traveling and loving perception."

To form coalitions across difference we must "travel" to each other's "worlds." The logic of purity teaches us to see each other as singular, fossilized, and limited. Thus, to form coalitions, we must learn to first adopt the logic of curdling. This allows us to engage each other in our particularity.

> There are "worlds" that we can travel to lovingly, and traveling to them is part of loving at least some of their inhabitants. The reason I think that traveling to someone's "world" is a way of identifying with them is that by traveling to their "world" we can understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*. Only when we have traveled to each other's "worlds" are we fully subjects to each other. (Emphasis in original. Lugones 2003, 97)

The logic of purity is a logic of domination. When we see each other through the logic of purity, we see the "other" as we want to see her, not how she is. This is partially related to the questions of intelligibility I raised earlier, but Lugones is also trying to explain how this shift in logic is an act of resistance (not just a "new" normative framework that makes some actions intelligible).

The logic of purity forces multiple "worlds" into one social world or a coherent unity. The logic of purity does this by ignoring "anomalous parts" or ignoring what does not make sense from its viewpoint. Since the logic of purity can only function if we all

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"play along," part of domination consists in forcing everyone to support the fantasy of unity and coherence. In other words, we are all co-opted into the logic of purity and domination. Thus, to resist the logic of purity (and the way it defines people and categories) is an act of resistance.

> I want to take up the practice [of playful "world"-travel] as a horizontal practice of resistance to two related injunctions: the injunction for the oppressed to have our gazes fixed on the oppressor and the concomitant injunction not to look to and connect with each other in resistance to those injunctions through traveling to each other's "worlds" of sense. (Lugones 2003, 80)

We resist the logic of purity in at least two ways. By seeing each other in our particularity (traveling to each others' "worlds"), we practice not seeing "the" world through the oppressors eyes (or the logic of purity/domination). Second, by learning to "lovingly" see each other (among other things, adopting the logic of curdling), we can form coalitions across diversity to help resist oppression.

If agency (including intentionality) is only possible through interaction, then creating the possibility for nonoppressive interactions (coalitions and "loving perception") is an act of resistance. "World"-traveling not only makes certain types of agency possible (meaningful), but it makes "existence" (as individuals in our particularity) possible. "We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking. So traveling to each other's 'worlds' would enable us to *be* through loving each other" (Emphasis in original. Lugones 2003, 86). Although she would not phrase it this way, Lugones is articulating a conception of

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human flourishing. The logic of purity/domination is harmful in a number of ways. Here Lugones emphasizes the harm of being rendered invisible or seen only as the other wants to construct you for her own purposes. Forming coalitions through actually seeing each other in our particularity resists the totalizing gaze of the logic of purity by recognizing the existence of alternate "worlds" of sense.

In these ways, Lugones completely disengages from autonomy theory and liberal political theory to focus on many local forms of resistance. On a personal level, the individual resists oppression and the logic of purity by understanding herself as multiple and remembering herself in different "worlds." In specific personal relationships, we can resist oppression and the logic of purity through "world"-traveling and loving perception. Learning to disengage from the logic of purity and see each other in our particularity (to travel to each other's "worlds") enables us to connect in a non-oppressive way. If we cultivate this ability we may be able to form coalitions (groups, communities) of resistance to oppression.[117]

We can now begin to see why I believe autonomy theory and feminist theory are not as compatible as some feminists want to make them. Since the concept of autonomy relates to control over your life, many feminists believe it is valuable for articulating some of the harms of oppression and can, therefore, be useful in developing strategies of resistance to oppression. However, I believe there is a danger in combining our analysis

[117]Part of what Lugones is worried about here is how we deal with (or refuse to deal with) diversity within the feminist community. The logic of purity can sabotage relationships among differently oppressed groups.

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of oppression with a theory of autonomy. Autonomy theory is about personal responsibility; therefore, it places primary responsibility within the individual herself. Yet, oppression is a systemic phenomenon. A person cannot overcome oppression by her will alone. For this reason, I worry that analyzing oppression while remaining committed to a conception of autonomy will implicitly or explicitly hold the individual accountable for things that are beyond her control.

As Sandra Bartky points out in her discussion of psychological oppression, without an analysis of the larger social relations that produced oppression, there is a tendency for the oppressed individual to blame herself for the limited control she has over her life and ability to succeed at certain endeavors (Bartky 1990, chapter two). I worry that an emphasis on personal autonomy will exacerbate this tendency for oppressed individuals to blame themselves. After all, if we are primarily concerned with personal skills and the ability to use them, then we are implying that *these aspects of oppression* are primarily a personal problem. This emphasis on personal responsibility (and assumed control) is why I am concerned about feminists remaining committed to a conception of autonomy.

The motivating question for autonomy theorists is what makes certain preferences "our own" or how to tell authentic preferences from nonauthentic ones. Thus, autonomy theorists focus on the individual and her capacities. As a result, their political projects are tied to enhancing personal capacities (usually for reflection and control). In contrast, feminist theorists are interested in an analysis of oppression or how the social context shapes the actual options individuals have. I have argued that based on their more

accurate understanding of the individual in relation to her social world, nonsubjective theorists are engaged in more useful political projects. If we understand the interactive nature of agency, the project of "self-government" and the question of "authenticity" begin to lose their coherence. As Lugones would explain, we need to understand "moving with people" (Lugones 2003, 6) or the give and take of various types of agency and resistance. As Babbitt would explain, we need to understand how social contexts structure "choices" and how humane institution are. Once we understand the connection between a theory of autonomy/agency and the political commitments of the theorists, we can see how nonsubjective theorists direct us toward more realistic strategies of resistance and more useful political projects.

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