



Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender

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CHAPTER

2 Three Dimensions of Autonomy: A Relational Analysis

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Abstract

Theoretical work on relational autonomy over the last decade has significantly advanced our understanding of the constitutive social preconditions for individual autonomy. Yet significant disagreement remains concerning how the concept of autonomy and these social preconditions should be understood. This chapter argues that one reason for the persistence of these disagreements is confusion over the kind of concept that autonomy is. Its first aim is to propose that autonomy should be understood not as a unitary and context-invariant concept but as a multidimensional and context-sensitive concept. To develop this claim, three distinct, but causally interdependent, dimensions of autonomy are distinguished and explicated: self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization. Each of these involves distinct conditions that may be satisfied to varying degrees. The second aim of the chapter is to develop a relational interpretation of the three dimensions of autonomy and their distinct conditions.

Keywords: [Autonomy](#), [relational autonomy](#), [self-determination](#), [self-governance](#), [self-authorization](#)

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It is no secret that although respect for individual autonomy is a foundational principle of liberal and democratic theory, just what this principle means and how the concept of autonomy should be interpreted and applied in specific contexts are highly contested. For example, in many debates in bioethics, it is not uncommon for disputants on both sides of a debate to invoke the concept of autonomy in support of their position. One way to interpret what is at stake in these disputes is to appeal to Rawls's concept/conception distinction. While the disputants both invoke the *concept* of autonomy, they are in fact appealing to different *conceptions* of individual autonomy, and these different conceptions arise from different normative theoretical frameworks and from different value orientations and political commitments.

I think this suggestion goes part of the way toward explaining why autonomy is such a contested value. However, I don't think that the concept/conception distinction provides a full diagnosis of the problem.

Another aspect of the problem is that in both bioethics and debates about autonomy in the philosophical literature there is a lot of talking at cross-purposes because there is a lack of clarity about what kind of *concept* the concept of autonomy is. Is it a unitary concept or a multidimensional concept? And is it a context-invariant concept or a context-sensitive concept that is employed for different purposes in different contexts? Related to this second question, there is a lack of clarity about what is at issue in debates about autonomy. Is the aim of such debates to analyze the concept, or is it to clarify the role the concept plays in our social and normative practices?

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My aims in this chapter are twofold. First, I seek to address the question of what kind of concept the concept of autonomy is. My response to this question is that autonomy is a multidimensional, rather than a unitary, concept. In developing this response, I propose a taxonomy that distinguishes three distinct, but causally interdependent, dimensions or axes of autonomy: self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization. Each dimension involves distinct $\hookrightarrow$ conditions, which may be satisfied to varying degrees. I suggest further that autonomy is not a context-invariant concept. Rather, it is employed for different purposes in different social and normative contexts, and in these different contexts it may be appropriate to set different thresholds for satisfying the conditions for autonomy.

The second aim of the chapter is to develop a relational interpretation or *conception* of the three axes of self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization. Although relational conceptions of autonomy have become increasingly influential in feminist theory, relational autonomy is often invoked in support of feminist commitments rather than analyzed in detail, particularly in feminist bioethics. By developing a relational interpretation of the three dimensions or axes of autonomy, I seek to provide a more detailed analysis of the commitments and aims of relational autonomy. In doing so, I point to interesting conceptual connections between relational autonomy theory and capabilities approaches to justice, which have not hitherto been identified in the literature.¹

The chapter is in five sections. In the [first section](#), I provide a brief overview sketch of my proposed multidimensional analysis of the concept of autonomy. In the second section, I provide an overview of the main motivations and commitments of relational autonomy. In sections 3 to 5, I propose a specific relational interpretation of each autonomy axis and its relevant conditions. It is important to clarify at the outset that this is a big picture project, an exercise in conceptual mapping. Each of the three axes of autonomy, with their specific conditions, refers to a large and complex literature, which I cannot discuss in any great detail. So my conceptual map is an outline of the terrain. Filling in its topographical details is a much bigger project than could be undertaken in a single chapter.

1. Three Dimensions of Autonomy

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A unitary concept is a concept for which there is a single set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the correct application of the concept. Natural kind terms such as water, gold, and elephant are unitary concepts. Ethical concepts, such as goodness, trust, and autonomy, are also often treated as unitary concepts. In the case of individual autonomy, the kernel of what is taken to be the unitary concept of autonomy is the notion of self-governance, the idea that to be autonomous is to be capable of making decisions and acting on the basis of $\hookrightarrow$ motives, values, or reasons that are “one’s own” in some relevant sense. Different conceptions of autonomy aim, in part, to analyze the necessary and sufficient conditions for a motive, value, reason, or action to be “one’s own.”

In the literature two broad kinds of condition for self-governance have been identified: competency conditions, which spell out the cognitive, volitional, normative, or other competences deemed necessary to act effectively on one’s motives, values, or reasons; and authenticity conditions, which spell out what it means for these elements of one’s motivational structure to be genuinely one’s own. Much debate about

autonomy in philosophical moral psychology, including debate among theorists of relational autonomy, has focused on advancing differing interpretations of these conditions, with debate proceeding by way of examples and counterexamples designed to test the necessity or sufficiency claims of rival interpretations. Not surprisingly, no agreement on a single, definitive interpretation of the competence or authenticity conditions for autonomy has emerged from the debate. I think there are two connected reasons for this. First, the concept of autonomy is employed for different purposes in different social and normative contexts. This is one reason why we need a multidimensional analysis of the concept. Second, the unitary notion of self-governance, which identifies conditions for autonomy that relate to agents' practical identities and the skills and competences required for autonomy, is inadequate to capture the multidimensional nature of the concept of autonomy.

My suggestion is that the concept of autonomy involves three distinct but causally interdependent dimensions or axes: self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization. *Self-determination* involves having the freedom and opportunities to make and enact choices of practical import to one's life, that is, choices about what to value, who to be, and what to do. The self-determination axis identifies external, structural conditions for individual autonomy, specifically *freedom* conditions and *opportunity* conditions. Freedom conditions identify the kind of social and political constraints that interfere with the exercise of self-determination and the kind of political and personal liberties that enable it. Opportunity conditions specify the kinds of opportunities that need to be available to agents in their social environments for them to have choices about what to value, who to be, and what to do. Gerald Dworkin, Joseph Raz, and Marina Oshana have all emphasized the importance of freedom and opportunity conditions for autonomy.²

p. 18 *Self-governance* involves having the skills and capacities necessary to make choices and enact decisions that express, or cohere with, one's reflectively constituted diachronic practical identity. Following Korsgaard,³ I understand ↪ practical identity as a normative self-conception, which embodies a person's sense of self-identity and her commitments, values, and beliefs. The self-governance axis identifies internal conditions for autonomy, specifically competence and authenticity conditions. Competence conditions are central to many accounts of autonomy in bioethics. Beauchamp and Childress, for example, understand competence in medical decision making in terms of capacities to understand relevant information, make a judgment about that information in light of one's values, and communicate the decision to caregivers.⁴ Within philosophical moral psychology, there is quite a range of different accounts of competence, including reason-responsiveness views (e.g., Wolf), normative competence views (e.g., Benson and Stoljar), and skills-based views (e.g., Meyers).⁵ Predominantly, however, debates about autonomy within philosophical moral psychology have focused on authenticity conditions. For example, the early work of Harry Frankfurt on identification with one's will, care-based analyses of autonomy that develop themes in Frankfurt's later work on caring⁶, and John Christman's nonalienation analysis of critical reflection all provide different articulations of authenticity.⁷

p. 19 The third axis, *self-authorization*, involves regarding oneself as having the *normative authority* to be self-determining and self-governing. In other words, it involves regarding oneself as authorized to exercise practical control over one's life, to determine one's own reasons for action, and to define one's values and identity-shaping practical commitments. The self-authorization axis has emerged as a central concern of recent social and relational theories of autonomy. This axis identifies several conditions for autonomy, relating to *accountability*, *self-evaluative attitudes*, and *social recognition*. These conditions are discussed, with different inflections and emphases, in recent work by a range of theorists. Paul Benson and Andrea Westlund, for example, ground ↪ autonomy in an agent's attitudes or dispositions to hold herself accountable and answerable to others for her reasons.⁸ Carolyn McLeod emphasizes the importance of agents' self-evaluative attitudes, in particular self-trust, for autonomous decision making in health-care contexts.⁹ And Joel Anderson argues that autonomy is a constitutively social capacity, in the sense that it is constituted within normative social practices of mutual recognition.¹⁰

Two clarifications are in order at this point. First, the aim of this taxonomy is to map out the different dimensions or axes of the concept of autonomy in a way that makes sense of our complex, and sometimes conflicting, intuitions about autonomy and our diverse autonomy-related social practices. Of course, the map by itself doesn't resolve debates about how best to understand the different conditions I have identified as relevant to each axis. Different theories of autonomy will continue to conceptualize these conditions in different ways, and in later sections I propose a relational conception of each of the conditions. But I hope the map will help to resolve some of the talking at cross-purposes in the literature that arises from understanding autonomy as the unitary concept of self-governance.

Second, it is important to recognize that the exercise of autonomy along these different dimensions can be assessed at different levels: locally, with respect to specific decisions or choices; programmatically, with respect to domains of a person's life, such as with respect to her finances, at work, or in her family or intimate relationships; or globally, with respect to a person's life overall.¹¹ So it is possible that a person might exercise a high level of autonomy in one domain, such as at work, while being subject to domination in another domain, such as in her family life. It is also possible that a person might be able to exercise local autonomy with respect to a particular decision, such as the choice to accept or refuse a particular medical treatment, even though his global autonomy may be seriously impaired, for example because he is an addict.

p. 20 Within bioethics, autonomy is usually understood as local, that is, as applying to a specific decision at a specific time.¹² Feminist bioethicists, however, who are influenced by relational theories of autonomy, tend to hold the view that the exercise of local autonomy needs to be understood in the context of a person's capacity to exercise programmatic or global autonomy.¹³

2. Why “Relational” Autonomy?

Relational theories of autonomy were originally motivated by three central convictions. First, in spite of feminist critiques of autonomy as a masculinist and excessively individualist ideal, it is a mistake for feminists to jettison the value of autonomy because the exercise of some threshold level of self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization is crucial for women's emancipation. Second, gender oppression, in different ways in different contexts and to different degrees, constrains women's abilities to lead self-determining lives and thus can impair their capacities for self-governance and can undermine their sense of being self-authorizing agents. Gender oppression is here understood as a system or pattern of hierarchically structured social relations, institutions, and practices of gender-based domination and subordination. Third, we need a refigured conception of autonomy that is responsive to feminist critiques of overly individualistic conceptions of autonomy. Relational theories aim to provide this refigured conception.¹⁴

p. 21 As a conception of individual autonomy, relational autonomy is committed to a form of normative individualism—that is, to the view that the rights, welfare, dignity, freedom, and autonomy of individuals matter and impose normative constraints on the claims of social groups or collectives.¹⁵ Capabilities theory is also committed to normative individualism in this sense.¹⁶ In what sense, then, is the theory “relational”? I suggest it is relational in several ways that can be articulated in the form of three premises or starting assumptions to which relational theories are committed. It should be noted that, with respect to these assumptions, there is much common ground between relational autonomy theory and capabilities theory.

The first premise is that an adequate conception of autonomy must be responsive to the facts of human vulnerability and dependency rather than assuming a conception of persons as self-sufficient, independent, rational contractors. It follows that the conditions for self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization cannot be specified in such a way that these dimensions of autonomy are inconsistent with

human vulnerability, dependency, or social relations of care.¹⁷ Because relational autonomy theory starts from a conception of persons as vulnerable and dependent to varying degrees, I want to suggest that it is highly relevant to health-care contexts, where obligations to respond to vulnerability must be balanced with respect for patient autonomy. It should also be noted that Nussbaum's capabilities theory, in particular, emphasizes the importance for a theory of justice to be premised on the facts of human vulnerability.¹⁸

The second premise is that persons are embodied and socially, historically, and culturally embedded and that their identities are constituted in relation to these factors in complex ways. Thus, although relational autonomy theory is committed to normative individualism, it is also committed to a social ontology of persons—that is, a conception of persons that emphasizes the role of embodied social practices (including linguistic and cultural practices), social group identities, and historical contingencies in the formation of our individual practical identities. This premise is particularly relevant to the way the self-governance dimension of autonomy should be understood. It suggests, first, that an adequate analysis of authenticity conditions must account for the complex social constitution of individual identity. Second, this premise suggests that an adequate analysis of competence conditions must acknowledge the extensive interpersonal, social, and institutional scaffolding necessary for the development and ongoing exercise of the complex cognitive, volitional, imaginative, and emotional skills involved in self-governance. As I argue in the following sections, the extent of this scaffolding also points to the causal interdependence between self-governance and the self-determination and self-authorization dimensions of autonomy.

The third premise is that social conditions restricting the exercise of self-determination are unjust. These include social conditions that deny members of social groups fundamental political or personal liberties or restrict the opportunities available in their social environments, that thwart the development and exercise of autonomy competences, or that sanction social relations of misrecognition, thereby excluding some individuals or social groups from the status markers of autonomy and compromising their sense of themselves as self-authorizing agents.¹⁹ A socially just society therefore has an obligation to develop social, legal, and political institutions that foster the autonomy of all citizens, particularly those from historically oppressed or marginalized social groups.

It is worth clarifying two points about the understanding of justice that underlies this third premise. First, this account of justice assumes that injustice is not just a function of inequality in the distribution of resources; rather, it is also a function of inequalities in opportunities, and in social relations, institutions, norms, and practices. These inequalities constitute forms of domination and subordination that track social group identities and that operate through hierarchies of social standing, power, authority, and esteem.²⁰ These hierarchies operate at multiple levels within a society, for example within the family and in the context of intimate relationships; in the institutions of civil society, for example in workplaces, educational institutions, hospitals and clinics, religious institutions, clubs, sporting teams, the media (including the Internet); and through the institutions of the state, such as the police force, the army, the judiciary, and the legislature. Relational theories aim to develop analyses of autonomy that are responsive to the effects of such inequalities on agents' abilities to lead self-determining, self-governing, and self-authorizing lives.

Second, I see relational autonomy as a form of non-ideal theorizing about autonomy, which is aligned with non-ideal approaches to justice.²¹ It does not assume that persons are ideally, or even hypothetically, fully rational agents or that their motivational structures are transparent to themselves. Nor does it take as its starting point a model of an ideally just society and assess the extent to which current social relations fall short of this model. Rather, its starting point is the individual as situated in, shaped, and constrained by her sociorelational context in all its complexity; that is, its starting point is non-ideal agents in a non-ideal world, characterized by social oppression, injustice, and inequality. Given this starting point, the aim of relational autonomy theory is to theorize the kind of autonomy that is possible for non-ideal human agents; to diagnose how social domination, oppression, stigmatization, and injustice can thwart individual

autonomy; and to hypothesize possible solutions, in the form of proposing how specific social relations, practices, and institutions might be reformed in such a way as to protect and foster individuals' autonomy.

In the following three sections of the paper I elaborate the three axes of autonomy in more detail and develop a specifically relational conception of each axis and its distinct conditions.

3. Self-determination: A Relational Conception

The notion of self-governance, as I have already suggested, is the core or kernel of what is taken to be a unitary concept of individual autonomy and has been the central focus of debates in bioethics and philosophical moral psychology. One problem with this focus, and with analyzing autonomy in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions for self-governance, is that it makes it difficult to explain how structural (social and political) constraints can undermine or impair individual autonomy and to identify the enabling structural conditions for autonomy.

p. 24 In the recent literature, theorists of autonomy have attempted to try to explain the importance of these constraints and conditions in different ways. One approach is that of Oshana, who develops a global analysis of self-governance as having de facto power and authority to exercise effective practical control $\hookrightarrow$ over one's life.²² Oshana argues that certain structural sociorelational conditions must be in place for an agent to be genuinely self-governing in this sense. Agents who stand in relations of subordination, subservience, deference, or economic or psychological dependence, for example, cannot be self-governing because they do not enjoy practical control over their lives. This is the case even if the agents in question endorse (or are not alienated from) their subordinate, subservient, or dependent position and even if they seem to satisfy the competence and authenticity requirements for self-governance. Oshana uses an array of examples—voluntary slaves, prisoners, women subject to extreme forms of gender oppression, members of restrictive religious orders—to support the guiding intuition behind her account—namely, that a person cannot lead a self-governing life if her options are severely restricted and she is effectively under the control of others.

I am very sympathetic to Oshana's guiding intuition, but I also think that she is forced into an overly strong position because she attempts to articulate this intuition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions for self-governance. Her view is overly strong because it is easy to devise counterexamples or to find real-life examples of persons who are subject to severe constraint but who are nevertheless clearly self-governing. Moreover, as John Christman and others have argued, the view seems to impugn the autonomy of persons who, despite being subject to crushing forms of oppression, nevertheless struggle to make plans, set goals, and have clear identity-defining commitments that are genuinely their own.²³ For this reason, I think a better way to articulate Oshana's guiding intuition is by distinguishing self-governance and self-determination as two distinct, but causally interdependent, axes or dimensions of autonomy.

p. 25 I develop this argument in what follows. Before doing so, however, I want briefly to discuss Christman's way of accounting for the structural constraints on and enabling conditions for autonomy. I refer here to his autonomy-based conception of justice as democratic legitimacy, as developed in *The Politics of Persons*.²⁴ Christman's account of the competence and authenticity conditions for self-governance is premised on a thick, sociohistorical conception of the person, and he is highly sensitive to the way that social group memberships and historic and ongoing injustice shape and constrain individual practical identities. But, contra Oshana, he does not think that structural conditions should be included in the conditions for self-governance.²⁵ Instead, he includes these $\hookrightarrow$ conditions as part of the requirements of democratic justice. Thus, Christman claims that an adequate description of the background circumstances of justice must include reference to the fact that specific social groups have been subject to historical and ongoing forms of social domination, inequalities of power, and "systematic exposure to unique forms of violence."²⁶ Christman also argues that his account of democratic legitimacy would support, as a basic claim of justice,

constitutionally guaranteed access to the basic capabilities and to the basic rights and liberties because of their role in enabling autonomy. I agree with Christman that claims of justice are distinct from the conditions for self-governance. However, autonomy as self-determination is typically a practical precondition for autonomy as self-governance, and securing the conditions for self-determination is a matter of basic justice.

I have defined *self-determination* as having the freedom and opportunity to make and enact choices of practical import to one's life, that is, choices about what to value, who to be, and what to do. I have also suggested that the self-determination axis identifies external, structural (social and political) conditions for individual autonomy, specifically *freedom* conditions and *opportunity* conditions.²⁷ Let me now say more about how I think these conditions should be understood.

Freedom conditions specify the political and personal liberties that are necessary for leading a self-determining life. Political liberties include the kinds of liberties that all liberal, democratic, and feminist theorists think should be protected, such as freedom of thought and expression, freedom of association, freedom of conscience and religious exercise, freedom to engage in political participation, and freedom from arbitrary arrest. Nevertheless, among theorists of autonomy and political philosophers, there will inevitably be substantive disputes about the extent of the liberties that are necessary for self-determination. A salient example in the context of international debates about immigration is whether freedom of international movement should be included among the basic liberties.²⁸ I won't take a stand on this issue here.

p. 26 With respect to the personal liberties, again I think there is likely to be substantial agreement among liberal, democratic, and feminist theorists about the basic personal liberties that are preconditions for self-determination. These liberties include freedom of movement (if not international movement), freedom of sexual expression, and freedom from all forms of coercion, manipulation, exploitation, and violence, including sexual exploitation and assault. However, again, there will be substantive disputes about what counts as coercion or exploitation. In bioethics, the question of how exploitation should be understood is at the core of debates about the commodification of reproductive tissue, body parts, and blood products. Bioethicists of a more libertarian persuasion, for example, insist that commodification—that is, markets in tissue, body parts, and blood products—need not be exploitative and that if properly regulated such markets enable individual self-determination. Their critics argue that in the constrained and often oppressive social contexts in which such markets operate, commodification is inherently exploitative.²⁹ Similarly, while liberal, democratic, and feminist theorists support the principle of reproductive freedom, there are substantive disputes about how far this liberty should extend. Bioethicists of a more libertarian persuasion think it extends to a right to determine the sex or to enhance the characteristics of one's offspring. Their critics respond that the libertarian position equates autonomy with negative liberty and mere preference satisfaction, fails to account for the social influences on and social impacts of individual choice, and trivializes the responsibilities and obligations attendant upon the exercise of reproductive autonomy, in particular parental responsibilities for the well-being and future autonomy of children.³⁰

p. 27 With respect to both these issues, I disagree with the libertarian position. Although I cannot engage in a detailed discussion of these specific normative issues here, hopefully the basis for my stance will become clearer in what follows. What these debates point to is that although the freedom and opportunity conditions for self-determination overlap and often converge they can also be in tension. Theorists who understand freedom in terms of negative liberty are likely to give more weight to freedom conditions than to opportunity conditions and hence to interpret the freedom conditions quite expansively. Theorists who emphasize the importance of substantive equality of opportunity think that what is important is not the promotion of freedom per se, since not all kinds of freedom are either important or desirable, but those freedoms that enable equality of opportunity.³¹ According to this view, which freedom conditions count as important will be determined by the opportunity conditions for self-determination. On my interpretation,

theories of relational autonomy prioritize opportunity conditions and hence fall into this latter category of theory.

Opportunity conditions specify the personal, social, and political opportunities that are preconditions for individual self-determination. Among theorists of autonomy, Raz is the most prominent exponent of the view that self-determination, as I have defined it, requires access to an adequate array of significant opportunities, or what he refers to as options.³² Although access to options requires certain freedoms, in the form of basic rights and liberties, Raz rejects the libertarian conception of freedom as minimally constrained freedom of choice, arguing that this conception conflates self-determination with license.³³ Raz develops a nuanced analysis of options as those complex and multidimensional activities, practices, and relationships that make our lives meaningful, such as pursuing a career in a particular profession, being a parent, being a member of a religious community, or participating in sport, cultural activities, or politics. Options, in other words, are ways of life, “dense webs of complex actions and interactions,” which depend on social practices, with their implicit rules, conventions, and shared meanings. Specific options are available only to those who have developed the relevant skills, as “embodied in social practices and transmitted by habituation.”³⁴ A culture, ↵ in Raz’s view, is a complex network of interlocking social practices, and it is only by being socialized in a culture that the range of options that constitute that culture are made available to a person. Thus, “by and large one’s cultural membership determines the horizon of one’s opportunities.”³⁵ Raz’s analysis of options highlights the importance of the social environment for self-determination. As he puts it, autonomy depends “not on the availability of one option of freedom of choice. It depends on the general character of one’s environment and culture.”³⁶ An autonomy-supporting culture, in his view, is one that makes available to its citizens an adequate range of significant options, by providing the institutional infrastructure—legal, educational, economic, political—that supports a wide array of significant options and by developing social policy measures aimed at making these options genuinely accessible to members of marginalized, disadvantaged, or historically oppressed social groups.

In developing her sociorelational account of autonomy, Oshana endorses Raz’s view of the importance of significant options for autonomy, and this is why I think her concern with the structural conditions for autonomy is best characterized as a concern with the self-determination dimension of autonomy.³⁷ While I am broadly sympathetic to Raz’s view, I have come to think that capabilities theory provides a better vocabulary for articulating the opportunity conditions for self-determination, both because it helps to make explicit the link between basic justice and self-determination and because I think there are fruitful connections, still to be explored, between relational autonomy theory and feminist interpretations of capabilities theory, such as those of Elizabeth Anderson, Martha Nussbaum, and Ingrid Robeyns.³⁸ I cannot explore these connections in any detail here, but I do want to provide a few reasons as to why I think capabilities theory provides a useful vocabulary for articulating the opportunity conditions for self-determination.

Capabilities theory provides a fine-grained comparative metric of equality, which disaggregates distinct dimensions of well-being and human development. The metric aims to focus attention on what a person is actually able to be and do in her life (her achieved functionings) and on the ↵ extent of her substantive opportunities (capabilities) to achieve valuable functionings. It also aims to focus attention on the factors that affect an individual’s ability to convert the resources available to her into valuable functionings.³⁹ Such factors include both individual differences in natural endowments, personal characteristics, and values and the external circumstances of people’s lives, such as their natural, social, cultural, and political environments. Because it attends to the particularities of individual circumstance and context, capabilities theory also enables a fine-grained analysis of the different sources of social injustice, inequality, and disadvantage within a society and their impact on people’s opportunities and capacities to lead self-determining lives.

There is some disagreement among capability theorists as to how valuable capabilities should be identified. Sen has resisted the development of a list of valuable capabilities, arguing that this should be settled via mechanisms of social choice, although it is evident from his writings that he thinks education, political participation, health, and gender equality are central capabilities.⁴⁰ Nussbaum, as is well known, has developed a universal list of ten central human capabilities.⁴¹ Other feminist capability theorists argue that such lists should be context specific and should be developed and refined through processes of democratic deliberation. For example, Elizabeth Anderson proposes a set of functionings necessary for equality of democratic citizenship, which includes “adequate safety, health and nutrition, education, mobility and communication, the ability to interact with others without stigma, and to participate in the system of cooperation.”⁴² Ingrid Robeyns suggests a more extensive list of fourteen capabilities necessary for gender equality in Western societies, which includes life and physical health, mental well-being, bodily integrity and safety, social relations, political empowerment, education and knowledge, mobility, domestic and paid work, time-autonomy, respect, and religion.⁴³ I do not propose to discuss the details of these lists here or to weigh into the debate about the appropriate method for arriving at any such list, although I do favor a more context-specific, deliberative approach. However, I would argue that lists of capabilities such as those of Anderson and Robeyns help to identify the kinds of opportunity conditions required for self-determination. Furthermore, the idea that a just society is one that ensures access, above a certain minimum threshold, to the valuable capabilities, however they are defined, shows why ensuring the opportunity conditions for self-determination is a matter of social justice.

p. 30

A further reason for thinking that capabilities theory provides a useful vocabulary for articulating the opportunity conditions for self-determination is that it marries a focus on the importance of individual self-determination with attention to the social and political constraining and enabling conditions of self-determination. Thus, on the one hand, the theory recognizes that different people will value different capabilities, and hence argues that a just society ought to ensure equality of access to a wide range of opportunities but leave it to individuals to choose which particular capabilities to realize beyond the threshold. On the other hand, capability theorists, like theorists of relational autonomy, are sensitive to the role of the social environment and social, political, legal and economic institutions in enabling or constraining individual self-determination. Of particular concern to both theories is the phenomenon of adaptive preference formation—the phenomenon whereby persons who are subject to social domination, oppression, or deprivation adapt their preferences (or goals) to their circumstances, eliminating or failing to form preferences (or goals) that cannot be satisfied, and even failing to conceive how their preferences might differ in different circumstances.⁴⁴ In social situations characterized by oppression or deprivation, the problem then is not just that restricted opportunities constrain self-determination but also that the internalization of these constraints can shape individuals’ sense of who they are and what they can be and do. Here, the causal interdependence between the opportunity conditions for self-determination, the competence and authenticity conditions for self-governance, and the conditions for self-authorization become evident.

My aim in this section has been to provide a brief characterization of autonomy as self-determination and its two conditions: freedom and opportunity. I have argued that relational autonomy theorists prioritize opportunity conditions, in the sense that the freedoms that count as important are those that promote substantive opportunity. I have also suggested that capabilities theory provides a vocabulary for articulating the kinds of opportunity conditions for self-determination that is particularly amenable to the concerns of relational autonomy theorists.

4. Self-governance: A Relational Conception

Self-governance, as I have defined it, involves having the skills and capacities necessary to make choices and enact decisions that express or cohere with one's reflectively constituted diachronic practical identity. The self-governance dimension of autonomy picks out autonomy conditions (competence and authenticity) that are in some sense internal to the person, whereas the self-determination axis identifies external, structural conditions. However, from a relational perspective, the distinction between internal and external conditions is complicated. If persons are socially constituted, then external conditions, including our social relations with others, shape the process of practical identity formation—the *self* of self-governance—and the development of the skills and competences required for *governing* the self. On the one hand, this is not necessarily problematic from a relational perspective—it points to the facts of developmental and ongoing dependency and to the extensive interpersonal, social, and institutional scaffolding necessary for self-governance. On the other hand, in contexts of social oppression, as is shown by the phenomenon of adaptive preference formation, severely limited opportunity conditions can deform the process of practical identity formation and impair the development and exercise of autonomy competence.

Authenticity conditions specify what it means to be self-governing with respect to one's motivational structure—that is, what it means for a choice, value, commitment, or reason to be one's own. Relational autonomy theorists are critical of conceptions of self-governance, such as hierarchical or endorsement conceptions, which analyze authenticity in terms of structural features of an agent's will at the time of choice or action. The argument, in brief, is that such synchronic accounts and criteria for authenticity that appeal to relations of internal coherence within the agent's will (e.g., identification, endorsement) fail to account for the historical processes of practical identity formation.⁴⁵ In particular, they fail to account for the internalized effects of psychological oppression, that is, the way oppression shapes agents' practical identities and motivational structures, for example their preferences, values, and cares.⁴⁶ Furthermore, criteria for coherence, such as identification, wholeheartedness, or endorsement, seem to rule out any kind of ambivalence or internal psychic conflict or fragmentation as inconsistent with self-governance.⁴⁷ But this is both normatively problematic and unrealistic, since ambivalence and some degree of inner psychic conflict or fragmentation seem to be inescapable aspects of practical identity formation.

On the basis of these criticisms, some relational theorists have rejected any kind of authenticity condition for autonomy, arguing that the concept of autonomy should be uncoupled from notions of practical or self-identity and understood in terms of other conditions, such as sociorelational structural conditions, normative (or some other) competence conditions, or accountability and answerability.⁴⁸ As I said at the outset, if we think of autonomy as the unitary concept of self-governance, requiring a single set of necessary and sufficient conditions, then these other conditions all need to be understood as additional or competitor conditions for self-governance. My proposal is to think of these conditions as identifying different dimensions or axes of the multidimensional concept of autonomy. In my view, the concept of self-governance cannot be uncoupled from the *self* who is supposed to govern itself, and I think the notion of practical identity provides a plausible conception of the self. For this reason, I don't think the authenticity condition should be rejected. Rather, I favor adopting a more nuanced analysis of authenticity, such as that proposed by John Christman, which is responsive to the criticisms that relational theorists have raised against standard accounts of authenticity. Christman understands authenticity as “non-alienation upon (historically sensitive, adequate) self-reflection, given one's diachronic practical identity and one's position in the world” or as reflective self-acceptance.⁴⁹

Competence conditions specify the range of competences or skills a person must possess, to some degree at least, to be self-governing. These include cognitive skills, ranging from minimally specified capacities to understand and process information, to more complex capacities for critical reflection and reasons responsiveness as well as volitional skills, such as self-control, and decisiveness. These skills have been

extensively discussed in the philosophical literature, along with the ways self-governance can be compromised by a range of mundane volitional or cognitive failings—such as weakness of will, self-deception, failures of self-control, and prudential irrationality—as well as by less common but more severe, volitional, and cognitive threats, such as compulsions, phobias and neuroses, addictions, and delusions and other forms of psychosis.

Relational autonomy theorists concur that such skills are certainly important for self-governance. However, relational approaches extend the philosophical understanding of autonomy competence by developing a more complex and capacious analysis of the skills involved in self-governance. Relational theorists argue that philosophers have overly rationalized the competences required for critical reflection while neglecting an array of other skills, including emotional skills, such as emotional responsiveness, and being able to interpret one's own and others' emotions; imaginative skills, which are necessary for envisaging alternative possible courses of action, or "imagining oneself otherwise" and engaging in self-transformative activities; and social or dialogical skills required for self-understanding or self-knowledge.⁵⁰ On a relational view, although self-governance does require a degree of self-knowledge, self-knowledge is not necessarily developed primarily through introspection. This is not only because we are not motivationally self-transparent but also because self-knowledge, indeed the self itself on this view, is constituted through ongoing social or dialogical interaction with others. This focus on the dialogical dimensions of self-governance echoes Charles Taylor's dialogical conception of the self.⁵¹ This kind of dialogical approach does recognize, of course, that some kinds of social interaction can thwart self-understanding and deform the formation of a self-governing practical identity. But the corrective is not to think that we can be self-governing only if we are freed from social influence. It is rather to promote social relationships that foster self-governance.

It is worth noting here that the autonomy skills identified by relational theorists and the relational emphasis on the constitutive role of social interaction overlap with four of the items on Nussbaum's list of capabilities:⁵²

1. Senses, imagination and thought, which she characterizes as "being able to use the senses, to think, imagine and reason—and to do these things in a 'truly human' way, a way cultivated by an adequate education."
2. ↳ Emotions, which she characterizes as "being able to have attachments to people and things outside ourselves.... Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety."
3. Practical reason, which she characterizes as "being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life."
4. Affiliation, which involves two components: (a) "Being able to live with and towards others, to show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another"; and (b) "Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others."

Although I would include affiliation (b) under the axis of self-authorization, the overlap between these four items on Nussbaum's list and the autonomy skills identified by relational theorists suggests that these items are centrally focused on the capabilities required for self-governance. Nussbaum also claims that practical reason and affiliation play an architectonic role in organizing and pervading the other capabilities.

This overlap raises a puzzle about why Nussbaum insists that her capabilities approach does not assume the value of autonomy and why she is at pains to distinguish the capability of practical reason from autonomy. She gives two reasons for this position.⁵³ First, although she regards the capability of practical reason as central to a dignified human life and thinks that this capability raises claims of justice against the state to

provide the kind of educational opportunities that enable the development of this capability, she argues that individuals who have acquired the capability may choose not to exercise it. Autonomy, on the other hand, is an exercise concept.⁵⁴ Nussbaum does concede that it is difficult to develop the capability for practical reason without exercising it, but she seems to think that this is possible. I think this is implausible and that it makes more sense to say that individuals may exercise the capacity for practical reason, or self-governance, to greater or lesser degrees, sometimes by choice, but often because their social environment has not supported the development of the relevant competences.

p. 35 Nussbaum's second reason, which I think underpins the first, concerns the relationship between autonomy and epistemic and normative authority. I take up this issue in the following section.

5. Self-authorization: A Relational Conception

Self-authorization, as I have defined it, involves regarding oneself as having the *normative authority* to be self-determining and self-governing. In other words, it involves regarding oneself as authorized to exercise practical control over one's life and to determine one's own values and identity-defining commitments. In the recent literature on social and relational autonomy, a number of theorists (myself included) have characterized what I am here calling self-authorization as a necessary condition for self-governance.⁵⁵ I now think this is a mistake and that self-authorization is a separate axis or dimension of autonomy, which involves three conditions: that the person regards herself as the kind of agent who can be held accountable and answerable to others for her reasons—call this the *accountability* condition; that the person stands in certain self-affective relations to herself, in particular relations of self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem—call this the *self-evaluative attitudes* condition; and that such attitudes in turn presuppose that the person is regarded by others as having the social standing of an autonomous agent—call this the *social recognition* condition.

In explaining the accountability condition it is helpful to contrast it with one way in which the notion of self-authorization might be interpreted. Self-authorization is sometimes understood as requiring substantive epistemic and normative independence from authority. That is, the self-authorizing person does not look to any external authority—whether another person or God—in determining what to believe, value, or commit herself to. I think Nussbaum equates autonomy with such a conception of self-authorization, as does Oshana. This is the second reason why Nussbaum insists that the capability of practical reason is different from autonomy: because she thinks a commitment to the value of autonomy is inconsistent with religious commitment. So she says: “Autonomy thus means something positive, that one gives oneself laws and engages in critical reflection; but it also means something negative, that one denies that God is a necessary part of the justification of moral claims.”⁵⁶ In my view, this is a mistaken interpretation of self-authorization, and in fact Nussbaum's capability of affiliation is centrally concerned with self-authorization, as I characterize it.

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Self-authorization involves, first, regarding oneself as responsible to oneself and as answerable and accountable to others, for one's beliefs, values, commitments, and reasons. Taylor's notion of autonomy as involving responsibility for self articulates this kind of accountability condition, as does Stephen Darwall's second-person standpoint.⁵⁷ In the recent literature on autonomy, Benson and Westlund are its most eloquent exponents.⁵⁸ The basic idea is that as social agents we are subject to others' demands that we account for our decisions, explain the reasons for them, and take responsibility for those decisions. To be self-authorizing, a person must not only be capable of understanding and responding to this social demand but must also regard herself as a valid source of self-authorizing claims.

It is important to clarify that being accountable does not mean that we must be accountable to certain specific others or that others must agree with our beliefs, values, commitments, reasons, or decisions. Nor

does it mean that we must actually be held to account for each and every belief, value, and so on. What it requires is what Westlund refers to as a disposition to be answerable: that we are prepared to take responsibility as agents, for our beliefs, values, and commitments. This means being responsive to others' requests for explanation, being prepared to provide reasons for our beliefs and values, and being willing to defend or revise them in light of others' critical questioning. It also requires, in turn, that we regard ourselves as authorized to hold others accountable in the same way. I want to stress that the accountability condition is fundamentally social and dialogical, not only because its structure is dyadic or second-personal but also because our reasons, values and commitments, indeed our sense of our selves, emerge only through this kind of dialogical interaction. I would also suggest, contra Nussbaum, that accountability, thus understood, is not inconsistent per se with religious commitment. But it is inconsistent with dogmatic forms of religious commitment, or any other form of dogmatism, for that matter, which involve appeals to authority that bypass a person's reflective agency.

p. 37 Regarding oneself as accountable involves having a sense of one's epistemic and normative authority with regard to one's life and one's practical commitments. This in turn seems to require the agent to have certain self-evaluative attitudes, in particular attitudes of appropriate self-respect, self-trust, and ↵ self-esteem. This second condition for self-authorization has been articulated in different ways in the literature on social and relational autonomy.⁵⁹ I mention here Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth's version of the claim, which brings out the connections between self-authorization and self-governance.⁶⁰ Anderson and Honneth characterize *self-respect* as "an affectively laden self-conception that underwrites a view of oneself as the legitimate source of reasons for acting."⁶¹ To regard oneself with appropriate self-respect is to regard oneself as the moral equal of others, as having equal standing to have one's views and claims taken seriously. *Self-trust* or "basic self-confidence" is the capacity to trust one's own convictions, emotional responses, and judgments. Anderson and Honneth argue that this attitude underpins the kind of reflexive self-interpretation that is central to self-governance. Because our practical identities are complex and dynamic, deliberating about what to do involves self-interpretation—for example, working out which desires should constitute reasons for us, which commitments are most important, which emotional responses we should attend to, and how to reconcile conflicts arising from different social roles. The attitude of *self-esteem* or self-worth is a fundamentally evaluative stance toward oneself; it involves thinking of one's life, one's commitments, and one's attitudes as meaningful, worthwhile, and valuable.

p. 38 It is always possible to find or think up examples of heroic persons who hold appropriate self-evaluating attitudes even in situations where they are despised and humiliated by others. However, psychologically these self-evaluative attitudes are typically dependent on intersubjective social relations, that is, on whether a person is regarded as a respect-worthy, autonomous agent by others. These attitudes are also constituted within normative structures and practices of *social recognition*.⁶² Hence, they are vulnerable to others' failures, or refusals, to grant the person appropriate recognition in a range of different spheres: for example, in her interpersonal relations; at work and in the institutions of civil society; and as a citizen. Such failures of recognition are quite typical in social relations involving domination or inequalities of power, authority, or social and economic status, especially when these are inflected by gender, race, ethnicity, or disability. Relational autonomy theorists claim that the internalization of non- or misrecognition can corrode an agent's sense of self-regard, ↵ thereby undermining her sense of herself as self-authorizing. For example, unless she is incredibly resilient, an employee who is subject to constant sexist and racist abuse by her boss and co-workers may find it very difficult to maintain an appropriate sense of self-regard.⁶³

It might be thought that the self-authorization axis of autonomy is unduly demanding and likely to be met by relatively few people. For example, the accountability condition for self-authorization may seem to assume an unrealistically high level of articulacy and open-mindedness, while the self-evaluative attitudes condition may seem to assume an unrealistically high level of confidence in oneself. Who among us, for

example, does not doubt the worth or meaningfulness of our commitments? And if we did not would that make us more autonomous or just arrogant and insufferable? In response, it is important to emphasize that this condition requires that a person have “appropriate” self-evaluative attitudes.⁶⁴ I would also reiterate that each of these conditions should be understood as a matter of degree rather than an all-or-nothing affair. Different persons are likely to meet these different conditions to different degrees. Indeed any one individual is likely to meet them to different degrees in different contexts and domains.

It is also important to counter here a common, but I think misguided, charge against supposedly overdemanding conceptions of autonomy, namely, that they can be used to sanction objectionable forms of paternalistic interference with the choices of persons who may already be socially marginalized: those with limited capacities for self-governance or who do not regard themselves and are not recognized by others as self-authorizing agents.⁶⁵ In response I would argue that if the social relations, institutions, norms, and practices to which a person is subject fail to recognize her social standing as a self-authorizing agent and that if this kind of misrecognition impairs her capacities for self-governance it does not follow at all that paternalistic interference is warranted. Rather, first, it provides grounds for criticizing those social structures as unjust and reforming them, and second, it provides reasons for providing targeted social support and resources to scaffold the person’s capacities for self-governance.⁶⁶

p. 39 The conditions for self-authorization, then, although they may be met to varying degrees, are underpinned by a fundamentally normative conception of persons as moral equals who ought to be treated as respect-worthy, or dignified beings, and as self-authorizing sources of valid claims. This notion of persons as respect-worthy or dignified beings is categorical; it is neither context specific nor a matter of degree.⁶⁷

Conclusion

I have argued that autonomy should be understood as a multidimensional concept, with three distinct but causally interdependent axes—self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization—each with its distinct conditions, which may be realized to different degrees. There are two obvious objections to this multidimensional analysis. One objection might be to insist that there must be a unitary idea underlying these different dimensions of autonomy. The other objection might be to suggest that if my analysis is correct, then it is not clear why we should hold onto the concept of autonomy at all. Why not just stop talking about “autonomy” and start talking instead about self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization?

In response to the first objection, my reply is that if our goal is to understand the role played by the concept of autonomy in our social and normative practices, then insisting on the necessity of an underlying unitary idea is mistaken. Although philosophers are attracted to tidy conceptual boundaries, and for that reason are also attracted to the project of determining the necessary and sufficient conditions for the correct application of our concepts, many social concepts, such as the concept of autonomy, are not readily amenable to such analyses.

In response to the second objection, my reply is that although I have argued that the concept of autonomy is multidimensional rather than unitary, it would be a mistake to stop talking about autonomy and just talk instead about self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization. This is because the concept of autonomy plays an important role in diverse social and normative practices. The advantage of the multidimensional analysis is that it enables us to tease apart the different dimensions of the concept while still holding onto the term *autonomy*.

p. 40 There are several further advantages of the multidimensional analysis. First, distinguishing self-determination from self-governance and self-authorization enables us to give due weight to the social and

political preconditions for autonomy and to underscore that securing these conditions is a matter of social justice. But it also accounts for our important intuitions about autonomy—namely, that a person may be self-governing and self-authorizing to some degree even in situations of crushing oppression where these preconditions are severely curtailed, and conversely that a person may enjoy all the freedoms and opportunities necessary for self-determination but nevertheless fail to be self-governing or have a sense of herself as a self-authorizing agent. I think many of the examples and counterexamples in the literature on relational autonomy appeal to these conflicting intuitions and that the unitary concept of self-governance is inadequate to account for them. Rather than devoting our energies to thinking up yet more examples and counterexamples, theorists of autonomy should instead focus our attention on analyzing in more detail and depth the different dimensions of autonomy and the interrelations between them.

Second, in doing so, we may find that in different contexts certain dimensions of autonomy, and the conditions that fall under them, may be more salient than others. Further, since the conditions for autonomy may be satisfied to differing degrees, it may be important to set different thresholds for meeting these conditions in different contexts. For example, with respect to democratic citizenship, it might be important to set high thresholds for self-determination, in the form of requiring extensive opportunities and the liberties that enable them, but quite low thresholds for an agent to count as self-governing. It might also be important to place a great deal of emphasis, in interpersonal relations, in civil society, and at the level of the state, on ameliorating the social conditions that undermine self-authorization. In the context of medical decision making it may be the case that the most salient dimensions of autonomy are self-governance and self-authorization. Thus, health professionals ought to focus on whether patients meet the competence and authenticity conditions for self-governance to a sufficiently high degree and whether they seem capable of meeting the accountability condition. In cases where individuals do not meet the required threshold for one or other of these conditions, then extensive social scaffolding in the form of support and resources provided by carers may be required to enable autonomous decision making, except in cases where it is more appropriate for a legally appointed guardian or family members to make the decision on the patient's behalf.

Third, even if it is the case that the salience of the different dimensions and conditions varies with context, the importance of the multidimensional analysis is that it also draws attention to the interrelations among these distinct dimensions and conditions. For example, even if the self-governance and self-authorization dimensions of autonomy are most relevant to making specific decisions in medical contexts, it is nevertheless crucial, both in medical ethics and in bioethics more generally, to be attentive to the self-determination dimension of autonomy. In particular, we need to be attentive to the ways that constrained opportunities and restricted liberties may increase people's vulnerability, making them more open to exploitation, coercion, and manipulation and less able to regard themselves as self-authorizing agents.

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Notes

1 I also explore these connections in Mackenzie, "The Importance of Relational Autonomy and Capabilities for an Ethics of

- Vulnerability,” in *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*, edited by Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy A. Rogers and Susan Dodds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). For a related discussion, see Marina Oshana’s contribution to this volume.
- 2 Gerald Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) [10.1017/CBO9780511625206](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511625206); Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Marina Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006).
 - 3 Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) [10.1017/CBO9780511554476](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554476).
 - 4 Tom Beauchamp and James Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 7th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
 - 5 For reasons-responsiveness views, see Susan Wolf, *Freedom within Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); for normative competence views, see Paul Benson, “Autonomy and Oppressive Socialization,” *Social Theory and Practice* 17 (1991): 385–408 [10.5840/soctheorpract199117319](https://doi.org/10.5840/soctheorpract199117319); Natalie Stoljar, “Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition,” in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*, edited by C. Mackenzie and N. Stoljar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 94–111; for skills-based views, see Diana Meyers, *Self, Society and Personal Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
 - 6 For the notion of identification, see the essays in Harry Frankfurt, *The importance of what we care about* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) [10.1017/CBO9780511818172](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511818172); for care-based analyses, see, e.g., Frankfurt, “On Caring,” in Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 155–180; Agnieszka Jaworska “Caring and Internality,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74:3 (2007): 529–568 [10.1111/j.1933-1592.2007.00039.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2007.00039.x); Jaworska, “Caring, Minimal Autonomy, and the Limits of Liberalism,” in *Naturalized Bioethics: Towards Responsible Knowing and Practice*, edited by H. Lindemann, M. Verkerk, and M. Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 80–105.
 - 7 John Christman, *The Politics of Persons: Individual Autonomy and Socio-historical Selves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) [10.1017/CBO9780511635571](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511635571).
 - 8 Paul Benson, “Feminist Intuitions and the Normative Substance of Autonomy,” in *Personal Autonomy: New Essays on Personal Autonomy and Its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, edited by James Stacey Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 124–142 [10.1017/CBO9780511614194](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511614194); Paul Benson, “Taking Ownership: Authority and Voice in Autonomous Agency,” in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism*, edited by J. Christman and J. Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 101–126 [10.1017/CBO9780511610325](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511610325); Andrea Westlund, “Rethinking Relational Autonomy,” *Hypatia* 24:4 (2009): 26–49 [10.1111/j.1527-2001.2009.01056.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2009.01056.x).
 - 9 Carolyn McLeod, *Self-Trust and Reproductive Autonomy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
 - 10 Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth, “Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition and Justice,” in Christman and Anderson, *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism*, 127–149; Joel Anderson, “Vulnerability and Autonomy Intertwined,” in *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*, edited by Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy A. Rogers, and Susan Dodds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
 - 11 For discussions of the distinctions between local, programmatic, and global autonomy, see especially Meyers, *Self, Society and Personal Choice*; Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society*.
 - 12 See the discussion of autonomy in Beauchamp and Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*. See also UK Department for Constitutional Affairs, *Mental Capacity Act 2005 Code of Practice* (Norwich: Stationery Office, 2007).
 - 13 For further discussions of this claim and of the significance of relational autonomy for bioethics, see Susan Sherwin, “A Relational Approach to Autonomy in Health Care,” in *The Politics of Women’s Health: Exploring Agency and Autonomy*, edited by S. Sherwin and the Feminist Health Care Ethics Research Network (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 19–47; Catriona Mackenzie, “Autonomy,” in *Routledge Companion to Bioethics*, edited by John Arras, Elizabeth Fenton, and Rebecca Kukla (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).
 - 14 For more extended discussion of these claims, see Mackenzie and Stoljar, “Introduction: Autonomy Refigured,” in Mackenzie and Stoljar, *Relational Autonomy*.
 - 15 A stronger version of normative individualism is proposed by Elizabeth Anderson, “Towards a Non-Ideal, Relational Methodology for Political Philosophy,” *Hypatia* 24:4 (2009): 132 [10.1111/j.1527-2001.2009.01062.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2009.01062.x). She holds that the claims of individuals have normative priority over the claims of social groups or collectives. Relational autonomy need not be committed to this stronger form of normative individualism, although some relational theorists might endorse the stronger view.
 - 16 See, e.g., Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011) [10.4159/harvard.9780674061200](https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674061200).
 - 17 This is not to deny that some sources of vulnerability (e.g., abusive interpersonal relationships, or political repression) may undermine autonomy. For more detailed analysis of vulnerability, see Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy A. Rogers, and

- Susan Dodds, eds., *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). For reflections on the complex relationship between autonomy and vulnerability, see especially the essays in that volume by Joel Anderson, Catriona Mackenzie, and Jackie Leach Scully. For extended discussion of the way that some social relationships, including relations of care, can undermine autonomy, see especially Marilyn Friedman, "Autonomy and Social Relationships: Rethinking the Feminist Critique," in *Feminists Rethink the Self*, edited by Diana Tietjens Meyers (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 40–61; Friedman, "Autonomy, Social Disruption, and Women," in Mackenzie and Stoljar, *Relational Autonomy*, 35–51; Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) [10.1093/0195138503.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/0195138503.001.0001).
- 18 See especially Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
- 19 This third premise is implicit rather than explicit in many accounts of relational autonomy. Theorists who have explicitly discussed the social justice implications of relational autonomy are Anderson and Honneth, "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition and Justice"; Catriona Mackenzie, "Autonomy: Individualistic or Social and Relational?" in *Risk, Welfare and Work*, edited by G. Marston, J. Moss, and J. Quiggin (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010), 107–127; Mackenzie, "Conceptions of Autonomy and Conceptions of the Body in Bioethics," in *Feminist Bioethics: At the Center, on the Margins*, edited by Jackie Leach Scully, Laurel Baldwin-Ragaven, and Petya Fitzpatrick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Marina Oshana, "Personal Autonomy and Society," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 29:1 (1998): 81–102 [10.1111/j.1467-9833.1998.tb00098.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.1998.tb00098.x); Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society*.
- 20 The way I have formulated this point is influenced by Elizabeth Anderson's analysis of relational inequality in Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109:2 (1999): 287–337 [10.1086/233897](https://doi.org/10.1086/233897); Anderson, "Towards a Non-Ideal, Relational Methodology for Political Philosophy," *Hypatia* 24:4 (2009): 130–145 [10.1111/j.1527-2001.2009.01062.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2009.01062.x); Anderson, "Justifying the Capabilities Approach to Justice," in *Measuring Justice: Primary Goods and Capabilities*, edited by Harry Brighouse and Ingrid Robeyns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81–100 [10.1017/CBO9780511810916](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511810916).
- 21 In his critique of ideal theory, Charles Mills describes relational autonomy as a form of non-ideal theorizing about autonomy. Mills, "Ideal Theory as Ideology," *Hypatia* 20:3 (2005): 165–184. For a related discussion of non-ideal theory, see Ingrid Robeyns, "Ideal Theory in Theory and Practice," *Social Theory and Practice* 34:3 (2008): 341–361 [10.5840/soctheorpract200834321](https://doi.org/10.5840/soctheorpract200834321). For a different kind of critique of ideal theory, see Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- 22 Oshana, "Personal Autonomy and Society," Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society*.
- 23 See, e.g., his critique of Oshana's position in Christman, *Politics of Persons*, 167–173.
- 24 Christman, *Politics of Persons*.
- 25 Christman's reason for excluding structural conditions from the conditions for self-governance is that he thinks including them involves unacceptable perfectionism. Christman criticizes Oshana's view on these grounds, claiming that her account requires "that autonomous agents must have certain value commitments and/or must be treated in certain normatively acceptable ways," even if the agents in question do not endorse those value commitments. Christman, *Politics of Persons*, 171. For a detailed response to Christman's perfectionism argument, see Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society*; Mackenzie, "Relational Autonomy, Normative Authority and Perfectionism," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 39 (2008): 512–33 [10.1111/j.1467-9833.2008.00440.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.2008.00440.x).
- 26 Christman, *Politics of Persons*, 224.
- 27 The distinction between freedom conditions and opportunity conditions overlaps to some extent with Isaiah Berlin's distinction between negative and positive liberty in Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). As I explain in the following text, theorists who understand the freedom conditions for autonomy in terms of negative liberty construe the freedom required for autonomy primarily as freedom from the undue interference of other persons or the state. Theorists who understand the freedom conditions for autonomy in terms of substantive freedom or opportunity think that although some degree of negative liberty is a necessary condition for autonomy it is insufficient. What matters for autonomy is the extent of a person's substantive opportunities to be and to do. Autonomy-enabling opportunities require a lot more than freedom from interference; they require substantial support by other persons and by state agencies.
- 28 Joseph Carens and Phillip Cole are examples of theorists who argue that liberal political principles entail that freedom of international movement should be included among the basic liberties. Carens, "Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders," *Review of Politics* 49:2 (1987): 251–273 [10.1017/S0034670500033817](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500033817); Cole, "Open Borders: An Ethical Defense," in *Debating the Ethics of Immigration: Is There a Right to Exclude?*, edited by Christopher Heath Wellman and Phillip Cole (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Liberal theorists who reject this claim and who seek to defend the rights of nation states to exclude immigrants include Michael Blake, "Immigration," in *Companion to Applied Ethics*, edited

- by R. Frey and Christopher Heath Wellman (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 224–237; David Miller, “Immigrants, Nations and Citizenship,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 16:4 (2008): 371–390 [10.1111/j.1467-9760.2007.00295.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2007.00295.x)[↗]. This is of course a complex debate that I cannot enter into here, and I refer to it purely for illustrative purposes.
- 29 Theorists who appeal to the right to self-determination to defend markets in body parts, tissues, and eggs, include, e.g., J. Radcliffe-Richards, “Selling Organs, Gametes and Surrogacy Services,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Medical Ethics*, edited by R. Rhodes, L. Francis, and A. Silvers (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 254–268 [10.1002/9780470690932](https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470690932)[↗]; David Resnik, “Regulating the Market for Human Eggs,” *Bioethics* 15:1 (2001): 1–25; James Stacey Taylor, “Autonomy, Constraining Options, and Organ Sales,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 19:3 (2002): 273–285 [10.1111/1468-5930.00221](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5930.00221)[↗]. For critiques, see, e.g., Margaret Jane Radin, *Contested Commodities: The Trouble with the Trade in Sex, Children, Body Parts and Other Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); N. Scheper-Hughes, “Illegal Organ Trade: Global Justice and the Traffic in Human Organs,” in *Living Donor Organ Transplants*, edited by Rainer Gruessner and Enrico Benedetti (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 106–121; Tamara Zutlevics, “Markets and the Needy: Organ Sales or Aid?” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 18:3 (2001): 297–302 [10.1111/1468-5930.00196](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5930.00196)[↗].
- 30 The most well-known advocates of the libertarian position on genetic enhancement are Nicholas Agar, “Designing Babies: Morally Permissible Ways to Modify the Human Genome,” *Bioethics* 9:1 (1995): 1–15 [10.1111/j.1467-8519.1995.tb00297.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8519.1995.tb00297.x)[↗]; John Harris, *Clones, Genes and Immortality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Julian Savulescu, “Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children,” *Bioethics* 15:5–6 (2001): 413–426 [10.1111/1467-8519.00251](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8519.00251)[↗]. I develop critiques of the libertarian position with respect to debates in bioethics in Mackenzie, “Autonomy: Individualistic or Social and Relational?”; “Conceptions of Autonomy and Conceptions of the Body in Bioethics”; “Autonomy,” in Arris et al., *Routledge Companion to Bioethics*.
- 31 This is clearly Nussbaum’s position as well, and it is on these grounds that she criticizes Sen’s interpretation of capabilities theory as concerned with promoting freedom. See, e.g., Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 69–76.
- 32 Raz, *Morality of Freedom*.
- 33 Raz, “Multiculturalism: A Liberal Perspective” in Raz, *Ethics in the Public Domain: Essays in the Morality of Law and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 17–191.
- 34 Raz, “Multiculturalism,” 177.
- 35 Raz, “Multiculturalism,” 177.
- 36 Raz, *Morality of Freedom*, 391.
- 37 Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society*, 84–86.
- 38 Elizabeth Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?”; Anderson, “Justifying the Capabilities Approach to Justice”; Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) [10.1017/CBO9780511841286](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511841286)[↗]; Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*; Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*; Ingrid Robeyns, “Sen’s Capability Approach and Gender Inequality: Selecting Relevant Capabilities,” *Feminist Economics* 9:2–3 (2003): 71–84; Robeyns, “Gender and the Metric of Justice,” in Brighouse and Robeyns, *Measuring Justice*, 215–235.
- 39 See Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) for a detailed analysis of the notions of capability and functioning.
- 40 See the chapter on social choice in Sen, *Idea of Justice*.
- 41 For a recent version of this list, see Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*.
- 42 Anderson, “Justifying the Capabilities Approach to Justice,” 83.
- 43 Robeyns, “Sen’s Capability Approach.”
- 44 For the original formulation of the problem of adaptive preferences, see Jon Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For its relevance in motivating capabilities theory, see Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*; Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*; Nussbaum, “Adaptive Preferences and Women’s Options,” *Economics and Philosophy* 17 (2001): 67–88 [10.1017/S0266267101000153](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266267101000153)[↗]. For a recent discussion of its relevance for gender oppression, see Serene Khader, *Adaptive Preferences and Women’s Empowerment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199777884.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199777884.001.0001)[↗]. For discussion of its relevance to relational autonomy theory, see Natalie Stoljar’s contribution to this volume.
- 45 Examples of synchronic hierarchical theories include Dworkin, *Theory and Practice of Autonomy*; Frankfurt, *Importance of What We Care About*. Endorsement theories include Gary Watson, “Free Agency,” *Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1975): 205–220 [10.2307/2024703](https://doi.org/10.2307/2024703)[↗]; Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*.
- 46 For the first critique along these lines, see Marilyn Friedman, “Autonomy and the Split-Level Self,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24:1 (1986): 19–35 [10.1111/j.2041-6962.1986.tb00434.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.1986.tb00434.x)[↗]. For a more detailed overview, see Mackenzie and Stoljar, “Introduction: Autonomy Refigured.” Christman is the best-known proponent of the historical approach, first articulated in Christman, “Autonomy and Personal History,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 21 (1991): 1–24 and developed in its most sophisticated form in Christman, *Politics of Persons*.

- 47 For critiques along these lines, see Benson, "Taking Ownership"; Oshana, "Autonomy and Self-Identity," in Christman and Anderson, *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism* 77–97.
- 48 For sociorelational structural conditions see Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society*. For normative (or some other) competence conditions see Benson, "Autonomy and Oppressive Socialization." For accountability and answerability see Benson, "Feminist Intuitions and the Normative Substance of Autonomy"; Benson, "Taking Ownership: Authority and Voice in Autonomous Agency"; Westlund, "Rethinking Relational Autonomy."
- 49 Christman, *Politics of Persons*, 155. Much more needs to be said of course to flesh out Christman's analysis of authenticity. For detailed discussion see Christman, *Politics of Persons*, 149–163, and his contribution to this volume. It is important to stress that Christman's reflection condition is hypothetical; an agent is not required to reflect on every aspect of her practical identity, that is, every value, commitment, preference, trait, and characteristic to be authentic with respect to that aspect of her motivational structure. Rather, the requirement is just that were she to so reflect she would not feel alienated from it. Note that in his contribution to this volume Christman weakens the requirement of reflection further, now preferring to talk of *reflexive* rather than *reflective* self-acceptance.
- 50 For discussion of the importance of these skills for autonomy, see especially Meyers, *Self, Society and Personal Choice*; Mackenzie, "Imagining Oneself Otherwise," in Mackenzie and Stoljar, *Relational Autonomy*, 124–150; Mackenzie, "Critical Reflection, Self-Knowledge, and the Emotions," *Philosophical Explorations* 5:2 (2002): 186–206 [10.1080/10002002108538732](https://doi.org/10.1080/10002002108538732).
- 51 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- 52 Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 33–34.
- 53 Nussbaum provides the most extensive discussion of these reasons in Nussbaum, "Political Liberalism and Respect: A Response to Linda Barclay," *SATS: Nordic Journal of Philosophy* 4:2 (2003): 25–44 [10.1515/SATS.2003.25](https://doi.org/10.1515/SATS.2003.25).
- 54 Nussbaum also seems to think that those who support the value of autonomy, such as Raz, think that a life in which a person does not exercise this capacity is less valuable and less worthy of respect. I don't think that Raz holds a derogatory view of persons whose lives are not autonomous. His view is rather that individual autonomy is crucial for living a decent human life in contemporary democratic societies and that therefore the state has an obligation to support its development and exercise by ensuring that individuals have an adequate range of significant opportunities.
- 55 See, e.g., Benson, "Feminist Intuitions and the Normative Substance of Autonomy"; Benson, "Taking Ownership"; Mackenzie, "Relational Autonomy, Normative Authority and Perfectionism"; Westlund, "Rethinking Relational Autonomy."
- 56 Nussbaum, "Political Liberalism and Respect," 41.
- 57 See Taylor's distinction between strong and weak evaluation in "What Is Human Agency?" in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 15–44; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. For Darwall's account of the second-person standpoint, see Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
- 58 Benson, "Taking Ownership"; Westlund, "Rethinking Relational Autonomy."
- 59 For different variants, see, e.g., Trudy Govier, "Self-Trust, Autonomy, and Self-Esteem," *Hypatia* 8 (2003): 99–120 [10.1111/j.1527-2001.1993.tb00630.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1993.tb00630.x); Paul Benson, "Free Agency and Self-Worth," *Journal of Philosophy* 91 (1994): 650–668 [10.2307/2940760](https://doi.org/10.2307/2940760); Carolyn McLeod, *Self-Trust and Reproductive Autonomy*; Mackenzie, "Relational Autonomy, Normative Authority and Perfectionism."
- 60 Anderson and Honneth, "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition and Justice."
- 61 Anderson and Honneth, "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition and Justice," 132.
- 62 See Anderson, "Vulnerability and Autonomy Intertwined" for a detailed analysis of the interrelation between the psychological and normative dynamics of social recognition with respect to the self-evaluative attitudes.
- 63 The impact of work on personal autonomy has been curiously neglected in the literature. This neglect is a serious omission, given the importance of work for our lives. For valuable analyses of work and autonomy, see Beate Roessler, "Meaningful Work: Arguments from Autonomy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20:1 (2012): 71–93 [10.1111/j.1467-9760.2011.00408.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2011.00408.x); Andrea Veltman's contribution to this volume.
- 64 The question of how to distinguish appropriate from misplaced self-evaluative attitudes raises complex psychological and normative issues that do need to be addressed by theorists who emphasize the importance of these attitudes for autonomy. However, it is beyond the scope of my discussion in this chapter to address this question.
- 65 For criticisms along these lines, see, e.g., John Christman, "Relational Autonomy, Liberal Individualism, and the Social Constitution of Selves," *Philosophical Studies* 117 (2004): 143–164 [10.1023/B:PHIL.0000014532.56866.5c](https://doi.org/10.1023/B:PHIL.0000014532.56866.5c); Jules Holroyd, "Relational Autonomy and Paternalistic Interventions," *Res Publica* 15:4 (2009): 321–336 [10.1007/s11158-009-9090-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-009-9090-6).
- 66 For a more detailed argument for this claim, see Mackenzie, "Importance of Relational Autonomy and Capabilities for an Ethics of Vulnerability."
- 67 This categorical notion of respect is what Stephen Darwall refers to as recognition respect, as distinct from appraisal

respect, which involves positive evaluation of a person's character or accomplishments and attributes and which is context dependent, earned, and a matter of degree. Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* 88 (1977): 36–49 [10.1086/292054](https://doi.org/10.1086/292054)[↗]. It should be noted that having appropriate self-evaluative attitudes seems to be dependent on both recognition and appraisal respect.