





raffaella giovagnoli

# Autonomy: a Matter of Content

preface by James Swindler

FIRENZE UNIVERSITY PRESS

2007

Autonomy : a matter of content / Ra aela Giovagnoli ;  
preface by James Swindler. – Firenze . Firenze University  
Press, 2007.  
(Studi e saggi)

<http://digital.casalini.it/9788884536365>

ISBN 978-88-8453- 636-5 (online)

ISBN 978-88-8453- 635-8 (print)

170 (ed 20)

Il volume è co-finanziato dall'Università degli Studi di Salerno.

© 2007 Firenze University Press  
Università degli Studi di Firenze  
Firenze University Press  
Borgo Albizi, 28, 50122 Firenze, Italy  
<http://epress.uni.it/>

*Printed in Italy*

*a Bustik*



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## PREFACE

A man may go through life, systematically keeping out of view all that might cause a change in his opinions. But this method of fixing belief will be unable to hold its ground in practice. The social impulse is against it. The man who adopts it will find that other men think differently from him, and it will apt to occur to him, in some saner moment, that their opinions are quite as good as his own, and this will shake his confidence in his belief. This conception, that another man's thought or sentiment may be equivalent to one's own, is a distinctly new step, and a highly important one. It arises from an impulse too strong in man to be suppressed, without danger of destroying the human species. Unless we make ourselves hermits, we shall necessarily influence each other's opinions; so that the problem becomes how to fix belief, not in the individual merely, but in the community.

*C. S. Peirce*

We search through our congested, urbanized, cacophonous world for a firmation of personal worth. But everywhere, from the each of our beginnings, we face potential coercion and oppression. Each society has its practices, expressed through family, work, the arts, religion, etc., into which we are thrown and by which we are made. We are indeed social creatures: we are products of powerful, even overwhelming, forces of socialization, largely unchosen by anyone in particular. They create in us without our even noticing, convictions and commitments that color all our actions and relationships. From the beginning of learning our native tongues, we see the world and one another from a narrowed, usually misleading, perspective that merely reflects the accidents of birth. The problem of personal autonomy, which is the subject of this thoughtful book, is how to be more than what the social world makes us, how to turn the enormous weight of socialization into an adventure of discovering, perfecting and practicing our own personal worth where life has value beyond mere service to norms and values determined mindlessly and imposed by others. This book's ambitious and essentially optimistic goal is to show the way.

Ra aela Giovagnoli here offers a wide-ranging but coherent, erudite but well-focused account of personal moral autonomy, its nature, its development and its challenges. She draws on many sources to generate a powerful and novel analysis, the key ideas of which are (1) the need for an open, pluralistic society providing the ground in which autonomy can take root, (2) the development of critical and self-critical rationality capable of discerning not only subjective reasons for action but also the objective reasons that there are, and (3) a deontic social structure sensitive to many kinds of reasons that provides non-oppressive, practical norms enabling agents to be not merely authentic but to achieve personal autonomy.

As Kant, Habermas and others have noticed, we exercise reason in variety of ways. Relevant here is the contrast between instrumental and substantive reason. Reason can be indeed and often is made the slave of the passions. It is hard to see how a rational species like ours could have arisen or survived unless this were so. In the “practical” world of getting and spending, acquisition and consumption – maintenance, as I like to call it – instrumental rationality rules. Nevertheless, over and above and often against this we have the capacity to progressively develop enough independence of judgment to free reason from its bondage, to attain attitudes and standards that enable us, if we are fortunate, to critically evaluate the desires, commitments and goals that drive instrumental reason. The way out, on Giovagnoli’s reading, is to socialize reason itself, to let it occupy a “public space,” as Sellars and Brandom call it, to dialogically expose it to the public critique of other rational points of view so that it can learn to stand on its own, content of its substantive constitution by acceptable and appropriate self-imposed norms. In such a Socratic enterprise, one comes to recognize reasons that are not merely subjective but which can be embraced from many perspectives, indeed universally; this way lie objectively valid norms. This is a more realistic approach than, e.g., the theoretical construct of Rawls’ original position. Following Kant and Korsgaard, Giovagnoli insists that we are not merely moments in the universal causal mechanism but actors in a self-determined and self-justifying drama. The justificatory moment comes, as Susan Wolf says, by confronting objective reasons, “the reasons that there are,” aiming at defining the true and the good.

Instrumental reason can produce nothing more than a procedural conception of autonomy that sets moral autonomy equivalent to personal authenticity rather than genuine autonomy. There is little to be gained by failing to recognize that authenticity, as integration of character, is of real moral value. But one can, of course, be completely authentic in the service of morally deplorable ends, so that it is not of *unconditional* moral worth. By contrast, autonomy, as critical reflection on the moral acceptability of desires, etc., goes beyond aiming to make the desires one finds in oneself coherent, to actually changing or eliminating or at least not acting on them. On the

Frankfurtian scheme of authenticity – wanting to want what one wants – desires at one level are justified so long as they cohere with desires at “higher” levels. But here is a potentially immobilizing regress that merely complicates decision-making. Wanting what we want does not set us free, since at every level our desires may be manipulated even without our realizing it. The key, as Giovagnoli has it, is the possibility to resist desire formation. Nor is self-criticism to be understood as a quest to discover some underlying “real self,” since, on her view, the self is constructed by this very process, which is social and not merely introspective. Approaches based on the assumption that an account of autonomy is merely an account of personal identity are, in a sense, too demanding. For we can and do co-opt, i.e., “identify with” or identify ourselves through, all sorts of things, even the most trivial. We take ownership for our desires even when we should not.

Again, the implication is the need for realistic and objective assessment of the true and good and there is no hope of carrying out this project apart from open, public discourse. As realists have long maintained, what is needed is a persistent “standing back,” a willingness never to be complacent about given results, no matter how attractive. We need and are able to develop what Giovagnoli calls “normative competence” to overcome the traps of socially distorted development. Women, e.g., can resist the debilitating effects of common stereotypes by reflecting on the inappropriate and false content of social norms. On the other hand, if normative competence is conceived too aggressively it becomes another trap. Here Giovagnoli follows Brandom in opting for “weak normative competence” because it enables us to distinguish between autonomous self-rule and being subject to the right rule. The weaker version lends itself more readily to concrete application to one’s own acts, to claiming ownership by speaking for oneself, by treating oneself as authority. Again, this requires critical dialogue in a public space of reasons.

Giovagnoli combines a model of discursive “scorekeeping” from Brandom with a position I have taken on normativity. Normativity in any field entails the possibility of mistake and mistakes are objectively discernible only in public view. Famously, Wittgenstein took advantage of this structure to refute Cartesian subjectivism about language. I have used it to suggest the sociality of genuine moral norms. Giovagnoli’s dialogical interpretation of sociality reinforces this perspective with Brandom’s scorekeeping model, which is grounded in his expressivist and inferentialist theory of meaning. Thinking and saying are ways of understanding commitments in the open space of reasons where we play the game of asking for and giving reasons for actions. Thus we hold one another to account and keep score by the quality of our reasons. Practicing this game is maturing into non-oppressive and non-oppressing rational autonomy. Normative freedom must be rational because it means consistency with norms. In the social space of reasons we are accountable for and required to justify our commitments and entitlements, a task accomplished in the

role of scorekeeper. The important point Giovagnoli makes is that we are all occupants of this role insofar as we pursue genuine personal autonomy. Since no one is expert in advance, we are all apprentices of each other. As Kant would say, we are all the same before the moral law. Realism about the true and the good demands that we come as close as possible to tracking all possibilities, which seems a very strident demand and there may be doubt as to whether, even if we could succeed in this, we could ever communicate it to anyone else. This might well threaten the dialogical social structure of scorekeeping. But Giovagnoli stresses that our normal social practice of giving and asking for reasons is reliable and our best hope of keeping the good and the true in sight.

Far from a mere liberty of indifference, much less sheer license for self-indulgence, the condition of personal moral autonomy amounts to being bound by desire-independent conceptual (and therefore linguistic) rules that hold beyond a personal point of view because they express objective reasons for action. The “content” of meaning of what is expressed, if it is to be objective, can only be determined dialogically through recognition of commitments and entitlements. So giving and asking for reasons depends on social practices. Thus we come to the crucial Kantian capacity of acting not merely according to rules but according to the conception of rules. We come, as Giovagnoli says, to “intend [Brandom’s] notion of ‘autonomous discursive practice’ as the structure of personal autonomy.” Autonomy entails social accountability for claims we make. We are not merely social creatures, we are dialogical creatures, i.e., we are and must remain sensitive to what Brandom calls “material incompatibilities,” which Giovagnoli identifies as the “source” of autonomy. I am entitled only to what I can justify. Rationality enables finding and repairing incompatibilities, precisely the task of the scorekeeper.

Importantly our task as would-be autonomous agents is not merely to take up attitudes and beliefs that have been previously screened, since this may once again entail oppression. No. For Giovagnoli our task is to learn to take them up critically, which requires exposure to panoply of options provided by a fully open, pluralistic society where the agent can give and evaluate reasons besides her own. Thus, autonomy means internalizing the normative structure of dialogical rationality. Here Giovagnoli moves beyond Brandom and Habermas to admit that reasons besides the moral may legitimately determine the autonomous will. This widens the conception of personal autonomy and identity and requires a wider, more nuanced, normative vocabulary to express a wider plurality of norms while also avoiding norms that are too abstract or strident for practical application.

Nor does Giovagnoli limit autonomy to personal goals but affirms a view I have defended, along with others working on collective intentionality, that common or shared goals often entail personal goals, thus emphasizing social practice, and deepening the necessity of justification through

openly, critically giving and asking for reasons in social groups. Thus, it is doubtful that anyone can ever be fully autonomous but we can practice, if not perfect, autonomy by engaging one another dialogically.

As we have seen, a fundamental thesis of Giovagnoli's work is that socialization can engender oppressive norms but that we can overcome them. Since socialization is largely a feature of political culture, oppressive norms must be rejected first in the public political arena. Because social norms favor the powerful, autonomy is, in rhetoric as well as reality, a more decisive goal of the few than of the many who therefore realistically see equality as their wiser collective route to autonomy. Society's commitment to protect the conditions for the development of personal autonomy is therefore crucial and means engendering respect and trust of oneself as essential aspects of socialization. A primary means to this end is discouragement of stereotyping, "pro ling" in the current jargon. Here Habermas' analysis of the ideal speech situation is of help. Though for Giovagnoli, Habermas' accounts only for procedural autonomy, he at least recognizes the problem and that the solution demands respectful public discourse. Giovagnoli favors Brandom's scorekeeping model, despite its not taking adequate account of the threat that the authoritative collective perspective poses, as it may itself easily make autonomy seem redundant or impossible. Giovagnoli's quarry, personal autonomy, instead requires public asking for and giving reasons to establish one's voice and authority over oneself by criticizing existing social norms and power structures and enacting those critiques. Autonomy as deontic intersubjective structure presents agents with their best chance of finding the best reasons for acting as they do, for being who they are. Personal autonomy conceived most broadly requires a universal "politics of difference" where each person formulates and expresses her personal narrative in public space in order to expose oppression and oppressor for what they are. Each of us can be witness for the true and the good by expressing our reasons in public dialogue. The public, argumentative structure needed, is each one of us taking responsibility for what we know best, viz., our own case, about which even the least of us can understand the deontic structure and its implications. Any adequate philosophy of autonomy must account for the possibility of saying, "No." Key is the account of the social development of a self "able to do what is required to take something [different] as a self," to understand, in Hegelian terms, the "I that is we and the we that is I."

In a globalized, pluralistic world such as ours, morally defensible identity able to support self-confidence entails public accountability for our reasons by common standards, readiness to face dissent. The readiness is the all.

*J. K. Swindler  
Illinois State University  
(April 24, 2007)*



## INTRODUCTION

The concept of “autonomy” is one of the most important topics in moral and political philosophy. The recent publication of the books *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism* (Christman & Anderson 2005) and *Personal Autonomy. New Essays on Personal Autonomy and Its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy* (Taylor 2005) shows that most contemporary authors aim at superseding the metaphysical questions of determinism and free will. I think that this is the right step to take in emphasizing the dimensions of individual choice and also the role of socialization in order to develop capacities for critical reflection. In this context, my contribution tries to give an original account of the notion of autonomy in social terms.

The debate on autonomy is very lively in different fields. There are therefore many conceptual distinctions worthy of consideration. For the sake of my discussion, the most important distinction is between “moral” autonomy and “personal” autonomy. Generally speaking, the theorists of personal autonomy I shall consider in my contribution try to give an account of autonomy that is conceived not only as moral agency. This move allows the consideration of several patterns of practical reasoning that imply several kinds of reasons for acting. My book is divided into two parts because I think that it is very important to consider the context of the discussion together with the theoretical proposal. The first part refers therefore to the contemporary debate on autonomy in moral and political philosophy, and the second part is dedicated to my account of autonomy.

As we shall see in the first part, we can describe personal autonomy in “procedural” or in “substantive” terms. Procedural theories emphasize the structural conditions of the process of “identification” with one’s own motives. Even if these conditions are relevant, substantive theories rightly point to the role of the content of our reasons for autonomous agency. This perspective requires substantive standards according to which we can recognize and criticize oppressive norms. The discussion of these questions grounds the shift from moral to personal autonomy based on a substantive account.

I underscore the question of normativity because a person is autonomous not only if he is able rationally to recognize reasons for acting but also to “take responsibility” for subjective reasons (i.e. desires and preferences) and objective reasons (moral norms) for acting. As I will show in the second part of my book, autonomy requires the possibility of taking deontic attitudes in order to make explicit the material structure of the content of our reasons for acting, that play a suitable role in autonomous agency.

What are the steps necessary to move from moral to personal autonomy?

In the first chapter, I describe the Kantian account starting also from some relevant interpreters of the contemporary debate on autonomy. Following Kant, an agent is autonomous in a moral sense when her own rules for acting are included in her will as universal law (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* section 2 IV). Moving from the primacy of the categorical imperative as the principle of the unity of will, I underscore some relevant consequences for modern proponents of this theoretical option. According to Christine Korsgaard and Thomas Hill, we can recognize two senses of autonomy or self-determination. In one sense, to be autonomous or self-determined is to be governed by the principles of your own causality, principles that are definitive of your will. In another deeper sense, to be autonomous or self-determined is to choose the principles that are definitive of your will. This is the kind of determination that Kant called “spontaneity”. Every agent, even an animal agent, is autonomous and self-determined in the first sense, or it would make no sense to attribute its movement to it. Only responsible agents, human agents, are autonomous in the second and deeper sense. However, I maintain that an autonomous agent must refer also to substantive characteristics of the content of reasons for acting. The important result of Susan Wolf’s analysis, which I discuss in the last section, is that the freedom necessary for responsibility is not just the freedom that allows one’s action to be governed by one’s own reason, but also a freedom that allows one’s reasons to be governed by what reasons there are. The assumption of what Wolf calls “normative pluralism” shows a different way of interpreting the objectivity of “normative facts”: seeing the world rightly involves seeing reasons for and against many different options. We must consider the plurality of values belonging to different cultures: these values as normative facts are the content of our practical reasoning.

Despite this interesting conclusion, the task of a theory of autonomy is, in my opinion, to give a plausible account of the way in which a person can criticize the commitments implied by the nonrational determinants of the agent’s identity “...if it is the case”. This requirement is fulfilled if we can describe the normative (rational) structure of that point of view that allows the agent to be autonomous, i.e. able to discern and justify a wide range of (subjective and objective) commitments.



If we accept this conclusion, must we embrace a procedural account of personal autonomy? In the second chapter I provide different interpretations of the classical procedural account in order to make clear that structural conditions of individual reflection are necessary for autonomy but not sufficient.

Procedural theories consider recognition as successful when certain structural conditions of critical reflection are satisfied. These conditions are fulfilled when the identification of the agent with his own desires occurs. Harry Frankfurt and Gerald Dworkin introduced the hierarchical model: we are autonomous when we want, via our volitions of the second order, the content of desires of the first order to be realized. For instance, a person may have a higher-order volition that her lower-level desire to drink water be fulfilled.

Generally speaking, procedural theories level autonomy and authenticity: an autonomous agent must be able to reflect and to accept (i.e. to identify himself with) her own desires, values, etc. The identification means that an agent possesses a volition, i.e. a second order desire, which allows the reflection on the first order desires to be in competition. The process of identification presents two difficulties, which arise either in the case of the agent's identification as recognition (without judgment) of an aspect of her personhood, or in the case of approving it. In the first case, identification does not seem an indication of autonomy, because a person could identify, as part of her own self, coercive or imposed aspects of it. In the second case, approval is a problematic requirement because perfectly authentic aspects of the self (for which one is fully responsible) exist, even though they are not totally approved.

In order to avoid these problematic results, John Christman focuses on relevant aspects of the formation of beliefs, values and desires in the process of socialization. His analysis attempts to secure the autonomy of an agent's higher order identifications and values by building certain historical constraints into the process of critical reflection. This account has two fundamental virtues. The first is attention to the historical dimensions of reflection. It shows how an agent may change his relation to (some of) her beliefs and values by coming to understand the processes by which they were acquired or developed. The second virtue is the compatibilist explanation of the relationship between autonomy and socialization. As long as we do not, or would not resist the process by which we acquired our beliefs, desires, values, and higher-order identifications, then they are autonomous, even if we acquired them as a result of socialization.

Theories based on authenticity refer to internal self-reflection and procedural independence; these options mean that they do not consider the role of the content of desires or preferences for the development of autonomy. In the third chapter I underscore the reasons why some philosophers maintain that an autonomous person must show not only pro-

cedural but also “substantial” independence, which rightly requires the consideration of the social context in which an action can be judged as autonomous.

Both Natalie Stoljar and Paul Benson show the limits of procedural theories. Procedural theories and their historical variants (Fisher, Ravizza, Christman) underestimate the role of the internalization of oppressive norms.

In my opinion, Benson focuses on a point that is fundamental for understanding the normative source of autonomy. He addresses himself directly to the social and discursive dimension of “taking ownership”, which explains how internalized invisibility (internalization of oppressive norms diminishing autonomy) can defeat agents’ capacity “to take ownership” of what they do. The active dimension of taking ownership implies the capacity of the agent for giving reasons for her actions and so responding to potential “challenges” arising in the social context from her own point of view. I maintain that Benson’s account rightly points to the social and discursive dimension of autonomy. This move makes it possible to take responsibility in a public context and implies also the possibility of speaking for people who are marginalized.

Starting from a social perspective, in the second part of my book I propose an account of the concept of autonomy that develops in the “social” space of reasons where the agent can give reasons for her actions and can answer for reasons. The necessity of introducing an intersubjective account of autonomy emerges in the contemporary studies on Hegel. Generally speaking, they move from the Hegelian concept of reason, which conflicts with the Kantian idea that reason represents the law for itself without a real confrontation with something external. Reason can be authoritative only if it is “historically”, i.e. “socially” construed; we should not consider it as something external to our social practices, as a normative standard for interpreting and revisiting them. In this context, autonomy of the agent requires a peculiar sensitivity to reason, which constitutes our projects “sedimented” in our traditions and considers them as fallible and revisable. Rationality is bound to a process of recognition between different persons, i.e. to a social process in which different standards are in competition.

In the fourth chapter I argue for the primacy of “normative freedom” based on the normativity of social practices (Swindler). Moreover, if we adopt the scorekeeping model (Brandom), there emerges the know-how implied by the “social role” of the autonomous agent as “scorekeeper”, who participates in the game of giving and asking for reasons. This social role is defined by the use of language bound to certain social attitudes (attributing and undertaking commitments and entitlements) through which the recognition of deontic status (commitments and entitlements) seems possible. Even if we accept the inferential structure of this space proposed

by Wilfrid Sellars, we must also give an explanation of the social perspectives from which we can undertake and attribute commitments.

Starting with this thesis, we can conclude that the autonomous agent occupies the social role of scorekeeper, thus she is able to justify and to take responsibility for her assertions (or the assertions of others). The description of the scorekeeping model is the topic of the 4th chapter.

First, I focus on the epistemological results of the previous chapter. The normative competence of the autonomous agent is bound to the social structure of the space of reasons. The entitlement to a claim can be justified (1) by giving reasons for it, or (2) by referring to the authority of another agent, or (3) by demonstrating the capacity of the agent reliably to respond to environmental stimuli. The scorekeeping model is based on a notion of entitlement that presents a structure of “default” and “challenge”. This model is fundamental in order to introduce autonomy as capacity to participate in the game of giving and asking for reasons.

I shall give an account of the autonomous agent as a scorekeeper who is able to justify an action (her own or another agent's) on the basis of the recognition of different kinds of reasons or practical commitments (subjective, institutional and moral commitments). The distinction of several patterns of practical reasoning leads to the thesis that autonomy is the capacity (1) for discerning subjective and objective reasons for acting and (2) for endorsing the corresponding commitments. Moreover, the acknowledgment of reasons is structured by the deontic structure of discursive practices. In this sense, we as agents are in the role of scorekeeper when we are able to attribute reasons for acting and to undertake the corresponding commitments by ourselves if it is the case. This happens in the interaction with other people, namely when we come into contact with points of view different from our own.

What are the political consequences of the social concept of autonomy I describe?

The argumentation of the last chapter considers the possibility of making individual autonomy and the public space compatible. It seems clear to me that individual theories of autonomy in their procedural or substantial variants underestimate the role of the interpersonal ambit for the agent's development of autonomy. This observation does not imply that we have to embrace a “recognitionist” model in Hegelian terms, which points to the primacy of the community's point of view. In the 5th chapter, I introduce the normative competence required by autonomous agency. Generally speaking, the discussion falls into the contemporary debate on some Hegelian topics. In this context, I propose a comparison between intersubjective accounts that point out formal conditions of intersubjectivity, so that the concept of individual autonomy becomes redundant (Habermas, Honneth) and intersubjective accounts which, while considering the role of socialization, give weight to individual autonomy (Benson, Oshana,

Tugendhat, Ferrara). My project falls to the latter group. I think however that the scorekeeping model provides a more plausible account of the interpersonal dimension of autonomous agency. In my opinion, we must provide an exhaustive explanation of those requirements that characterize the agent's critical point of view in the public sphere. My work aims at proposing two senses of the adjective "relational" for a new concept of autonomy: (1) the "semantic" sense that shows the inferential commitments (governed by material incompatibility) which agents must acknowledge and (2) the "pragmatic" sense that reveals the normative structure of that acknowledgment as a social net of deontic attitudes.

I hope that the argumentation of my book fulfills this claim.

I wish to thank James Swindler, for his in-depth reading and helpful criticisms of my work.

Thanks also to all the participants of the 11<sup>th</sup> French-German Colloquium "The Question of Normativity" in Evian and to Jürgen Habermas, Giacomo Marramao, Giovanni Iorio Giannoli, Tony Burns, Simon Thomson, Laura Bazzicalupo, Felice Cimatti, Tito Magri, Marina Oshana, Robert Brandom, Axel Honneth, Germana Ernst, Luigi Ruggiu, Riccardo Dottori, Fabrizio Pandolfi, Teo Orlando, Sandra Plastina, Per Bawn, Mario Ricciardi, Emanuela Ceva, Corrado Del Bò, Ian Carter, João Vila-Chã, Raimo Tuomela, Daniele Gambarara, Chiara Di Marco, Angela Ales Bello for fruitful discussions.

A particular affectionate thought goes to Franco Bianco, who was a fundamental guide for my philosophical formation.

I would thank my friend Francesco for the moral support.

PART I  
FROM MORAL AUTONOMY TO PERSONAL AUTONOMY



# I

## MORAL AUTONOMY

### 1. *Autonomy and Freedom*

The contemporary philosophical debate on autonomy presents several conceptual distinctions; one of these is the fundamental distinction between “moral autonomy” and “personal autonomy”<sup>1</sup>. According to Kant, an agent is autonomous in a moral sense when her own rules for acting are included in her will as universal law (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* section 2 IV). Modern proponents of personal autonomy introduce rather the image of a person in charge of her life, not just following his desires but choosing which of her desires to follow<sup>2</sup>.

In this chapter I shall deal with the concept of moral autonomy. The first matter is the distinction between autonomy and freedom. Isaiah Berlin describes autonomy as “positive freedom”. Positive freedom: «(...) derives from the wish to be self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realizing them»<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, Berlin also presents a kind of “negative freedom” because he thinks that a liberal government must protect citizens from external constraints. Thomas Green underlines rather the importance of positive freedom as autonomy in a Kantian sense: human will is a form of a principle that realizes itself consciously<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See D. Johnston, *The Idea of Liberal Theory*, New York, Princeton University Press, 1994; J. Waldron, *Moral and Personal Autonomy* in J. Christman and J. Anderson (ed.), *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> The hierarchical model is introduced by R. Dworkin. See his *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1988. See also H. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> I. Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, in his *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 131.

<sup>4</sup> T. H. Green, *On the Different Senses of Freedom*, in T. H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, London, 1941.

According to Kant, freedom and autonomy are two different concepts. In the practical field freedom corresponds to “practical spontaneity”, which is different from “epistemic spontaneity” in its revealing of the laws of nature. According to Kant: «Reason must look upon itself as the author of its own principles independently of alien influences. Therefore, as practical reason or as the will of a rational being, it must be regarded by itself as free; that is, the will of a rational being can be a will of his own only under the idea of freedom, and such a will must therefore – from a practical point of view – be attributed to all rational beings» (*Groundwork* III, section 4). Starting from this perspective, the conditional result of spontaneity is evident: if I take myself to be a rational agent i.e. I take myself to be acting on the basis of reasons and of a reflective evaluation of my situation rather than merely responding to stimuli, I must necessarily regard myself as free<sup>5</sup>.

It is possible for human beings to be guided by heteronomous principles (i.e. dependent on the relationships between an agent’s will and the properties of objects). Autonomy requires therefore a further condition: the capacity of the will to determine itself independently of every property belonging to the objects of volition. Moral autonomy implies not merely that our actions conform to duty but that they derive “from duty”: the duty itself provides a sufficient reason to act. Nevertheless, freedom and moral law imply each other. The “reciprocity thesis” can be interpreted by starting from a conception of negative freedom as including motivational as well as causal independence. Freedom corresponds to spontaneity, i.e. to the rationality of the agent: «This entails that its choices must be subject to a justification requirement. In other words, it must be possible for such an agent to offer reasons for its actions; since reasons are by their very nature universal, this means that such an agent must be willing to acknowledge that it would be reasonable (justifiable) for any rational being to act in a similar manner in relevantly similar circumstances»<sup>6</sup>.

Moving from this perspective, to be autonomous is to be intentionally bound by conceptual rules that are not individual desires and preferences. I maintain that an analysis of the concept of freedom requires investigations into individual motivations such as desires and preferences. In this sense, we are free to act according to our means-end reasoning without the necessity of assuming a detached, responsible perspective over personal desires and preferences. Naturally, we are free to act when external or internal constraints do not exist. Autonomy can be considered rather as that capacity human beings normally have of universalizing their own point of view and thus distinguishing subjective and objective reasons.

<sup>5</sup> See H. E. Allison, *Idealism and Freedom*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 133.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, p. 137.



Autonomy comes into play also when an agent has conflicting subjective reasons for acting. For this reason, motivation alone cannot be the source of autonomy and we need to consider the rationality of choice. This rationality is expressed by the fact that we can justify our choices. For example, we can explain why we prefer to drink wine rather than beer or why we recognize that an insult will offend our interlocutors.

The kind of rationality we are looking for entails dimensions that supersede merely means-end reasoning. For the sake of my analysis it is useful to consider the reasons Habermas provides for superseding contemporary interpretations of classical empiricism<sup>7</sup> in order to present a “communicative rationality” (i.e. that rationality oriented toward a consensus among speakers)<sup>8</sup>. Empiricism understands practical reason as instrumental reason. According to the agent, it is reasonable to act in a certain way when the outcome of her action corresponds to her interest, or is satisfying. In this case, action is motivated by preferences and personal ends. They are “pragmatic” or “preferential” reasons, as they deserve to motivate actions and, contrary to “epistemic” reasons, not to justify judgments and opinions. Pragmatic reasons “modify” free will only when the agent decides to follow a certain rule. In this sense, intentional motivation distinguishes itself from spontaneous motivation. According to Hume, autonomy corresponds to the undertaking of attitudes of approval or disapproval. These feelings belong to the third person perspective of “benevolent detachment” from which actors are morally judged. Every agreement on the moral valuing of a character will imply a coincidence of feelings. Approval and disapproval express likes and dislikes; thus they have an emotional nature. It is true that we all react with disapproval when someone performs a bad action. We consider a person as virtuous when he reveals himself to be useful and agreeable to us and to our friends. There exist pragmatic reasons for an agent who wants to adopt “altruistic” attitudes. Indeed, the benevolence of the interlocutors provides satisfaction to a useful and agreeable person. By starting from this perspective based on emotional attitudes the social force of reciprocal trust can develop.

Nevertheless, pragmatic reasons supporting moral attitudes and actions are convincing only with regard to interpersonal relationships of small sympathetic communities (for example family or neighbourhood). In complex societies interpersonal relationships require a moral point of view, i.e. one of autonomy, which aims at universal justice, since they become more abstract. In this sense, the members of a primary group could not immediately refer to the benevolence of persons living in a different cultural context. When feelings of obligation pertain to relationships be-

<sup>7</sup> J. Habermas, *The Inclusion of Other, Studies in Political Theory*, The Mit Press, 1998, chap. 1.

<sup>8</sup> I shall describe Habermas’ perspective in chapter 6, where I discuss an intersubjective concept of autonomy in the political field.

tween strangers, the agent cannot consider them “rational” as he considers those of his group, on whose cooperation he can always rely. A theory of autonomy aiming at social justice must explain the normative primacy of the rational “ought” in a wider context.

Contractualistic tradition does not consider solidarity, rather it directly relates the normative ground of a system of justice to individual interests (this move implies the shift from “duties” to “rights”). This strategy aims at understanding whether it is rational to subordinate the individual will to a system of rules (i.e. subjective rights). In virtue of the nature of the contract, it seems possible to ground subjective rights in a symmetric way and so to construct a legal system based on a free agreement. This system is right in a moral sense if it satisfies the interests of its members equally. The social contract derives from the idea that every candidate must necessarily have rational motives for becoming a member of the collectivity and to subordinate him/herself freely to its norms and procedures. The cognitive content that turns the contract into a “moral” or “right” system is bound therefore to the collective acknowledgment of all members. Moreover, it refers to the instrumental rationality of each member who values his advantage from the perspective of his own interests.

Contractualism is subject to two fundamental criticisms. First, from this perspective a universal morality becomes impossible, because it neglects the problem of the normativity of interpersonal relationships. A person can undertake a commitment only if she can expect the right response from her interlocutors in a cooperative situation. Second, it raises the “free rider” problem that shows how a person could commit herself to a cooperative praxis while being free to break the norms when a good opportunity arises.

## 2. *The Role of Reason*

For these reasons it is useful to reconsider the Kantian normative role of reason. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* the concept of reason has a “regulative function”: it imposes on one’s mind the infinite search of the unconditioned. Epistemological doubt forces us not to stop the search even when we think we have reached the truth. In its practical function, reason shows an opposite requirement: it must determine by itself as pure reason its own will, because only in this way is it “moral” i.e. unconstrained by nature or inclinations. In the theoretical field, reason regulates mind, which must apply to empirical dates. In the practical field it possesses a “constitutive” function: its tendency to be subordinated to subjective inclinations is criticized<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> See W. Mathieu, Introduction to Kant *Fondazione della metafisica dei costumi*, Milan, Rusconi, 1994, pp. 11-2.

The first step for demonstrating the efficacy of reason is the argumentation about the shift from morality of common sense to philosophical knowledge (*Groundwork* part I). A representation of the “ought” is rational if it is independent of sensitivity, as the moral value is peculiar to a being determining his/her own will by him/herself i.e. regardless of immediate impulses or physical necessity. How could reason be effective without empirical motivation? Undoubtedly, we cannot observe as a fact how the mere representation of a law determines the agent’s behavior. On the contrary, the psychologist analyzes the relations between an agent’s behavior and empirical circumstances of it, coming to find certain “regularities”. He could call them “laws”, but they are effective because of the empirical circumstances determining human agency. From this perspective, the agent is passive, like a body falling as a consequence of gravity. In the case of morality, the agent presupposes rather that she is the one who (rightly or wrongly) decides. This decision takes place once she is free from all empirical influences and determines her will only because of his obligation (it does not matter if he likes to or not). If the empirical circumstances are deprived of motivational force, then she can be compelled only by the pure form of the law. The law is therefore “rational” as experience is ruled out.

Rationality, in this context, is bound only to pure obligation and must be distinguished from instrumental rationality. One can act out of self-interest; for example, behaving honestly, because doing otherwise implies bad consequences, is rational and contrasts immediate egoistic impulses. But this is a case of instrumental rationality aiming for the goal of its own happiness: reason is not the source of will; it is indeed a practical reason but not a “pure” practical reason. Thus the work of pure practical reason is to rule out reasons for justifying action that limit reason to the service of sensibility.

The categorical imperative, being constitutive of volition, is therefore a peculiar principle of practical reason. It tells us to act only on maxims we can will as universal laws. What is the status of this principle? According to the Kantian discussion on the nature of practical reason, the most immediate conclusion is that it must be “formal”, as it must show the possibility of acting out of self-interest. How does the principle of morality work to unify human will? Let us consider Korsgaard’s arguments against the empiricist and rationalistic traditions<sup>10</sup>. Starting from Hume’s point of view, three correlated arguments are important: (1) the role of reasoning is to ascertain the relations between things; (2) the only relation directly relevant to action is the causal relation and (3) that relation can have motivational force only if we have a desire to obtain or avoid one of the two objects thus related. In this case, the success of the action depends on our belief about reaching a

<sup>10</sup> See C. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, lectures 1 and 2.

certain end (in case of error it is a matter of theoretical considerations). This option hinges on the fact that we are always reliable in reference to our desires and actions. This “optimistic” view of human rationality could imply a tautology: «The problem arises when we ask what makes something someone’s end. Suppose someone claims to desire a certain object. We inform him that taking a certain action is the adequate and sufficient means to the achievement of that object, yet he fails to form the desire to do that action. Then we are entitled to conclude that he does not desire the object, or does not desire it enough to inspire him to take those means. That being so, the object is not his end, and that being so, he has not failed to act on any instrumental reason that he has. If we mean by your “end” is that which you in fact pursue, it is conceptually impossible for you to fail to take the means to your end. If you fail to pursue something, then it isn’t your end, and then you don’t act irrationally in failing to pursue it. But then the force of saying you acted on an instrumental “reason” becomes unclear. Your desire for the end plays a role in explaining why you took the action, but there is no requirement of taking the means to your end that has any normative force for you, and so no reason on which you acted»<sup>11</sup>.

The rationalist view (Samuel Clarke, John Balguy, and Richard Price in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, William Whewell in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and W.D. Ross, H. A. Prichard, and Derek Parfit in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries) supersedes the problem of Hume, who considers action as nothing more than a movement caused by a judgment or idea. In a rationalistic sense, action is not merely caused by a judgment, but rather guided by it. According to this “realistic” or “externalist” view, action refers to true substantive moral principles for its justification, i.e. certain act-types or actions are inherently right or wrong. Another externalist view maintains that irreducibly normative reasons for actions simply exist. We act according to normative verities because we apply our knowledge that an action is right by choosing it. Korsgaard rightly observes that simple choice guided by knowledge of the right reason does not explain “moral” obligation. In my opinion, we need to make clear the normativity of the principles of rationality by reference to two different cases: (1) the case in which we act for subjective reasons and (2) the case in which we act for objective reasons.

### 3. *Action and Normativity*

The conclusion of the argumentation sketched above leads to the thesis that if the principles of practical reason are to be normative, there

<sup>11</sup> C. Korsgaard, *Practical Reason and the Unity of the Will (lecture II)*, forthcoming, pp. 3-4.

must be principles of the logic of practical deliberation. In the *Groundwork* a fundamental distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives is introduced. These represent the normative source of personal identity, as constitutive principles of actions. According to Kant, action is determining oneself to be the cause of some end. In the case of the hypothetical imperative, the normativity of action implies that the commitment to realize an end binds the agent, obligating her to take the necessary means. In this sense: «(...) this is a commitment that you may fail to meet. Finding the means daunting, frightening, tedious, or painful, you cannot face them and do not go forward. Finding yourself nevertheless unprepared to decide that the end is not worth it, you cannot not change your mind and you cannot not go back. A paralyzed will is not the same thing as one that has simply failed to operate; an abortive effort at self-determination has taken place. The standard represented by hypothetical imperative, though constitutive, is normative as well»<sup>12</sup>.

The categorical imperative is normative in an unconditional sense. For example, if I say “don’t lie” I presuppose that lying is unconditionally wrong and this is not the same as saying “don’t lie if you want to preserve a friendship”. How can we demonstrate the absence of subjective conditions of the categorical imperative? In this context, the action is put to the test of the “universalization of the maxim”. A maxim is a subjective principle of action, and the problem is to know whether the chosen maxim corresponds to the law, i.e., the universal principle. A corresponding version of this thesis is the following: act in accordance with the maxim you can will as a universal law. Naturally, it does not imply any “particularistic” will, which means that an agent acts according to momentary impulses. The unity of will is due to the categorical imperative. This is a constitutive standard of action because conformity to it is constitutive of an exercise of the will of the self-determination of a person. A significant interpretation of the universalization test is the one presented by John Rawls<sup>13</sup>. By using the metaphor of the “veil of ignorance” an autonomous moral legislator must, in Kantian terms, abstract from personal differences. The central point for both Kant and Rawls is that: «(...) for purposes of trying to adjudicate fairly and reasonably among *competing* principles and values, certain considerations must be ruled out of the court. For example, the fact that a principle would benefit *me*, *my* family, and *my* country instead of someone else, someone else’s family and country, is not *in itself* a reason for anyone, as a moral legislator, to favor that principle. In other words, at the level

<sup>12</sup> C. Korsgaard, *Autonomy, Efficacy, and Agency (Lecture III)*, on-line, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

of deliberation about basic principles, morality requires impartial regard for all persons»<sup>14</sup>.

This interpretation of the categorical imperative focuses on the dimension of choice that is fundamental for the contemporary Kantian philosophers. It entails the difference between “act” and “action”. An act is performed for a certain end and for this reason Kant called it “heteronomous action”. On the contrary, “acts” are subject to individual choice, i.e. are “objects” of individual choice and become therefore actions as they are guided by the categorical imperative. Another way to demonstrate the role of the categorical imperative for human action is to examine the difference between human and animal choices<sup>15</sup>. Indeed all animal choices are subject to external causes. The animal acts from natural laws, i.e. nature provides laws of causality of animal action. What is peculiar about human choice? Korsgaard refers to Aristotle’s classification of actions in order to distinguish between merely voluntary actions and choices. The former are peculiar to animals that act according to natural laws. Animals represent the objects of their desires because they have a form of intelligent adaptation in perceiving their environment. Human beings have the possibility of moral choice, i. e. of classifying actions as morally good and bad.

But in order for us to be considered as autonomous we must distinguish technical knowledge from moral knowledge. Aristotle discusses this topic in his *Nicomachean Ethics* where he maintains that in the ethical field we cannot have prior knowledge of the means to reach certain ends<sup>16</sup>. Moreover there are not particular ends but moral knowledge determines all the goodness of moral life. For this reason, moral knowledge is bound to individual deliberation and reflection. Because of the fact that we do not previously know the means for reaching determinate ends, moral knowledge is internally related to ethical consciousness, which must refer to the concrete situation. The most important consequence of this thought is that moral consciousness directly reflects on the means for determining the moral validity of ends. An individual’s reflection on his ends is *eo ipso* a moral commitment. It is not bound to sensible perception but rather orients itself to the actual situation, i.e. it is consciousness of the ends and the means necessary for it. What is right is the result of a reflection that is not constrained by passions causing the loss of control. Moral knowledge is that which includes our consciousness of means and ends, and is therefore opposed to a pure instrumental knowledge.

<sup>14</sup> T. E. Hill, *Autonomy and Self-respect*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> See Korsgaard, *Autonomy, Efficacy, and Agency*, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> H. G. Gadamer clarifies this distinction in *The Problem of Historical Consciousness* in P. Rabinow & W.M. Sullivan (eds.), *Interpretive Social Science. A Second Look*, California University Press, Berkeley, 1987.

Moral knowledge pertains not only to individual moral action but also to interpersonal relationships. In this case we need not only the concept of *Phronesis* but also that of *Synesis*. The latter refers to the phenomenon of the comprehension among persons. *Synesis* is an intentional modification of moral knowledge whenever we need to value the agency of our interlocutors in an ethical sense. In this case, moral evaluation means taking the place of the other, placing oneself in the situation in which the other must act. This mutual relationship is based on a kind of “affinity” which allows the discernment of the other’s situation and the tolerance resulting from that knowledge. The importance of these thoughts for the Kantian tradition is the possibility of undertaking a reflective attitude over personal impulses and desires in order to consider others’ peculiar situation. This fact allows us to supersede merely instrumental attitudes so that we can consider persons as ends in themselves.

#### 4. *The Deep Deliberator*

As we have already seen in the last paragraph, animals are not guided by hypothetical and categorical imperatives for a fundamental reason: animals do not choose the principles of their own causality, they do not choose the “content” of their instincts. Moving from this thought, we can recognize two senses of autonomy or self-determination: «In one sense, to be autonomous or self-determined is to be governed by the principles of your own causality, principles that are definitive of your will. In another, deeper, sense to be autonomous or self-determined is to choose the principles that are definitive of your will. This is the kind of determination that Kant called “spontaneity”. Every agent, even an animal agent, is autonomous and self-determined in the first sense, or it would make no sense to attribute its movement to it. Only responsible agents, human agents, are autonomous in the second and deeper sense»<sup>17</sup>.

The figure of the “deep deliberator” presented by Korsgaard aims at demonstrating that autonomy needs a “normative” concept of reason relating to the “reflective self”. I think that Korsgaard’s criticism of Thomas Nagel’s realism could elucidate this point<sup>18</sup>. According to Nagel: «Why isn’t the reflective individual just someone with more information, who can therefore make choices which may be different but which need be no less purely personal – or even temporally fragmented? How do reasons, law, and universality get a foothold here – one that cannot be dis-

<sup>17</sup> Korsgaard, *Autonomy, Efficacy and Agency*, op. cit. p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> See C. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.217-233.

lodged? Presumably it has something to do with the difference between reflective and unreflective consciousness, but why should awareness of self bring with it this further regularizing effect?».<sup>19</sup> Kant would respond that this happens because the will is a causality and a causality must operate in accordance with laws. But two further points show Nagel's refusal of this thesis. (1) If will is self-determining it could be the case of disconnected choices as well as those guided by consistent laws. In this sense causality does not allow the distinction between merely following a rule and applying the categorical imperative. (2) According to (1), the reflective self must be more universal than the unreflective self (i.e. the self guided by desires and impulses), because it achieves its self-conscious awareness by detaching itself from the individual perspective. Korsgaard underlines the necessity of assuming a detached perspective but he recognizes also the importance of determining "how" the achievement of reflective distance leads the agent to identify himself as a "person", i.e. to have a normative conception of himself as a person.

This option represents a problem in Nagel's account because it is important to establish why reasons for acting could be general. A relevant fact is that the person possesses a kind of normativity for judging whether some reasons are more objective than others. The agent's causality is normative as he directly perceives power; consequently individual exercises of power become perceivable. In this sense: «(...) willing is *self-conscious* causality, causality that operates in the light of reflection. To will is not just to be a cause, or even to allow an impulse in me to operate as a cause, but so to speak, to consciously pick up the reins, and make *myself* the cause of what I do. And if I am to constitute *myself* as the cause of an action, then I must be able to distinguish between *my* causing the action and some desire or impulse that is "in me" causing my body to act. I must be able to see *myself* as something that is distinct from any of my particular, first order impulses and motives, as the reflective standpoint in any case requires. Minimally, then, I am not the mere location of a causally effective desire but rather am the *agent* who acts *on* the desire. It is because of this that I endorse acting in a certain way now; I must at the same time endorse acting the same way on every relevantly similar occasion».<sup>20</sup>

Normative principles of the will possess the function of bringing integrity and unity to human actions. The reflective self is the self which is capable of achieving a reflective distance from immediate impulses. The reflective attitude unifies the self "not" because it has some reason to want or anticipate that it will persist into the *future*.

<sup>19</sup> T. Nagel, *Universality and the Reflective Self*, in Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, p. 201.

<sup>20</sup> Korsgaard, *op. cit.* p. 227-228.



The interpretation of Kantian principles of rational will is discussed by Hill who criticized Nagel's theory of reasons<sup>21</sup>. The point of contention is the role of the rational will for the choice to do something implying projects and pains. The problem of metaphysical determinism is irrelevant here because it is not a case of predicting a future action. Also the deliberation from the instrumental point of view, i.e. the consideration of means, risks, costs, sacrifice, etc., has nothing to do with deliberative reflection on previous ends and commitments. Deep deliberation presents two fundamental features: (1) the searching for "justifying reasons" and not "motivating reasons" and (2) the agent's performing of actions from choices that reveals himself as agent.

Let us now ask whether pleasure and pain provide the necessary common denominator of rational choice. Extreme hedonism identifies rational choice with choice that maximizes the agent's balance of pleasure over pain, and so counts nothing but pleasure and pain as ultimate reasons. This perspective comes to the conclusion that the foregoing of innocent pleasures for the sake of highly desired and valued states of affairs after one's death is always irrational. A more modest claim maintains that pleasure and pain are not the only ultimate reasons but they are "always" ultimate reasons. The problem here is that if in a certain moment of his life an agent takes a perverse pleasure in performing a bad action it is not a question of balancing pro and contra: the very nature of pleasure makes it inadequate to count as justifying reason. Also Nagel's consideration of severe physical pain as an ultimate reason for acting needs to refer to the procedural condition of rational deliberation: claiming to discount severe pain is a good sign of a disorder in one's thinking about practical matters. The agent's inclinations are therefore not viewed as forces which fix one's ends without one's cooperation: «Naturally, one assumes that one *will* not choose to discount inclinations without a reason, and acknowledging something as a reason implies caring about it. But searching for reasons is not simply trying to discover one's inclinations, just as weighing reasons is not simply trying to introspect the relative strengths of one's inclinations. One may find that one "cannot" typically express a refusal, not a disability. Like Martin Luther's remark, "here I stand, I can do no other", it does not complain of powerlessness but rather expresses sustained commitment»<sup>22</sup>.

Theories based on prudence represent a modification of the Kantian view as they give regard for one's future. In this context, immediate pleasures, desires, etc. necessarily give the agent reasons to act; the agent is the same person over time so if an experience is of a kind to make his reason

<sup>21</sup> See Hill op. cit., chap. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Ivi, p. 183.

favor it for himself now, the same features must make his reason, other things being equal, favor it for himself later. Also this perspective moves from the presupposition that certain ends in themselves necessarily give the agent reasons to act. The fact that an agent is the same rational agent over time does not need to be construed as referring to a set of attitudes typically presupposed in deliberation: «For example, I'm now responsible for and to myself later, and I later will be responsible for my choices now as well as then, and responsible to myself still later»<sup>23</sup>. The notion of "responsibility" could however be interpreted by considering both the causal and the normative dimensions. In this sense, when the agent takes a deliberative standpoint she has not only the ability to influence her future choices indirectly but also a capacity to make plans and resolutions for his future relevant for later deliberations. An agent responsible for present choices will therefore acknowledge that she is the author of the character and consequences resulting from her current choices<sup>24</sup>.

In the consideration of individual projects, the Kantian idea of respect for oneself takes the place of the necessity of certain experiences as reason-giving. This move is due to the thesis that deep deliberators are concerned to choose so that their choices stand up, at least at that time, to critical scrutiny of and by themselves. Values and inclinations may vary with time, but these are what the agent subjects to scrutiny and not a fixed presupposition of it.

### 5. *The Reason View*

In this last section I shall present arguments that moderate the Kantian internalist conceptions presented above. Individual self-reflection needs to confront itself with objective reasons, i.e. reasons that are external to the pure exercise of practical reasoning. This is a very important point because the consideration of the content of our beliefs and actions seems fundamental in order for a performance to be autonomous.

The starting point of my discussion is Susan Wolf's observation that the relationship between autonomy and responsibility implies the possibility of acting in "discordance" with reason. It is indeed difficult to see how an agent is autonomous only if she acts always in accordance with reason. In this case, the work is done by the notion of responsibility with the consequence that we do not need the notion of autonomy. It can also be pointed out that: «(...) if one lacks the ability to act in accordance

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. 185.

<sup>24</sup> On this subject see also F. Duque, *Liberdade y sacrificio: Deber ser para dejar ser*, «Revista portuguesa de Filosofia», 61, 2005, 667-686.

with Reason, one cannot be responsible even if one is autonomous. For dogs and psychopaths might conceivably be autonomous in the sense that they might be ultimate sources of their own actions, able to act on no basis. But because they lack the ability to act on a basis – in particular, the basis of Reason – they are not responsible in the sense that would allow them to be deserving of deep praise and blame<sup>25</sup>.

What Wolf calls the “Autonomy View” is the view of metaphysical free will. The problem according to this perspective is that the ability necessary for responsibility is “bidirectional” – it is an ability to do one thing *or* another, an ability to do X or something other than X. On the contrary, according to Wolf’s “Reason View” the ability necessary for responsibility is unidirectional – it is an ability to do one sort of thing, which is compatible with the *inability* to do anything else. This fundamental difference entails an agreeable clarification of the flexibility of the agent’s identity. The Autonomy View maintains that a responsible agent is flexible insofar as she is able to choose and act in a way that is not forced upon her by uncontrollable features or events of her past. It is indeed the Reason View that can explain flexibility: an agent partly acts in accordance with Reason if she is sensitive and responsive to relevant changes in her situation and environment. Acting according to Reason means having the peculiar ability to choose and act for the “right” reasons. The source of this “normativity” requires a distinction between human beings and non-human beings. According to the Reason View we have the intellectual power to recognize the True and the Good, and it has nothing to do with the metaphysical power to choose and act out one path of action or another independently of any forces that could represent potential constraints. Autonomy, i.e. acting according to the True and the Good, implies two kinds of explanations that are related. In the case of action, we can first point out that in the process of socialization the agent was taught to act justly, and was subsequently positively reinforced for doing so. Second, we can point out that it is right to act justly, and go on to say why she knows this is so. These explanations are likely to be related: if it were not right to act justly, he might well not have been taught that it was. And if the person had not been taught that she ought to act justly, the person might not have discovered this on her own. These explanations are therefore compatible: one can be determined by the Good *and* determined by the Past.

Moreover, acting according to the True and the Good entails a wider notion of “responsibility” which implies not only the dimension of the moral point of view. In this sense, subjective reasons for doing something, such as drinking coffee, exhibiting a fondness for purple or spending so

<sup>25</sup> S. Wolf, *Freedom within Reason*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 68.

much time philosophizing, come into play. «According to the Reason View, it is up to me if my decisions to do these things are made in the light of my knowledge or of my access to knowledge of the (true and good) reasons for doing and not doing them (assuming as well that my doing these things is dependent on my decisions to them). For example, I am responsible for drinking coffee if in deciding whether to drink it, I am in a position to know, appreciate, and act on the reasons for and against drinking it. If, on the other hand, I am not in such position – if perhaps I am hypnotized to drink coffee, or deceived about what is in my cup – then I am not responsible from drinking it»<sup>26</sup>.

The important result of Wolf's thesis is that the freedom necessary for responsibility is not just the freedom that allows one's action to be governed by one's own reason, but also a freedom that allows one's reasons to be governed by what reasons there are. This theoretical option could entail the presupposition that there are objective values in a Platonic sense that we have the ability to recognize. But the assumption of what Wolf calls "normative pluralism" shows a different way of interpreting the objectivity of "normative facts": seeing the world rightly involves seeing reasons for and against many different options. In this sense, maximum freedom and responsibility would presumably imply being able to see all of them. It is indeed difficult to have capacities, knowledge and time to engage in such an enterprise. The explanation of this capacity is easy to understand if we think that the case of the agent is moved by praise or blame. But, according to Wolf, from this perspective it is hard to isolate the special ability to appreciate reasons and values, because it seems necessarily bound to intellectual moral reflection and introspection. Rather we must consider the plurality of values belonging to different cultures: these values as normative facts are the content of our practical reasoning: «If inevitable features of myself – my gender, my race, my nationality, for example – and rationally arbitrary choices and twists of fate shaped my values and decisions, this does not seem to me to place objectionable limits on my status as a free and responsible agent. As long as these non-rational determinants do not prevent me from a sufficiently open-minded and clear-headed assessment of my values to allow me to see whether they fall into the range of the reasonable, and as long as my blindness to some other reasonable alternatives does not lead me to acts of intolerance or prejudice, then it seems that, for most intents and purposes, I am free and responsible enough. These non-rational determinants are, after all, what give us our individuality and distinctiveness. If, at the limits, they can be in tension with our freedom and responsibility, in more central cases they provide the basis for substantive identity and

<sup>26</sup> Ivi, p. 91.

an attachment to the world without which no interest in freedom and responsibility could arise»<sup>27</sup>.

Despite this interesting conclusion, the task of a theory of autonomy is, in my opinion, to give a plausible account of the way in which a person can criticize the non-rational determinants of his identity if it is the case. This requirement is fulfilled if we can describe the normative (rational) structure of that point of view that allows the agent to be autonomous, i.e. able to discern and justify a wide range of (subjective and objective) commitments.

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p. 146.



## II

### PERSONAL AUTONOMY: THE PROCEDURAL ACCOUNT

#### 1. *Affinities between Moral Autonomy and Personal Autonomy*

As we have seen in the last chapter, moral autonomy is based on specific capacities of rational deliberation. The main consequence of this option is that a conception of autonomy oriented to the pursuit of the good life at an individual level might seem out of place. Modern theorists of personal autonomy have also pointed to the engagement of specific capacities, the capacity for reflection and “second-order” motivation, that are similar to capacities required by the Kantian account. In this chapter I shall describe some relevant perspectives that are “proceduralist” because they concentrate on structural conditions of critical reflection. By choosing this strategy they overcome the substantive account proposed by Kant. The aim of my discussion is to show how some important criticisms develop from within the debate on procedural autonomy. I think that this argumentation is useful in order for understanding the shift from procedural to “substantive” autonomy.

One possible challenge for the theorists of personal autonomy is to demonstrate that there is something approximating personal autonomy in Kant’s account of happiness<sup>1</sup>. The first important issue is the uniqueness of each person’s happiness: «Only experience can teach us what brings joy. Only the natural drives for food, sex, rest, and movement, and (as our natural predispositions develop) for honor, for enlarging our cognition and so forth, can tell each of us, and each only in a particular way, in what he will *find* those joys; and, in the same way, only experience can teach him the means by which to *seek* them. All apparently a priori reasoning about this comes down to nothing but experience raised by induction to generality, a generality still so tenuous that everyone must be allowed countless exceptions in order to adopt his

<sup>1</sup> For the discussion of this topic I refer to J. Waldron, *Moral Autonomy and Personal Autonomy*, in *Autonomy and the Challenger to Liberalism*, op. cit. pp. 307-329.

choice of a way of life to his particular inclinations and his susceptibility to satisfaction...»<sup>2</sup>.

This thought could be read as a non-paternalistic thesis of freedom: the person himself is the author of his own happiness<sup>3</sup>. Also in the pursuit of happiness the normative distinction between action and passivity plays a fundamental role<sup>4</sup>. To be the author of his/her own happiness means to favor self-cultivation, that pertains not only to *moral* perfectibility: «He owes it to himself (as a rational being) not to leave idle and, as it were, rusting away the natural predispositions and capacities that his reason can some day use (...) as a being capable of ends (...), he must owe the use of his powers not merely to natural instinct but rather to the freedom by which he determines their scope»<sup>5</sup>.

Reason has a peculiar role also in the pursuit of individual happiness, but it is not a matter of instrumental rationality. As we have already seen in the last chapter, Korsgaard points out that human beings have the possibility of choosing, so that it is difficult to see happiness as the scheduling of satisfactions on the utilitarian model. On the one hand, the set of possible desires coming into play in the calculus of future happiness is indeterminate. On the other, humans can pick and choose in a non-quantitative way which desires have a primacy in their pursuit of happiness. According to a famous example of Kant's, a man who suffers from gout may choose intelligibly to opt for the pleasures of port even at the cost of physical agony, which in quantity and extent far outweighs those pleasures on any utilitarian calculation<sup>6</sup>. However, this is not a case of renunciation of moral power. It is rather a case in which the person makes a *choice* that controls and disciplines inclination even for the sake of other inclinations incommensurable with the first.

The dimension of choice is fundamental also for the theorists of personal autonomy, but they conceive autonomy as identification with individual desires, preferences and values. According to Joseph Raz, autonomy is not just a matter of having values and discovering them in one's choices, but is related to a kind of "self-authorship": «An autonomous person is part author of his own life. His life is, in part, of his own making. The autonomous person's life is marked not only by what it is but also by what

<sup>2</sup> I. Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 371, in I. Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> See A. Rosen, *Kant's Theory of Justice*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> In this context, Paul Guyer has pointed to Kant's *Reflexionen* in order to underline that we are more content when we view ourselves actively as authors of our happiness, rather than simply having contentment wash over us. See his *Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 565.

<sup>6</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 544.



it might have been and by the way it became what it is. A person is autonomous only if she had a variety of acceptable options to choose from, and her life became as it is through her choice of some of these options. A person who has never had any significant choice, or was not aware of it, or never exercised choice in significant matters but simply drifted through life is not an autonomous person»<sup>7</sup>.

## 2. *The Hierarchical Model*

The fundamental point of Kantian autonomy is the capacity of the agent not to renounce desire altogether but to stand back from her desires and consider whether they are the sort of thing that she ought to be motivated by. In this sense morality is associated with authenticity because it allows the access to the individual's true self. Deliberation is the core of moral authenticity, which can defy desires and inclinations that are judged to be alien to the agent. According to Waldron, personal autonomy is *like* moral autonomy in the kind of deliberation and commitment that it emphasizes; in both cases reflection reveals the true self.

Despite the role that theorists of personal autonomy assign to reflection, the Kantian account provides substantive principles representing the normative sources of freedom and autonomy (the hypothetical and the categorical imperatives). Indeed the debate on personal autonomy is divided into those authors who consider the procedural conditions of reflection and those who refer to normative factors of identity. Both, in my opinion, differ from the classical Kantian account of autonomy as they emphasize not only the moral dimension.

Gerald Dworkin and Harry Frankfurt introduced the higher-order desire approach to present the structural condition of autonomy as "authenticity"<sup>8</sup>. The reflexivity essential to self-rule can be explained in terms of the attitudinal relationships between the person's wants, or what are called *optative* relations<sup>9</sup>. Dworkin distinguishes between liberty and autonomy. We need a separate notion of autonomy because not every interference with the voluntary character of one's action interferes with a person's abil-

<sup>7</sup> J. Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986, p. 369.

<sup>8</sup> See G. Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988 and H. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

<sup>9</sup> N. Roughley in his *The use of Hierarchy: Autonomy and Valuing*, in «Philosophical Explorations», 2002, n.3, pp. 162-185, proposes to use "optative" to mean want-related, where "want" means the generic attitude verbally expressed by "Let it be the case that p" and characterized by a world-to-content direction of fit. Actually, Frankfurt uses "volitional" rather than "optative". Optative attitudes show a will that entails additional components i.g. a motivational nature.

ity to choose his mode of life: «Consider the classic case of Odysseus. Not wanting to be lured onto the rocks by the sirens, he commands his men to tie him to the mast and refuse all later orders he will give to be set free. He wants to have his freedom limited so that he can survive. Although his behavior at the time he hears the sirens may not be voluntary – he struggles against his bonds and orders his men to free him – there is another dimension of his conduct that must be understood. He has a preference about his preference, a desire not to have or to act upon various desires. He views the desire to move his ship closer to the sirens as something that is not part of him, but alien to him. In limiting his liberty, in accordance with his wishes, we promote, not hinder, his efforts to define the contours of his life»<sup>10</sup>.

According to Dworkin, if we consider only the promotion or hindrance of the first-order desires we ignore the fundamental trait of persons of reflecting upon and adopting attitudes toward their first-order desires, wishes and intentions. It is therefore peculiar to human beings to reflect on first-order desires: one may not just desire to smoke, but also not to have that desire. Consequently, it is not enough for autonomy to consider the condition of “authenticity”, i.e. the necessary condition of autonomous agency that a person’s second order desires be congruent with his first-order motivations<sup>11</sup>. Identification or lack of identification loses its central function if we do not focus on the capacity to raise the question of whether we “will” identify with or reject reasons for acting. This is the condition of “procedural independence” and it is subjected to a fundamental difficulty. If we imagine a person who lives his life in a subservient way and who also with the first order desires comprising such a life we could easily conclude that he is not autonomous<sup>12</sup>. According to the hierarchical model he passes the test of autonomy since his higher-order desires are consistent with his lower-order desires and identifies with them. But he may be a manipulated person, if his values even at the second order are the mere product of his upbringing and conditioning.

The condition of procedural independence introduces therefore an infinite regress<sup>13</sup>: if the acts of identification must themselves be autonomous, there must exist another act of identification at a higher level<sup>14</sup>. A

<sup>10</sup> Dworkin, op. cit. pp. 14-15.

<sup>11</sup> Dworkin introduced this condition as necessary in his *Autonomy and Behavior Control*, Hastings Center Report (February 1976). He now maintains that it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for being autonomous.

<sup>12</sup> See J. Christman, *Autonomy and Personal History*, «Canadian Journal of Philosophy», v. 21, n. 3, 1991, pp. 1-24.

<sup>13</sup> The problem of “infinite regress” is discussed also by G. Strawson in his *Freedom and Beliefs*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986.

<sup>14</sup> On this problem cf. Irving Thalberg, *Hierarchical Analyses of Unfree Action*, in *The Inner*

first solution to this problem could be the claim that desires can be autonomous without foundations. But this option makes it impossible to recognize whether an action is the result of manipulation.

### 3. *Reasons for Hierarchy*

Frankfurt developed his model in order to overcome the regress problem: the higher order approval of an act of identification with a desire is not necessary for that identification to indicate the autonomy of the agent. In this sense: «Suppose a man wants to be motivated in what he does by the desire to concentrate on his work. It is necessarily true, if this supposition is correct, that he already wants to concentrate on his work. This desire is now among his desires. But the question of whether or not his second-order desire is fulfilled does not turn merely on whether the desire he wants is one of his desires. It turns on whether this desire is, as he wants it to be, his effective desire or. If, when the chips are down, it is his desire to concentrate on his work that moves him to do what he does, then what he wants at that time is indeed (in the relevant sense) what he wants to want»<sup>15</sup>.

Frankfurt's model exposes itself to several critical observations. The most popular are the ones proffered by Gary Watson. The hierarchical model does not provide an explanation of the reason why second-order volitions favor first-order desires i.e. allow the agent's endorsement of them. In this sense: «since second-order volitions are themselves simply desires, to add them to the context of conflict is just to increase the number of contenders; it is not to give a special place to any of those in contention»<sup>16</sup>.

A consequence of the first objection is the second objection on the nature of higher order attitudes. If they deserve to give an account of the responsiveness to judgments of the good their normativity must be given by an "evaluational system". Higher-order volitions become evaluative judgments about what "is most worth pursuing".

As Michael Bratman suggests<sup>17</sup>, this is a "Platonic challenge" and is reinforced by a third objection: «(Agents) do not (or need not usually) ask themselves which of their desires they want to be effective in action; they ask themselves which course of action is most worth pursuing. The initial practical question is about courses of action and not about them-

*Citadel*, pp. 123-36 and M. Friedman, *Autonomy and the Split-level Self*, «Southern Journal of Philosophy», vol. 24, n. 1 pp. 19-35

<sup>15</sup> H. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> G. Watson, *Free Agency*, «Journal of Philosophy», 72, 1975, pp. 205-220.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. M. E. Bratman, *Planning Agency, Autonomus Agency*, in *Personal Autonomy*, op. cit.

selves»<sup>18</sup>. Indeed Frankfurt in giving an account of the agential authorship introduced the fundamental idea of “satisfaction”. Even if this idea is not sufficient to explain agential authority because of the possibility of desires grounded in depression. Nevertheless this notion is used also by Watson’s Platonic model. It is interesting to see whether it solves the regress problem. Critical/cases involve a rational breakdown and in the absence of rational breakdown an agent’s standpoint consists of relevant evaluative judgments. According to Bratman, even in the absence of rational breakdown the agent’s evaluative judgments frequently undetermine important commitments: «Turning the other cheek is a good, but so is an apt reactive response to wrongful treatment; resisting the use of violence by the military is good, but so is loyalty to one’s country; human sexuality is good, but so are certain religious lives in abstinence. In many such cases, the agent’s standpoint involves forms of commitment – to draft resistance, say – that have agential authority but go beyond his prior evaluative judgment (...) The hierarchical model has room for the view that these elements of the agent’s standpoint – elements of commitments in the face of underdetermination by prior value judgment – are constituted by relevant higher-order conative attitudes»<sup>19</sup>.

The problem is to explain why these conative attitudes have the authority to ground the agent’s standpoint<sup>20</sup>. The reason resides in their nature: they are plan-type attitudes and not mere desires. Our planning agency extends over time; this extension involves activities at different times performed by the very same agent. Thus, plan-type attitudes form the temporally persisting agent. Why are they higher-order attitudes rather than first-order ones? According to Bratman, plan-type attitudes are higher-order attitudes as they show the agent’s self-governance by appealing to considerations that legitimize and justify autonomous choices. What is very important here is the shift from the motivational to the “normative” content: the content of second-order attitudes are not desires but “self-governing policies” motivationally effective in practical reasoning. Self-governing policies ground the agential authority through their “relexivity”, that shows its efficacy in case the agent endorses the content of such activities i.e. he is satisfied (in the sense of Locke) with them.

<sup>18</sup> G. Watson, *Free Agency*, p. 219.

<sup>19</sup> Bratman, *Planning Agency*, p. 40. For a similar view see K. Lehrer, *Self-Trust: a Study of Reason, Knowledge, and Autonomy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, chap. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Roughley noticed an incoherence in the account of the causal efficacy of “freedom of the will” by Frankfurt. On the one hand, a second order volition is defined as a want whose object is an “effective” first-order desire. On the other, he argues that freedom of the will does not entail action according to the person’s will, but involves merely a relationship between desires. Following some thoughts of A. Mele, Roughley concentrates rather on the conditions of the process of “valuing”. See *The Uses of Hierarchy*, op. cit.

Let us now see how this new hierarchical model replies to Watson's three objections. (1) The regress problem is overcome once we introduce the systematic role of self-governing policies for a temporally persisting agent, i. e. for constituting and supporting the cross-temporal organization of practical thought and action. (2) The Platonic challenge requires reference to normative commitments. It is the very appeal to self-governing policies that provides for such commitments possessing stability over time. Here Bratman means a normative stability that involves norms of reasonable stability. (3) The objection from deliberative structure need not rule out hierarchy: «We can understand that model as one of background structures that bear on an agent's efforts to answer this "initial practical question": when a self-governing agent grapples with this question, his thought and action are structured in part by higher-order self-governing policies. Or, at least, this is one important case of self-governance»<sup>21</sup>.

Finally, there are two fundamental reasons for accepting hierarchy. First, the reflexivity of self-governance policies grounds the idea of a conative hierarchical model, i.e. hierarchies of conative attitudes about conative attitudes. Second, hierarchy implies a form of deliberation, as reflection on agent's desires, reflection aiming at choosing on which desire to act. The central point of Bratman's proposal is the introduction of a kind of "normative" content. Like Korsgaard, he introduces a model of deliberation with its own normativity that emerges in choosing which desire to act on. In this sense: «(...) it is plausible to suppose that his (the agent's) basic commitments will themselves include a commitment to associated management of relevant first-order desires and thus include self-management as part of their content. And that means these commitments will be higher order. In particular, given the centrality of practical reasoning to self-governed agency, we can expect that these commitments will include policy-like attitudes that concern the justifying significance to be given (or refused) to various first-order desires, and/or what they are for, in his motivationally effective practical reasoning»<sup>22</sup>.

#### 4. *The Normativity of the Historical Process of Desire Formation*

Reasons for overcoming hierarchy are provided by those authors who consider rather the process along which a person develops autonomy. This analysis is useful because of the problems that the Frankfurtian concept of identification as "decisive endorsement" entails: «Imagine someone who has been secretly hypnotized to want strawberries and no new information

<sup>21</sup> Bratman, *Planning Agency*, p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> Bratman, *Planning Agency*, p. 49.

he might gather would dissuade him of his preference. But such a person is surely not autonomous relative to this desire for strawberries. On the other hand, if Frankfurt accepted the judgment that this person is *lacking* autonomy despite the decisive identification with the desire, this would imply that identification is insufficient for autonomy. We would then be left wondering what the missing condition is (that the hypnosis victim lacks). This is another example of the incompleteness problem»<sup>23</sup>.

According to Christman, it is a matter of the way in which the desire was formed, i.e. the conditions and factors that were relevant during the “process” of coming to have the value or desire. It seems easier to recognize whether the actual desire of the agent is authentic, especially in the case of formation of a totally new desire, if we consider the conditions that determine the agent’s participation in the process of preference formation. Before setting out these conditions, a fundamental requirement must be satisfied: that the agent had the possibility of resisting the development of a desire and did not. Consequently, Christman suggests the following conditions:

- (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 conditions (i) is (minimally) rational and involves no self-deception.

Among these conditions, we must underline the second clause of (i). It indicates that the test may need to be hypothetical as some persons may not resist the development of a desire when this occurs, but they *would have* done so under conditions that make this possible. This means that a person “attends to” the development of a desire when he is in a position to focus on the processes and conditions of the acceptance of that desire, i. e. he can describe the steps of reasoning or the causal processes that led him to have the desire. In this sense, the “transparency” of the agent’s motivating reasons corresponds to the ability to bring to conscious aware-

<sup>23</sup> Christman, *Autonomy and Personal History*, p. 8-9.

ness a belief or desire – either in the form of mental representation or a proposition – and concentrate on its meaning<sup>24</sup>.

In order for agents to be autonomous, reflection must satisfy certain conditions of normal cognitive functioning: (1) rationality and (2) self-awareness. Regarding (1) Christman defends the claim that only minimal “internal” conditions for rationality (such as consistency of beliefs and desires) would be plausible as conditions for autonomy. An externalist view is excluded here: if rational reflection requires a confirmation of one’s beliefs by objectively relevant evidence, then the agent cannot be considered as autonomous<sup>25</sup>. The requirement of consistency must be interpreted however in a wide sense because it is hard to imagine a person who has examined all of her beliefs and preferences to establish whether they are consistent and transitive. Nevertheless, an autonomous person cannot be guided by *manifestly inconsistent* desires or beliefs, i. e. desires or beliefs that, once brought to consciousness reveal themselves and so are recognized as incompatible. In this sense: «What this requirement for consistency entails, however, is that the autonomous agent does not act on the basis of mistaken inferences or violation of logical laws. If I believe that “p” and I believe that “if p then q”, but I desire something X which is based on the belief that “not-q”, then the desire for X is not autonomous (...) The final ends and purposes that an agent has must also be consistent with the rest of the judgments, values, and beliefs to which he has committed herself. And a good deal of conflict at this level can occur within an agent»<sup>26</sup>.

In my opinion, logical laws are relevant for determining a condition of autonomy, but they have an expressive role: they deserve to make explicit the “material” inferences involved in theoretical and practical reasoning. In this sense, the material content of our judgments becomes relevant to autonomy.

Moreover the internalist view seems to ignore the ways that autonomy can be lost as a result of others deliberately manipulating or cutting off a person’s access to true information (even if beliefs remain consistent).

<sup>24</sup> Christman’s notion of transparency is similar to H. Finguerette’s: it is intended as the act of “spelling out” to oneself one’s beliefs. See H. Finguerette, *Self-deception*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969. This view is contrasted by those authors who maintain, in a Freudian sense, that much of our motivational structure is not immediately transparent to us. I agree with Christman in considering the concept of autonomy under normal conditions; otherwise therapy is necessary to create the conditions of autonomy.

<sup>25</sup> As Berlin pointed out: «once I take this view (i.e. the externalist view) I am in a position to ignore the actual wishes of men or societies, to bully, oppress, torture them in the name... of their “real” selves, in the secure knowledge that whatever is the true goal of man (happiness, the performance of duty...) must be identical with his freedom – the free choice of his “true”, albeit often submerged and inarticulated, self». I. Berlin, *Two concepts of Liberty*, op. cit. p. 133.

<sup>26</sup> Christman, *Autonomy and Personal History*, p. 15.

The procedural account points out the fact that the agent is autonomous if she comes to have desires and beliefs in a manner which she accepts. The consequence of this thought is rejection of the view that one lacks autonomy *simply* because one's beliefs are false.

Regarding (2), the judgments of the processes of preference formation cannot involve self-deception. Self-deception arises when the motivating desires and beliefs are not transparent to the agent. Motives that undermine self-awareness are incompatible with autonomy as self-government: in case of a dissociated, fragmented or insufficiently transparent self the process of self-determination involved in the concept of autonomy is absent or incomplete.

Finally, Christman's account leads to the following claim: an agent is autonomous as regards a desire if influences and conditions that generated that desire were factors that the agent approved of or did not resist, or would not have resisted had she attended to them, and that this judgment was or would have been made in a minimally rational, non-self-deceived manner. The most important consequence of this thesis is a "content-neutral" approach, that – as we will see in the next chapters – is subjected to several criticisms. These critical remarks are directed also to the political dimension of Christman's theory, on which I shall focus in the last chapter. On the one hand, I agree with the possibility of theorizing an "individual" autonomous point of view, based on the possibility of critical reflection. On the other, Christman's "atomism" does not consider the material properties of the content of our beliefs and action: it possesses not only an inferential structure but also a social dimension founding this very structure.

##### 5. Problems with the "Real Self View"

A previous shift to a possible consideration of reasons due not only to the internal structure of reasoning but also to properties external to the agent suggests that we analyze the relationship between individual agency and reasons. The central result of Wolf's argumentation was the fact that we have the possibility of choosing according to what reasons there are and this thesis is useful for overcoming the "real self view" (RSV) implied by the hierarchical model.

The origin of the RSV is the Humean perspective, which Wolf synthesizes in the following thought: under normal conditions of freedom (i.e. in the absence of external constraints) an agent is able to govern her behavior on the basis of her will, which in turn can be governed by the set of the agent's desires<sup>27</sup>. But this model is too simplistic to make a clear

<sup>27</sup> Wolf, *Freedom within Reason* p. 28.



distinction between normally free actions and ones that are intuitively unfree. Cases of hypnosis or kleptomania show that there are situations in which an agent may be constrained by her own desires and others in which she may feel forced to act from a will that, in one sense but not in another, is not her own. In the kleptomaniac case, the agent can be alienated from her desire, i.e. she might say that she would not have the desire if she could choose. In the case of hypnosis, the answer to whether the agent would have the desire if she could choose may be indeterminate. These cases could cause confusion in the attribution of responsibility for acting.

The RSV is the one inherited by Frankfurt and aims to exclude the notion of autonomy as fundamental for an agent to be responsible. It focuses on freedom based on causation of our motivational system (i.e. desires) whenever we are free from external constraints. The problem of the relationship between autonomy and responsibility is more complicated. According to Wolf, we sometimes question the responsibility of a fully developed agent even when she acts in a way that is clearly attributable to her real self. Consequently, there are two senses for interpreting the notion of responsibility. The first is used to identify what can be called the primary causal agent of an event or state of affairs (for example “the beautiful weather is responsible for the picnic’s success”). This notion of responsibility comes into play when we acknowledge the causal role of an agent and we praise or blame her, i.e. we acknowledge that she has good or bad qualities, or has performed good or bad acts. The second “deeper” sense refers to those situations in which we are doing more than identifying the role of the agent in the causal series that brings about the event in question. In this sense: «We are regarding her as a fit subject for credit or discredit on the basis of the role she plays. When, in this context, we consider an individual worthy of blame or of praise, we are not merely judging the moral quality of the event with which the individual is so intimately associated; we are judging the moral quality of the individual herself in some more focused, noninstrumental, and seemingly more serious way»<sup>28</sup>.

The RSV does not consider the fact that real selves may not only be selves in the second sense. Cases of victims of comprehensive insanity, psychological conditioning, and dramatically deprived childhoods demonstrate that some individuals with fully developed real selves may not deserve praise or blame for what they do and what they are. We need an account of what is peculiar in the relationship between these agents and the world. This task requires a reconsideration of the condition of autonomy: an autonomous agent is neither the product of some inevitable

<sup>28</sup> Wolf, *Freedom within Reason*, p. 41

interactions among things in the world (prior to themselves), nor the victim of his nature (arbitrarily and unalterably given to her). Autonomous agents have a kind of control over their behavior: they not only act “in” the world but “on” the world. They have the possibility of reaching (at least in part) that point of view detached from the world that is necessary for the attribution of deep responsibility. According to Wolf, it must be possible to explain why agents are responsible, why the idea of responsibility makes any sense at all.

#### 6. *The Historicist Condition of Reflection*

As we have noticed, the procedural model introduced by Frankfurt does not take into consideration the historical factors that influence the process of the agent’s self-evaluation, so, recalling Wolf’s argumentation, we need a clarification of conditions enabling the agent’s control over her actions. For this reason, Martin Fisher and John Ravizza point to the fact that morally responsible agents must have actual causal control or guidance over actions. For example, if a heroin addict is to be held morally responsible for taking heroin he must be responsive to possible reasons for not doing so. If he is not responsive as such, he could not do otherwise, and thus, is not morally responsible for his drug use. Fisher and Ravizza introduced the notion of “moderate reasons responsiveness” as a condition of autonomous agency. Moderate reasons responsiveness implies regular reasons-receptivity and at least weak “reasons-reactivity”. “Reasons receptivity” is the capacity to recognize “The reasons that exist”, and “reasons reactivity” is the capacity to translate reasons into choices, and thus, subsequent behavior. Fischer and Ravizza maintain that: «The reactivity to reasons and receptivity to reasons that constitute the responsiveness relevant to moral responsibility are crucially asymmetric. Whereas a very weak sort of reactivity is all that is required, a stronger sort of receptivity to reasons is necessary to this kind of responsiveness»<sup>29</sup>. In this sense, if a heroin user is to be held morally responsible for his drug use he must be both regularly reasons-receptive to the reasons for not using heroin, and at least weakly-reactive to such reasons. In order for the heroin user to be weakly-reactive to reasons to do otherwise, there need be only one hypothetical situation in which the heroin user recognizes reasons for not using heroin, and acts on those reasons. For example, a heroin user is weakly reasons-reactive if he refrains from taking the drug in at least the one situation where he knows that he would die if the drug were in-

<sup>29</sup> M.J. Fisher and S. J. Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 69.

jected one more time. The fact that the heroin user refrains from taking the drug in this one situation is a reflection of the fact that his urges to take heroin are not irresistible, and thus do not preclude his responsibility for the drug use. Although an autonomous agent need be only weakly reasons-reactive he must be regularly reasons-receptive. Whenever we judge a person's receptivity, we are not only concerned to see that she recognizes sufficient reason in one instance; we also want to see that the person exhibits an appropriate pattern of reasons-recognition. Namely, we want to know that a person recognizes how reasons fit together, and understands why one reason is stronger than another. An understandable pattern of reasons-receptivity is a defining characteristic of regular reasons-receptivity<sup>30</sup>. The idea is that the pattern of reasons-receptivity be such that it is understandable as if by a third party. This means that a person's pattern of reasons-receptivity is judged from some perspective that takes into account "the subjective features of the agent (i.e., the agent's preferences, values, and beliefs) but is also not simply the agent's point of view"<sup>31</sup>. There is a sense, then, in which an autonomous agent must be receptive to the right reasons, as determined by his moral community. According to Fischer and Ravizza, in order for a person to be regularly reasons-receptive, and thus a morally responsible agent, it is sufficient that she be receptive to a pattern of actual and hypothetical reasons that are understandable by some appropriate external observer<sup>32</sup>.

The theory of Fisher and Ravizza seems to solve the problem of autonomy also in the case of an oppressive socialization. Indeed this situation could require "substantial" conditions of autonomy because of the internalization of norms oppressive in nature. Let us quote the thought experiment of the twins Betty and Ella who grew up with a liberal education but exposed to options different in their content. Betty was presented mostly with options for positive values like the principle of treating others as ends in themselves. Ella, on the contrary, was presented with negative values like treating others merely as means to ends. During their development, the respective families and communities gave them the possibility of adopting an autonomous point of view, i.e. of taking their own position to make their own decisions. It was important to ensure moral education to ensure equality between the two. When they were twelve years old a pair of new figures entered in their lives: aunts who spent time with them once a week. The aunts had the task of teaching values as liberally as possible, but the values were different in the two cases. Betty's

<sup>30</sup> T. Kolke, *Procedural vs. Substantive Theories of Autonomy: Reinterpreting the Connection between Good Values and Autonomy*, on-line,

<sup>31</sup> Fisher and Ravizza, *op. cit.* p. 73

<sup>32</sup> Ivi, pp. 69-73.

aunt aimed to teach positive values such as compassion, charity, loyalty, and honesty, values based on the principle of treating others as ends in themselves. But Ella's aunt taught her oppressive values such as revenge, getting ahead at any cost, and using others merely as means to an end. The result of the two educational processes was that at the age of twenty-ve Betty was a caring and compassionate individual who had many close friendships, while Ella's behavior with her friends was guided only by dishonesty and disloyalty.

The question at this point is whether we can consider one girl more autonomous than the other because of the content of the internalized norms. The first important observation is that the moral education was not totally liberal because of the absence of a full range of options necessary for developing autonomy. For Betty it was easier to choose good values and for Ella to choose bad values; consequently both Betty and Ella lack autonomy to some degree. From the "substantive" point of view, which we shall consider in the next chapter, oppressive norms restrict autonomy more than non-oppressive ones. This observation means that it is relevant to base our judgment on the content of the internalized norms, i.e. the fact that they can be good or bad for a right process of self-determination. In this sense the values Ella adopted are oppressive in nature: «(...) tend to lead to cruel and harsh treatment of both others and Ella herself. To see this, consider the contrast between Betty and Ella's values. Betty's values consist in compassion, honesty, and loyalty. Underlying Betty's values is the principle that says, 'people should be treated as ends in them selves'. The action resulting from Betty's values are not a threat to herself or others. For this reason, the content of Betty's values is non-oppressive in nature. Ella's values, on the other hand, are nearly the opposite: personal gain at any cost to others, whether that is by treachery, dishonesty or whatever means. The norm underlying Ella's values is the principle 'people should be treated as means to ends when it suits your own purpose'. One can imagine the harm to people that could result from acting on such values. Ella's internalized norms, then, unlike Betty's, are oppressive in nature; both to herself and to others»<sup>33</sup>.

According to the proceduralist view of Fisher and Ravizza, the conclusion is different. The twins both have regular reasons-receptivity and weak reasons-reactivity so they are autonomous and not autonomous to some degree. It seems that the consideration of the level of autonomy based on the history of self-determination is not sufficient. But, if we look at the implications of a liberal education, things change: a liberal education is itself consistent with treating others as an end in themselves. The very meaning of liberal education involves respecting and valuing the opinion

<sup>33</sup> Ivi, p. 10

and choices of another. In this sense, we must focus on the development of autonomy not only as regards the conditions of reasons responsiveness and reasons reactivity, but also the necessity of having a variety of options. This condition favors critical reflection because if a person cannot compare his ideas with other ideas the ability of critical reflection is blocked.

Finally, I would underline the following conclusion very close to Wolf's thought. It is a fact that our knowledge limits our choices. If an agent is exposed to conditions constraining her recognition of moral norms, she cannot be held responsible for not choosing in accordance with these norms. According to Fischer and Ravizza's notion of reasons responsiveness, a person is reasons responsive when she is sufficiently responsive to possible reasons for doing otherwise. But if a person has limited options of choice, then she is not sufficiently responsive to possible reasons for doing otherwise. For this reason, she cannot be considered as a fully autonomous agent.



### III

## PERSONAL AUTONOMY: THE SUBSTANTIVE ACCOUNT

### *1. Acting according to the True and the Good*

The debate on autonomy presents several “substantive” perspectives that – generally speaking – try to overcome the regress problem involved by the procedural theories (both in their structural or historical variants). In this chapter, I shall focus on some relevant substantive perspectives, because they explain very clearly the role of the content of beliefs and preferences in the discussion on autonomy. This is a first useful step for introducing the topic of the second part of my book. I maintain that together with some fundamental social attitudes, we must consider the structure of the content of beliefs and actions that we can recognize and criticize.

First, why is the regress to individual desires a problem? As Noggle points out: «In its “synchronic”, or contemporaneous, form, such a regress is a problem because we do not have an infinite number of psychological elements ready to serve as authenticators to authenticators to authenticators...In its “diachronic”, or historical, form, the regress is a problem because of the obvious fact that we lack infinitely long psychological histories. As we move back in time, we eventually reach a point at which our psychological configurations no longer even exist. And well before then, we find psychological causes that involve processes (often lumped together under the broad heading of “socialization”) like conditioning, role model imitation, the internalization of socially endorsed behavioral norms, and the acceptance of claims on the basis of adult authority»<sup>1</sup>. These processes could represent a kind of external manipulation that interferes with the development of autonomy.

A more convincing critical observation comes from the substantive point of view embraced by Paul Benson. Following Meyer’s criticism of

<sup>1</sup> Noggle, *Autonomy and the Self-Creation*, p. 95. This essay is very clear in its explanation of the difference among “structural”, “historical” and “substantive” conditions of autonomy, even if Noggle argues for “authenticity” in a Frankfurtian sense.

the “united self”, Benson notices that identity-based theories set conditions too strong to be necessary for autonomy, because one can take ownership for what he/she does even if the action does not align with who he/she is or what he/she stands for. A fruitful example of this situation is the performance of trivial acts such as “swivelling my office chair” that rise above the level of sub-intentional behaviors. These acts, whenever subjected to critical scrutiny, could generate alienation from the ways in which the agent was moved to do such trivial things. Nevertheless, the agent is autonomous in performing them. But trivial acts are problematic for procedural identity-based theories because they directly challenge the relationship these theories presume between what the agents care about and which actions are authentic.

Another deeply problematic situation is the possibility of integrating different aspects of the self. For an autonomous agent it becomes very difficult to take ownership for commitments that are incompatible even if they constitute the identity of a single person, and so they generate internal conflicts. Identity-based theories cannot explain autonomy in such cases because they require “identification” with a motive as a necessary condition for reflection. In Benson’s terms: «(...) the authorization that constitutes autonomy is an authorization of agents with respect to their wills, not, in the first instance, authorization of their motives or courses of action. Identity-based theories are wrong not only in focusing so intently on person’s practical commitments, values or personality integration: they are also mistaken to focus on the authenticity of particular motives, as opposed to the authority that agents claim in taking ownership of them»<sup>2</sup>.

There are therefore convincing reasons for introducing a model of personal autonomy based on substantive conditions such as truth, goodness, appropriateness, etc. Another good argument for a substantive conception of autonomy is that the acceptance of a belief, for example, is due to the recognition of the grounds of its acceptance, i.e. the (existing) grounds justifying its adoption by any rational agent<sup>3</sup>.

According to Berofsky, the problem of freedom in the sense of the metaphysics of free will has no sense for autonomy. We live in a world of contingencies, but at the same time we must be capable of changing these contingencies if they do not fulfill our desires, preferences or values. We must have control over our life. We would better consider the freedom necessary for responsibility. Recalling Wolf’s thought, this is not just the freedom that allows one’s action to be governed by one’s own reason, but also a freedom that allows one’s reasons to be governed by what reasons there are. This theoretical option could entail the presupposition that there

<sup>2</sup> Benson, *Authority and Voice in Autonomous Agency*, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> See B. Berofsky, *Autonomy without Free Will*, in *Personal Autonomy*, op. cit. pp. 58-86.



exist objective values, in a Platonic sense, which we have the ability to recognize. But the assumption of what Wolf calls “normative pluralism” shows a different way of interpreting the objectivity of “normative facts”. The most prominent property of normative pluralism is its “partial” objectivity, i.e. the fact that values and value judgments are partially objective because of the presence of controversies within cultures and among cultures. Consequently, moral values cannot converge in a unique universal system or in several systems of moral reasons. Moreover, we have to consider reasons guiding our choices other than moral ones. Together with a plurality of reasons we must recognize that there may not be a uniquely right answer to the question of “how” moral to be. On the one hand, normative pluralism involves a plurality not only of good moral outlooks, but also of good aesthetic values and good personal ideals, and on the other hand a plurality of good ways of integrating the reasons that emerge from these different normative perspectives. A relevant result of Wolf’s thesis is that the autonomous agent does not correspond to the one who is most acutely sensitive to *moral* reasons: «Appreciation of the Good need not be con ned to appreciation of the *moral* Good. Indeed, in certain contexts, appreciation of the moral good may interfere with one’s ability to appreciate the nonmoral good or with one’s ability to recognize reasons for preferring a morally inferior course of action. Thus, one’s disapproval of bigotry may prevent one from enjoying an immoral but funny ethnic joke. One’s commitment to impartiality may block one’s recognition of reasons that originate in bonds of friendship and love. Just as Reason may fail to pick out a uniquely best conception of how, and how much, one’s conception of impartiality should be re ected in one’s life»<sup>4</sup>.

Wolf’s account seems to fall into a sort of “relativism” that could make it difficult to explain how an autonomous agent could act according to the True and the Good. Indeed, two different cases are presented. The first is the case of an agent acting according to the True and the Good but under the influence of external forces such as, for example, the authority of a determinate figure or hypnosis. In this case it is evident that the agent is acting not *for the right reasons*. But if we have to act for “our own” reasons how could we gain a more objective perspective, i.e. acting according to the right reasons? What is the sense of the term “right” in this context? The second case shows the perspective of normative pluralism as a solution to these questions. Normative pluralism replaces the ideal of choosing freely (for oneself) with the ideal of choosing “rightly” whereas the right reasons do not derive from narrow or rigid patterns of thought. In this sense, there exists a “right” choice together with the reasons acknowledged from a wide variety of sources. The Reason View must not be seen through the con-

<sup>4</sup> Wolf, *Freedom within Reason*, p. 137.

trast between the ability to act in accordance with the right reasons and the ability to act in accordance with the wrong ones, but through the contrast between the ability to act in accordance with Reason and the possibility of not acting by Reason at all. According to Wolf: «It makes no contribution, according to the Reason View, that the agent be able (or free) to act *irrationally* – that is, at the limit, *insanely*. It makes *no* contribution, according to the reason View, that the agent be able not to see what reasons there are. But insofar as seeing the world rightly involves seeing reasons for (and against) many different options, then maximum freedom and responsibility would presumably involve being able to see them all»<sup>5</sup>.

The ability to see whatever reasons there are favors the agent's control over his actions. A good reasoning does not generate an autonomous action automatically because it could be the case of the action being caused by external reasons, i.e. reasons that are not under the agent's control. The agent's control is bound to normative pluralism as it implies the possibility of appreciating reasons that come from a variety of sources not necessarily all commensurable and not necessarily representing reasons "for" actions in every case. Even if we inevitably act on the basis of the determinants of our identity, the task of a theory of autonomy is to investigate the possibility of critical reflection, of criticizing the content of our beliefs and values. I think that Wolf does not provide an exhaustive explanation of the normative structure of the point of view that allows the individual development of the capacity for critical reflection. We must be able to see what reasons there are, but, at the same time, we must be presented with the way in which we can see these very reasons and with the properties pertaining to these reasons that qualify them as true and good.

## 2. *Strong Normative Competence*

The motive for introducing normative constraints on the content of desires, preferences or values is that this very content has to be subjected to individual critical reflection. The reasons for doing so are underlined by most of the feminist philosophers who notice that ordinary feminine socialization disrupts women's autonomy because of the contents of the norms internalized. What Natalie Stoljar calls the "feminist intuition" shows how preferences that, according to procedural theories satisfy the standards of critical reflection, can nonetheless be non-autonomous because of the influence of pernicious aspects of the oppressive context<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Ivi, p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> See, N. Stoljar, *Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition*, in C. Mackenzie & N. Stoljar (ed.), *Relational Autonomy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp.94-111.

According to Stolyar, an example of the feminist intuition is Kristin Luker's study of women who take contraceptive risks<sup>7</sup>. The research showed how most of the women of the selected group used no contraception the month prior to becoming pregnant (40%) or used it inconsistently (26%). Luker aims to demonstrate that the decision not to use contraception or effective contraception is rational despite the premises of the rational-choice theory. Moreover, she maintains that the behavior of the women is both reasonable and logical given their *own* definition of the situation. As we will see, Stolyar observes that they are rational but non-autonomous. Elizabeth Anderson, who adopted a rhetorical theory of rational choice, recognizes that the women are non-autonomous, but she radicalizes her point of view by claiming that they are also irrational<sup>8</sup>. This is so because Anderson conceives autonomy as a characteristic of rational agency. There are two conditions of Anderson's theory of autonomy that show its substantive character. First, autonomous agents must regard themselves as authorized to act on their own interests and ordering of preferences. In this sense, their behavior is not the result of traditions, conventions, morality or other people's reasons. Second, autonomous agents must "regard themselves as self-originating sources of claims". According to Stolyar, we can understand the first condition in a strong or in a weak sense. In the strong sense, an autonomous agent must not take others' reasons for acting as her own, while the weaker suggests that the agent must regard himself as authorized to act in his own interests. The most important consequence of the first version is his incompatibility with socialization, a conclusion that is ruled out by procedural accounts. The weaker condition and the second one are clearly not procedural, as procedural theories do not consider failures to regard one's own interest as sufficient to undermine autonomy.

Stolyar's conclusion is that Anderson's point of view, contrary to Luker's thought, is substantive and represents an example of the feminist intuition. This conclusion is supported by a deep observation of the content of the interviews. The subjects of Luker's study are judged to be non-autonomous because they are overly influenced in their decision about contraception by stereotypical and incorrect norms of femininity and sexual agency.

<sup>7</sup> K. Luker, *Taking Chances: Abortion and the Decision Not to Contracept*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975.

<sup>8</sup> In her work *Should Feminists reject Rational Choice Theory?* (paper presented to the APA Eastern Division Meetings, 30 December 1996) Anderson identifies various theories of rational choice. The *formal theory* describes rationality according to the standard of maximizing utility. In this sense, it is procedural as it does not consider the content of preferences in the maximization of utility. The *rhetorical theory of rational choice* considers an agent as rational when he has certain substantive characteristics like self-reliance, autonomy and self-confidence. In this sense, it is a substantive theory.

Indeed, Luker considers a wide range of the costs of contraception: the social and cultural costs, the costs of obtaining and maintaining contraception, and the medical and biological costs. The social norms motivating the subjects interviewed are better reflected by the social costs of acknowledging intercourse by planning and using contraception. For example, let us quote the following excerpt from an interview:

I: Why didn't you use more effective contraception?

R: I always thought about it, but never did anything about it. I used to think about the pill, but my sister used it, she's married now and stupid, and my mother used to tell me she'd die. She's really Catholic. But it seems as if most of my friends are on it<sup>9</sup>.

A second example shows another kind of social cost related to internalized religious or cultural norms:

I: Did you think you might get pregnant not using contraception?

R: I thought so, I mean, I knew it was a possibility. But there was this problem of my religious background. If you are familiar with the Catholic Church it is against the Church to use contraception or to have pre-marital sex. ... Just using a contraceptive seems like you're planning<sup>10</sup>.

A third case considered by Luker is the fact that subjects tacitly weighted up the costs of obtaining and using contraception against what they anticipated would be benefits of pregnancy:

I: You said you had a strong maternal urge. So you think that could have been a factor in getting pregnant?

R: I think so, yeah. I don't know exactly, but taking a wild stab, I think that getting pregnant means having someone who will take my love and care, cause lots of times I think no one else wants it<sup>11</sup>.

The cases taken into account fulfill the feminist intuition because the internalized norms motivating the decision to take a contraceptive risk have criticizable contents. These contents correspond to norms of religion, femininity, and sexuality that are oppressive to women. On the contrary, these norms do not undermine autonomy if we start from a procedural point of view. Let us consider the necessary conditions Stoljar isolates from procedural accounts: *counterfactual*, *internal coherence*, *endorsement*, *self-*

<sup>9</sup> Luker, op. cit. p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> Ivi, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Ivi, pp. 47-48.

*knowledge, and inhibiting factors.* I summarize her interesting argumentation<sup>12</sup>. The counterfactual condition is embedded in Christman's perspective and requires that an agent be autonomous with respect to a certain desire or preference only if he did not resist the process of its development or would not have resisted had he attended to the process. Luker's subjects can be judged as autonomous according to this test because they are "bargainers", i.e. they weighed the costs and benefits of using contraception and decided to take a risk.

The self-knowledge condition is proposed, among the others, by Diana Meyers and requires that the agent not be self-deceived in the formation of his desires and preferences<sup>13</sup>. In Meyer's terms, this means that acting from one's authentic self, and hence being autonomous, is the result of a successful application of a number of skills; one of these is the skill of self-discovery. The cases considered by Luker show problematic conclusions, according to which the self-knowledge condition is not fulfilled. Most of the subjects decided to take the contraceptive risk for a complex array of factors, including a wish, based on pragmatic reasons, not to be seen to be violating norms of female sexual agency.

The internal coherence condition is exemplified by the "minimal rationality" proposed by Christman: the set of beliefs and desires that contributes to the process of reflection must not show inconsistencies. Friedman introduces another kind of internal coherence condition: higher- and lower-order desires must be integrated in the sense that higher-order desires are subject to revision in light of lower-order desires, and vice-versa<sup>14</sup>. Luker's subjects are not all cases of internal incoherence because the conflicts between desires do not always cause an internal breakdown. For example, the case of the woman whose decision to risk sexual intercourse without contraception because of a paralyzing ambivalence is different from that of the woman whose decision not to use contraception is the result of a conflict between the desire to have sex and the desire to reveal her sex life to her father.

The endorsement condition could be interpreted as a way of understanding the integration condition. In this sense, first-order desires must be endorsed by second-order desires (as we have seen in the second chapter). At a first glance Luker's subjects are not autonomous because there is a conflict between premarital sex and religious or cultural norms. According to Stolyar, they are autonomous in most cases. For example, a woman who thinks that deliberate planning for sex is distasteful and also that getting pregnant is a good way of testing her partner's commitment to her

<sup>12</sup> Stolyar op. cit. pp. 100-107.

<sup>13</sup> See D. Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> See M. Friedman, *Autonomy and the Split-Level Self*, «Southern Journal of Philosophy», 24 (1986), pp. 19-35.

can decide to take a contraceptive risk. In this case the preference seems to be endorsed by a set of norms that suggests not using contraception.

The last condition is the inhibiting factors condition articulated by Christman: the lack of resistance to the development of a preference or desire must not have taken place (or would not have taken place) under the influence of factors that inhibit self-reflection. It is indeed difficult to answer the question of whether internal factors are present to inhibit Luker's subjects' capacity for critical reflection. Moreover, even women socialized through stereotypical feminine socialization can develop good capacities for reflection and hence for autonomy. According to Stolyar, this fact means that the observed subjects have severely hampered critical capacities because their preferences to take contraceptive risks and most of their other preferences are "automatically" non-autonomous. Procedural theories set conditions that have no possibility of vindicating the feminist intuition. For this reason, we would do better to consider the conditions proposed by substantive accounts.

Anderson's perspective reflects a "weak" substantive theory of autonomy like the one introduced by Paul Benson, because agents must have a «sense of worthiness to act (which involves) regarding oneself as being competent to answer for one's conduct in light of normative demands that, from one's point of view, others might appropriately apply to one's actions»<sup>15</sup>. Weak normative competence requires that the agent regard herself as the self-originating source of claims, i.e. she must have a subjective sense of his authority to answer for her own preferences and actions. Whenever the agent lacks self-confidence, self-trust or self-esteem will fail to be autonomous. Benson proposes the case of the "gaslighted" woman who is passionate, excitable and "prone to emotional outburst in public" so that her husband and the scientific establishment believe that she is significantly unstable. What undermines her autonomy is the fact that she trusts these external judgments of her character and her behavior, even if the capacity for critical reflection invoked by procedural theories is not undermined.

Let us now explain why a weak normative competence theory could explain the failures of autonomy in Luker's subjects. First, some women believe that pregnancy and motherhood increase their self-esteem and their status in the eyes of family members or society. This observation suggests that they lack self-worth, so that their normative competence is undermined. Second, sometimes women frame their actions as excuses for not engaging in sex with their partner. This fact shows that they see themselves as passive and not as self-authors of their claims. In this sense, they

<sup>15</sup> P. Benson, *Free Agency and Self-Worth*, «Journal of Philosophy», 91, 1994, pp. 650-668.

regard their partners as normatively competent. Third, some women are ashamed of their sexual agency: shame could be sufficient for eroding the sense of self-worth necessary for normative competence.

What are the reasons for reinterpreting these conclusions in the light of a strong normative competence theory? According to Stolyar: «Women who accept the norm that pregnancy and motherhood increase their worthiness accept something *false*. And because of the internalization of the norm, they do not have the capacity to perceive that it is false. Most of Luker's examples can be explained in these terms. The reason that Luker's subjects are judged not to be autonomous is that the reasons weighed up in the bargaining process – the costs of active sexual agency, as well as the benefits of pregnancy – are often derived from false norms that have been internalized, such as that women should not actively desire sex or prepare for sex in advance, that pregnancy is an expression of “real” womanhood, or that pregnancy is likely to lead to a marriage commitment from one's partner and that this is a good thing. It is the content of these norms that can be criticized from a feminist point of view, not the way in which Luker's subjects engage in the bargaining process»<sup>16</sup>.

In my opinion, Stolyar rightly insists on the criticizable status of the content as interiorized norms. Nevertheless, if we adopt a strong substantive theory of autonomy we run the risk of idealizing the very concept of autonomy, because it is difficult for a person to be always in the position of recognizing false norms. Consequently, we are forced to ascribe this capacity only to a small number of people. Most of us are so deeply bound to the values of our life-world that it becomes very difficult to assume the autonomy point of view that is necessary for critical reflection. A weaker notion of substantive autonomy must take into consideration the development of social attitudes enabling critical reflection together with the structure of the contents of the interiorized norms.

### 3. *Weak Normative Competence*

As we have seen, a strong normative account presents normative restrictions on the content of the agent's preferences or values (autonomously formed). The normative dimension could require that the agent can only prefer what accords with autonomy considered as a “value”<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Stolyar, *op.cit.* p. 108.

<sup>17</sup> This is the theoretical option presented by M. Friedman that is contrasted by P. Benson who maintains that the values limiting the agent's choices need not be limited to the value of autonomy. Other strong substantive theories allow that agents can autonomously choose or act in ways that are incompatible with the value of autonomy. But the main

Benson presents three critical considerations against strong substantive theories I find agreeable because they leave open the possibility of making compatible autonomy and socialization<sup>18</sup>. First, many feminist theories start from the observation that the reach of oppressive practices and institutions is broad; moreover the socialization that transmits them runs deep. Strong substantive theories of autonomy do not seriously consider these phenomena, so they do not state the compatibility between autonomy and mistaken or unwarranted normative judgments, embracing harmful values or taking attitudes contrasting the agent's own interests. As I have already noticed, they propose an idealized concept of autonomy.

Second, there is a political objection to strong substantive approaches. Within the studies of oppression, some authors underscore the importance of identifying arenas for some autonomy within evaluative, psychological and political contexts that favor domination and subordination. The idea is that in the absence of such spaces for autonomy the agency of persons weighed down by those relations vanishes. These spaces are therefore presupposed by critical examination of and resistance to oppression. The second charge is political because such conceptions do not seriously take into consideration the agential capacity for autonomy, i.e. the possibilities for autonomous agency within oppressive social relations that constitute opportunities for internal criticism and resistance. According to Benson: «(...) we can recognize prospects for autonomous action within the scope of false or harmful norms without having to erase impairments of autonomy from the catalog of injuries that oppressive practices perpetuate. That is, we can hold off the skepticism about autonomy that Stolijar's position implies without going to the opposite extreme and finding an implausible wealth of autonomy within oppressive social systems. Misogynist conceptions of women's sexuality, for example, often assail women's autonomy by underwriting coercion of women's choices, by denying many women access to the material, cognitive, and emotional resources they need to participate meaningfully in the development of social policies affecting women's sexual health and freedom and by interfering with some women's reflective capabilities or with their sense of their own trustworthiness and authority as agents within a community of moral equals»<sup>19</sup>.

The third objection to strong substantive theories is that they postulate the primacy of the power to *get things right* instead of the power to *take ownership* of one's action. This option undermines the function of autonomy

criticism of Benson points to the fact that Friedman leaves no room for weaker types of substantive accounts that do not constrain directly the agent's motives or preferences. See Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, pp. 19-20 and Benson, *Feminist intuition and Normative Substance of Autonomy*, in *Personal Autonomy*, op. cit. pp. 124-142.

<sup>18</sup> See, Benson, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Benson, op. cit. p. 133.



because it focuses on orthonomy, i. e. the ability to follow an ideal of right rule as a rule one ought to have. The power to take ownership of one's action favors, on the contrary, the standard of self-direction or self-rule. Recalling the second objection, the idea of self-rule is distinct from the one of right rule as we can autonomously take ownership of our mistakes or limitations and act according to them even when we are not entirely capable of doing the right thing for the right reason. The problem is the way in which we must consider the relationship between autonomy and socialization that causes so many difficulties in the case of women's capacity for self-direction. I agree with Benson about the fact that if we have to take women's experiences and perspectives seriously, then we have to focus on women's capabilities for self-direction. The motive for this choice is that the internalization of gender training undermines women's experiences of themselves as agents.

We must therefore introduce a "weaker" notion of normative competence. Instead of bounding autonomy "immediately" to the substance of preferences or values, some authors establish a correspondence between normative substance and the agent's *competence* to recognize and appreciate various norms that apply to their actions<sup>20</sup>. A fundamental consequence of this theoretical option is the reinterpretation of the social dimension of autonomy. According to the strong substantive account, social relations may causally influence the connections between identity and will that determine autonomy. In this sense, the content of persons' practical concerns encompasses interpersonal relations; the problem is that such "individualism" ascribes motives to the agents independently of their socially structured authority to stand by what they do<sup>21</sup>. The main point of Benson's proposal is his interpretation of the social dimension of autonomy, that reveals the discursive significance of an agent's authority: «Autonomous agents specially own what they do in that they are properly positioned to give voice to their reasons for acting – speak for their acts, or to give account of them – should others call for their reasons. Their position does not depend upon their having privileged access to the conditions that best explain their behavior. Nor must autonomous agents be more proficient than others at constructing reasons that could justify their acts. Rather the special authority conveyed in local autonomy concerns who is properly situated to face and answer potential criticism»<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> See, Benson, *Autonomy and Oppressive Socialization*; Pettit and Smith, *Freedom in Belief and Desire*, Stoljar, *Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition*, and Wolf *Freedom within Reason*.

<sup>21</sup> According to Benson, this is not to deny that identity-based views of ownership might incorporate social, or relational, theories of mind, intentional agency, or value. He only maintains that these views do not suppose that autonomy *per se* has anything more than a contingent dependence on agents' social situation.

<sup>22</sup> Ivi, pp. 108-9. This idea is exposed to the criticism of circularity. First, the person's

Taking ownership of one's actions by claiming authority possesses two fundamental features explained in social and discursive terms: an "active" character and a "responsive" character. The first is bound to the ability of playing the social role of potential answerer, whether the second refers to the agent's regard for her abilities and social position. The relationship between these two features is the dependence of the first on the second as self-authorization. In this context, Benson observes how the internalization of social invisibility does not allow the agent to speak or answer for her action. According to Benson, Ralph Ellison shows very clearly this phenomenon in *Invisible Man*, where the unnamed protagonist remarks that others consider him as «a figure in their nightmares, a phantom-like projection of their contradictory desires and fears».

This example demonstrates not only the impairment of the protagonist's autonomy from others, but the fact that he has incorporated his invisibility to others in his own attitudes toward himself. According to Benson, Ellison's protagonist fails to meet the conditions of most Identity-based theories, because his mind is too divided for wholehearted identification. For this reason, the starting point represented by the social and discursive dimensions for taking ownership can better explain how internalized invisibility can defeat the agent's autonomy. A fundamental consequence of internalized invisibility is that, even if Ellison's hero has the ability to recognize the conventional social norms that regulate his relationships, he cannot respond to potential challenges from *his own* evaluative standpoint. But the agent cannot acquire ownership for what she does simply by finding herself passively in the position of owners<sup>23</sup>. She can occupy the position of potential answerer only if she *claims* authority as answerer. This requirement is fulfilled only if the agent does not acquire the authority to speak for what she does solely by virtue of satisfying "external" conditions. Moreover, the agent can claim authority to speak for her action's in a way similar to third person authorization. This happens when we invest authority in others explicitly and self-consciously by deliberately performing the adequate action. For example, we often invest institutional authority by assigning, delegating or promoting. The contexts in which we invest authority could be

authority to speak for his action seems to presuppose some prior fact about his being autonomous in performing that action. Second, whenever the agent owes others an account of his reasons autonomy seems presupposed: to have the obligation to account for their actions might presuppose that the agents acted autonomously. We will see how Benson overcomes these difficulties by introducing normative conditions of discursive competence.

<sup>23</sup> According to Benson, the active character of agential taking ownership is underlined also by most identity-based theories. Frankfurt, for example, interprets the taking responsibility for motives as central to underscoring the active nature of identification. See *The Importance of What We Care About*, chapp. 4 and 12. The active feature of the agent's evaluative standpoint is underlined also by Watson in *Two Faces of Responsibility*, and Bratman in *Identification, Decision and Treating as a Reason*.

more or less formally structured or institutionalized and the corresponding authorizing performance could not necessarily be deliberate. In this case, there is a shared understanding that the agent's regard for the authority of the other properly contributes to his actually having it.

The active character of self-authorization is evident in situations in which the agent's claiming authority takes the form of explicit or deliberate action. In Ellison's case, for instance, his hero has to claim authority deliberately in order to reconstitute his autonomy and to speak for his actions. Another example is the therapeutic context, in which self-authorization must be enacted self-consciously in order to overcome psychological barriers to patients acquiring self-regard and self-esteem. Benson's fundamental observation is that "normally" self-authorization that contributes to autonomy is not a full-blown action. This means that the active character of taking ownership is not a matter of deliberate action: to claim authority for ourselves «as ones who are in a position to speak for our conduct involves understanding that treating ourselves in this way is a necessary condition of our having such authority. Adopting the requisite attitudes toward ourselves plays an indispensable part in effecting our authorization as answerer, and we understand this»<sup>24</sup>.

A consequence of this perspective is therefore that self-authorization arises partly out of self-regard; moreover, it is bound to our abilities to reflect, decide and act<sup>25</sup>. Another fundamental aspect of the activity of self-authorization is the idea of taking responsibility for ourselves: autonomous agents normally hold themselves accountable as answerers<sup>26</sup>.

The result of Benson's thought is that taking ownership for our actions does not presuppose fulfillment of the conditions settled by identity-based theories. It is rather a matter of the active and reflective character of self-authorization to speak for ourselves. Autonomy as self-governance must be taught in the light of normative, relational and discursive authorization. This move shows the shift from an individual to a social concept of autonomy because social circumstances can lead the agents to withdraw their claim to authority as answerers or inhibit their consideration of them-

<sup>24</sup> Benson, *op. cit.* p. 116.

<sup>25</sup> As we have seen in the first chapter, this theoretical option emerges in Frankfurt's conception of identification, as he maintains that higher-order volitions need not be formed deliberately. Also Bratman maintains that a broader notion of identification does not require an actual decision to treat desires as reason-giving.

<sup>26</sup> M. Oshana presents a similar point of view: «Agent autonomy consists in taking control of – or, better, ownership of – one's life. Someone who does not, as a rule, acknowledge some cognitive, affective, attitudinal, and behavioral characteristics and attachments as part of her self-conception, nor concede the absence of others, and who lacks a desire for self-understanding, if not a capacity for self-evaluation, is not in a position to assume an active and authoritative voice in the direction of her life». See, *Autonomy and Self-Identity*, in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism*, *op. cit.* p. 85.

selves as competent and worthy to speak for their actions. In my opinion, Benson rightly points out the consequences of an oppressive socialization for the normative competence of an autonomous agent. Nevertheless he loses a dimension fundamental for critical reflection: the agent's recognition of external reasons for acting. I would underline the importance for autonomy of the presence of several different points of view that correspond to several reasons for acting. Even if the active and reflecting aspects of taking ownership are fundamental for autonomy, it is also fundamental that the agent be exposed to reasons different from his own to develop the capacity for critical reflection that represents the most relevant result of autonomous agency.

PART II  
AUTONOMY AS A SOCIAL CONCEPT



## IV

### THE DEONTIC STRUCTURE OF THE SPACE OF REASONS

#### *1. The Question of Normativity*

The aim of the second part of this book is to describe autonomy in social terms. In the first part I indicated the relevance that socialization has for autonomy. It is relevant for two reasons: first, we are constrained by interiorized norms that only in unusual cases undermine autonomy and, second, socialization implies the undertaking of social attitudes that are necessary for criticizing oppressive norms. Moreover, as I pointed out, it is necessary to be exposed to the reasons of others, to what reasons there are. To fulfill this condition one must participate in the public space of intersubjective communication.

My next task is therefore to make as clear as possible the steps required by my argument for a social concept of autonomy. In this chapter, I move from the epistemological base of those social attitudes I take to be necessary to develop autonomy. The problem of normativity arises because we need to provide standards according to which our beliefs are true and our actions are good. Autonomy implies normativity, since critical reflection does not take place in a vacuum. Our judgements and our actions are correct or incorrect according to certain norms. These norms emerge from the fact that we can justify our claims, i.e. we can give reasons for them. A very good expression for clarifying this possibility is the notion of “accountability”<sup>1</sup>. Accountability can be considered as a deontic consequence of our basic “normative freedom”. As I noted in the first chapter, freedom can assume two senses: the first is the freedom from external constraints (negative freedom) and the second is the freedom of following laws we give to ourselves (positive freedom). Thus, in this second sense, freedom necessary for autonomy is a kind of freedom that is subject to norms. For

<sup>1</sup> For this discussion I shall follow James Swindler’s argumentation as sketched in his paper *Normativity: from Individual to Collective* for the Conference on “Collective Responsibility” (Helsinki, Summer 2006). [Forthcoming in *Journal of Social Philosophy*.]

the task of my argumentation, Swindler makes a relevant move in order to establish the kinds of norms founding our freedom: «I suggest that the strongest evidence that we can have of anyone's or anything's freedom is its being subject to norms: moral norms, yes, but others as well. Speaking a language, as Wittgenstein's private language argument shows, brings us under linguistic norms; arguing makes us subject to norms of rationality; citizenship makes us subject to legal norms, etc. There are modes of freedom properly associated with each of these and more. The old maxim should be amended a bit to read "Only ought implies can"»<sup>2</sup>.

The most important result of this thought is that freedom is a social matter, because, as a phenomenon, it emerges only through social "attribution". Normally, we attribute freedom by considering someone "accountable"; in this sense, the one to whom we attribute freedom is accountable for enacting or failing to enact norms. Such attribution is a social act and process as we can be accountable only because of a normative background, i.e., a background of normative principles that gives us standards for choosing and acting. The most famous test of how this background functions is the Wittgensteinian observation that we normally have the possibility of recognizing and correcting mistakes. A further proof of freedom is the fact that we have also the possibility of not following background norms (causal determination as determination from natural laws is only a part of human nature). According to Swindler, normative freedom is not a matter of violating the natural causal order but it is dependent on accountability. If accountability is a social concept then freedom is social.

If freedom is bound to social norms embedded in many linguistic games how could individual autonomy be possible? According to the authors of the linguistic turn (more precisely the "pragmatic" turn) such as Habermas and Apel, there is a universal structure of linguistic norms that entails formal conditions for the validity of our validity claims<sup>3</sup>. But, as we will see in the final chapter, these conditions apply directly to an intersubjective linguistic context, so that the notion of individual autonomy could result superfluous.

A possible solution is to introduce a norm of norms as an individual "meta-norm" to which all norms must conform<sup>4</sup>. This meta-norm that characterizes the concept of social accountability is formulated in Kantian style: «Act only on those maxims for which you also will to be accountable».

<sup>2</sup> Swindler, op. cit. p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> I discussed this theoretical option in *Habermas. Agire comunicativo e Lebenswelt*, Carocci, Roma, 2000. For a confrontation between Habermas and Brandom on the interpretation of the normative structure of social practices see my essay *On Normative Pragmatics: a Comparison between Habermas and Brandom*, *Teorema*, XXIII, 2003, pp. 51-68.

<sup>4</sup> See Swindler op. cit.



It is interesting to see how this formulation favors a social concept of autonomy. First, as Swindler observes, the meta-norm that is based on accountability brings out the social aspect of free choices and actions. Second, this account is broader than the Kantian because instead of focusing on the direct knowledge of the categorical imperative, it emphasizes the process of “discovering” the right reasons through the notion of social accountability. Swindler’s account represents a form of realism because it presupposes that there are right maxims we ought to recognize to be considered as accountable. These very maxims are universal as they ground the normativity of human reason.

My account starts from the relevance of social practice for autonomy, but follows another strategy to understand autonomous agency. I shall argue for a social concept of autonomy that is bound to the social roles that individuals can play, because I think that the possibility of “taking ownership” in discursive situations is fundamental. We are often exposed to conflicts of beliefs and values because of the fact that we actually have different collateral commitments. For this reason, the social role of “score-keeper” helps us to understand that perspective from which one can give and ask for reasons in a public context.

## 2. *The Primacy of Inferentialism*

Let us now introduce the epistemological moves we need to isolate a “social” concept of the “space of reasons” as that space of freedom in which we, as autonomous agents, can justify our beliefs and actions. The discussion of this chapter focuses on beliefs expressed in assertions, but we will see in the next chapter that this holds true also for practical commitments.

In embracing the idea of normative freedom, what are the nature and the structure of the conceptual realm? Following Wittgenstein, our first theoretical point is the primacy of public, ordinary language, because we are convinced that we believe and act according to a shared background of social rules. The practice of rule-following is the only possibility we have for recognizing the correctness of a validity claim. The consequence of this theoretical option for freedom is that the social practice of rule-following represents normativity of freedom without the need to refer to a kind of primordial consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Swindler criticizes procedural theories of autonomy: «Finally, we need not imagine that the subject who is

<sup>5</sup> I analyzed the necessity to overcome the philosophy of consciousness in the context of the German pragmatic turn. In particular, I focused on the shift from the phenomenological to the communicative concept of lifeworld in Habermas’ theory of communicative action. See my *Habermas: agire comunicativo e Lebenswelt*, op. cit.

free either understands in any but a practical sense the norms she realizes or that she has to consciously deliberate and choose in order to be free. To be sure, there are junctures in life when our actions come down to a choice between evident and exclusive alternatives (Oedipus meets his father on the road) and there are ones, relatively rare, in which we can or do formulate the relevant norms (as in courts of law) and choose in their light. But no such empirical facts would alter, must less strengthen, the evidence that merely being *subject* to a norm already provides for freedom. For whether I choose or deliberate independently of the determination by internal or external causes is at least as problematic as whether I am free. Who can tell what sort or depth of deliberation Oedipus really undertakes over whether to kill the stranger he meets on the road; can Oedipus himself tell? The depth of the agent's normative insight and self-understanding are quite beside the point. It is enough that she actually falls under a relevant norm and can be expected to have a practical grasp of that fact». <sup>6</sup>

This thought is motivated by the opinion that there exist standards of reasoning (belonging to different cultural fields) to which human freedom is necessarily bound. We are free if we are able to recognize norms of reasoning and so perform correct inferences in different areas.

This is a good move in order for us to conceive the primacy of inference for autonomous agency beyond a naturalistic account. Laws of nature cannot represent norms for accountability because we tackle the problem in order to justify our beliefs and actions with good and appropriate reasons. This is a "metaproblem", i. e. a problem that concerns reason itself. To justify beliefs and actions means to apply concepts; consequently we have to grasp the content of our concepts. Brandom plausibly explains the way in which we may understand the primacy of a sort of inference whose commitments are expressed in assertions. I summarize the discussion in four points. <sup>7</sup>

- (1) To concentrate on the primacy of assertion means to choose a pragmatic strategy rather than a Platonic one. Platonism focuses on the grasp of conceptual content logically prior to and therefore relevant for understanding linguistic expressions. Pragmatism (intended as a kind of functionalism) aims at explaining how the use of linguistic expressions or the functional role of intentional states confers conceptual content on them. This is a version of Hegel's rationalist pragmatism<sup>8</sup>,

<sup>6</sup> J Swindler, *The Cogito, The Private Language Argument and Normative Freedom*, manuscript, p. 3. [Forthcoming in *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*.]

<sup>7</sup> See R. Brandom, *Articulating Reasons*, op. cit. Introduction.

<sup>8</sup> Italo Testa offers a clear explanation of this point in his essay *Idealismo e normatività* in Robert Brandom, in L. Ruggiu, I; Testa (ed.), *Hegel contemporaneo. La ricezione americana di Hegel a confronto con la tradizione europea*, Guerini, Milano, 2003, pp. 318-337.

whereas experience is not intended as an application of pure concepts, but also as the very development of their content: conceptual norms are shown by the same process in which they are applied.

- (2) The first option leads to the priority of language over mind. This does not mean that we do not apply concepts *privatim*. But the possibility of grasping content is bound to the use of language. Language is, so to speak, the locus of normative freedom. One way of speaking about “linguistic intentionality” is the “analogical” model. It is defended by Dummett, Sellars and Geach. Generally speaking, they see language use as a priori and independently intelligible so that it can provide a model for understanding mental acts and occurrences “analogically”, i.e. by taking thinking as a kind of inner saying. Davidson defends, rather, a “relation” theory of intentionality: the activities of believing and asserting can be made sense of reciprocally. Their conceptual contents are “essentially” and not “accidentally” capable of going beyond the concepts of both claims and beliefs. The scorekeeping model follows this line of thought and, consequently rewrites Sellars’s principle that grasping a concept is mastering the use of a word” in a relational sense.
- (3) The pragmatist order of explanation focuses on the role of expression rather than representation. In this context, “expression” means making explicit in assertion what is implicit in asserting something. A fundamental claim of this form of expressivism is understanding the process of explicitation as the process of the application of concept. According to the relational account, what is expressed must be understood in terms of the possibility of expressing it. For instance: «(...) one ought not to think that one can understand either believing or asserting except by abstracting from their role in the process of asserting what one believes (that is, this sort of expressivism has as a consequence a relational linguistic view of the layout of the conceptual realm)».<sup>9</sup>
- (4) Making something explicit means transforming it into a premise and a conclusion of inferences. What is implicit becomes explicit as a reason for asserting and acting. Saying or thinking something means undertaking a peculiar kind of *inferentially* articulated commitment. It shows a deontic structure that entails the *authorization* of the inference as a premise and the right to entitle oneself to that commitment by using it (under adequate circumstances) as the conclusion of an inference from other commitments that one is or can become entitled to. To apply a concept is to undertake a commitment that entitles to and precludes other commitments. Actually, there is a relevant difference between

<sup>9</sup> R. Brandom, *Articulating reasons. An Introduction to Inferentialism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 9.

the Wittgensteinian theory of linguistic games and the scorekeeping model. Inferential practices of producing and consuming reasons are the point of reference of linguistic practices. Claiming means being able to justify one's claims and other claims (starting from one's claims) and cannot be considered as a game among other linguistic games. A fundamental consequence of this "top-down" explanation is semantic holism: one cannot have *any* concepts unless one has *many* concepts (this thought will be clear in the next chapter).

### 3. The "Space of Reasons"

The concept of the "space of reasons", introduced by Wilfrid Sellars in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*<sup>10</sup>, is a metaphor suggesting a fundamental theoretical choice: to consider knowledge as a normative matter. Knowledge is therefore bound to the problem of justification of our claims, i.e. how they earn objectivity. In this context, a very important question is that of clarifying the role of perceptual experience and, once we abandon empiricism, of how we can criticize our judgements, made explicit by assertions. My analysis will not consider knowledge as the result of a description of cognitive capacities, rather as one of social practices of justification.

Following Sellars, Robert Brandom uses the metaphor of the "space of reasons", but he understands it as a "social" concept, i.e. as the space of the intersubjective justification of our assertions<sup>11</sup>. Reasons contained in assertions possess a content that, in Sellars's and Brandom's opinion, is inferentially structured<sup>12</sup>. The formal structure of communication makes it possible to render this content explicit. This is the reason why a pragmatic analysis of the use of language in a Wittgensteinian sense is fundamental. From the point of view of a "social" concept of the space of reasons, beliefs, mental states, attitudes and actions possess a content because of the role they play in social "normative" practices (inferentially articulated).

For the sake of my discussion, it is interesting briefly to refer to the problem of justification in the reliabilist account, because it shows how truth is external to the agent. In our terms, truth is external to the agent because it is a social matter. Within the epistemological debate, there are

<sup>10</sup> W. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> R. Brandom, *Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons*, «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research», 55, 1995, pp. 895-908.

<sup>12</sup> According to Richard Rorty, Brandom embraces the linguistic turn by reformulating pragmatism in a way that makes the concept of experience, still present in James e Dewey, totally superfluous. See R. Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, chap. 6.

interesting externalist positions based on the “reliability” of the agent. Generally speaking, reliabilism maintains that true beliefs do not require the agent be able to give reasons for them by justification, because truth depends on the circumstances of the acquisition of those beliefs. I think that this option cannot represent the normative source of autonomy because normally we are able to give reasons for our beliefs and actions. We are looking for another form of externalism.

According to Brandom, reliabilism implies two blindspots: the “conceptual” blindspot and the “naturalistic” one<sup>13</sup>. The first does not allow the distinction between conceptually articulated beliefs and mere representations of creatures that cannot participate in the game of giving and asking for reasons. In my opinion we encounter here the problem of understanding what we, as human beings, have in common with animals. But this explanation is possible only from our point of view; this is the reason why normativity can be introduced only at the level of our discursive practices.

Another problem that corresponds to the second blindspot is the “naturalistic fallacy”, which explains beliefs and truth in naturalistic or physicalistic terms. For example, if we refer to Goldman’s notion of “objective probability”<sup>14</sup> then it becomes difficult to specify the right class of reference. An adequate choice of the class of reference cannot be objectively determined by facts that are deniable in a naturalistic language. Again, I suppose, if we want to introduce a “realistic” view of how things proceed with normativity we have to focus on our practices.

If we encounter these difficulties, we have to make reliabilism and justification compatible. Reliabilism rightly reveals that the reasons for justifying beliefs are external to the agent’s claim. But if we need to supersede classical accounts of reliabilism what kind of reliability are we looking for? A new form of reliabilism is based on the articulation of the social practices of acknowledgement of valid reasons, which I clarify in the next sections.

*Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* is a fundamental step toward understanding the idea that to master a language is a precondition of the conscious experience<sup>15</sup>. To acquire a concept is to be capable of using a word. «The essential point is that in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that epi-

<sup>13</sup> See R. Brandom, *Articulating Reasons. An Introduction to Inferentialism*, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> See A. Goldman, *Discrimination and perceptual Knowledge*, «Journal of Philosophy», 20, 1976.

<sup>15</sup> Sellars’ discussion of consciousness is similar to Wittgenstein’s discussion of sensation in his *Philosophical Researches*. According to Rorty, what they have in common is a form of pragmatism. In this sense, if we hear someone speaking about entities such as “sentience”, “consciousness” or “qualia”, which are not related to anything else, we must remember that they can vary even when all remain the same. Moreover, they are in pure external relationships with any other thing, so we must forget them; or, at least, we should not consider them worthy of consideration for philosophy. See Rorty, op. cit.

sode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says»<sup>16</sup>.

Following Sellars, Brandom and McDowell suggest two ways of interpreting perceptual judgements<sup>17</sup>. We can consider the following example as the matter of contention. Suppose that Monique has been trained reliably to discriminate hornbeams by their leaves. As a result of the training, she is often disposed to respond to the visibility of the right sort by noninferentially reporting the presence of a hornbeam. She understands what it means to claim that something is a hornbeam and, in circumstances appropriate for such reports, actually comes to believe that there is a hornbeam present. She may still be uncertain of her discriminatory capacity long after she has in fact become reliable. In such a situation she may have a true belief that there is a hornbeam in front of her, yet be completely unable to justify that claim (for instance, by citing features distinctive of hornbeam leaves), and even deny that she is a reliable noninferential reporter of hornbeams. The problem is: must we consider the report of Monique as true regardless of her attitudes toward her reliability?

We can consider perceptual judgements as the product of two types of capacities: the capacity to respond to environmental stimuli and the capacity of taking a position in the game of giving and asking for reasons<sup>18</sup>. Otherwise, we can imagine two different logical spaces: the space of impressions and the “normative” space of knowledge, of the “normative” relations with the world (for example justification)<sup>19</sup>. The motive for making these distinctions is that the natural response to environmental stimuli is a necessary condition of empirical knowledge but not a sufficient one<sup>20</sup>. A parrot can reliably respond to the presence of a red thing by uttering the sound «That is red» and we can also suppose that an observer can do the same under the same circumstances. Consequently, we can conclude that the parrot and the observer share the same *reliable differential responsive dispositions*.

Sellars distinguishes the capacities to respond to stimuli from observational knowledge (the whole of true beliefs): true beliefs are responses by the application of concepts. The observer responds generally to red things by asserting “that” there is something red. To respond reliably to red things means to

<sup>16</sup> Sellars; op. cit. p. 76.

<sup>17</sup> For a deep analysis of the reinterpretation of the space of reason according to Brandom and McDowell see R. Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> R. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead. Historical Essays on the Metaphysics of Intentionality*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2002;

<sup>19</sup> J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1994, Introduction.

<sup>20</sup> A useful explanation of the Sellars’s concept of the space of reasons is offered by R. Tuomela in the first chapter of his book, *The Philosophy of Social Practices*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002.

make a certain kind of move, i.e. to take a position in the game of giving and asking for reasons, to commit oneself to a certain content playing the role of premise and conclusion of inferences. The response of the observer possesses a conceptual content because it occupies a node of the net of inferential relations. The parrot does not treat “red” as implying “coloured”, implied by “scarlet” and incompatible with “green”. In the game of giving and asking for reasons two dimensions can be distinguished: the dimension of the undertaking of contents expressed by assertions, and the one of the justification of the performed assertions. In this sense, assertions have a pragmatic sense that corresponds to the undertaking of a specific type of normative attitude: the undertaking of commitment. The cognitive commitment possesses therefore an inferential structure: by performing an assertion the agent commits himself to its use as a premise from which certain conclusions can be derived.

Let me now underline the most fundamental conclusion of Sellars' opinion about perceptual judgements. The non-inferential descriptions do not form an autonomous level of language: a game that can be played without at the same time playing another. Perceptual judgements are non-inferential as the corresponding tokenings are expressed in non-inferential terms; they depend on capacities to respond to perceptual states of affairs by applying concepts. But beliefs, judgements or assertions can be understood only because of the role of their content in reasoning, i.e. as potential premise and conclusion of inference. Naturally, grasping a concept corresponds to the use of a word: concepts are acquired in the process of learning a language. This process requires two elements: the inferential knowledge of how that allows the speaker the connection of different sentences and the social acknowledgement of that know-how as sufficient for the speech acts of the speaker to have the sense of commitments and entitlements to inferentially articulated claims.

#### 4. McDowell: *Experience and the Space of Reasons*

Sellars's inferentialism could cause a certain kind of “deformation” of the space of reasons that makes it difficult to clarify the very nature of knowledge. «The deformation is an interiorization of the space of reasons, a withdrawal of it from the external world. This happens when we suppose we ought to be able to achieve flawless standings in the space of reasons by our own unaided resources, without needing the world to do us any favors»<sup>21</sup>.

McDowell picks out some philosophical points of view that share this kind of deformation of the space of reasons. First, skepticism does not

<sup>21</sup> J. McDowell, *Knowledge and the Internal*, «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research», VII, p 396.

permit a reconstruction of the space of reasons based on perceptual appearance. We could respond to the skeptical problem by undertaking a kind of dogmatism of practices (second point of view), i.e. by showing that there are some practices which permit us to base belief on appearance. Third, following Sellars' inferentialism, we can add an external condition of knowledge: knowledge becomes a status that one possesses when he reaches an adequate position in the space of reasons, namely when the world does us the favor of seeing things as we believe they really are. In this case reliabilism has a hybrid form, as it is taken into consideration only when we determine the acceptance of a claim. Fourth, there is an extreme form of externalism. Knowledge has nothing to do with the space of reasons; knowledge is a state of the subject determined by state of affairs. We share this kind of knowledge with nonhumans.

The problem with externalism is the exclusion of the truth condition from the space of reasons. In the extreme version both reliability and truth are excluded; in the hybrid version only truth is excluded. If truth is an external condition of knowledge, how can reason possess the resources to value the reliability of our practices of formation of beliefs? According to McDowell, if we do not start from facts accepted with risk by exercising cognitive capacities like perception and memory, we cannot understand how our point of view is a point of view of a space in which positions are connected by relations that reason can explore. This observation motivates McDowell's criticism of Sellars's concept of the space of reasons. Sellars maintains that the subject must be able to give inferential evidences for his/her claims. This thought is not plausible, as it deprives expressions such as "I see that" of their power of justification. These expressions are correct moves of the game for giving and asking for reasons and imply entitlements to propositions they express. In *Mind and World* the thesis emerges that the perceptible fact is immediate, as conceptual capacities are passive when exercised in perception and active in responsibly expressing our perceptual judgements<sup>22</sup>.

To return to the case of Monique, McDowell maintains that it is not possible to consider her reports as knowledge since she is not "rationally" convinced of her own reliability, i.e. since she does not (responsibly) endorse her judgment. Nevertheless, McDowell's realism presents a fundamental problem: if our knowledge depends on the capacities of states of affairs to be immediately apparent to us, whenever we non-inferentially acquire a belief how can we recognize a "true" perceptible experience, how can we be "responsible" for what we perceive?

The more convincing answer we find in McDowell's thought is implied by the concept of "second nature". According to McDowell, human beings

<sup>22</sup> See, McDowell, *Mind and World*, op. cit.



acquire a second nature that gives them the rational and not merely causal control over their validity claims, because they develop conceptual capacities in a certain life-form. By analogy they acquire also a moral character. This thought is inherited from Aristotle, who thinks that we acquire a moral character through the social process of acculturation (i.e. *Bildung*), which favors the development of sensibility to reasons. The second nature provides us with the possibility of rationally controlling the world through our responsible judgements. This is the sense in which we can enter the realm of “rational freedom”. Rorty underscores the importance of a kind of “openness” to the world, the world as our real interlocutor. McDowell attributes to reliability a sort of status that Wittgenstein considers in *On Certainty*.<sup>23</sup> According to McDowell: «It is held firm for me by my whole conception of the world with myself in touch with it, and not as the conclusion of an inference from some of that conception. If we equip Sellars with something on these lines as a spelling out of his “in some sense” his intuition that observational authority must be self-consciously possessed can stand».<sup>24</sup>

Rorty sees Brandom, Sellars and Davidson as defending a vision of the world as merely causing a pressure on our space of reasons as well as the brute pressure of environment produced by a succession of stages also in cultural evolution. But this is not a theoretical option from which these approaches choose their starting point. Rather, it is a situation whose facts and norms we can give a plausible account of only by referring to some cultural pattern, to knowledge we already have or can inherit on a particular question. The notion of “reasons reactivity” is the basis of rational freedom but, according to McDowell, cannot be without “empirical” content. This is contrary to what Davidson, Sellars and Brandom maintain, because he understands intuitions in rational relationship with what we ought to think. The moral consequence of rational freedom is to conceive concepts like “Boche” or “witch” as lacking empirical content because of the favor the world makes us. In my opinion, this account does not allow us to isolate the condition for critical reflection, because it sweeps away the very stuff that is to be subject to criticism, namely the commitments implied by the use of those terms.

##### 5. The “Social” Space of Reasons

Contrary to McDowell, who maintains that immediate certainty of responsibly expressed perceptual judgements exists, Brandom specifies

<sup>23</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1969.

<sup>24</sup> J. McDowell, *Knowledge and the Internal Revisited*, «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research», p. 8.

that this is the only way we have for speaking about immediate certainty. But justification has to do with a different concept of space of reasons, which does not require experience. McDowell is wrong in so far as he does not consider the social articulation of the space of reasons. The idea of learning the inferential use of a concept is bound to social attitudes that imply “responsibility” and “authority”. Only after this learning process are we able to participate in the game of giving and asking for reasons. In the space of reasons we can occupy two positions: commitment and entitlement. The attitudes of undertaking a commitment and justifying it have a conceptual content in virtue of two properties: «First, it must be part of the conception of these commitments that the issue of one’s *entitlement* to such a commitment can arise. Second, it must be possible for one such commitment to *inherit* or *derive* its entitlements from another. Together these mean that commitments can both serve as and stand in need of reasons»<sup>25</sup>.

Brandom uses Lewis’ vocabulary when he describes social practices as “scorekeeping”<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, he refers to discursive practices distinguished by the use of ordinary language. This option is important for our concept of autonomy because practices guided by mere sanctions favor heteronomy. Discursive practices are characterized by the inferential articulation of normative senses embedded in assertions and, therefore, by the attribution of conceptual content to states, attitudes, actions and expressions. When we assert something we undertake a certain kind of commitment. The structure of this commitment emerges in social practices where the participants keep score by taking adequate deontic attitudes: they attribute commitments and corresponding entitlements.

The game of giving and asking for reasons becomes therefore dependent on the social practices by which we recognize commitments and entitlements. The “scorekeeper” takes the place of Sellars’s knower and becomes a “social role”. The scorekeeper is the autonomous agent who is able to reliably recognize inferentially articulated commitments that constitute the content of beliefs. She possesses an “expressive” rationality as the capacity to perform inferences in the game of giving and asking for reasons. The inferences the scorekeeper performs are material, as for example, “If Rome is to the south of Milan, then Milan is to the north of Rome”. By the acknowledgement of these “doxastic” commitments we keep score in conversation.

What is the source of this kind of inference? In his *Tales of the Mighty Dead* Brandom offers an interesting interpretation of the inferentialist tradition, in particular of those authors he finds as presenting an adequate

<sup>25</sup> Brandom, *Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons*, op. cit. p. 898.

<sup>26</sup> D. Lewis, *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1983.

form of holism. It is worth considering the notion of “representation” in Spinoza and Leibniz. They supersede the Cartesian analysis of the modes of consciousness because they accord a sort of semantic primacy to inferential relations: Leibniz, for example, presents the certainty of an object as application of a concept. This approach presupposes however the possession of a concept so that it raises the question of how conceptual capacities are acquired. The dualism between intuition and concept is inherited by Kant, who does not seem to solve the problem of the acquisition of concepts, of how it is possible to move in the space of reasons.

According to Hegel<sup>27</sup>, on the other hand, the very nature of negation is incompatibility, which is not only formal but also material, i.e. entailing material properties as for example the “triangular”. In this sense, we can say that non-p is the consequence of anything materially incompatible with p. From an idealistic point of view we cannot objectively acknowledge relations of material incompatibility unless they take place in processes and practices by which we subjectively acknowledge the incompatibility among commitments. This is the reason why applying a concept means occupying a social position, i.e. undertaking a commitment (taking responsibility to justify it or being entitled to it). Thus judgements as the minimum unit of experience possess two sides: the subjective side, which indicates who is responsible for the validity of his claims, and the objective one, which indicates whatever the speaker considers as responsible for the validity of his/her claims. Through specific attitudes we can specify the social dimension of knowledge. Ascription *de dicto* such as “he believes that...” determines the content of a commitment from a subjective point of view, i.e. from the point of view of the one who performs a certain claim. Ascription *de re* such as “he believes about this thing that...” determines the content of a commitment from an objective point of view, i.e. the inferential commitments the scorekeeper must acknowledge<sup>28</sup>.

How does this acknowledgment occur? We can use the ascriptions mentioned above. If, for example, I am a scorekeeper who performs the *de dicto* ascription «Vincenzo says that this golden agaric must be cooked in butter» and at the same time I acknowledge that the mushroom is totally similar to an *amanita caesarea* (a good golden agaric) but it is mortal because it is an *amanita muscaria* (an evil golden agaric), I can isolate the content of Vincenzo’s assertion through the ascription *de re* «Vincenzo says about this golden agaric that it must be cooked in butter» and make explicit the commitments I undertake and the ones I refuse from an objective point of view.

<sup>27</sup> For the contemporary discussion of some Hegelian topics see R. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, op. cit. I refer also to L. Ruggiu, I. Testa (ed.) *Hegel contemporaneo. La ricezione americana di Hegel a confronto con la tradizione europea*, Guerini, Milano, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> See, Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, chap. 8.

I argued for an inferential conception of the space of reasons, since the discursive construction of conceptual content seems plausible. Why do we need a universal formal structure of norms that guide the game of giving and asking for reasons to secure objectivity for our beliefs? The reason is that we are not always scorekeepers, often we do not know all the inferential commitments implied by a concept. Some doubts about Brandom's inferentialism remain. Can we deprive our capacity to see how things are of any cognitive possibility? Must I necessarily know all the circumstances and consequences of the concept of camomile in order to know that it relaxes me? Another problem concerns the meaning of a sentence: if the meaning of a sentence corresponds to the whole of all possible premises and consequences, it seems impossible for two persons who possess different collateral beliefs to attribute the same meaning to it. In my opinion, this solipsistic situation is not probable, as the figure of scorekeeper is introduced to imagine cases where communication is broken; normally communication works even if we cannot exclude cases of incomprehension. Can we rule out the figure of a scorekeeper as a competent interlocutor who is able to acknowledge or refuse our validity claims?<sup>29</sup>

Even if we have different collateral beliefs, there is the structure of an "expressive" rationality, which helps the speakers to make beliefs explicit, to regiment them as validity claims and thus to maximize the chances of agreement. This universal structure corresponds to the game of giving and asking for reasons. In this context, truth becomes a social matter, which in scorekeeping terms emerges from three fundamental moves of the game: *attributing* a commitment that can serve as a premise and conclusion of inferences, *attributing* the entitlement to that commitment and *undertaking* it oneself. Also, in the case of a critical assimilation of contents of traditions, as Brandom suggests in *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, objectivity is bound to the "social" recognition of propositional contents, which are objective because they are governed by material incompatibility. The social recognition of contents is open to any community whose practices acknowledge the normative status of "commitment" and "entitlement", i.e. "responsibility" and "authority". In the next chapters I describe the role of these deontic dimensions for autonomous agency.

<sup>29</sup> According to Swindler, it might be interesting to compare this point to Davidson's old "omniscient interpreter argument".

## AUTONOMY AND SCOREKEEPING

*1. No Motivation Necessary*

If I say that motivation is not necessary for autonomy I mean that the reconstruction of a kind of process that secures us the transparency of our motives for acting is a *chimera*. The problem of motivation is similar to the problem of experience and therefore presupposes some form of reliability bound to subjective knowledge. As I showed in the last chapter, I prefer to locate the discussion on autonomy in an intersubjective context, where the role of discursive practices for the development and the application of such capacity becomes clear. Procedural theories, which we analyzed in the second chapter, run into difficulties when the conditions of the identification process get theorized. The problems this attempt provokes are underscored by substantive theories, which rightly consider the role of socialization for autonomy.

In this chapter, I shall argue for a concept of autonomy as an essential component of the self-realization of a subject living in a society that develops in communicative praxis understood as intersubjective acknowledgement of commitments or validity claims. The language that we share enables us to be autonomous. The conditions for autonomy we are going to explore are bound to conceptual-linguistic rules that do not correspond to individual desires and preferences. I maintain that an analysis of the concept of “freedom” needs investigations of individual motivations such as desires and preferences. In this sense, we are free to act according to our instrumental reasoning when we organize our life-plans according to that form of practical reasoning which is represented by the Kantian hypothetical imperative. Naturally, we are free to act when external and internal coercions do not exist.

Autonomy can be considered rather – in broad Kantian terms – as that capacity human beings normally have of decentralizing their own point of view, thus of distinguishing subjective and objective reasons. It does not “directly” have to do with individual motives, because it is a reflective capacity on them. It is guided by conceptual rules and for this reason

only requires an analysis of the structure of the process of their recognition. Autonomy does not mean rational choice (means-end reasoning), but capacity of participation in the “social”, hence discursive “game of giving and asking for reasons”.

The result of the previous chapter shows the relevance of the rational structure of the space of reasons together with the relevance of the social attitudes an agent must undertake to be autonomous. The theoretical points I introduce in the following sections to conceptualize autonomy are: (1) the basic concept of inference an agent must necessarily perform; (2) the kind of normativity implied by autonomous agency; (3) the structure of the conceptual content; (4) the dimensions of justification in the game of giving and asking for reasons and (5) practical reasoning in score-keeping terms.

Let us start with the first point. An agent must be able to recognize the correct use of concepts by performing correct inferences, which owe their correctness to the fact that they express precise circumstances and consequences of the application of concepts.

This theoretical option means that inference must be considered as “material”. For example, the inference from “Milan is to the north of Rome” to “Rome is to the south of Milan” is governed by material properties: the concepts of “north” and “south” make inference correct. It is therefore necessary to grasp and to use these concepts in order to perform correct inferences without the necessity of referring to norms of formal logics.

The conceptual content of the conditional is inferentialist in score-keeping terms: «What’s incompatible with such a conditional, e.g. with if  $p$  then  $q$ , is what’s simultaneously compatible with its antecedent ( $p$ ) and incompatible with its consequent ( $q$ ). In any context where one is committed both to a conditional and to its antecedent, then, one is *not entitled* to any commitment incompatible with its consequent, and that is just to say that one is also committed to that consequent. Assertional commitment to the conditional if  $p$  then  $q$ , in other words, establishes a deontic context within which a commitment to  $p$  carries with it a commitment to  $q$  – but this is just a context within which  $p$  (commitment) *implies*  $q$ . It is in this sense that the conditional *expresses* the propriety of the corresponding inference, without so to speak, also *reporting* it, as would the corresponding normative metalinguistic claim».<sup>1</sup>

The role of the conditional is relevant for making explicit the material properties of the content of our beliefs. This is a crucial move for autonomy, because the agent playing the role of scorekeeper undertakes, at the same time, a “critical” perspective. A good example of the expressive

<sup>1</sup> J. F. Rosenberg, *Brandom’s Making It Explicit: A First Encounter*, «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research», vol. LVII, 1997, p. 182.

function of conditionals is Michael Dummett's question of "harmony".<sup>2</sup> Dummett maintains that the application of a concept directly derives from the application of other concepts: those concepts that specify the necessary and sufficient conditions that determine the truth conditions of claims implying the original concept. This assumption requires an ideally transparent conceptual scheme embedding all the necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a concept that, consequently, makes invisible the "material" content of concepts. Let us consider the term "Boche", which applies to the whole German people and implies that every German is a rough and violent type, especially if compared to other Europeans. In this case, the conditional, which makes explicit the material inferences of the use of the concept (if he is Boche he is rough and violent), enables an adequate criticism that aims at the acceptance or the refusal of certain material commitments. The introduction of the term "Boche" in a vocabulary that did not contain it does not imply, as Dummett suggests, a non-conservative extension of the rest of the language. The substantive content of the concept implies rather a material inference that is not already implicit in the contents of other concepts used for denoting the inferential pattern from an individual of German nationality to a rough and violent individual. In Brandom's terms: «The proper question to ask in evaluating the introduction and evolution of a concept is not whether the inference embodied is one that is already endorsed, so that no new content is really involved, but rather whether that inference is one that *ought* to be endorsed. The problem with 'Boche' or 'nigger' is not that once we explicitly confront the material inferential commitment that gives the term its content it turns out to be novel, but that it can then be seen to be indefensible and inappropriate – a commitment we cannot become entitled to. We want to be aware of the inferential commitments our concepts involve, to be able to make them explicit, and to be able to justify them».<sup>3</sup>

The idea of learning the inferential use of a concept is bound to "social" attitudes implying "responsibility" and "authority". After having learned the inferential articulation of a concept, a person is able to participate in the game of giving and asking for reasons, and so in developing his autonomy through the performance of correct "moves". An agent can occupy two fundamental positions: "commitment" and "entitlement". The attitudes of undertaking a commitment and attributing an entitlement possess a conceptual content by virtue of two properties: «First, it must be part of the conception of these commitments that the

<sup>2</sup> See M. Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, Duckworth, London, 1973 (I ed.), 1981 (II ed.).

<sup>3</sup> R. Brandom, *Articulating Reasons*. op. cit., pp. 71-72.

issue of one's *entitlement* to such a commitment can arise. Second, it must be possible for one such commitment to *inherit* or *derive* its entitlement from another. Together these mean that commitments can both serve as and stand in need of reasons. That is the sense in which they are being taken to be standing *in the space of reasons*.<sup>4</sup> The game of giving and asking for reasons become therefore dependent on social practices in which commitments and entitlements are recognized.

As we noticed in the last chapter, the "scorekeeper" becomes a "social role". The scorekeeper is one who is able reliably to recognize inferentially articulated commitments constituting the content of beliefs. He/she possesses an "expressive" rationality as the capacity to perform inferences in the game of giving and asking for reasons. The logic of expressive rationality aims at making explicit the material inferential commitments by the rational and re-expressive "Socratic" practice of harmonizing our collateral beliefs. The game of giving and asking for reasons structures this practice, because a commitment can be justified at several levels in relation with other commitments and entitlements, as we shall see in the third section. In this sense: «Life is interwoven so of historical and accidental circumstances as of subtle logical interconnections, and we should always try to take into consideration the interrelation between the two levels».<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Normative Compulsion

The result of the last thesis provides the end lines of my present discussion. Autonomy is related to inferential rules that belong to the social practice of giving and asking for reasons: what is the nature of these rules? First, we must consider the relevant point of "normativity", as norms enable us to distinguish between correct and incorrect performances. Autonomy can be thought of in Kantian terms as acting according to our conceptions of rules. This "normative compulsion", which is quite different from the natural compulsion, forces us to act according to our "grasp" or "understanding" of rules. The compulsion of rules is mediated by our attitude toward them, i.e. we must "acknowledge" them.<sup>6</sup> In this context, normative attitudes become relevant: our performances are not

<sup>4</sup> R. Brandom, *Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons*, op. cit. p. 898.

<sup>5</sup> P. Parrini, *Conoscenza e realtà. Saggio di filosofia positiva*, Bari, Laterza, 1995, pp. 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> Swindler agrees but with the reservation that some rules do not depend on acceptance for their "objective" compulsion or authority, such as moral rules and rules of logic, math, etc. These cannot be made to go away by merely not accepting them. These are the rules that drew Kant's interest because they seem to have force for us *a priori* both in perception and action. In this context, he recalls the linguistics of Noam Chomsky.



correct or incorrect according to various rules, but we can “treat” them as correct or incorrect according to various rules. Autonomy is therefore related to the practice of assessing a performance as correct, but assessing is itself something that can be done correctly or incorrectly.

The source of normativity in scorekeeping terms can be understood also as a kind of “autonomous discursive practice” in which the semantic and the pragmatic dimensions occur. The first corresponds to the capacity to associate with materially good inferences *ranges of counterfactual robustness*. In this context, modal vocabulary is a *conditional* vocabulary that serves to *codify* endorsements of material inferences: it makes them explicit in the form of material inferences that can themselves serve as the premises and conclusions of inferences. According to Ryle: «We have another familiar way of wording hypothetical statements. Although the standard textbooks discuss “modal propositions” in a different chapter from that in which they discuss hypotheticals, the differences between modal and hypothetical statements are in fact purely stylistic. There is only one colloquial way of correctly negating the superstitious hypothetical statement “If a person walks under a ladder, he comes to grief before the day is out,” namely, by saying “No, a person may (might or could) walk under a ladder and not come to grief.” And only colloquial way of putting a question to which an “if-then” statement is the required affirmative answer is to ask, for example, “Can an Oxford Vice-Chancellor not be (or need he be) a Head of College?” ... (W)e always can reword an “if-then” statement as a statement of the pattern “It cannot be Monday today and not be Tuesday tomorrow».<sup>7</sup>

In Ryle’s sense, for material inferences to have counterfactual robustness means that they remain good under various merely hypothetical circumstances. The problem is to show what are the circumstances that are relevant for normativity. The circumstances are specified by material inferential relations that express the commitments one “ought” to undertake. According to the argument Brandom calls “the modal Kant-Sellars thesis”<sup>8</sup>, we are able to secure counterfactual robustness (in the case of the introduction of a new belief) because, among all the inferences that rationalize our current beliefs, we “practically” distinguish which of them are update candidates. The possibility of this practical capacity derives from the notion of material “incompatibility”, according to which if we treat the claim that *q* follows from *p* as equivalent to the claim that everything materially incompatible with *q* is materially incompatible with *p*. [incomplete sentence] Thus, for example if we say that “Cabiria is a dog” entails

<sup>7</sup> G. Ryle, “If”, “So”, and “Because” in M. Black (ed.), *Philosophical Analysis*, Prentice Hall, 1950, p. 313.

<sup>8</sup> See, R. Brandom, *Modality and Normativity: From Hume and Quine to Kant and Sellars*, Lecture 4, on-line.

that “Cabiria is a mammal”, we are stating that everything incompatible with her being a mammal is incompatible with her being a dog.

For the sake of our study on autonomy, it is useful to see how the notion of material incompatibility applies to the “normative” vocabulary including norms of concept application. A “normative” vocabulary has a basic function because it contains normative concepts that make explicit commitments which are implicit in the theoretical as well as in the practical use of concepts. Brandom tells us that every autonomous discursive practice (whereas asserting and inferring are essentially related) must include core practices of *giving and asking for reasons*. My claim is that we can understand the notion of “autonomous discursive practice” as the structure of personal autonomy. The use of the expression “autonomous discursive practice” seems to refer to a communicative situation somewhat similar to Habermas’s point of view<sup>9</sup>. In this context, this move could imply that the criteria for truth and good are essentially “intersubjective”: truth and good are the result of the “consent” between two speakers who have exchanged their reasons for asserting something. This perspective is a form of “internalism” but, according to the scorekeeping model, truth and justification are two separate questions. The role of scorekeeper is an individual role, which is guided by “regulative ideas” such as truth and good from an individual point of view, i.e. he/she is ready to justify his/her claim on the basis of correct material inferences. The sense of embracing a “social” externalism means here that the dimension of justification is not sufficient for truth and good: we need to be able to participate in the game of giving and asking for reasons by undertaking normative stances.

To be autonomous means in my opinion that an agent ought to be in the position to master the requisites for accepting or refusing validity claims. The “necessary condition” for autonomy is therefore to be able to make explicit propositional contents embedded in assertion and to be able to justify assertions. The “sufficient” condition is to participate in the social situation of the game, i.e. to be able to take responsibility for claims and action<sup>10</sup>. This is a fundamental idea, because, as we shall see in the next section, it implies that an agent can also refer to sources external to his direct knowledge to give reasons for his claim. This is a thesis that Brandom does not introduce. In his model the autonomous agent corresponds to the scorekeeper who knows the correct moves of the game. I think that for an agent to be autonomous it is sufficient that he “take ownership” for what he asserts and, at the same, he is ready to change his view in light of better reasons. For these reasons, I understand autonomy

<sup>9</sup> For a comparison between Habermas and Brandom on the use of background linguistic norms see my *On Normative Pragmatics* op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> As Swindler observes, these two conditions are jointly sufficient for autonomous agency in my terms.

as a “social role” that implies the undertaking of deontic attitudes and the common reference to a material inferential content.

Socialization is therefore important because we learn how to take responsibility for our validity claims. In my opinion, it is true that we can be exposed to the internalization of oppressive norms, but at the same time we are fundamentally “dialogical” beings, so we can accept or refuse the material commitments embedded in assertions when we come into contact with the reasons of our interlocutors. On the one hand, we have that kind of rationality which Brandom calls “expressive”, i.e. our assertions express propositional contents as material inferential structures. Expressive rationality represents the kind of rationality necessary for participation in the game of giving and asking for reasons. On the other hand, we also have that kind of rationality which we can define in Kantian terms as “dialogical”, i.e. “critical”, which deserves to show the deontic structure of human critical reflection.

Now I briefly describe the inferential structure of any autonomous linguistic practice as a “necessary” condition for sentences to be intelligible as expressions of *propositional contents*. In the game of giving and asking for reasons we practically acknowledge the normative status of *commitment and entitlement*: «Suppose we have a set of counters or markers such as that producing or playing one has the social significance of making an assertional move in the game. We can call such counters “sentences”. Then for any player at any time there must be a way of partitioning sentences into two classes, by distinguishing somehow those that he is disposed or otherwise prepared to assert (perhaps when suitably prompted). Those counters, which are distinguished by bearing the player’s mark, being on his list, or being kept in his box, constitute his score. By playing a new counter, making an assertion, one alters one’s score, and perhaps that of others».<sup>11</sup>

The consequence of this thought is to introduce the rules of assertional games as rules of *consequential commitment*. To claim that a move is assertional is to recognize that it must have *consequences* for whatever else it is appropriate to do, according to the rules of the game. As we have seen in the previous chapter, if a human being makes the assertion “That’s red” we are entitled to think that he is also committed with consequential commitments related to that sentence: for example, that the object to which he refers is coloured or is not black.

The incompatibility that governs material inference seems the source of the normativity Brandom is looking for. Because of the fact that we are rational, i.e. capable of performing correct inferences, then we are obliged to adopt a particular sort of normative stance towards an inferentially articulated content. It is taking *responsibility* for it or *committing* oneself to it. In this sense, making a move in the assertional game should be under-

<sup>11</sup> R. Brandom, *Modality and Normativity*, op. cit. p. 14.

stood as acknowledging a certain *commitment* articulated by consequential inferential relations linking the asserted sentence to other sentences. In the game of giving and asking for reasons it is also important to recognize a distinguished subclass of the commitments the agent undertakes: that to which he is *entitled*. According to Brandom: «Giving reasons for a claim is producing other assertions that *license* or *entitle* one to it, that *justify* it. Asking for reasons for a claim is asking for its *warrant*, for what *entitles* one to that commitment. (...) Indeed I take it that liability to demands for *justification* is a major dimension of the *responsibility* one undertakes, the commitment one makes, in asserting something. In making an assertion one implicitly acknowledges the propriety, at least under some circumstances, of demands for reasons, for justification of the claim one has endorsed, the commitment one has undertaken. Besides the *committive* dimension of assertional practice, there is the *critical* dimension: the aspect of the practice in which the propriety of those commitments is assessed. Apart from this critical dimension, the notion of *reasons* gets no grip».<sup>12</sup>

The critical dimension of the game of giving and asking for reasons is fundamental. The problem with Brandom's view is the relationship between material incompatibility expressed in modal vocabulary and the deontic structure of normative vocabulary. It seems to me that on the one hand, Brandom wants to establish the primacy of pragmatic stances, and on the other pragmatic stances are possible because we possess basic substitutional capacities. My point is that we as human beings master material inferential relations that have a normative relevance for discursive practice. But for an agent to be autonomous it is "sufficient" to learn the sense of "responsibility" and "authority" in relation with other points of view. Autonomy is "intersubjective" because it makes sense only if we understand the difference between our opinion and the opinion of another agent, and the difference between subjective reasons and objective reasons. The pragmatic capacities in terms of incompatibility are fundamental, but in a society where several cultural perspectives live all together it is not so useful for the agent to be able only to recognize the inferential relations that govern the commitments of his own culture. If we want to give some sense to the problem of harmony we discussed above, we must also introduce "critical" capacities, which come into play if, in Fisher's and Ravizza's sense, we have different options.

### 3. The Normative Structure of Content

Starting from the thesis that the transparency of subjective motives is not relevant if we understand autonomy as that capacity for recognizing

<sup>12</sup> Ivi, p. 15.

subjective and objective reasons on the basis on what reasons there are (recall Wolf's thought), we need to introduce a different kind of content of beliefs and actions. On the one hand, we refuse procedural accounts because of the role of social norms, while on the other we need a point of view from which we can criticize oppressive norms. My proposal is to try to use the scorekeeping model to explain the functioning of autonomous agency. The account I introduce is "pragmatic" because it is grounded on the idea of making explicit important features of the use of ordinary language in which we use expressions to say something. Discursive practice implies normative and modal vocabulary articulating commitments; normative vocabulary essentially addresses *acts* of committing oneself, while modal vocabulary essentially addresses the *contents* one thereby commits oneself to. This idea introduces a promising model of "discursive intentionality".

Let us start with an example<sup>13</sup> of how incompatibility works from the basic level of perception to establish objective facts expressed by modal and normative vocabulary. Imagine a non-autonomous vocabulary focused on the use of the term "acid". In this make-believe instance, if a liquid tastes sour one is committed and entitled to apply the term "acid\*" to it. And if one is committed to calling something "acid\*", then he is committed to its turning phenolphthalein blue. In this community there is an agreement, under concurrent stimulation, about what things are sour and what things are blue and it has experts certifying some vials as containing phenolphthalein. Moving from this background, the community implicitly endorses the propriety of the material inference from a liquid's tasting sour to its turning phenolphthalein blue. If a practitioner comes across a kind of liquid that tastes sour but turns phenolphthalein red, he "experiences" materially incompatible commitments. To repair that incompatibility he is obliged either to relinquish the claim that the liquid tastes sour, or relinquish the claim that phenolphthalein solution is red, or to revise his concept of an acid\* so that it no longer mediates the inference that caused the problem. In this sense, he can restrict its applicability to *clear* liquids that taste sour, or restrict the consequence to turning phenolphthalein blue when the liquid is heated to its boiling point. This move clearly shows how difficult it is to undertake new commitments since the practitioner may discover that he is not entitled to them. The lesson we learn from this example is that the world can alter the "normal" circumstances and consequences of application embedded in our concepts. Considering the concept acid\* we conclude that it is not *necessary* that sour liquids turn phenolphthalein blue but it is *possible* that a liquid both be sour and turn

<sup>13</sup> See; R. Brandom, *Intentionality as a Pragmatically Mediated Semantic Relation*, Lecture 6 on-line

phenolphthalein red. The acquisition of new beliefs – sufficiently tested – is a holistic process that demonstrates how objectivity is related not just to true claims, but also to the right concepts.

For the sake of my discussion, it is interesting how we can understand Kantian normativity in terms of “incompatibility” relations between commitments. Actually, there is a distinction between empirical vocabulary and moral vocabulary, because the world cannot tell us what we ought to do in certain situations. But, as we shall see in the next sections, incompatibility relations are important also in the moral field, even if in this case we can appeal only to deontic attitudes.

The content is normally understood in terms of *representation of objects*. The scorekeeping model replaces the Kantian notion of transcendental *apperception* with a kind of synthesis based on incompatibility relations: «In drawing inferences and “repelling” incompatibilities, one is taking oneself to stand in representational relations to objects that one is talking *about*. A commitment to A’s being a dog does *not* entail a commitment to B’s being a mammal. But it *does* entail a commitment to A’s being a mammal. Drawing the inference from a dog-judgment to a mammal-judgment *is* taking it that the two judgments represent one and the same object. Again, the judgment that A is a dog is not incompatible with the judgment that B is a fox. It *is* incompatible with the judgment that A is a fox. Taking a dog-judgment to be incompatible with a fox-judgment *is* taking them to refer to or represent an object, the *one* object to which incompatible properties are being attributed by the two claims». <sup>14</sup>

The normative *rational* unity of apperception is a synthesis that expands commitments inferentially, noting and repairing incompatibilities. In this sense, one’s commitments become reasons for and against other commitments; so the rational critical responsibility implicit in taking incompatible commitments obliges one to *do* something, to update one’s commitment so as to eliminate the incompatibility.

To present an exhaustive account of autonomy we must refer not only to the content of beliefs and actions but also to the role of the subject who recognizes incompatible commitments. According to the scorekeeping model, attention must be given not only to “modal” incompatibility but also to “normative” incompatibility. Again, modal incompatibility refers to states of affairs and properties of *objects* that are incompatible with others and it presupposes the world as independent of the attitudes of the knowing-and-acting subjects.

Normative incompatibility belongs to discursive practices on the side of the knowing-and-acting subjects. In discursive practice the agent cannot be entitled to incompatible doxastic or practical commitments, and

<sup>14</sup> Ivi, p. 7.

if one finds himself in this situation he is obliged to rectify or repair the incompatibility. On the side of the object, it is impossible for it to have *incompatible* properties at the same time; on the side of the subject, it is *impermissible* to have incompatible commitments at the same time. In this sense, Brandom introduces the metaphysical categorical sortal metaconcept subject whereas it represents the conceptual functional role of *units of account for deontic normative incompatibilities*. In my opinion, we can understand this role as a “social” role because of the fact that we learn how to undertake deontic attitudes in the process of socialization. In this context, Brandom presents an interesting discussion of some topics of Hegelian logics<sup>15</sup>. He refers mostly to *The Science of Logics*. He makes this move because, contrary to McDowell, he aims at avoiding empiricism even in its minimal version. According to Hegel inference as syllogism includes a logical succession of forms of judgment. The first form is the immediate and qualitative form of the judgment of perception: judgments such as “this ball is red” directly attribute a universal quality to a single thing. The second form of judgment is the judgment of reflection, in which we express a “relative” property of a subject. This property is not immediately present to perception but is manifested by a third form of judgment. Let us consider the Hegelian example of the judgment “This plant is curative”. It is evident that the property of the plant is not given by immediate perception but is a relative property manifested by the effect the plant has on an ill person. The assertive judgment as a third form of judgment emerges from the relationship between the immediate form and the relative form, and it presents itself as an evaluative judgment that applies universals such as “true” and “good” to individual objects. In this sense, we say not only how an object “is” but also how it “ought to be”.

The “material” inference implied by this logical movement demonstrates how the determination of objects entails also the activity of the knowing-and-acting subject. We can go into greater depth on this thought by specifying three points of the Hegelian inheritance.

(1) The determination of how things are is a question of individuation and, precisely, of how things differ from one another. The difference can be a “mere” difference that concerns compatible properties such as “red” and “circular”, or can be a matter of material incompatibility as in the case of the properties “triangular” and “circular”. Consequently, formal negation represents material incompatibility: not-*p* is the minimum that is incompatible with *p*; it is what is implied by everything materially incompatible with *p*. What is relevant for our discussion is that this sort

<sup>15</sup> For the discussion of the Hegelian topics see R. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, op. cit. chapp. 6 and 7. For a global view on the Hegelian inheritance in contemporary philosophy see L. Ruggiu and I. Testa (ed.), *Hegel contemporaneo. La ricezione americana di Hegel a confronto con la tradizione europea*, Guerini, Milano, 2003.

of “objective idealism” considers conceptual contents rather than objects of knowledge. Consciousness is not a relation between two “things”, i.e. “subject” and “object”: objective “truth” and subjective “certainty” are two different forms in which contents are expressed.

Objective incompatibility is different from subjective incompatibility. As we have noticed about the distinction between modal vocabulary and normative vocabulary, whereas an object cannot show incompatible properties at the same time, a subject simply ought not to undertake incompatible commitments at the same time. Consciousness lives in the relation between objective pole and subjective pole.

(2) The comprehension of the conceptual content is determined by the exclusion relations among contents: this thesis implies a form of “semantic holism”. According to Brandom, Hegel’s inferentialism presents two levels of holistic commitment:

I Weak individualization holism: the articulation of material incompatibilities is *necessary* in order to grasp a determinate content (state of affairs and properties on the objective side, and propositions and predicates on the subjective side);

II Strong individualization holism: the articulation of material incompatibilities is *sufficient*, i.e. it is all we need in order to grasp a determinate content (state of affairs and properties on the objective side, and propositions and predicates on the subjective side).

Brandom and McDowell have shown how Hegel embraced the first form of holism because he maintains that a property can be determined only if we understand many other properties (incompatible with it) as similarly determined.

(3) The distinction between inferential *processes* and inferential *relations* is useful for clarifying the question of holism by Hegel. Why must we introduce this distinction? If the rules of deductive inference should exist then they should say something of the kind of “from p and if p then q, infer q”. This is not meaningful because we can have better evidence against q rather than for p or for the conditional. We could be forced to abandon one of them. According to deductive logics, it is not possible simultaneously to believe p, if p then q, and  $\sim$ q; but it does not say what we have *to do* inferentially. Deductive logic simply specifies deductive relations of implication and incompatibility, which put constraints on what we ought to do without making it so or forcing us to act. Thus, we must consider inference as a *process* and logical implication as a *relation*.<sup>16</sup> From an idealistic point of view, we cannot recognize relations of *objective* incompatibility (incompatibilities expressed by state of affairs) if we do not

<sup>16</sup> In this context, Brandom refers to G. Harman, *Logic and Reasoning*, in «Synthese», 60, (1984), pp. 107-128.



refer to *processes* and *practices* in which we recognize *subjective* incompatibility among commitments (this recognition implies the revision or the abandonment of such commitments). Starting with Sellars's conceptual pragmatism, we must conclude that the application of concepts requires their acquisition in terms of what we have to do in order to be authorized to say that we have undertaken a commitment (inferentially articulated) or to be entitled by whatever authority (conceptually articulated).

#### 4. *The Dimensions of Justification*

The autonomous agent occupies the social role of scorekeeper, thus he is able to justify his assertions. The necessary condition of autonomy is the recognition of the content of beliefs and actions that is materially, inferentially structured. According to the scorekeeping model, the sufficient condition is the undertaking of those deontic attitudes that allow the agent to be able to ask and to give reasons for his beliefs and actions. First, I present the normative competence of autonomy by following Brandom's description of the required social attitudes. But I think that we have to provide a "broader" sufficient condition for autonomy, i.e. the simple possibility of participating in the game of giving and asking for reasons in which we can "learn to undertake" and not just "undertake" deontic attitudes. I introduce this option because I am convinced that if the agent can be exposed to reasons different from her own she can accept or refuse the reasons there are also by appealing to external authority (for instance by inheritance). This is a good move for attributing autonomy not only to persons who know exactly the commitments implied by the use of a concept, but also to those who come to grasp them in linguistic interaction. My thesis has relevant consequences, as we shall see in the last chapter, for autonomous agency in public arenas.

The scorekeeping model describes a system of social practices in which agents perform assertions that express material inferential commitments.

For the sake of my discussion of autonomy, it is important to underscore the insufficiency of practical reasoning as "instrumental" reasoning. According to instrumental reasoning, we must consider intentional states as possessing propositional contents implying objective truth conditions fulfilled from an individualistic point of view. The problem with this model is the primacy of the first person point of view. Inferential practices that confer propositional contents on beliefs and actions include not only first person reasoning but also attributions and determinations from the "third" person perspective. In this sense, the process of deliberation becomes "internalization" of an interpersonal practice, as judgment is the internalization of a public process of assertion.

This is a relevant thought in order to give sense to a social conception of autonomy: for an agent to be autonomous he ought to internalize the normative structure of a “dialogical” rationality.

In the previous section, I considered modal and normative vocabulary together, as being both related to the use of ordinary language. Let us see now what are the inferential relations that the scorekeepers ought to master in order to justify their claims<sup>17</sup>. Here we are moving at the normative level of communication, i.e. the level we consider as sufficient for autonomous agency. Our assertions have a “sense” or are “contentful” by virtue of three dimensions of inferential social practices. To the first dimension belongs the *commitment-preserving* inference that corresponds to the material deductive inference. For example, A is to the west of B then B is to the east of A, and the *entitlement preserving* inference that corresponds to inductive inference, such as: if this thermometer is well made then it will indicate the right temperature. This dimension is structured also by *incompatibility* relations: two claims have materially incompatible contents if the commitment to the one precludes entitlement to the other.

The second dimension concerns the distinction between the *concomitant* and the *communicative* inheritance of deontic status. To the concomitant inheritance corresponds the *intrapersonal* use of a claim as a premise. In this case, a person is committed to a claim if at the same time he is committed to other concomitant claims as consequences. By the same token, a person entitled to a commitment can be entitled to others by virtue of permissible inferential relations. Moreover, incompatibility relations imply that undertaking a commitment has as its consequence the loss of the entitlement to concomitant commitments to which one was previously entitled. To the communicative inheritance corresponds the interpersonal use of a claim, because undertaking a commitment has as its “social” consequence the entitlement of others to the “attribution” of that commitment.

The third dimension shows the two aspects of the assertion as “endorsed”: the first aspect is the “authority” to other assertions and the second aspect, dependent on the first, is the “responsibility” through which an assertion becomes a “reason” enabling the inheritance of entitlements in social contexts. The inheritance of entitlements is in relation with the justification function of the endorsed assertion. It clarifies the distinction between justified and unjustified assertive commitments: «Talk of *inheritance* of entitlement makes sense only in an explanatory context that includes a story about the significance of *possession* of entitlement. It is this question that is addressed by an account of the dimension of *responsibility* characteristic of asserting. In asserting a claim, one not only authorizes further assertions (for oneself and for others) but undertakes a responsibility, for one

<sup>17</sup> For the discussion of justification I refer to the third chapter of *Making It Explicit*.

commits oneself to being able to vindicate the original claim by showing that one is entitled to make it. Overtly acknowledging or undertaking a doxastic commitment by issuing an assertional performance can warrant further commitments, whether by the asserter or by the audience, only if that warranting commitment itself is one the asserter is entitled to. Only assertions one is entitled to make can serve to entitle anyone to their inferential consequences». <sup>18</sup>

The entitlement to a claim can be justified (1) by giving reasons for it, or (2) by referring to the authority of another agent, or (3) by demonstrating the capacity of the agent to respond to reliably to environmental stimuli. The scorekeeping model is based on a notion of entitlement that presents a structure of “default” and “challenge”. This model is fundamental in order to introduce autonomy as capacity of participation in the game of giving and asking for reasons.

A fundamental consequence of this description is that the deontic attitudes of the interlocutors represent a perspective on the deontic states of the entire community. Let us begin with the intercontent/intrapersonal case. If, for instance, B asserts “that p”, B undertakes a doxastic commitment to p. This commitment ought to be attributed to B by anyone who is in a position to accept or refuse it. The sense of an assertion goes beyond the deontic attitudes of the scorekeepers, because it possesses an inferentially articulated content that is in relationship with other contents. In this sense, if by virtue of B’s assertion the deontic attitudes of A change, as A attributes to B the commitment to p, then A is also obliged to attribute to B the commitment to q. A recognizes the correctness of that inference when she becomes a scorekeeper and, therefore, consequentially binds q to p. Again, the incompatibility between r and p means that the commitment to p precludes the entitlement to r. Then A treats these commitments as incompatible if she is disposed to refuse attributions of entitlement to r when A attributes the commitment to p. In the infracontent/interpersonal case, if A thinks that B is entitled (noninferentially or inferentially) to p, then this can happen because A thinks that C (an agent who listened to the assertion) is entitled to p by testimony.

An interesting point is to see how the inferential and incompatibility relations among contents alter the score in conversation. First, the scorekeeper A must include p in the set of the commitments already attributed to B. Second, A must include the commitment to whatever claim q that is the consequence of p (in committive-inferential terms) in the set of all the claims already attributed to B. This step depends on the available auxiliary hypothesis in relationship to other commitments already attributed to B. These moves determine the closure of the attributions of A to B

<sup>18</sup> Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, op. cit. p. 171.

by virtue of the commitment-preserving inferences: starting from a prior context with a certain score, the closure is given by whatever committive-inferential role A associates with *p* as part of its content. Naturally, the resulting attributions of entitlements must not be affected by material incompatibility.

Incompatibility limits also the entitlements attributed to B. A can attribute entitlements to whatever claim is a consequence in permissive-inferential terms of commitments to which B was already entitled. It can be, however, the case that B is entitled to *p* because he is a reliable reporter i.e. he correctly applies responsive capacities to environmental stimuli. The correctness of the inference depends here on A's commitment, namely on the circumstances under which the deontic status was acquired (these conditions must correspond to the ones in which B is a reliable reporter of the content of *p*). Moreover, A can attribute the entitlement also by inheritance: reliability of another interlocutor who made the assertion in a prior stage comes into play.

The scorekeeping model presents other kinds of speech acts related to the assertive praxis that we can consider as going in depth concerning the competence we are seeking in order to define autonomous agency. The "deferrals" have the same content of assertion but different force. A determines the deferral to C about *p*, while determining, first, B's entitlement to *p* and, second, C's entitlement to inherit it. In this context, we must consider not only the compatibility between the commitments of C and B, but also the compatibility of the commitment of C with the entitlement of B (which allows the inheritance). Actually, it may be the case that the entitlement to B, according to A, depends on the justification of *p* referring to the claim *q*, whereas A thinks that C and not B is committed to some claim incompatible with *q*. Or, it may be the case that C and not A is committed to some claim incompatible with one of the conditions that, according to A, is necessary in order to be entitled to *p*. For instance: «Thus if C takes it that B is looking through a tinted window, A may take this to preclude C's inheritance of entitlement to B's non-inferential report of the color of a piece of cloth, even though A takes it that C is wrong about the conditions of observation».<sup>19</sup>

The force of a sentence can also assume the direction of "disavowal". Disavowals have the function of refusing a commitment previously undertaken or to clarify that the commitment is not acknowledged. In this case, A thinks that B's disavowal of *p* is successful if A stops attributing to B the commitment to *p* and rehabilitates each entitlement already attributed but refused because incompatible with *p*. The disavowal can fail if (a) B directly earns the entitlement as performing the assertion "that *p*" or

<sup>19</sup> Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, p. 192.

(b) B indirectly acquires the commitment as the consequence of a commitment to q in virtue of a commitment-preserving inference. In such situations, the disavowal is successful only if B is also disposed to refuse q. But if B insists on asserting q, this is incompatible with the disavowal and the disavowal of p cannot rehabilitate the entitlement attributed to claims that A refuses by virtue of the mistake of B's entitlement corresponding to the commitment to a claim incompatible with p. Another kind of speech act is the "query" that is parasitic on the acts of acknowledgment or refusal.

Finally, we have to introduce the "challenge" that appears in the case of performance of incompatible claims. A thinks that the challenge of C about the claim p of B is successful if A answers with a refusal of the attribution of the entitlement to B and with a suspension of the justification of B (inferentially or by inheritance). Consequently, the assertion is not available for other interlocutors who could otherwise inherit by testimony from B the entitlement to commitments with the same content.

In the next chapter, I shall present some examples of how this structure can be used for autonomous agency in the political field.

### 5. *Practical Reasoning*

The recognition of commitments in the "social" space of reasons is the fundamental result of autonomous agency. The internalization of the deontic structure of intersubjectivity makes the agent able to move in that space, as he becomes able to attribute and to undertake commitments. Starting from this thesis, the autonomous agent occupies the role of a scorekeeper who is (in my terms) "ready to take ownership" for an action (his own or another agent's) on the basis of the recognition of different kinds of reasons or practical commitments (subjective, institutional and moral commitments) and he is "ready to demonstrate" adequate entitlements using the described "multidimensional" justification. Also, in the practical field there is a relationship between the content of a commitment and the attitudes that enable the agent to "make true" this very content.

I must, however, begin with a problem in Brandom's approach to practical reasoning. The problem is that he introduces autonomy as "rational will" in Kantian terms only at the level of moral commitments. But we are looking for a wider concept of autonomy as rational will that can be defined as personal autonomy and has to do with several reasons for acting. At the same time, we cannot make a compromise between the Humean and the Kantian accounts because we do not want to leave room for a concept of autonomy that is also based on instrumental reasoning. As I have argued, I think that instrumental reasoning comes into play when we speak of freedom. This is quite a different notion from autonomy. Could

we still use the scorekeeping model? I think yes and I shall argue for this claim below.

The first move is to consider the status of inference in practical reasoning. In this context, Sellars' thought is relevant for superseding Humean accounts such as Frankfurt's. In Sellars' opinion desire does not correspond to will because desires cannot only be realized, they can also be satisfied.<sup>20</sup> Desire is a richer notion than intention. Intention is realized if the intended state of affairs comes to obtain. The outcome for our discourse is the idea that *intentions* are to *reasons* as *commitments* are to *entitlements*: «What makes a performance an *action* is that it is, or is produced by the exercise of a reliable differential disposition to respond to, the acknowledgement of a practical commitment. That acknowledgement need not itself have been produced as a response to the acknowledgement of other commitments inferentially related to it as entitlement-conferring reasons (though that it *could* be so elicited *is* essential to its being the acknowledgment of a practical commitment)».<sup>21</sup>

Again, this move favors our explanation of autonomy in an intersubjective context even if Brandom finds it relevant here to supersede Davidson's approach to practical reasoning.<sup>22</sup>

Actually, there is an asymmetry between theoretical and practical commitments as, in the first case, the semantic content still retains a contact with the objective world. And it seems implausible to state this kind of objectivity in the practical field. For this reason, Brandom is forced to underscore that normative vocabulary plays the same expressive role on the practical side that conditionals do on the theoretical side. Normative vocabulary is broader here because we have to consider several patterns of practical reasoning that correspond to different reasons for acting (desires, cultural norms and moral norms).

These reasons result from different kinds of practical reasoning.

Let us consider the following examples:

- (1) "There is a lot of traffic, so I'll take the underground";
- (2) "I work in a pharmacy, so I'll wear a white smock";
- (3) "Walking on the neighbor's grass will offend him, so I won't do it".

The discussion of these examples aims at clarifying the concepts of desire or preference, obligation and (moral) norm in terms of the corresponding material inferences. In case (1), the scorekeeper attributes to the agent the desire not to be blocked in traffic. This desire is in compe-

<sup>20</sup> See W. Sellars, *Volitions Re-affirmed*, in M. Brand and W. Douglas (ed.), *Action Theory*, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht/Boston, 1976, pp. 47-66.

<sup>21</sup> R. Brandom, *Articulating Reasons*, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> Against Davidson's model of practical reasoning Brandom claims that the insertion of interfering desires to make an inference invalid does not show that the rejection of that premise was already "implicit". See Brandom, *Articulating Reasons*, pp. 83-89.

tion with others because for example the agent might prefer to take his car and listen to music. In this context, only *prima facie* reasons for acting come into play. In case (2), the correctness of the inference is related to the social status, such as the role of the pharmacist or the salesman in a pharmacy. This case presents a higher degree of objectivity of the reasons for acting, because the obligation is codified by an institutional role. The scorekeeper will maintain that (2) it is a good inference for everyone working in a pharmacy, i.e. the scorekeeper is disposed to undertake the commitment of the agent, contrary to any attribution of desire (it does not matter whether the agent desires or not to wear a white smock). In case (3), the inference requires that the scorekeeper acknowledge entitlement to the action not only with reference to the agent but to everyone, regardless of desires, preferences or social roles.

From the point of view of a scorekeeper in Brandom's terms, the result of the three kinds of practical reasoning seems to consider the commitments implied by the corresponding contents as crucial for an action to be "reasonable", acceptable for different interlocutors. But the problem is that the point of rational will as autonomy requires more than the possibility of an agent action to be justified. Autonomy requires that the agent be in a position to distinguish and criticize his own reasons from the reasons of other and objective reasons that are moral norms. In the case of desires, we are free because of our nature and we act according to a sort of instrumental reasoning. Why must we introduce autonomy at this level? I think that autonomy is very important here because we are not so transparent to ourselves as procedural theories would maintain. It may be the case, for instance, that I am in a pub with my friends and because of some stomach problem I cannot drink beer. But I see all my friends drinking beer and indeed I would like to drink it too. I do not think that only the rational recognition of the fact that my desire to drink something is compatible with drinking a lot of different beverages helps me to be autonomous (as Brandom's model suggests). Moreover, I have to put a little distance between my situation and the situations of my friends, namely I ought to take responsibility for my choices (naturally it is necessary that I come somehow to know what are the circumstances and the consequences of the application of the concept beer). But, I can be autonomous in a "minimal" sense even if I do not directly know the circumstances and the consequences of the application of the concept beer but I inherit this knowledge from a competent interlocutor. In some sense, McDowell is right in attributing responsibility to the knowing and acting subject, because Brandom's opinion as regards the relationship between reliability and responsibility imposes conditions that are too emphatic. In some sense the knowing and acting subject is always "responsible" but, naturally, he is not always entitled to his claims in Brandom's terms. In this sense, the intersubjective praxis of the game of giving and asking for reasons provides sufficient conditions for

developing autonomy.

It is arguable that social status and moral norms are more objective than desires because they are socially accepted, but as Swindler maintains, we do not necessarily have to embrace “individualism” or “holism” when they coincide with a primacy of the I-mode or, on the contrary, with the “we-mode”.<sup>23</sup> He discusses the theories of two eminent members of the “we-intentionality” group: Raimo Tuomela on the individualistic side and Margaret Gilbert on the holistic side. Swindler’s criticism is useful for understanding how we can instead apply Kantian vocabulary in the practical field. But in my opinion Gilbert’s account of we-intentionality is nevertheless useful in order to lay stress on social relations.

Tuomela’s theory is different from Searle’s. He underscores the primacy of the I-mode. In this sense, the necessary and sufficient conditions of cooperation that lead to collective action (also in its deontic dimensions, such as collective responsibility) are embedded in we-intentions as mutually appropriate beliefs and I-intentions. Responsibility, if we want to grasp the term in a way that implies mutual recognition, namely to take into account the perspective of others, cannot be based only on the fact that the participants of whatever game of giving and asking for reasons undertake a goal-oriented stance. Swindler agrees with Searle but leaves room “for important reservation”. First, let us briefly consider the *pars construens* of Searle’s argument. Problems for Tuomela arise in the case of the situation of “competing freely” where an agent cooperates without reference to some shared social authority. Cooperation in this sense does not generate “we-intentions” because it does not reveal collective intention as intention to cooperate.

Searle aims at demonstrating the primacy of we-intentions for cooperation. Moreover, he maintains that cooperation is required also in the case of competition, i.e. regardless of the aim of the group. This can be an objectionable point from a moral point of view, even if plausible from a theoretical point of view, once we consider Habermas’s and Apel’s argument of “performative contradiction”.<sup>24</sup> Indeed this argument is closer to our primacy of assertive practice in scorekeeping inferential terms. But according to Swindler, Searle rightly criticizes Tuomela’s individualism about we-intentions, which are irreducible to I-intentions.

Like Searle, Gilbert embraces a form of holism, according to which the ontological status as well as the character of collectives depends on the content of the mental states of their members. In this sense, a group is

<sup>23</sup> See J. Swindler, *Social Intentions: Aggregate, Collective, and General, Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 26, 1, 1996.

<sup>24</sup> According to the “performative contradiction” argument, it is possible to find some unavoidable presuppositions in every linguistic game, such that they cannot be eliminated without a loss of sense for that game.



constituted by a number of members who think in a “we” fashion or, in my terms, in a “relational way”. I find agreeable the move Gilbert makes to lay stress on practices we participate in and according to which we perform our actions. This option means that accepting a common goal does not entail accepting personal goals, and that members of a group need not share the same goal. I maintain that this is a relevant step in overcoming instrumental reasoning as the basis of collective responsibility. Gilbert’s account of we-intentions is based on two fundamental conditions: (1) joint action requires (sincere) willingness to share the act with others in the group and expression of this willingness and (2) joint action requires readiness to act jointly and mutual expression of this readiness. The mutual expression of readiness creates common knowledge and only from this basis is it possible to achieve willingness, i.e. willingness to be responsible with others for A when the time comes.

According to Swindler, Gilbert’s account of joint action is exposed to some problems. First, he holds that neither mankind, nations, economic classes nor businesses are social groups, but that tribes, families, opposing baseball players, lovers, a poetry circle, and two people chatting are. In my opinion, this is a rather useful distinction because it focuses on relations among individuals and not on institutions (such as nations or economic classes).

The second objection seems more problematic and has to do with the concept of “willingness”. It is indeed difficult to think that a child whose family is his primary group possesses the concept of group and willingness to act jointly. This is a good example for demonstrating that the group has a certain authority and could make it dangerous to explicate collectivity through conceptual dependence on group structure. It is so because the content of beliefs and actions constitutes the normative basis of theoretical and practical reasoning. And this very content must be in some sense open to criticism from the individual as well as from the group perspective. In Swindler’s words: «What Gilbert’s holism seems to miss is precisely what people have in common whether they are members of groups or not and what they share in being persons can provide a normative basis for intentional content, come what may. Only people’s intrinsic or essential interests, as rationalist moral philosophers have long held, provide genuinely action-directing as well as action-prompting principles that one is obligated or even permitted to obey».<sup>25</sup>

The idea of moral responsibility goes beyond individualism and holism because it has to do with a normative content grounding relationships in a moral and universal sense. According to Swindler, speaking about responsibility in a collective context means referring to a “substantive” reason

<sup>25</sup> J. Swindler, *Social Intentions*, op. cit. p. 8.

based on a form of universalizability principle as a necessary condition of morally acceptable intentions. They are morally acceptable intentional states and not “merely nominalistic functions of the arbitrary intentions of individuals or groups”. The universalizability principle expresses moral equality of rational beings as a function of the intrinsic worth of their interest in freedom and well-being.

As we argued in the previous chapter, autonomy entails responsibility but it must be investigated in several dimensions (thus not only in the moral field), so holism helps us to focus on social practices. In our point of view “willingness” and “readiness” are bound to the rational structure of the game of giving and asking for reasons. Actually, the rational will can collapse into the concept of “readiness”, which corresponds to the undertaking and attributing of commitments and entitlements in a social context, so that we rule out reference to prior individual intentions. To be ready to undertake deontic attitudes is sufficient for autonomous agency. If we also focus on willingness we are forced to introduce a separate analysis of authenticity of personal motives and inclinations. This wrong move could bring us back to procedural theories of autonomy.

I also suppose that a person exercises reflective capacities on different kinds of reasons. It is therefore important to distinguish subjective and objective reasons, and it can be the case that we have to reflect on values that are different from the values of our life-form but they may be better for our own conception of life. I think moreover that reflection in the moral field starts from a set of individual values and only by moving from this set can we scrutinize the reasons that there are.<sup>26</sup>

To underscore the notion of personal autonomy we would do better to look for a wider concept of autonomy that concerns not only the moral point of view. To introduce a normative structure of deontic status and attitudes makes it possible to reach this end. Personal autonomy means that the agent is autonomous even if she moves from her own reasons for acting (which are not necessarily universalizable) and is ready to demonstrate the entitlements to such reasons. This is a relevant point for understanding the possibility of a critical point of view. It may be that my interlocutor lets me know his reasons, which are better than mine or vice-versa, for acting in a certain way. Again, the necessary condition of autonomy in such discursive situations is the recognition of certain contents (materially, inferentially articulated) and the sufficient condition is the participation in the game of giving and asking for reasons by undertaking a commitment and being ready to demonstrate the entitlement to that commitment by using the different possibilities of the praxis of justification we considered above.

<sup>26</sup> This is the sense in which I take for granted Oshana’s criticism of the primacy of “authenticity”.

The distinction of several patterns of practical reasoning leads to the thesis that autonomy is the capacity for distinguishing subjective and objective reasons for acting. In this sense, we as agents are in the role of scorekeeper when we are able to attribute reasons for acting and to undertake corresponding commitments. This happens in interaction with other people, namely when we come into contact with points of view different from our own.



## POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

*1. The “Recognitional” Account of Autonomy*

The main task of a theory of autonomy is to investigate the possibility of critical reflection in case of conflicts in the subjective and social spheres. Socialization is a complex process and could convey false norms; nevertheless, we, as human beings, possess the capacity for recognizing and rejecting them. But, and this can be a contradiction, the same process of socialization allows us to criticize the contents of our beliefs and actions. This happens because we can introduce the distinction between socialization as internalization of social norms (content-dependence) and socialization as social process structured by a net of deontic attitudes characterizing intersubjectivity (attitude-dependence). My argumentation aims to clarify how autonomy can make the two dependencies compatible. For this reason, I presented in the last two chapters the deontic structure embedding necessary and sufficient conditions for autonomy which requires the consideration of both the semantic and the pragmatic levels.

In this section, I shall describe several possible interpretations of the “interpersonal” dimension of autonomy; I maintain that the normative structure of the dialogical dimension presented in the last chapter is what we ought to master in order to be autonomous. The political consequences of my argumentation are related to the possibility for a person to represent a critical voice in the public sphere. According to my interpretation of the scorekeeping model, this means that an agent can be able “directly” or “indirectly” to earn entitlements for his commitments.

The claim of the primacy of an intersubjective structure is the core of several important approaches of the “relational” theories of autonomy. The point is how we must intend the term “relational”. I shall present different accounts of “normative” intersubjectivity to show how my account can be situated and give an original contribution to the debate. First, I describe the “recognitional” model introduced by Axel Honneth as an inheritance of Hegelian themes. This account is relevant in order to understand the “preconditions” for autonomy or the lack of autonomy,

but it does not provide examples of the exercise of this rational capacity in dialogical situations because it is obviously bound to the phenomenon of “dependence” in its emotive dimensions. Second, I shall describe the Habermasian thesis of “reflective communicative action” that represents a good point from which to relate autonomy to the linguistic normative competence that applies to the political field. Third, starting also from the debate between Habermas and Brandom, I shall motivate my preference for the scorekeeping model that introduces the first person critical point of view in an intersubjective context. This option shows my proximity to positions like those of Tugendhat, Benson and Oshana. Fourth, I shall consider an interesting attempt to theorize authenticity in intersubjective terms (Ferrara) in order to provide further arguments for the primacy of autonomy in a wider sense. Fifth, I argue for the compatibility between autonomous agents and the public sphere. Finally, I shall show a possible and I hope plausible result of my analysis, one that underscores the role of the game of giving and asking for reasons in its intrinsically dialogical dimension in the political field.

It is a platitude that “recognition” of the personal identity in the process of socialization is fundamental as a “precondition” for autonomy. According to this point of view, social dependence becomes necessary: «Dependency is necessary for human survival, and it promotes interrelationships of intimacy and love that ground some of our most profound values. This point does not show, however, that personal autonomy is not also valuable. Material and emotional dependencies are not incompatible with personal autonomy – that is, with persons behaving and living in accord with wants and values they have reflectively considered and come to hold without dependencies of some sort at various, if not at all, times»<sup>1</sup>.

In this context, autonomy is considered as a value that possesses a heterogeneous trait, because it emerges in those cases in which it is not socially protected. Autonomy is more visible as a fundamental goal from the point of view of the dominators rather than from the point of view of the dominated. The value of personal autonomy of the dominated favors the realization of moral equality among persons, whereas that of the dominators destroys this moral ideal. For example, women’s personal autonomy (in those cases where there is a strong male dominance) reveals the standards of male autonomy of force and aggressiveness. The disparity of force and aggressiveness is related to gender conditions that enable some individuals to have control over others, who consequently lose their autonomy. When the subordinated persons decide to act according to their desires and values (reflectively endorsed) they can overcome the moral asymmetry due to their subordination. They act in this way when

<sup>1</sup> M. Friedman, *Autonomy and Male Dominance*, in Christman, Anderson ed., p. 166.

their desires and values do not imitate the desires and values of those who control them.

To propose a kind of intersubjectivity that is in some sense “procedural”, as based on conditions of mutual recognition, could represent a valid expedient against vulnerability in possible social conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

This kind of intersubjectivity gets its reasons in precise relations of recognition in which the practical relationship with ourselves is acquired and supported only by the recognition of those whom we recognize by ourselves.<sup>3</sup> Competences so acquired are: self-respect, self-trust and self-esteem. These dimensions of identity are neither beliefs nor emotional states but properties of a dynamic process in which individuals gain experience of themselves as having a certain status in interactive situations.

Starting with self-respect, John Rawls assigned a relevant weight to it as a basic condition of a good life. If a person possesses self-respect because he has as her objective the authority to raise and defend claims as a person undertaking an egalitarian attitude, then self-respect must be understood as the active source of a legitimate self-conception. If a person does not see herself as a competent decider and legitimate co-author of decisions, then it is not possible to understand how she could think of himself as being seriously engaged in his own practical reasoning. Subordination, marginalization and exclusion destroy self-respect; it is a matter of social justice to guarantee individual rights<sup>4</sup>. In comparison with Rawls’ liberalism, the recognitional theory, which guarantees them, secures autonomy “directly” (in the negative sense of blocking interferences) and “indirectly” by supporting self-respect.

Self-trust is the characteristic of an agent who has an open and solid relationship with his own feelings, emotions, impulses etc. Whereas self-respect has to do with the capacity to make considerations in deliberation, self-trust has to do with a actively mediated perceptual capacities through which what is subjectively grasped becomes primarily stuff for deliberation. The courage to be openly and critically in relationship with subjective feelings is facilitated by the secure love of others, which reinforces self-trust. Because of the fact that a correct relationship with our own deep subjective world is a fundamental condition for self-comprehension, critical reflection and hence for autonomy, we can observe that

<sup>2</sup> The term “recognition” indicates those attitudes, experiences and vulnerability that are related to claims for recognition. The historical background of the recognitional theory is Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and the inheritance of Hegelian topics represented by the work of J. H. Mead *Mind, Self and Society*.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. J. Anderson e A. Honneth, *Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice*, in Christman, Anderson ed., pp. 127-149.

<sup>4</sup> In this sense, R. Forst discusses the notion of “legal autonomy”. Cfr. R. Forst, *Political Liberty: Integrating Five Conceptions of Autonomy*, in Christman, Anderson ed., pp. 226-242.

there is a close internal connection between openness and freedom in the subjective sphere and openness and freedom in the social context. In this sense, the commitment of society to protect the conditions for autonomy implies the commitment to protect the kinds of relation in which self-trust develops and is reinforced<sup>5</sup>.

Self-interpretation, which is central for autonomous reflection, presupposes a certain degree of effective openness but also certain semantic resources. The meaning and validity of actions is formed by a semantic and symbolic field, in which reflection occurs (as the Sellars' space of reasons, the sense horizon of Taylor, the truth/ knowledge regime of Foucault or the social-cultural meaning of Fraser). Naturally, expressions used in a particular social context could undermine autonomy as they provide "denigrator labels" to persons and groups. They can destroy self-esteem.

According to the recognitional model, full autonomy, i.e. the real and effective capacity for developing and pursuing our own conception of a life worthy to be lived, is favored by relations to ourselves (self-respect, self-trust and self-esteem) that are *per se* bound to social recognition. These relations are highly exposed to risks, vulnerable against various forms of injustice, violation and denigration, so that protection of contexts in which they emerge becomes a question of justice: «(...) it becomes attractive to reconsider, more radically, the individualistic understanding of rights as well. For rights too have this general intersubjective structure. These rights – and the power and freedom they accord to individuals – are actually the result of members of a community recognizing each other as free and equal. To view them as free-standing is to confuse an emergent property for something independently existing»<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. *Autonomy and Communicative Action*

Habermas introduced the question of recognition but he underscores formal linguistic conditions for a rational and egalitarian dialogue. Honneth concentrates on those cases that are dangerous for individual identity and maintains that rights must protect individuals by virtue of their very relational structure. The point of view of Habermas possesses the advantage of assigning to the agent the possibility of being autonomous when he enters into contact with others by choosing to act in an "instrumental" or in a "communicative" way. Naturally, an agent is au-

<sup>5</sup> The protection of the contexts that favor self-esteem, intending such protection not merely in legal terms, is discussed by B. Rössler, in *Des Wert des Privaten*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> A. Honneth, *op. cit.* p. 138.



tonomous if he acts in this latter way. Otherwise he is heteronomous in Kantian terms.

According to Habermas, autonomy is bound to the recognition of presuppositions or linguistic rules as a condition of the universal validity of theoretical and practical claims. Contrary to Rawls, Habermas overcomes the Kantian perspective of the categorical imperative, since he maintains that an adult and competent individual is autonomous because the interiorized conditions of an ideal dialogue guarantee equality and justice. In this sense, Habermas also supersedes the Hegelian perspective because he uses the Meadian dynamic of social roles and the construction of the epistemic post-conventional perspective theorized by Kohlberg.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, Habermas establishes a fundamental relationship between autonomy and “communicative action”<sup>8</sup>. He interprets the Meadian concept of identity in a pragmatic sense. Mead maintains that the formation of identity develops through the medium of linguistic communication<sup>9</sup>. The process of socialization is a process of individualization based on an asymmetry between the perspectives of speaker and listener. The “self” is the identity of the socialized individual who has undertaken fundamental roles in a linguistic situation. The self indicates the point of view that Ego presents to Alter in the interaction, when the latter makes an offer of a speech act. The interpersonal relationship between speaker and listener is fundamental as Ego, by undertaking the perspective of the interlocutor, cannot abandon his/her communicative role. In this sense, Ego undertakes the perspective of Alter for picking up his/her expectations; Ego is the first person role that must satisfy the behavioral models initially undertaken and internalized by Alter. According to Habermas, the performative attitude assumed by Ego and Alter in the communicative situation is bound to the presupposition that the interlocutor has the possibility of accepting or refusing the offer of a speech act. Ego cannot give up this “space of freedom” even in the case of the playing of social roles; indeed the very internalized behavioral model implies the linguistic structure of the relationship between “responsible” (i.e. autonomous) agents.

In my opinion, Habermas does not put emphasis on the “space of freedom” of Ego. He intends autonomy of the agent in pure procedural terms without considering the role of the normative structure of the semantic content with respect to the objectivity of linguistic validity claims. According to Habermas, an agent is autonomous only if he has consent

<sup>7</sup> For this interesting discussion see J. Habermas *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, The Mit Press, Cambridge, 1990 and *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, The Mit Press, Cambridge, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> J. Habermas, *Post-metaphysical Thinking*, The Mit Press, Cambridge, 1992, chap. 8.

<sup>9</sup> J. H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, op. cit.

as his fundamental end.<sup>10</sup> For an agent to reach this end he must satisfy some structural conditions of the intersubjective linguistic practice: (a) pursue their illocutive ends without mental constraint, (b) subordinate their consent to the acknowledgment of validity claims and (c) be available to undertake commitments that in uence the development of the interaction.

This rational core of communicative agency is intended as primacy of the “ideal linguistic situation”, which is the reason why Habermas criticizes the scorekeeping model.

Let us focus on some of Habermas’s criticisms of the scorekeeping model that reveal other possible solutions for the question of the autonomy point of view in a social sense<sup>11</sup>. Our discussion can be articulated in three fundamental points: (1) the relationship between semantics and pragmatics, (2) the problem of objectivity and (3) the difference between facts and norms.

(1) Habermas and Brandom share the pragmatic point of view in their analysis of the presuppositions of communication. The “background” of our linguistic and social practices is made up of cognitive and linguistic capacities. In this context, Habermas introduced his shift from a phenomenological to a communicative concept of lifeworld that, as we have already seen, presents conditions bound to the use of language in a Wittgensteinian sense. Actually, he radicalizes the Wittgensteinian approach because he thinks that the conditions of rational consent are universal. The speakers must: (a) pursue their illocutive ends without mental constraints, (b) subordinate their consent to the acknowledgement of criticizable validity claims and (c) be available to undertake commitments that in uence the development of interaction.

Brandom underlines rather the primacy of the performative attitude of the scorekeeper. Social practices are games in which participants present commitments and entitlements. Their autonomous agency is bound to a net of deontic status and deontic attitudes so that they keep score on deontic status by attributing them to others and undertaking them by themselves. According to Habermas, we can observe a problem in Brandom’s methodological strategy. This problem arises from an ambiguity in the relation between pragmatics and semantics: it seems contradictory to state that social practices confer conceptual content to states and expressions

<sup>10</sup> For a clear discussion of some ambiguities in Habermas’s conception of communicative action see R. Tuomela, *Collective Goals and Communicative Action* in «Journal of Philosophical Research», vol. 27, 2002, pp. 29-64.

<sup>11</sup> For this discussion, I briefly refer to my essay *On Normative Pragmatics: a Comparison between Brandom and Habermas*, «Teorema» vol XXIII 2003 pp 51-68. See also the clear analysis of these topics presented by Luigi Ruggi in his essay *Hegel: fine della filosofia*, in Ruggi, Testa, *Hegel contemporaneo*, op. cit. pp. 218-246.

and that material rules of inferences confer, at the same time, the content. Habermas maintains that the perspective of the participant who reconstructs the linguistic practice from the inside does not allow the speaker to talk about truth, but about how truth appears to him<sup>12</sup>.

Sebastian Rödl<sup>13</sup> focused on the fact that normative attitudes institute normative states. In this sense, the latter supervene over the former: talk of commitments can be traded in for talk of undertaking and attributing commitments. One can notice a tension in Brandom's problem of justification. On the one hand, he refers to normative attitudes, and on the other he introduces a theory of meaning that possesses its own "normative" concepts (the normative vocabulary we analyzed in the previous chapter). If the norms are instituted then a normative theory of meaning cannot be expressively independent. But if we maintain the thesis of independence, the interpreter cannot be considered, for logical reasons, a participant of the game of giving and asking for reasons. In my opinion, this observation could show a limit in the scorekeeping theory, but it is difficult to think of an autonomous agent in the role of scorekeeper who undertakes deontic attitudes that are related to "unknown" contents. Normativity is given neither by formal inference nor by fixed cultural presuppositions. It is a matter of the relationship between modal vocabulary and normative vocabulary.

(2) As regards the question of "objectivity" Habermas thinks that in the case of "theoretical" rational discourse the speakers refer to an "objective" world that represents the source of common or shared knowledge. In this sense, Brandom falls into a form of "conceptual realism" because he assigns a semantic primacy to material inferences. It seems therefore interesting to see whether Brandom avoids two consequences of conceptual realism: "epistemological passivity" and "semantic passivity". In Brandom's terms: «The conceptual articulation of facts is such that the most basic ones must have the structure of attributing properties and relations to objects. That is the part of what it means to say that facts are about objects – not of course, in the same sense in which linguistic *expressions* are about objects, but in the way the claim they *express* are about objects»<sup>14</sup>

The problem of semantic passivity is a matter of the social game of ascriptional attitudes. We can consider, for example, the conditional "that is pink and this is darker than that; then this is red". What is incompatible with such a conditional (if p then q) is what is simultaneously compatible

<sup>12</sup> J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, chap. 1.

<sup>13</sup> See S. Rödl, *Normativität des Geistes versus Philosophie als Erklärung. Zu Brandom Theorie des Geistes*, «Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie», vol. 48 pp. 762-79.

<sup>14</sup> R. Brandom, *Facts, Norms and Normative Facts: Reply to habermas "from Kant to Hegel: on Robert Brandom's Pragmatic Philosophy of Language"*, «European Journal of Philosophy» vol. 8, 2000, pp. 358.

with its antecedent *p* and incompatible with its consequent *q*. This paradigm refers to the ascription in scorekeeping terms and this is why conceptual contents are perspective. By the use of *de dicto* and *de re* ascriptions there result ascriptions of the form “S believes that F(*t*)” and those of the form “S believes of ‘*t*’ that F(*it*)”, that make explicit specific aspects of the difference in social perspectives. *De re* specifications identify “what” an ascribed belief is about or in Brandom’s words: «what individual, according to the ascriber, it is, whose properties must be investigated in order to determine whether the ascribed belief is true»<sup>15</sup>

(3) According to Habermas, Brandom does not assign to the consent rationally accepted by the members of a community a fundamental epistemic authority. He maintains that the primacy of the collective point of view could cancel the distinction between simple acceptance and rational acceptance of a validity claim. But Brandom refers to an I-Thou relation in which the scorekeeper is a social role nevertheless played by a single agent. There is no recognition of an interlocutor as such, because the person who raises a validity claim is in relationship with a third person who attributes validity claims to the other; The problem is that communication in scorekeeping terms is not a “fruitful” communication because it does not establish those expectations of reaction considered by symbolic interactionism. When we communicate it is not only a matter of letting the other know our claim and vice versa, but there is the fundamental aim of establishing a relationship that commits both parts to relevant consequence of interaction. The most important task of the notion of lifeworld is to reduce the risks of dissent: communication functions only against a shared cultural and linguistic background. In my opinion, however, that rational consent has the basic function of protecting the social order and introducing new points of view that must be submitted to public discussion. Nevertheless, a strong primacy of a collective authority makes autonomy redundant. Autonomy is not important only in the private sphere but in all contexts where different reasons come into play and we have to decide what to believe and do. It is obvious that we start from a common knowledge that is made of cognitive and cultural norms (Searle) but it is fundamental to underscore the possibilities of agreement and disagreement, and this can be possible only if we provide an exhaustive model that goes in depth on the “logical” nature of acceptance.

A further consequence of conceptual realism is to level the difference between facts and norms. It is indeed true that Brandom introduces several reasons for acting but he does not fulfill his intention to refer to the Kantian notion of autonomy. As I noted in the last chapter, it is not so illuminating for autonomy to make a compromise between Hume and Kant.

<sup>15</sup> Idem, *Making It Explicit*, p. 584.

I take for granted Habermas's distinction between instrumental reasoning and practical reasoning in a moral sense. But this distinction provides only good reasons for distinguishing between freedom and autonomy. My thesis is somehow different because I am looking for a notion of "personal" autonomy that applies not only to the moral field. In this sense, I think however that we do not need Brandom's compromise even if we can use the scorekeeping model. Habermas's criticism serves this clarification because he focuses on the fact that Brandom himself does not distinguish between instrumental reasoning and moral reasoning. However we do not want to refer to the point of view of community even though we do not exclude that community could have the right reasons (it depends on the situation). Thus we introduce a notion of autonomy as a capacity to participate in the game of giving and asking for reasons.

Nevertheless, the primacy of "communicative rationality" is useful for understanding the social and dialogical aspects of the human mind. Following "social constructivism", the psychology of Vigotsky and Habermas's theory of communicative action, Richard Smith underscores the social and linguistic nature of mind.<sup>16</sup> Communicative or dialogical rationality implies the epistemological thesis that our rational capacities are formed by virtue of communicative interaction with others since the first years of our life. To make the "collective turn" means here to promote communicative rationality, namely to open a public space in which participants can express their reasons beyond authoritarian and paternalistic relationships. Naturally, individual cognitive and moral development is not ruled out; but, in collective the case, a progress emerges as regards a reflective consciousness of illusions, self-illusions and delusions that the agent normally does not want to continue, namely as regards a kind of autonomy that we earn by confrontation with others. In this case, rationality becomes coextensive with autonomy and it does not have a precise aim, as in the case of instrumental reasoning; it becomes rather a complex activity in the social exchange of reasons. If autonomy means having control over our own lives, there exist dependencies.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, there are public, professional and institutional circumstances that cause the loss of self-esteem. We are subject to political and economic choices made over our heads, whose negative effects we perceive as often having the paradoxical outcome of making us ask what is wrong with us. The place of communicative rationality becomes the political place or the "public

<sup>16</sup> See R. Smith, *Freedom and Discipline*, Allen & Unwin, Londra, 1986; id. *The Education of Autonomous Citizens*, in D. Bridges (ed.), *Education, Autonomy and Democratic Citizenship*, Routledge, New York 1998.

<sup>17</sup> For a clear phenomenology of such dependencies see C. Castelfranchi, *Founding Agent's Autonomy. On Dependence Theory*, Spring Symposium on Agents with Adjustable Autonomy, Stanford University, 1999.

space” in Hannah Arendt’s terms, which we have largely lost, “times and places described with attention apart” and in “those arenas that are apposite construed for containing it”. According to David Smail, the public space is the space of “moral” agency, i.e. the space in which they have the possibility of commonly reacting against coercions of public power, against the use of public functions in an instrumental way.<sup>18</sup>

Autonomy becomes therefore a critical capacity that is protected by the very interaction – genuine clinical cases apart – by a fruitful confrontation among people’s experiences and perspectives. We as citizens have the opportunity to create and participate in groups and collectives, public associations, movements, public meetings that make us conscious of the sources of power and of the nature of its abuse, as well as of the possibility of limiting its control over our lives.<sup>19</sup>

It is a matter of participation to what Habermas calls the “informal public sphere” where themes are debated as they reflect problems that otherwise remain confined in the private sphere. In Habermas’s terms: «Because of the fact that the general public sphere is “not restricting” in the sense that its communicative fluxes are not regulated by procedures, it becomes the most adequate place to the access of a public “right for recognition” ... Only after that this public right for recognition has happened then the controversial situations of interests can be assumed by competent political instances, and insert and discuss in parliamentary agenda, eventually elaborated in legislative proposals and binding decisions».<sup>20</sup>

Following this point of view, Smith proposes the “discursive model” in which the public space is seen, in a democratic sense, as a creation of procedures, where general social norms and collective political decisions can be submitted to discussion. We need to move to a more simple idea of autonomy based on a deep comprehension of the origin of the power over us and of how it is kept and exercised, together with a certain degree of ability to act in common in order to reject that power and so control our life.

### 3. *The Claim for Truth*

The problem of overcoming dependence in socialization is related to the right for recognition that takes place when a person gets in touch with other groups and perceives the dissonance between his projects and opin-

<sup>18</sup> See D. Smail, *The Origins of Unhappiness*, Harper & Collins, New York, 1993.

<sup>19</sup> See S. Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, Routledge, New York, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Habermas, *Fact and Norms*.

ions and those of others. According to Habermas: «Each part becomes conscious of the monadic constitution of her own point of view as relative, and feels the imperious impulse to amplify his perspective so that both parts understand why the opponents realize their projects from another point of view. The fight for recognition, which at first glance appears as a practical question and seems to derive from a conflict of self-assertion against a stranger will, acquires therefore an epistemic sense»<sup>21</sup>. The dialectic between master and slave indicates how an objective moral point of view is socially construed and based on the reference to a shared objective world and to judgments intersubjectively constraining. Here we are not dealing with Rawls's neutral point of view. Nevertheless, interpersonal relationships provide intersubjective, shared standards that authorize us to expect to form the same opinions in virtue of an exchange of reasons.

In this sense, the structure of mutual recognition is a fundamental precondition of autonomy. Moreover, it could be useful to reconsider the main criticisms to Kantian formalism. First, a moral point of view cannot rule out the content of subjective reasons; second, it is necessary to consider consequences that could be ascribed to the agents, and third, it is difficult to apply universal laws to concrete cases<sup>22</sup>. On the contrary, it seems totally unacceptable to subordinate history to reason because institutions can be judged only *a posteriori*. This is the reason why contemporary Hegelian authors tend to consider institutions and liberal procedures of democratic regimes as the result of a historical process that aims at social order without referring either to a strong moral authority or to an absolute spirit.

If it is true that modern societies are more complex and cosmopolitan then the primacy of public autonomy emerges in public discussion where themes are criticized. Is it still possible to retrieve anything of the Hegelian theory of self-consciousness, anything that allows us to grasp some critical aspects of individual judgment relevant for public life? It is interesting to interpret the relationship between truth and autonomy not merely by the shift to an epistemic intersubjective dimension such as that of an ideal communicative community, but by reclaiming the relational aspect of truth, which entails relevant consequences for individual identity. In this sense, it is questionable whether the idea that a person is authentic only if she is in an "assertive" relationship with his community represents a productive contribution to the problem of self-determination as a rational relationship with himself<sup>23</sup>. The assertive relationship which the

<sup>21</sup> J. Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, Polity Press, 2003, (from the Italian Translation, *Verità e giustificazione*, Laterza, Bari, 2001, p. 203).

<sup>22</sup> See K. Günther, *Der Sinn für Angemessenheit*, Frankfurt, 1988.

<sup>23</sup> See E. Tugendhat, *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung. Sprachanalytische Interpretationen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1979.

person could have with his community seems to rule out the possibility of rationally taking a position against existing norms for a better society, namely of being able to think and act autonomously. We can therefore make compatible Heidegger's analysis of the possibilities of action and the symbolic interactionism of Mead, which focus on a broad concept of freedom, with the Hegelian conception of a thin freedom that coincides with autonomy. According to Tugendhat, someone who acts and lives in a responsible manner if he is deeply conscious of his actions, namely if he can give reasons for them by embracing all the consequences; on the contrary, someone acts and lives in an irresponsible manner if he renounces justifying his actions because he does not give reasons for them.

The important result of Tugendhat's work lies in his underscoring how the problem of truth is bound to an assertional practice. Whenever we affirm something, even when we say that something is possible or that something is good or the best or that it ought to be done, it raises the following question: do things "really" (i.e. truly) happen this way?

Even if Tugendhat moves from a different theoretical context, it seems to me interesting to propose a comparison between his attempt to make a compromise between socialization and autonomy and the approaches of Oshana and Benson. Oshana calls for autonomy not by reference to authenticity but "directly" to social interaction under the "weak" condition of acknowledging the unavoidable aspects of agent's identity. In her terms: «Autonomy requires that equilibrium of power be effected by the agent between herself and society. The possibility of effecting such equilibrium and the ease with which this is achieved depends largely on the energy that social navigation requires. The invasive quality of racial scripting to self-management stems from the fact that racial scripting more often than not is disabling in practice. It is not enough for autonomy that a person authentically embraces the social constraint mandated by the inescapable aspects of her life, for the fact that she finds these constraint acceptable does not mean they are acceptable or adequate for self-governance. One's self-conception as a member of a marginalized group, and the very grounds that nurture this self-conception, can frustrate autonomy, in part because autonomy calls for social recognition and respect of a sort "scripting" often impedes, even where one's self-conception is authentically her own as mainstream accounts require»<sup>24</sup>.

Benson too focuses on the importance of social recognition, so that self-authorization enabling one to take ownership of one's actions is not a deliberative matter. I agree with Benson when he says that to treat oneself as having authority to speak for one's action is a "precondition"

<sup>24</sup> M. Oshana, *Autonomy and Self-Identity*, in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism*, p. 92.



for autonomy. In this sense I find Honneth's analysis very illuminating. But it is also necessary that we *properly* treat ourselves as fit and worthy to possess such authority, and this is possible because of elements of such ownership that constrain the attitudinal aspects of autonomy. As we have seen in the third chapter, Benson does not think that these elements pertain to identity-based theories, nor does he rule out the very possibility of "autonomy" in an individualistic sense. In his words: «The position of authority that autonomous agents claim for themselves is, I have argued, socially situated and relationally structured; both the capabilities and attitudes this position demands concern interpersonal exchange governed by publically shareable norms. There is nothing unduly individualistic about the conception of selfhood this view might suggest. Nor does this understanding of autonomy promote some asocial, atomized view of human well-being or political life»<sup>25</sup>.

Benson's account of self-authorization considers interpersonal relationships and social practices not only under the aspect of their "causality" to the development of capacities for autonomy. Moreover he maintains that social and discursive elements "belong intrinsically" to autonomous agency<sup>26</sup>. In this sense, the autonomy point of view based on self-authorization tends to supersede the "neutrality" of the liberal moral point of view, because it suggests taking seriously the different "accountable" voices that come into the public space. Another advantage is that self-authorization avoids an excessive rationalism where rarefied intellectual skills of detachment and analysis represent too high a standard of normativity<sup>27</sup>.

#### 4. Authenticity and Intersubjectivity

Oshana's position can be considered as the opposite of an interesting attempt to rule out autonomy to favor authenticity. Alessandro Ferrara proposes a new version of the relationship between authenticity and intersubjectivity in order to avoid the ideal of monological individual reflection<sup>28</sup>. The starting point of Ferrara's work is, if I am on the right track, the search for a notion of autonomy that goes beyond the Kantian "moral" point of view to reach a more concrete consideration of the "content" of human choices. The move he makes is to replace the traditional

<sup>25</sup> P. Benson, *Taking Ownership: Autonomy and Voice in Autonomous Agency*, op. cit. pp. 118-19.

<sup>26</sup> For the discussion of the influence of social factors on individual choices see M. Oshana, *Personal Autonomy and Society*.

<sup>27</sup> Benson develops this point in *Answering for Ourselves*, chap. 5 forthcoming.

<sup>28</sup> For my brief discussion of the work of Ferrara see *Reflective Authenticity. Rethinking the Project of Modernity*, Routledge, New York, 1998.

liberal notion of autonomy with an intersubjective notion of authenticity. Ferrara's proposal is very useful to understand my vision of autonomy because he tries to make compatible individual autonomy as "reflective authenticity" and intersubjectivity.

First, it must be clarified how authenticity entails intersubjectivity. This can be done by discussing three points. (1) Authentic identity is intersubjective because it presupposes, among other things, that the agent be able to see himself through the eyes of another. Ferrara refers to Mead to explain that this thesis does not imply "inauthentic" identity just because it is grounded on social expectations. Indeed, even if the agent is socialized so that she internalizes norms of her community, she "is constantly reacting to the social attitudes and changing in this co-operative process the very community to which she belongs". Moreover, authenticity is broader than the concept of autonomy because Ferrara takes autonomy to mean the capacity to make life plans starting from subjective intentions. But she does not separate autonomy and authenticity: «In other words, for an identity to be *authentic* it must not only be *autonomously* willed; it is also necessary that its project-like moment ("Who I want to be"), where the expression "to it" does not mean that it depends in a mechanical way on it, but rather that a relation of mutual relevance is created or maintained between these two moments»<sup>29</sup>.

(2) Authenticity appeals to a form of self-realization that implies recognition in Honneth's terms. As we have seen in the first section, Honneth refers to Hegel and Mead in presenting the standards of self-realization as sedimentations of three kinds of successful relations of reciprocal recognition: relations of parental *love*, relations of *legal* recognition and relations of *solidarity* within which one becomes an object of recognition.

According to Ferrara, a fourth kind of reciprocal recognition is required because a person must be recognized also for the uniqueness of the project which constitutes him and, at the same time, distinguishes him from others. It must be possible to articulate the distinction between «(1) recognizing the dignity and worth of another person from the standpoint of what that person *shares in common* with the other members of a culture, and (2) recognizing the dignity and worth of that person from the standpoint of what distinguishes him/her from everybody else and makes them unique»<sup>30</sup>.

(3) According to Ferrara, the intersubjective aspect of authenticity is present also in the Kantian reflective judgment as providing the point of view from which we can evaluate the appropriateness of a course of action or of a life-project to an identity. The *Critique of Judgment* reminds

<sup>29</sup> Ivi, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Ivi, p. 17.

us of the relevance of a sort of *sensus communis* as critical faculty which *a priori* takes into considerations the mode of representation of every one else: «by weighing the judgment, not so much with actual, as rather with the merely possible judgments of others, and by putting ourselves in the position of every one else, as the result of a mere abstraction from the limitations which contingently affect our own estimate»<sup>31</sup>.

This is a valid argument for demonstrating that autonomy is wider than the classical moral account, which, by Kant, appeals to categorical imperative. However, Ferrara does not focus on self-determination but rather on self-realization. For this reason he wants to give an account of authenticity that is quite a different notion and cannot replace autonomy or dispense us from trying to elucidate the notion of personal autonomy.

However, Ferrara makes an interesting and useful attempt to show the intersubjective dimension of identity also through some remarks on the communicative paradigm of Habermas. First, Ferrara shares the criticism generally raised against Habermas's idealization of argumentative presuppositions. One important consequence of the theory of communicative action is to rule out aesthetic claims from the realm of validity so that it becomes impossible to find an intersubjective dimension that can provide standards of judgment in ethics and politics<sup>32</sup>. Second, there is a tension in Habermas's notion of consensus that I find agreeable: «Furthermore, while on the one hand the strong point of consensus-theoretical approach is the reconstruction from a *third-person perspective* of our intuition regarding validity, on the other hand this approach leaves us impotent when it comes to a *first-person perspective* on validity. When we are faced with a number of alternative ways of solving a given practical or theoretical dilemma and we have to deliberate, we certainly cannot invoke, as a justification for our choice the rationality of a consensus not yet formed. We have to choose on *some other* basis in order to contribute, through our choice, to the very formation of that rational consensus. One of the strong point of the *authenticity-thesis* lies, in my opinion, precisely in its providing an account of this alternative basis on which we rest our choices and deliberations»<sup>33</sup>

Finally, a further consequence of the idealization of presuppositions of communication is the selection of models of rationality and judgment which, because of its "contrafactual" character, are difficult to reconcile with the plurality of cultural linguistic games. His analysis of sharing the

<sup>31</sup> I. Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986, p. 186.

<sup>32</sup> In this context, I would recall the debate between Habermas and Derrida about the validity of aesthetics claims. This discussion is the central topic of Rorty's chapter 16 of *Truth and Progress* op. cit. I showed however the plausibility of Habermas's account in *La differenza di genere fra filosofia e letteratura*, in «Segni e comprensione», n. 27, 1996, pp. 27-40

<sup>33</sup> Ivi, p. 20

intersubjective background is worthy of consideration since it is not so abstract with respect to autonomy as the categorical imperative seems to be. Nevertheless, Habermas's attempt has the advantage of presenting the difficulties of the accounts based on subjective experience that differs from individual to individual<sup>34</sup>. Sensibility does not secure social justice in case of strong conflicts, especially among individuals who are not strictly in touch. Moreover, I think that cultural values could influence subjective motives so that individual reactions to the actions of others can vary according to them.

For this reason, I think that autonomy based on a deontic intersubjective structure provides a more plausible chance to the agents for trying to find the best reason in a situation where this search is required.

### 5. Reason, Identity and the Public Sphere

In moving from a lucid criticism to the paradigm of rational choice, Giacomo Marramao underscores the relevance of social identity for rational agency. But he refers to Sen when he suggests not placing emphasis only on a communitarian point of view<sup>35</sup>.

Marramao focuses on two problematic aspects of social identity:

(1) *the negation of the problem of autonomy*: it is not possible to address any criterion of rational behaviour other than those accepted as valid from the person belonging to a community: for this reason every reference to rationality raises objections related to the *form* (for instance "Which rationality?") or to the subjects (for instance "Whose rationality?");

(2) *the negation of the possibility of intercultural normative judgments*: in case of conflict of values among different groups or cultural communities there exists no value (independent from conflicting values) to which we can appeal to find a rational solution of the very conflict.

According to Marramao, if it is implausible to rule out the capacity for autonomy, it is questionable the plausibility of an impersonal point of view such as Nagel's (the *view from nowhere*) is questionable. The problem is what kind of social identity we are looking for in moving from the fact that there exist conflicts of values that are "interpersonal" as well as "intrapersonal". It is not fruitful to stress the contrast between individual rationality and social normativity in which the first represents the conscious dimension of human choices whether the second represents the collec-

<sup>34</sup> To make this point clearer, I find very instructive the arguments Habermas presents to favor the position of Frege against phenomenology. See chap. 1 of *Between Facts and Norms* op. cit.

<sup>35</sup> Sen discusses this important question in *Reason Before Identity*, Oxford University press, new York-Oxford, 1999.

tive unconscious. It is worthy of for the sake of our analysis to consider the necessity of investigating the normative structure of intersubjectivity in order to try to harmonize the tensions between individual motives and social norms.

Another fundamental point related to the question of social identity is the interpretation of the global public sphere as the locus of conflict of interests and conflict of identities. I summarize the argumentative passages discussed by Marramao<sup>36</sup>. The problem of the global public sphere is bound to the problem of globalization and it must be considered from the perspective of the cultural dynamic process of modern secularization. Starting with this thesis, globalization does not imply either universal homologation under the sign of competitive individualism (Fukuyama) or the post Cold War world as the stage of a planetary intercultural conflict (Huntington): «On the one hand, globalization is techno-economic and financial-mercantile standardization with the consequent phenomena of deterritorialization and increasing interdependency among the various areas of the planet; on the other hand, however, it is an equally accelerated trend of differentiation and reterritorialization of identities – of relocation of the processes of symbolic identification. Between the two aspects, with the sociological lexicon tends to summarize in the oxymoron of the *glocal* there is in my opinion an interfacial relation. At the same time, however, there may arise a dangerous short circuit with paralyzing effects»<sup>37</sup>.

If we understand globalization only in relation to the dominance of the logics of market, then the only possible reaction is a proliferation of cultural identities that try to affirm their own values. But globalization in this sense does not entail “universalization”, in which we can try to find a common structure of a dialogical rationality that allows the expression and the confrontation of all possible points of view. It is however a fact that we cannot avoid conflicts of identity and interests as the works of Fraser and Honneth describe correspondingly as “redistributive conflict” and “fight for recognition”<sup>38</sup>. Marramao’s proposal is therefore the plausibility of a global public sphere marked by a universalistic politics of “differences”. And this is a fundamental point for our application of autonomy in the political field because it is grounded on the possibility of a dialogical

<sup>36</sup> For the full discussion of the questions of globalization, identity and the public sphere, I would point to Marramao’s book *Westward Passage: Philosophy and Globalization*, Verso, London-New York, 2005.

<sup>37</sup> G. Marramao, *Ragione e Identità. Questioni e proposte*, in *Le ragioni del conoscere e dell’agire. Scritti in onore di Rosaria Egidi*, (R.M. Calcaterra ed.) Franco Angeli, Milano, 2006, p. 340.

<sup>38</sup> See N. Fraser and A. Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A political Philosophical Exchange*, Paperback, Oxford, 2003.

solution in which each individual is asked to form an opinion and to express it in the public space.

The main reason for the dialogical solution is the recognition of two phenomena: *incommensurability* and *incomparability*. I think however that the possibility of contrasting coercive and oppressive norms is possible from the autonomy point of view as explained by the use of a dialogical rationality. In this sense, I also find interesting Habermas's criticism of the communitarian view of Alasdair MacIntyre in order to relate the possibility of a "flexible" identity to normative standards of "communicative" competence<sup>39</sup>.

The recognition of these cultural characteristics does not imply relativism, which is grounded on the idea that each culture has its own standards of truth and good. Rather, cultural realities respond to different "metrics" that are sources of innovative and creative compositions capable of lasting longer than many allegedly homogeneous symbolic forms. This thought leads to the consequence that the notion of culture cannot be intended as a closed system and insular self-sufficiency, and the assumption of the idea of multiple identity as the only possible way of comparative access to the event of civilization.

The problem is: how can we arrive at different compositions among incommensurable cultures? The idea of a global public sphere marked by the universalism of differences comes into play if we want to avoid the primacy of the logics of market or the idealized Kantian conception of a cosmopolitan republic<sup>40</sup>. Marramao is more realistic and also criticized the communicative version of the Kantian cosmopolitan republic presented by Habermas. Habermas's theory assesses the primacy of ideal linguistic conditions so that the content of the reasons that guide choices and actions which often generates conflicts of values is ruled out<sup>41</sup>. The same possibility of recognition seems implausible without considering subjective motives, intended as emotive experiences, as prior to any rational solution<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Starting from some remarks of Habermas on MacIntyre contextualism, I have shown how a theory of communicative competence entails a plausible thesis for the development of a flexible identity. See my essay, *The Relationship between Translatability and Competence*, «*Analecta Husserliana*», LXXXII, 2004, pp. 245-260.

<sup>40</sup> See G. Marramao, *Reason and World System. The Problem of a Global Public Sphere*, in «*Bene Navigavi*». *Studi in onore di Franco Bianco*, M. Failla (ed), Quodlibet Studio, 2006, pp.333-350. See also A Martinengo (ed.), *Figure del conflitto*. Studi in onore di Giacomo Marramao. Valter Casini Editore, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> This difficulty is underscored by Franco Bianco in his important book, *Le basi teoriche dell'opera di Max Weber*, Laterza, Bari, 1997.

<sup>42</sup> I would thank Sandra Plastina for her suggestion to consider the book of Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, Routledge, New York-London, 2004, chap. 6. Butler discusses the desire for recognition in Hegelian terms and considers several interesting problems of the process of identification.

Moreover, the communicative paradigm has the inconvenience of an explicit discrimination between subjects with and without communicative-argumentative competence. For the sake of our account of autonomy, which tries to introduce a broad conception of justification, the question of marginalization raised by Marramao is crucial: «Yet, even those subjects who are strongly deficient as to the logic of rational-discursive argumentation can be capable of accounting for their ethical choices or for the consequences that the autonomous or heteronomous assumption of certain norms and life styles entails for their own existence. (...) A young Islamic woman living in a Paris *banlieu* – to take the most obvious, but also the dramatically closest example – may not be capable of arguing for her (more or less free) choice of wearing the veil, but not because of this will she be unable to narrate the *emotive-rational experience of the value* that such a decision entails, and its existential implications. In the public sphere the right of citizenship is due neither only to formal procedures of right (which are certainly essential and inalienable, because without them we could not call ourselves truly free) not to the logic of argumentation. The space of Cosmopolis of the global city must – contravening Plato's interdict – extend the rights of citizenship also to rhetoric, to the narration of oneself, to the experience of narrating voices»<sup>43</sup>.

#### 6. Attitude-dependence and Content-dependence

The tension between individual stances and normative contents is what characterizes autonomy in Brandom's sense. As Swindler pointed out, practical freedom is an aspect of the spontaneity of discursive activity as a kind of positive freedom. Because of the fact that the modality that articulates it is not alethic but deontic, agents are guided here by *conceptions of law*: freedom is *normative*.

Consequently, the analysis concerns normative statuses such as commitment, responsibility and authority and practical attitudes bound to the acknowledgement of them. Brandom traces an interesting distinction between "attitude dependence" and "content dependence" that characterizes different philosophical traditions. However this very tension is internal to his view of autonomy. The Enlightenment philosophers replace the traditional authority derived from divine commands with responsibility and authority derived from the practical attitudes of human beings. Another interesting observation is that the idea of normative statuses as attitude-dependent contrasts with the traditional objectivist view accord-

<sup>43</sup> Marramao, *Reason and World System*, pp. 345-6.

ing to which human normative subjects ought to conform their attitudes (i.e. what they *take* to be correct or appropriate conduct) to those attitude-independent norms as features of the non-human world (objective normative facts and objective non-normative facts).

The move I find questionable in Brandom's interpretation of the Kantian conception of autonomy is the coincidence between positive freedom and autonomy. If we follow Kant it is true that we are genuinely *normatively* constrained only by the rules we adopt and acknowledge as binding on us. From this idea, Brandom derives the consequent idea that the capacity to *be* bound by norms and the capacity to *bind ourselves* by norms are one and the same. Here authority and responsibility are symmetric and reciprocal because they are constitutive features of the normative subject who is at once authoritative and responsible. But this move is possible not in virtue of the Kantian notion of autonomy that applies in the moral field and refers to the substantive principle of the categorical imperative but in virtue of the tension Brandom establishes between attitude-dependence and content-dependence: «The Kant-Rousseau autonomy criterion of demarcation of the normativity tells us something about normative *force* – about the nature of the bindingness or validity of the discursive commitments undertaken in judging or acting intentionally. That force, it tells us, is *attitude-dependent*. It is important to realize that such an approach can only work if it is paired with an account of the *contents* that normative force is invested in that construes those contents as attitude-*independent*. The autonomy criterion says that it is in a certain sense up to us (it depends on our activities and attitudes) *whether* we are bound by (responsible to) a particular conceptual norm (though acknowledging *any* conceptual commitments may involve further implicit rationality – and intentionality-structural commitments). If not only the normative *force*, but also the *contents* of those commitments – *what* we are responsible for – were *also* up to us, then, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, “whatever seems right to us would be right”». <sup>44</sup>

The collapse Brandom propose of autonomy into positive freedom is also shown by his reference to the Kantian notion of apperception according to which empirical activity presupposes transcendental activity as rational criticism and rectification of one's commitments performed in the ambit of a normatively coherent, unified system. Here the problem is the one from which Hegel builds his criticism: Kant was not clear about the origin and nature of the determinate contentfulness of empirical concepts. According to Hegel the question of normativity of mind, mean-

<sup>44</sup> R. Brandom, *Autonomy, Community and Freedom*, p. 6, contribution to the V Meeting of Italian-American Philosophy, Rome 16-19 October 2007.



ing and rationality is a social question. Hegel stresses on the fact that the contents must have a kind of attitude-independence, consequently the content acquire a sort of *authority* that is independent of the *responsibility* that the agent takes for it. The tension between attitude-dependence and content-dependence is solved with the introduction of the *social* model of *reciprocal recognition*: authority and responsibility are ultimately *social* phenomena.

At a first glance, the plausibility of this thesis gets its reasons from a form of “sufficiency” accorded to attitude-dependence. But this is not the kind of sufficiency that could be dangerous because of a possible fall into an asymmetry of attitudes and consequently of distribution of power. The sufficiency of attitude-dependence is also “necessary” because we do not only attribute to ourselves responsibility and authority but we attribute them to the others and we need the same attribution to ourselves from the others. But we well know that this reciprocal recognition is possible in scorekeeping terms because we can jointly refer to commitments, which have inferential material contents. This implies the correspondence between positive freedom and autonomy: agents are autonomous because they bind themselves to shareable commitments i.e. commitments accepted by their community. According to this result is the game of giving and asking for reasons a game that agents play only in the boundaries of their community? What about the possibility of finding a universal pragmatic structure that favors the dialog among different cultures? Is it possible to conceive autonomy as a dialogical critical capacity shown by the fact that agents are ready to undertake deontic attitudes when they express their voice in private and public arenas?

### 7. To Say “No”

My claim is to conceive the public sphere as that locus where agents can freely express their opinions, as a locus where constraint and manipulation are subject to discussion and criticism. I am convinced that if one can take ownership for what he asserts he can convey the content of his reasons in an open public discussion. This is the only possibility we have to make our contribution – previously discussed in an informal way – to political discussions and decisions.

The public sphere can be considered as the “political social space of reasons” because in order to express and make sense of our opinions we have to master the deontic structure described in scorekeeping terms. The public sphere is the place of validity that is the shared background in virtue of which we form our opinions. Again I would refer to Habermas’s concept of the communicative lifeworld as the clearest and most plausible proposal of the process of communication with its constructive and

creative aspects<sup>45</sup>. Some theorists of adult learning establish a fruitful relationship between communicative lifeworld and autonomy<sup>46</sup>. In Welton's terms: «The lifeworld is the realm of intersubjective interaction and adult learning par excellence. It is within the lifeworld that we learn what life means, what binds us together as human beings and what constitutes an autonomous personality. It is in the lifeworld that we organize our common affairs through non-instrumental forms of communication, even though various traditions provide substance to our meaning perspectives and to our interactions. Critical adult education practice, we argue, has as its normative mandate the preservation of the critically reflective lifeworld (communicative distortions can be sedimented in traditional practices) and extension of communicative action into systemic domains; thus the fate of critical adult learning is tied to the fate of lifeworlds»<sup>47</sup>.

I argued for the primacy of a dialogical rationality, and this option entails the primacy of shared linguistic rules. But the lesson we learn from Kant and his interpreters is the primacy of the public use of Reason<sup>48</sup>, namely the public use of the human capacity for autonomy. This human capacity must be investigated and not operationalized through the absolutization of ideal conditions of rational consent. We must give an account of the individual possibility of saying “no”<sup>49</sup>. Santoro maintains that a person is autonomous (or not autonomous) because of his position inside the linguistic games in which he participates. Normally, he is not autonomous because he consciously follows the rules of the linguistic game structuring social scenarios and is convinced of the validity of the move he performs according to these rules. So it could happen that the agent is surprised when someone challenges him to give reasons for his choices because he thinks he made a calculus mistake. But the agent often acts in a creative fashion by trying to justify his assertion or action according to some “partially dead” metaphors. Sometimes, such as in the case of Galileo, a person in order to affirm his metaphors must run the risk of being socially sanc-

<sup>45</sup> For an in-depth discussion of this topic see U. Matthiessen, *Das Dickicht der Lebenswelt und die Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Wilhelm Fink verlag, Munich, 1985; S. Dietz, *Lebenswelt und System*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 1993; J. M. G. Gómez-Heras, *El apriori del mundo de la vida*, Editorial Anthropos, 1989.

<sup>46</sup> On the application of the communicative concept of lifeworld to adult learning see M. Welton (ed.), *In Defense of the Lifeworld. Critical perspectives on Adult Learning*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1995.

<sup>47</sup> M. Welton, *The Critical Turn in Adult Education Theory*, in *ivi* pp. 4-5.

<sup>48</sup> A clear discussion of the Kantian use of public reason in the political context is offered by L. Tundo Ferente, *Pensare da se stessi. Kant e il compito della ragione*, in C. Di Marco (ed) *Un mondo altro è possibile*, Mimesis, Milano, 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Contrary to G. Iorio Giannoli, I think that conflicts ought to be thought and somehow solved in dialogical terms. See G. Iorio Giannoli, *Materializzazioni dell'anima. Dai modelli dell'intelligenza all'intelletto sociale*, Manifestolibri, Roma, 2003.

tioned and, in extreme cases, of being considered “crazy”. Santoro refers to Foucault to explain the phenomenon of autonomy as a peculiar form of individual resistance against the subtle power of the group. According to Foucault: «I would propose another way to move to a new economy of power relationships, an empirical way, more directly bound to our actual situation, that entails a stronger relation between theory and praxis. It suggests to take, as starting point, the forms of resistance against the different forms of power. Using another metaphor, it consists in the use of such resistances as chemical catalyst to bring to light power relationships, to localize their positions, to identify the point of application and the adopted methodologies. Instead of analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it is a question of power relationships investigated through the antagonism of strategies»<sup>50</sup>.

In my opinion, the capacity for autonomy that allows phenomena of resistance must however be investigated at the level of a normative linguistic competence. It is plausible to conceive a sort of spur to emancipation that is ground on substantive grounds, and this is again a good reason to consider the role of the content of beliefs and actions. In Brandom’s account of “recognition” in scorekeeping terms the possibility to undertake an autonomous perspective is bound to deontic attitudes and deontic status<sup>51</sup>. Recognition seems a fundamental requirement for an agent to be autonomous, but reciprocal recognition is possible by virtue of shared commitments. Beside the basic form of “simple recognition” through which we recognize each other by virtue of our common intentionality toward natural environment, self-consciousness requires “robust” recognition. Simple recognition entails to have a conception of the self in a double sense. First, an agent recognizes herself as something as a self i.e. as able differentially to respond to environmental stimuli moving from the satisfaction of basic desires (such as the attitude of “hunger”).

Second, an agent must have a capacity for *recognition*. He must have a conception of the self as able to do what is required in order to be taking or treating something as a *self*, namely a subject of normative status of *authoritative* (in the sense of probative, though still provisional and defensible) *commitments* as to how things are. This second sense implies reflexivity because the agent recognizes himself among those whom he recognizes. Starting from simple recognition, the agent can reach the dimension of “robust” recognition if he is disposed to acknowledging the

<sup>50</sup> M. Foucault, *Why Study Power: the Question of Subject*, in H.L. Dreyfus, P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, the University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> For the analysis of recognition in scorekeeping terms see R. Brandom, *The Structure of Deste and recognition. Self-Consciousness and Self-Constitution*, paper for the Conference *The Social Space of Reasons*, Venice, 1996.

simple recognitions of others and undertaking the consequent commitments by himself. In Brandom's terms: «If a robust recognizes b, then a acknowledges the (probative, but provisional and defensible) authority of b's successful simple recognitions. Robust recognition, we have seen, is a kind of simple recognition: simple recognition as able to take others to be simple recognizers. If b *robustly* recognizes someone, then that recognition is *successful* just in case it satisfies b's desire for robust recognition. If b's robust recognition of someone is successful in this sense, then in virtue of robustly recognizing b, a must acknowledge b's robust recognition as authoritative. But since by hypothesis a *does* robustly recognize b, we have a symmetry of robust recognition. Since, as we have seen, robust recognition is transitive, this means that a will acknowledge the authority of b's robust recognition of a. So a counts as robustly recognizing himself. Thus robust self-consciousness is achievable only through *reciprocal* recognition: being robustly recognized by at least some of those one robustly recognizes. This means that a *community* (a kind of universal) is implicitly constituted by one's own robust recognitions, and actually achieved insofar as they are reciprocated. That is the sort of reciprocally cognitive community within which alone genuine (robust) self-consciousness is possible: the "I" that is "We" and "We" that is "I"»<sup>52</sup>.

I think that Brandom's theory of recognition is useful for understanding the conditions of the development of autonomy. If we consider the question of socialization, it is relevant to grasp the right way in which a child comes to acquire a capacity for autonomy. Without the parents' recognitions of their child's successful recognitions autonomy could be dramatically undermined. Only by starting from a nonoppressive education is it possible to become a robust recognizer and consequently be able to recognize the simple recognitions of others. To make reciprocal recognition clearer it is necessary to consider the communicative competence we acquire during our cognitive and moral development. Recognition is recognition of inferentially structured commitments<sup>53</sup>. This thesis implies that I am not forced to follow commitments that are valid for a person or a group of persons or a community. If a person was educated in an open and flexible manner then he has concrete chances of being autonomous because he becomes ready to take part in the game of giving and asking for reasons, and this implies the consideration of all the reasons I can plausibly come to know.

My option introduces a notion of autonomy that is weaker than procedural theories because, at the same time, it tries to understand the role

<sup>52</sup> Ivi, p. 32.

<sup>53</sup> This theoretical option differs from the Hegelian interpretation of recognition and the space of reasons offered by Italo Testa in his essay *Seconda natura e riconoscimento*, in *Lo spazio sociale delle ragioni: da Hegel in avanti*, Guerini, Milano, 2007 forthcoming.

of the content for autonomous agency. Even if we are not so sure about inferential material commitments, if we participate in public discussions we have the possibility of coming to know and inherit them. Moreover, if we have the chance to participate in fruitful and open dialogues, i.e. we are exposed to different reasons, we can reach an autonomous point of view, namely that point from which we can accept or refuse validity claims.

Because of the participation in the game of giving and asking for reasons, we can master the communicative structure of justification by “default” and “challenge”. Autonomy is relational in two senses: (1) the “semantic” sense that shows the inferential commitments (governed by material incompatibility) agents must acknowledge and (2) the “pragmatic” sense that reveals the normative structure of that acknowledgment as a social net of deontic attitudes.

Which is the competence an agent must possess to be able to constitute an autonomous and critical voice in the public space? Let us consider the case of a politician who is committed to the following action: «If the dissidents attack, I shall respond to them». From the point of view of the justification by default, P could refer to his/her own knowledge of the norms that regulate war conflicts, or to the authority of others who are reliable. Naturally, this knowledge depends on the content of norms authorizing certain practical commitments. The fundamental trait of the scorekeeping model is that it represents a dynamic model, in which social practices are always exposed to the risk of dissent. In this context, social practices entail the dimension of “challenge”, i.e. the case in which the scorekeeper challenges the interlocutor to justify and eventually to repudiate his/her commitment. The speech acts implied by this critical role are: disavowals, queries and challenges. Even in the case in which an agent acquires the entitlement to act by deferral, i.e. by indicating a testimonial path whereby entitlement to act can be inherited, the query and the challenge assume the function of fostering P’s reflection. But if P can refer to the authority of a set of legal norms, it becomes difficult for the scorekeeper to alter the score of conversation. The disavowal is successful if the scorekeeper shows to P that his/her inference implies incompatible commitments from the subjective incompatibility perspective: for example that the response to the attack entails catastrophic consequences. In this case, P can be forced to perform a different inference such as: «If the dissidents attack, I shall find a diplomatic solution».



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