

Relational Autonomy: A Possible Portrayal

Lisa Bin

ABSTRACT

L'articolo intende analizzare il concetto di autonomia e, a tal fine, si definisce tale concetto attraverso un approccio relazionale. Tale approccio si caratterizza per un'attenzione particolare rispetto al giocato dal contesto sociale nello sviluppo dell'autonomia. Inoltre, l'articolo sviluppa la concezione di autonomia come concetto multidimensionale, così come presentato da Catriona Mackenzie. Successivamente, in tre paragrafi, presenta quindi nel dettaglio i tre assi che compongono il concetto di autonomia: determinazione di sé (self-determination), governo, o controllo, del sé (self-governance), e stima di sé (self-authorization).

The article discusses the concept of autonomy. To do so, it frames such a concept through relational approaches that highlight the role played by social contexts in the development of autonomy. Additionally, it develops Catriona Mackenzie's intuition of

autonomy as a multidimensional concept. Then, in three different paragraphs, it presents and analyses the three axes that define autonomy: self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization.

PAROLE CHIAVE

AUTONOMIA; AUTONOMIA RELAZIONALE; AUTODETERMINAZIONE; AUTOVERNO E AUTOAUTORIZZAZIONE.

KEY WORDS

AUTONOMY; RELATIONAL AUTONOMY; SELF-DETERMINATION; SELF-GOVERNANCE AND SELF-AUTHORIZATION.

1.1 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCEPT

Aim of this article is to define the concept of autonomy through relational perspectives on such a concept. However, since the term relational autonomy «does not refer to a single unified conception of autonomy but is rather an umbrella term, designating a range of related perspectives»¹, the following paragraph provides some preliminary information, highlighting the main characteristics of a relational approach. To do so, it analyses two

¹ C. Mackenzie and N. Stoljar (eds.), *Relational Autonomy Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*, New York, 2000a, p.1.

arguments that discuss individualistic and over-rationalistic conceptions of autonomy.

Even though relational accounts underscore the social nature of the self, this work does not discuss metaphysical claims concerning the nature of human beings. Some premises are intrinsic in discussing autonomy and in challenging atomistic views of the self. For example, it considers agents as causally connected. Despite this, this article does not examine any metaphysical hypothesis. I will only briefly mention a concern often connected with the subject. For, it seems that agents cannot be autonomous if every action they perform is the result of anteceded

ent - social or biological - causes. Therefore, determinism appears as a threat to autonomy since it might prevent agents from achieving their values, realizing their choices, or having authentic intentions. But, according to relational approaches:

Determinism is only a global threat to the possibility of autonomy on the assumption that agency is only genuinely autonomous if it is uncaused or determined by no reason whatsoever. However, that one is autonomous does not mean that one's choices are uninfluenced, or uncaused, for it is doubtful that such notion is even coherent. Autonomous agency does not imply that one mysteriously escapes altogether from social influence but rather that one is able to fashion a certain response to it².

Before proceeding with the analysis of relational theories, I also suggest that, from a relational standpoint, underscoring the role of social contexts in the constitution of personalities does not mean stating that agents are essentially and exclusively composed of their relations.

As Catriona Mackenzie and Nicole Stoljar point out³, Jennifer Nedelsky has been the first one to provide an account of relational autonomy. In her essay *Reconceiving Autonomy: Sources, Thoughts and Possibilities*, she identifies the fundamental characteristic of relational approaches:

The autonomy I am talking about does remain an individual value, [...] but it takes its meaning no less from the recognition that individuality cannot be conceived of in isolation from the social context in which that individuality comes to being. The value of autonomy will at some level be inseparable from the relations that make it possible; there will thus be a social component built into the meaning of autonomy⁴.

2 L. Barclay, *Autonomy and the Social Self*, in C. Mackenzie and N. Stoljar (eds.), "Relational Autonomy Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self", New York, 2000a, p.54.

3 C. Mackenzie and N. Stoljar (eds.), *Relational Autonomy Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*, New York, 2000a.

4 J. Nedelsky, *Reconceiving Autonomy: Sources, Thoughts and Possibilities*, in "Yale Journal of Law and Feminism", (1989) n.1, pp. 35-36.

Thus, relational theorists claim that abstracting individuals from their social context does not acknowledge how individual identities develop. Agents forge their identities within a background composed of social relationships and different – often conflicting – components such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Accordingly, relational theories underscore the social nature of the self, reflecting on the crucial role played by power structures and by social dynamics. Consequently, the challenge at stake is to argue against individualistic and over-rationalistic approaches to autonomy by providing an account of the concept that focuses on the embedded nature of human beings.

According to a widespread definition of autonomy, agents are autonomous if they possess control over their decision-making processes, and they can provide reasons that are their own. Such theories are the so-called procedural conceptions of autonomy⁵. Based on those conceptions, achieving autonomy is possible only if the process underlying the development of values, actions, or desires is of a proper sort. For it is true that there are procedural and relational conceptions

of autonomy⁶, this paragraph addresses classical versions of procedural conceptions - like Frankfurt's - in which autonomy requires wholehearted identification at a higher-order level with lower-order motives, preferences, or desires. The fallacy of this argument, as John Christmas pointed out, relies on the fact that obtaining some control over one's mental processes is not enough to consider someone as autonomous, due to the role that social context plays in the constitution of the self and, consequently, of autonomy.

For one can claim that I am autonomous just in case I can turn a reflective eye to certain aspects of my character, even those aspects can only be defined relative to external relations I have (or have had) with others. If political institutions and social patterns have the effect of distancing me from those connections by

5 Some examples can be found both in Gerard Dworkin (1988) and Frankfurt (1988).

6 See Paragraph 4 Autonomy as Self-governance.

which I, in part, define myself, and if upon due reflection I experience profound self-alienation when I realize the extent of this distancing, then those social patterns that induce this phenomenon are inimical to autonomy⁷.

Therefore, the process of finding one's law can only occur in social conditions that foster certain kinds of social relations rather than others. For instance, avoiding an analysis of the social contexts underestimates the role played by political institutions in carrying out oppressive policies. Mere rationalistic theories sometimes fail to identify autonomous agents because they do not consider how oppressed and dominated individuals, or minorities «endorse many of their first order commitments and connections (the very ones forced upon them by their oppressive circumstances)»⁸. So, without denying the importance of agents' abilities to reflect upon their decision, relational theorists claim the necessity to establish if this process is feasible in the first place. Merely reflecting on an agent's choices, or values, without questioning the environment where those choices or values developed can fail in providing a complete account of what an autonomous agent is. Additionally, procedural approaches do not consider how an analysis of the social context can illustrate how a decision or a choice might depend on some factors that damage self-understanding. For instance:

A person who endorses [even completely] his decision while in an uncontrollable rage, or while on heavy doses of hallucinating drugs, or having been denied minimal education and exposure to alternatives does not adequately reflect in this way⁹.

Precisely, those theories do not recognise the role played by social contexts in the development of competency conditions required to an autonomous agent, such as «self-control, capacities for rational thought, and freedom from debilitating pathologies, systematic

7 J. Christman, *The Politics of Persons*, New York, 2009, p.166.

8 J. Christman, *Relational Autonomy, Liberal Individualism and The Social Constitution of the Self*, in "Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition" (2014), Vol.117 N.1/2, p.153.

9 Ivi, p.154.

self-deception and so on»¹⁰. Moreover, pure procedural accounts do not include some abilities in the range of skills required for autonomy even though they deeply influence one's life, such as relational skills, such as empathy or compassion.

The second target of relational theories has been individualistic theories of autonomy. Such theories appear to be connected to liberal individualism, causing overlap between the concepts of autonomy and individuality. Not all forms of individualism are toxic or appalling. Relational theorists have not criticised individualism per se, but because of how liberal theories have shaped it. Accordingly, it fosters selfishness and self-aggrandisement both in social and political dynamics¹¹. From Rawls to Kymlicka, many forms of liberalism have been developed, but it consists of doctrine that:

generally, involves the approach to the justification of political power emerging from the social contract tradition of the European Enlightenment, where the authority of the state is seen to rest exclusively on the will of a free and independent citizenry. [...] Central to the specification of justice in this tradition are the interests and choices of independent, self-governing citizens, whose voice lends legitimacy to the power structures that enact and constitute justice in this sense¹².

According to John Christman¹³, liberal theories include at least four main concerns; a supposed valued neutrality, a justificatory regress, the role of integration and agreement, and the value of individualism. From a relational point of view, this latter is problematic because it assumes an unencumbered self, abstracted from its background and its self-constituting experiences. Moreover, it supposes the existence of a subject that can rationally choose between values, norms, or principles. Thus, by doing so, individualism

10 Ivi, p.155.

11 L. Code in *What Can She Know*, 1991 has analyzed the relation between individualism and autonomy.

12 J. Christman and J. Anderson, *Introduction*, in J. Christman and J. Anderson (eds.), *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, New York, 2005, p.4.

13 *Ibidem*.

promotes «mutual indifference among people by leading its adherents to pursue their own well-being in disregard of the costs they impose on others and to lose the concern for each other they would have otherwise had»¹⁴.

Furthermore, relational theorists argue that the overlap between autonomy and individuality leads liberal societies to perpetuate patterns of social inequality. By only emphasising formal equality, liberals are indeed failing to «deliver substantial equality and individual freedom, precisely because it failed to address those social forces, such as gender socialization, that radically delimit the actual choices of some individuals»¹⁵. For instance, financial disadvantages, gender-based dynamics, or race discriminations can seriously lessen agents' chances to become autonomous. Or, as Marilyn Friedman points out, highlighting the relationship between autonomy and liberal individualism is crucial because

- the autonomy of the few is enabled precisely by exploitative social arrangements; some persons labor tediously in subordination and deprivation while others are thereby freed to reflect on their desires and concerns. These are serious issues for anyone concerned about autonomy as a social idea¹⁶.

Accordingly, relational theories criticise the concept of liberal autonomy because of its inability to recognise the role played by social contexts and the disadvantages that such societies are perpetrating.

This paragraph focused on defining a relational approach to autonomy and it has also pointed out the differences between relational approaches and two other kinds of approaches: pure procedural approaches and individualistic approaches to autonomy. The next paragraph will define relational autonomy through a multidimensional approach.

14 M. Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, New York, 2003, p.16.

15 L. Barclay, *Autonomy and the Social Self*, in C. Mackenzie and N. Stoljar (eds.), «Relational Autonomy Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self», New York, 2000a, p.56.

16 M. Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, New York, 2003, p.46.

1.2 RELATIONAL AUTONOMY AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONCEPT

This paragraph frames the concept of relational autonomy through a multidimensional approach. First, it defines a multidimensional approach then it highlights its advantages. Moreover, it shortly presents each axis of this approach. To do so, it refers to Mackenzie's account of autonomy as she has developed it in her articles *Three Dimensions of Autonomy: A Relational Analysis*¹⁷ and *Responding to the Agency Dilemma*¹⁸.

Before shaping a multidimensional approach, Mackenzie provides some remarks that justify the use of such an approach. Precisely, she distinguishes between unitary and multidimensional concepts. A unitary concept is one «for which there is a single set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the correct application of the concept»¹⁹. Mackenzie includes in this category natural kind terms such as objects, or animals. She notices how sometimes this mechanism applies to moral philosophy as well. However, moral concepts are not unitary concepts. Instead, they are multidimensional notions. For instance, autonomy «is employed for different purposes in different social and normative contexts, and in these different contexts it might be appropriate to set different thresholds for satisfying the conditions for autonomy»²⁰. Accordingly, Mackenzie defines autonomy as a multidimensional concept involving three distinct and interdependent axes: self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization.

This paragraph sketches the main characteristics of each dimension, while the following sections provide a more detailed analysis

17 C. Mackenzie, *Three Dimensions of Autonomy: A Relational Analysis* in A. Veltman and M. Piper (eds.), *Autonomy, Oppression and Gender*, New York, 2014.

18 C. Mackenzie *Responding to the Agency Dilemma: Autonomy, Adaptive Preferences, and Internalized Oppression*, in M. Oshana (ed.), «Personal Autonomy and Social Oppression», New York, 2015.

19 C. Mackenzie *Three Dimensions of Autonomy: A Relational Analysis*, in A. Veltman and M. Piper (eds.), «Autonomy, Oppression and Gender», New York, 2014, p.16.

20 Ivi, p.16.

of all the components. Specifically, Paragraph 3 focuses on self-determination through Marina Oshana's conception. Paragraph 4 analyses self-governance by juxtaposing Marilyn Friedman's interpretation of the concept and John Christman's account. Paragraph 5 argues self-authorization through Paul Benson's intuition of the concept. It also refers to Anderson and Honneth's conception of self-authorization to specify its facets. In the end, the conclusions deepen the analysis of multidimensional analysis of autonomy by comparing the three dimensions.

Describing autonomy in terms of a multidimensional concept allows to «map out the different dimensions or axes of the concept of autonomy in a way that makes sense of our complex, and sometimes conflicting, intuitions about autonomy and our diverse autonomy-related social practices»²¹. Furthermore, a multidimensional approach to relational autonomy is responsive to human vulnerability since it does not assume agents as self-sufficient, rational contractors. Instead

The conditions for self-determination, self-governance and self-authorization cannot be specified in a such a way that these dimensions of autonomy are inconsistent with human vulnerability, dependency, or social relation of care²².

Additionally, it does not picture an ideally just society, as according to, for example, the Rawlsian model. Rather its «starting point is the individual as situated in, shaped, and constrained by her socio-relational context in its complexity, [...] characterized by social oppression, injustice and inequality»²³.

Thus, the first advantage of a multidimensional approach to autonomy is that it accounts for our precognition of autonomy, or that agents are autonomous in various degrees, and that several and different components shape individuals' autonomy. Accordingly, «we may find that in different contexts certain dimensions of autonomy, and the condition that fall under them, may be more

²¹ Ivi, p.19.

²² Ivi, p.21.

²³ Ivi, p.23.

salient than others»²⁴. In other words, autonomy is a matter of domain and degrees. In this way, the three axes preserve the ductility of the concept of autonomy. Moreover, Mackenzie's hypothesis of relational autonomy as a multidimensional concept weighs the role of social and political institutions. Therefore, it aims to identify oppressive dynamics and improve the environment in which individuals grow and develop. Additionally, a multidimensional approach focuses on the relations between the three axes. Indeed, even though autonomy is divided into three dimensions, they all still refer to the same concept.

The first dimension of autonomy is self-determination. It involves external, structural, and socio-relational conditions. Or precisely, it consists of «having the freedom and opportunity to make and enact choices of practical import to one's life that is, choices about what to value, who to be, what to do»²⁵. Specifically, it involves freedom conditions and opportunity conditions. Freedom conditions are the political and personal liberties necessary for leading a self-determining life, such as freedom of expression, thought, or association. On the other hand, opportunity conditions assure that agents can access an adequate array of significant opportunities. In other words, opportunity conditions are «ways of life, "dense web of action and interactions" which depend on social practices, with their implicit rules, conventions and shared meaning»²⁶. Both freedom and opportunity conditions deal with the role that social contexts play in defying autonomy. For these reasons, it is possible to assert that «self-determination is typically a practical precondition for autonomy as self-governance»²⁷, or that it deals with the requisites necessary for autonomy to develop.

The second axis of a multidimensional approach to relation autonomy is self-governance. A definition of this concept has already been provided. It involves having

²⁴ Ivi, p.40.

²⁵ Ivi, p.25.

²⁶ Ivi, p.27.

²⁷ Ivi, p.25.

Skills and capacities necessary to make choices and enact decisions that express or cohere with one's reflectivity constituted diachronic practical identity. The self-governance dimension of autonomy picks out autonomy conditions (competence and authenticity) that are in some sense internal to the person, whereas the self-determination axis identifies external, structural conditions²⁸.

Focusing on self-governance, relational approaches underline the connection between social contexts and personal identity. This said, analysing and determining the relationship between internal and external conditions might appear problematic and one could encounter the risk to overlap the two. However, asserting that the two dimensions are interconnected does not mean assuming a complete overlap between the concepts. Even if social contexts deeply influence the kind of skills and competencies required for self-governance, self-determination and self-governance represent two points of view on autonomy. One is directed to the practical condition for autonomy and allows to address oppressive dynamics. The other one points at the inner processes, at the array of skills that agents have. Those two dimensions are complementary and stress how complex the concept of autonomy is. Thus, without overlapping the two aspects, a relational account «points to the fact of developmental and ongoing dependency and to the extensive interpersonal, social and institutional scaffolding necessary for self-governance»²⁹.

If self-determination requires freedom and opportunity conditions, self-governance requires authenticity and competence conditions. Authenticity conditions specify the requirement for an action to fit one's motivational structure. As the previous section mentioned, relational accounts are often critical with pure procedural approaches to authenticity conditions since they fail to recognise how those processes formed. Or, hierarchical or endorsement accounts do not consider the internalized effects of psychological oppres-

28 Ivi, p.31.

29 Ivi, p.22.

sion, that is, the way oppression shape agents' practical identities and motivational structures, for example their preferences, values and cares. Furthermore, criteria such as identification, wholeheartedness, or endorsement, seem to rule out any kind of ambivalence or internal psychic conflict or fragmentation with self-governance³⁰.

Based on those critiques, some relational theorists reject authenticity conditions. However, as Mackenzie points out, it is not possible to separate self-governance from the self that governs itself. Additionally, John Christman's historical account has been responsive to the critiques against authenticity conditions, and he has defined authenticity, in a relational way, as «non-alienation upon (historical sensitive, adequate) self-reflection, given one's diachronic practical identity and one's position in the world»³¹.

On the other hand, competence conditions specify the cognitive skills required for self-governance. Relational theories have argued that one cannot over-rationalise the competencies required for critical reflection. Often, skills as emotional responsiveness, empathy, or imagination have been excluded from the array of the capabilities of the autonomous agent, even though they are constitutive of human beings. Considering this, relational theorists aim to be responsive to those skills as well as of agents' rationality.

The third and last facet of autonomy is self-authorization.

Self-authorization involves regarding oneself as having the normative authority to be self-determining, or self-governing. In other words, it involves regarding oneself as authorized to exercise practical control over one's life and to determine one's own values and identity-defying moments³².

Self-Authorization embraces three conditions. The first one is accountability, or a per-

30 Ivi, p.31.

31 J. Christman, *The Politics of Persons*, New York, 2009, p.155.

32 C. Mackenzie *Three Dimensions of Autonomy: A Relational Analysis*, in A. Veltman and M. Piper (eds.), "Autonomy, Oppression and Gender", New York, 2014, p.18.

son's consideration of themselves as accountable for their action. Furthermore, agents should also possess self-evaluative attitudes. For example, they should be in a self-affective relation with themselves or have self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem. Additionally, persons should possess social recognition. In other words, all these phenomena involve «regarding oneself as responsible to oneself and as answerable and accountable to others, for one's beliefs, values, commitments, and reasons»³³. Accordingly, a relational account of self-authorization highlights that persons are always subject to someone else's demands and how they actively elaborate reasons, or endorse decisions, and sometimes must assume responsibility for those decisions. Thus, self-authorization is a necessary component of autonomy, since «a person must not only be capable of understanding and responding but must also regard herself as a valid source of self-authorizing claims»³⁴. Self-authorization does not involve holding into account every value, belief, or cognitive status. Instead, as Paragraph 5 underscores, it is a disposition to be answerable, to provide reasons, and to be willing to discuss and defend them. By focusing on the social context, relational accounts recognise the role played by social recognition in shaping individual identities. In fact,

It is always possible to find or think up examples of heroic persons who hold appropriate self-evaluating attitudes even in situations where they are despised and humiliated by others. However, psychologically these self-evaluative attitudes are typically dependent on intersubjective social relations, that is on whether a person is regarded as a respect-worthy, autonomous agent by others³⁵.

This paragraph introduced the notion of autonomy as a multidimensional concept and highlighted the main characteristics of each axis. The next one will discuss the concept of autonomy as self-determination.

33 Ivi, p.36.

34 Ibidem.

35 Ivi, p.37.

1.3 AUTONOMY AS SELF-DETERMINATION

To characterise self-determination, the paragraph refers to Marina Oshana's account as she has developed it in *Autonomy and Free Agency*³⁶. Then, it presents some examples that highlight the role played by the external condition in the development of agents' autonomy. In the end, it analyses some critiques to a conception of autonomy as self-determination, and it suggests some possible resolutions. However, since the concept of oppression plays a crucial role in the following chapters, it is appropriate to define it before proceeding any further with the discussion. I will refer to Natalie Stoljar's definition of oppression, according to which it is a phenomenon that «occurs when a group [or individuals] suffer systematic injustice due to institutional structures or background social practices»³⁷. This definition has a twofold meaning. It addresses both external conditions that undermine autonomy and the insidious ways that lead agents to internalise oppression. Or, persons might become indirectly responsible for diminishing their autonomy by self-perpetuating forms of oppression. So, self-determination not only highlights how oppressive conditions narrow agents' possibility, but it also underscores how oppressed individuals «come to believe in the ideology of oppression and make choices, and form preferences and desires in the light of that ideology»³⁸.

By recalling the definition sketched in the last chapter, self-determination concerns the role played by the social context into agents' identities through both freedom and opportunity conditions. Accordingly, self-determination focuses mainly on how agents must have «power and authority within central social roles and arrangements»³⁹ to be autonomous.

36 M. Oshana, *Autonomy and Free Agency* in J. S. Taylor, "Personal Autonomy New Essays on Personal Autonomy and its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy", New York, 2005.

37 N. Stoljar, *Autonomy and Adaptive Preference Formation*, in A. Veltman and M. Piper (eds.), "Autonomy, Oppression and Gender", New York, 2014 p.228.

38 Ivi, pp. 227-228.

39 M. Oshana, *Autonomy and Free Agency* in J.S. Taylor, "Personal Autonomy New Essays on Personal Autono-

It is important to stress how this does not imply that agents must control, or free themselves from all external influences in order to achieve autonomy. It would be incoherent not only with a relational approach to autonomy, but it would also promote a misleading conception of the self. Autonomy as self-determination does not disconnect individuals from their socio-relational contexts. Instead, the axis of self-determination stresses the substantially social nature of persons and the fact that oppressive social roles and relations should not comprise agents. Furthermore, by proving how agents are premised on their ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, a relational analysis of autonomy as self-determination demonstrates how

Wholehearted identification or authenticity one experiences relative to one's cognitive and conative states, to one's physicality and to one's social attachments, depends largely on the self-conception brought to the process of reflective appraisal⁴⁰.

Or, as Oshana states in another article, that «central traits such as gender, and ethnicity animate social interactions by influencing the way a person is categorized and dealt with others»⁴¹.

Self-determination also points to the fact that some social structures deeply frustrate autonomy and narrow the opportunities one has of choosing a career or even a partner. For instance, according to this «being Black in a racist society situates one in a position that narrows the range of one's autonomy even if being Black is not itself antithetical to autonomy»⁴². So, if individuals live in an oppressive environment, their choices are deeply affected by other persons or social institutions and, consequently, their possibilities to live a self-directed life are diminished.

Moreover, self-determination addresses the fact that only focusing on agents' decision-making processes is not enough to analyze auton-

my and its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy", New York, 2005, p.184.

40 Ivi, p.198.

41 M. Oshana, *Autonomy and Self-Identity*, in J. Christman and J. Anderson (eds.), "Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays", New York, 2005, p.79.

42 Ivi, p.92.

my. Let us consider the example of a girl raised in a strongly patriarchal household that has internalised a gender-based conception of the so-called traditional family. Considering her future as a spouse and her choice to leave her work in order to take care of her offspring,

- her preference could be the result of learning experience (autonomous) or the result of adaptive preference formation (non-autonomous): one cannot tell from the preferences alone whether the process they have been shaped by adaptation⁴³.

Consequently, self-determination concerns the fact that agents who lack opportunities and live in oppressive social contexts are lacking effective control over their lives. That is to say, they are not fully autonomous in terms of the opportunity at their disposal.

To highlight the role of self-determination as an axis of autonomy, the paragraph considers now three examples. The first one is the example of the voluntary slave. Oshana observes how a voluntary slave is not an autonomous agent, since «having become a slave he has no authority over those aspects of his social situations that influence his will and the direction of his life»⁴⁴. Or, voluntary slaves are not autonomous in terms of self-determination because they lack practical opportunities to direct their lives, for happy and content they might be. This example allows to stresses on the importance of a multidimensional approach to autonomy. In fact people who choose slavery might be reflective of their cognitive status. However, they might nevertheless lack autonomy as of self-determination.

The second example concerns Andrea Veltman's essay *Autonomy and Oppression at Work*. By analysing what she calls eudemistically meaningless works⁴⁵, Veltman notices

43 N. Stoljar, *Autonomy and Adaptive Preference Formation*, in A. Veltman and M. Piper (eds.), "Autonomy, Oppression and Gender", New York, 2014, p.234.

44 M. Oshana, *Personal Autonomy and Society*, in "Journal of Social Philosophy", (1998) Vol.29, n.1, p.87.

45 "By eudemistically meaningless work, I mean work that does not develop or exercise human capabilities, permit independent judgment, integrate conception and execution, or otherwise facilitate expression of agency". A. Veltman, *Autonomy and Oppression at Work* in

the dependency between the development of autonomy and work environments. Specifically, this example points at the fact that self-determination highlights how the different opportunities subjects have at their disposal can be the cause of their diminished autonomy. Considering Kornhauser studies on workers of the automobile industries and their mental health, Veltman finds that «individuals working extensively at routine production jobs tend to have poor mental health and, in particular, diminished drives toward accomplishing self-determined life goals»⁴⁶. Accordingly, a poor work environment, not only diminishes agent's self-determination in terms of financial support, or of career opportunities. It also makes agents believe and internalise the belief that they are worth less opportunity conditions.

That is to say,

In a social context in which work dominates people's lives and plays a central role in identity formation, it is impossible to think that alienated work would have no impact on a person's self-conception and her relations with others in other spheres of her life⁴⁷.

Consequently, Veltman's example underscores how a poor job environment, often caused by a lack of meaningful opportunities, deeply influences workers' mental health and, consequently, their autonomy as self-determination in two ways: externally (they de facto have fewer opportunity conditions, for example, in terms of career opportunities) and from their inner point of view (they might feel like they deserve less opportunity conditions).

The last example is Paul Benson's account of feminine socialisation. It aims to show how deeply manipulative social contexts can be and how this is undermining, in this specific case, women's autonomy⁴⁸. Benson notices how so-

A. Veltman and M. Piper (eds.), "Autonomy, Oppression and Gender", New York, 2014, p.280.

46 A. Veltman, *Autonomy and Oppression at Work* in A. Veltman and M. Piper (eds.), "Autonomy, Oppression and Gender", New York, 2014, p.289.

47 Ivi, p.291.

48 I do not want to say that women are the only individuals that receive pressure over their physical appearance in contemporary societies. I am just using Paul Benson's example of feminine socialization to prove the

cialisation lessens women's autonomy in western societies by giving great significance to their physical appearance. Women «are [often] socially trained to be blind to the reasons there are for them to regard their appearance differently than the norms of femininity recommend»⁴⁹. For instance, he considers the examples of commercials that constantly invite women to look younger, or the language that is often used against women that choose to detach from beauty-fashion campaign standards. Then, he acknowledges that, by enhancing certain kinds of socialisation, not only is society contributing for create self-relational problems to young women, but it also «supports wide-ranging prerogatives for men at the price of corresponding restriction on women»⁵⁰. By creating so called double-standard, feminine socialisation also fosters inequality regarding the distribution of opportunities in a society. Additionally, the case of feminine socialization underscores how pure procedural accounts of autonomy might fail in recognizing autonomous agents. Since most women have internalised feminine socialisation, they would consider the choices concerning their physical appearance as autonomous. However, what an analysis of autonomy as self-determination shows is that a phenomenon like gender-based socialization has led «women to internalize false construal of their value and, in consequence, to misconstrue many of the reasons there are for them to act»⁵¹.

To conclude, the chapter analyses some critiques to self-determination through Paul Benson's work⁵². The first critique concerns

relation between social-contexts and self-determination. However, I think that his account does not consider how other individuals as males, non-binary people, or transgender persons can receive pressure over their physical appearance as well.

49 P. Benson, *Autonomy and Oppressive Socialization*, in "Social Theory and Practice" (1991) n.17, p.396.

50 Ivi, p.404.

51 Ivi, p.389.

52 The relation of Paul Benson with self-determination, or with substantive accounts of autonomy, is complexed. It might seem contradictory to firstly use one of his examples to show how self-determination is a component of autonomy, and then to present his critiques to such concept. He has developed what he calls a *weak substantive* theory of self-determination, that

self-determination and the fact that it seems to preclude the opportunity for agents to make mistakes. According to this argument, self-determination restricts the contents of agents' preferences and values. However, this is not accurate. As much as it is true that self-determination addresses social contexts and how they engage individuals and their self-conceptions, it does not exclude mistakes or the possibility to engage – consciously or unconsciously – harmful values. It simply states that embracing these values can compromise agents' autonomy. At the same time, affirming that autonomy has a component such as self-determination does not mean embracing paternalistic intervention over people's values. So, self-determination is not shaping individuals and their ideals in a certain way, but it seeks what social structures are appropriate to foster autonomy. A second concern about conceptions such as Oshana's is that they «seriously underestimate possibilities for autonomous agency within oppressive social relations and consequently fail to discern valuable opportunities for internal criticism and resistance»⁵³. However, conceiving autonomy as self-determination does not deny that resistance emerges even in the most oppressive situations. Rather, conceiving autonomy as self-determination states how emancipation can be rather unlikely in some oppressive contexts. Understanding autonomy in this way means addressing political and social institutions to foster most people's autonomy and not only one of the realistically few personalities who can emerge over harsh circumstances.

The third objection concerns the concept of orthonomy or the idea of the correct rule. Self-determination conflates «the power to take ownership of one's action with some-

could be described as a mixture between our axis of self-determination and self-authorization. This allows to present an example that shows the role played by social contexts in the development of autonomy and then to present some critiques he has moved to Oshana's account. However, I think it is clearer to keep the two dimensions separated.

53 P. Benson, *Feminist Intuitions and the Normative Substance of Autonomy* in J. S. Taylor, "Personal Autonomy New Essays on Personal Autonomy and its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy", New York, 2005, p.131.

thing quite different, the power to get things right, or the ability to adopt preferences or values one ought to have (or at least avoid those ought not to have)»⁵⁴. For it is true that by addressing opportunity conditions, self-determination is addressing social dynamics as well. However, one thing is to prove that some social dynamics lessen individuals' autonomy; another one is postulating a specific finite set of values that agents must respect. In this sense, autonomy and orthonomy are two distinct concepts.

Concluding, I would like to clarify that autonomy is globally and locally a matter of degree in a multidimensional perspective. Globally, in a multidimensional approach, self-determination is not the core of autonomy. So, even if the conditions for self-determination do not apply to a specific situation, agents can be nevertheless considered autonomous. Since autonomy is a multidimensional concept, one can lack autonomy as self-determination. However, they might count on autonomy as self-authorization or as self-governance (as seen in the example of the voluntary slave). Additionally, each axis does not represent an all-or-nothing concept as well. For, analysing autonomy as self-determination and pointing at the social conditions that prevent the flourishing of autonomy, illustrates specific areas of agents' lives in which they might not be autonomous, rather than stating that, since agents do not possess self-determination in those areas, then they do not possess it at all.

While this paragraph analysed autonomy as self-determination, the next one focuses on the second axis of autonomy: autonomy as self-governance.

1.4 AUTONOMY AS SELF-GOVERNANCE

To present the concept of autonomy as self-governance the paragraph considers both authenticity and capabilities conditions required for self-governance. It firstly introduces authenticity conditions by juxtapos-

54 Ivi, p.132.

ing Marilyn Friedman's intuition and John Christman's historical approach. Then, in presenting capabilities conditions, this paragraph illustrates how it is possible to define self-governance without embracing an over-rationalistic theory. Finally, it confronts self-determination and self-governance to delineate a complete account of autonomy as a multidimensional concept.

In her book *Autonomy, Gender, Politics* Marilyn Friedman states that self-governance focuses on «what it is for choices and actions in particular to be autonomous»⁵⁵. This first characterization of self-governance might appear vague and, in fact, it will be soon clarified; however, the reference to choices and actions highlights the main characteristic of self-governance. Self-governance involves reflecting on how autonomy requires a person to

- reflect on her wants, desires and so on and take up an evaluative stance with respect to them. She can endorse or identify with them in some way or being wholeheartedly committed to them, or she can reject or repudiate them or be only half-heartedly committed to them⁵⁶.

Because of this, such conceptions are part of the so-called content-neutral accounts. Content-neutral accounts acknowledge the role of agents in their behavior or choices; they recognise how autonomy requires agents' participation. By doing this, they also describe the processes that lead people to take an active part in what they do without being simply passive observers of their lives. From the agent's point of view, self-governance is a necessary requisite to live a self-determining life: it represents how agents can choose when facing an array of alternatives. Aim of this paragraph is to specify this feature, avoiding what was pointed out in Paragraph 1 about over-rationalistic conceptions of autonomy.

To define authenticity conditions this chapter refers to Friedman's account of self-reflection. When introducing such a concept, Friedman notices how it gives an imprimatur to concerns or commitments and allows

55 M. Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, New York, 2003, p.4.

56 *Ibidem*.

agents to recognise those concerns as authentic. Specifically, self-reflection involves having a specific stance toward one's values and can be summarised in a clear way by stating that when a person

Chooses or acts in accord with wants or desires that she has self-reflectively endorsed, and her endorsement is somehow part of her behaviour, then, according to this familiar generic account, she is behaving autonomously. When wants and desires lead to choice or action without having been self-reflectively endorsed by the person whose wants and desires they are, the resulting choices and actions are not autonomous⁵⁷.

Additionally, self-reflection specifies two different features of autonomous actions. First, self-reflective actions and choices are caused – at least partially – by a person's introspection on wants and desires that already characterise them. Second, self-reflective actions or choices must reflect commitments, values, or desires that someone aims to reaffirm. Friedman specifies that an autonomous behavior depends on the relation between actions or choices and an agent's deeper concerns. In her account, deeper concerns are those abiding concerns, usually preferred over other competing wants and values. Of course, a self that is constantly aware of its deepest concerns is not assumed. For how it might seem that self-governance calls for self-transparency, Friedman specifies that subconscious activities can actively contribute to self-governance. Or, someone might be self-governing on a specific occasion without being at that time extremely aware of that. In this sense, «long as a persons' choices and action reflect and issue from the self-reflections on her deeper wants and values, that she undertakes from her overall perspective at some level of thought, they have at least minimal degree of autonomy»⁵⁸. Additionally, considering the example of friendships or relationships in general, Friedman's account underlines how feelings constitute reasons for acting autonomously since they express a person's deeper concerns. Or

57 *Ivi*, p.5.

58 *Ivi*, p.8.

It does not matter ultimately whether the term “reason” is used either in the narrow sense best represented as an articulated statement or in wider sense that encompasses any mental state from the standpoint of which an action is good or valuable. What matters in this context is that emotions and desires, as well as imagination, can constitute a kind of reflection on or attention to objects or values of concern⁵⁹.

However, while considering a content-neutral approach, Friedman does not suggest that one’s deepest concern could be averse to autonomy or that one could be deeply influenced by the introjection of oppressive dynamics. Consequently, I suggest that John Christman’s intuition of a historical approach to autonomy as self-governance could be of use. Christman underscores the necessity to consider the process of socialisation that may lead to the development of an agent’s concerns. To avoid including desires that come from a manipulative context into the authentic ones, he introduces the concept of alienation, considering that «autonomy requires that one would not feel alienated from the aspect of oneself in question upon reflection given the conditions under which that factor came about»⁶⁰. Specifically, Christman defines alienation as a combination of cognitive status and affective reaction merging from critical reflection – such as a feeling of constraint or strong rejection. He suggests that when persons feel alienated, they are in a heteronomous relation to the characteristic over they are reflecting. By doing so, Christman’s account connects agents’ decision-making processes and their personal history to track down those concerns that might be the result of a manipulative process. Furthermore, a historical approach considers different personalities and ways to react by recalling individuals’ personal history.

What is important here is that each of us has a certain pattern of thinking and reacting which, generally speaking, is ours alone; it marks our character and personality. This

⁵⁹ Ivi, p.10.

⁶⁰ J. Christman, *The Politics of Persons. Individual Autonomy and Socio-historical Selves*, New York, 2009, p.146.

pattern develops and reflects the social components of our lives as well as the shifts and renewals that characterize our approach to decision-making, emotion, and judgment⁶¹.

Having described authenticity conditions, the paragraph presents two arguments that aim to improve the notion of relational autonomy and that distinguish a relational approach to autonomy to pure procedural accounts. The first one concerns the relation between self-governance and relational autonomy. The second one focuses on the relation between self-governance and individualistic conceptions of the self.

Friedman’s attention in describing social contexts defines her account as a relational one. Moreover, Section II of her book is committed to analyzing the social contexts and the development of autonomy. Here, she recognises the need for «an account [of autonomy] that explores how social relationships both promote and hinder the realization of autonomy»⁶². To do so, she takes into account the development of autonomy in oppressive environments and, specifically, she considers the case of abusive relationships. Specifically, she observes how abusive relationships undermine autonomy in three ways. First, they are coercive and they threaten women’s survival and safety, with the result of hindering the achievement of autonomy. Instead of living according to their values and commitments, people living in abusive relationships are reduced to seeking bare survival and security. Second, abusive relationships force agents to focus on the desires and demands of their abusers. Third, abusers attempt to exercise control over their partner. This constant subjection to someone else’s will is in contrast with autonomy’s fundamental significances. And so, «choices to live under autonomy-undermining conditions may habituate a person to mode of living that diminishes her future content-neutral autonomy, for example, by promoting submissiveness to others»⁶³. By

⁶¹ Ivi, p.150.

⁶² M. Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, New York, 2003, p.95.

⁶³ Ivi, p.154.

doing so, she stresses on the fact that social contexts can deeply frustrate one's autonomy as self-governance. However, autonomy is a matter of degree. Therefore, Friedman notices how women in abusive relations could still possess some level of self-governance.

Additionally, Friedman's analysis is coherent with relational theories since her conception of self-governance does not lead to a detached and individualistic self. Self-governance involves reflective capacities that are deeply rooted in both communal traditions and culture. She observes how self-reflection involves reflecting «in a language that one did not create, according to further norms and standards that one has almost surely [at least partially] taken from others, in light of what is of deep concern to that product of social development that is oneself»⁶⁴. Furthermore, her account underlines how autonomy does not imply a detachment from the context since, even if someone becomes more autonomous about some tradition or authority, they do not stop depending on the social context. On the contrary, they rearrange new commitments or values that reflect their change of perspective.

After describing authenticity conditions, the paragraph focuses on competencies conditions. Several theorists have tried to define the competencies for a relational approach to self-governance; however, none has provided a systematic set of abilities. Due to this, I will mention some of those suggestions to sketch the array of capabilities required for self-governance. In *Self, Society, and Personal Choice* Diana Meyers has highlighted how self-reflection presupposes faculties like memory, imagination, volition, and verbal communication since these faculties relate to the ability to make decisions or, more broadly, life plans. Furthermore, she highlights a feature of autonomy that was considered when presenting Christman's account: the fact that personal autonomy relates to human diversity. The account of self-governance sketched in Meyer's book stresses how every agent has different qualities. That is to say that everyone has a specific way in which their capabilities interact.

⁶⁴ Ivi, p.104.

Finally, Meyer's account suggests that autonomy is a matter of exercise. This consideration is particularly relevant because it recalls the fact that agents should possess opportunity and freedom conditions that enables them to exercise their autonomy.

Another attempt of determining the kind of skills required for self-governance is Catriona Mackenzie's one. Mackenzie suggested that analyzing Martha Nussbaum's capabilities theory can be of use from a relational stance. The first capability considered is represented by senses, imagination and thought as people should be «able to use the senses, to think, imagine and reason – and to do these things in a “truly human” way, a way cultivated by education»⁶⁵. The second one concerns emotions. In Nussbaum's account, emotions represent the ability to attach to people and things outside the self. About this, Mackenzie notices how fear or anxiety should not damage emotional developments. This latter consideration stresses how individuals in oppressive environments might not fully develop their self-governance skills due to the role played by fear in their lives. The third capability analysed is practical reason, or being able to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. Finally, Mackenzie recalls the capability of affiliation. Or the ability to live with others and to care for them, and to show empathy. Affiliation has a second feature that, for how it is part of Nussbaum's definition, should be included in the axis of self-authorization since it involves having social bases of self-respect and treating human beings as dignified beings. Additionally, in *Imagining Oneself Otherwise*, Mackenzie has called for the necessity to investigate the relation between self-governance and representational or imagistic thinking.

Other relational theorists underscore the necessity to rethink the concept of self-governance in light, for example, of vulnerability⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ M. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, pp.33-34. Or see C. Mackenzie, *The importance of Relational autonomy and Capabilities for an Ethics of Vulnerability* in Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds, “Vulnerability. New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy”, New York, 2014.

⁶⁶ See J. Anderson *Autonomy and Vulnerability Entwined* in C. Mackenzie, W. Rogers and S. Dodds, “Vulnerability

They share the conviction that vulnerability should not be understood merely as a weakness. Rather, it is an inevitable feature of human beings that can get sick and that age. Additionally, I would like to point at the fact that characterizing vulnerability is crucial in a relational account of self-governance because it recognises how social contexts can stress vulnerabilities and, therefore, test their self-governance skills. Since, for example:

An asylum seeker incarcerated in a detention centre is vulnerable to mental illness [and so, his ability of self-governance and self-determination are threatened], but the sources of his vulnerability are his political and social circumstances⁶⁷.

To conclude, the chapter focuses on the relationship between the concept of autonomy as self-governance and the one of autonomy as a multidimensional concept. Friedman suggests that autonomy is a multidimensional concept by stressing how an agent must possess «a significant array of opportunities to act in ways that reflect what deeply matters to her» to be autonomous, or on the fact that «in a number of ways, autonomy requires a social context for its realization»⁶⁸. These considerations emphasises the role of autonomy as self-determination, since «self-reflection requires meaningful options that can be weighted in light of wants, values, or other points of reference»⁶⁹. Furthermore, a comparative analysis between self-governance and self-determination is justified since Friedman herself notices that «to be autonomous, someone should have a significant array of opportunities to act in ways that reflect deeply what matters to her»⁷⁰. And so, for as much as Friedman describes her account as content-neutral, I suggest that autonomy can be coherently defined only through multidimen-

ty. *New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*, New York, 2014.

67 C. Mackenzie, *The importance of Relational autonomy and Capabilities for an Ethics of Vulnerability* in C. Mackenzie, W. Rogers and S. Dodds, "Vulnerability. *New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*", New York, 2014, p.38.

68 M. Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, New York, 2003, p.15.

69 *Ibidem*.

70 *Ivi*, p.18.

sional approach. Accordingly, a multidimensional approach to autonomy considers different situations in which autonomy reveals itself and calls for the necessity to consider human beings in their complex nature, made of both social context and cognitive abilities. Therefore, in a multidimensional approach, self-governance underscores the importance of considering the reasons that shape agents' behavior and focusing on the agent's internal point of view, rather than exclusively the external conditions. And so according to self-governance,

personal autonomy is realized by the right sort of reflective self-understanding or internal coherence along with an absence of undue coercion by others. Therefore, autonomy is not a matter of living substantively in any particular way⁷¹.

I would like to recall the example of abusive relationships since it is of use in specifying the relation between self-governance and self-determination. Specifically, it stresses how autonomy is a matter of degree globally and locally. Women in an abusive relationship often do not possess or have a little degree of autonomy as self-determination; however, they might still have autonomy as self-governance – even if it might be diminished. So, even if individuals who choose to stay in an abusive relationship cannot be considered fully autonomous from a self-determination perspective, their choice might nevertheless manifest content-neutral autonomy. About this, Friedman notices how

[Remaining in an abusive relationship] might, that is, cohere with a woman's deeper values and commitments, such as her religious outlook [or her concern to her offspring], and, even under conditions of domestic abuse, it might be the product of a period of uncoerced and unmanipulated self-reflection⁷².

Thus, self-determination and self-governance are two distinct axes of autonomy. Nevertheless they are two sides of the same coin. In other words, the axes are different, but they are not fully separated. The next chapter introduces the third, and last, axis of autonomy: self-authorization.

71 *Ivi*, p.103.

72 *Ivi*, pp.153-154.

1.5 AUTONOMY AS SELF-AUTHORIZATION

To analyse the third facet of autonomy, self-authorization, the paragraph discusses Paul Benson's characterization of the concept. Then, by following Anderson and Honneth's account, it focuses on the three facets of his axis: self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem.

Self-authorization acknowledges that autonomous agents should be able to provide reasons for their choices. Therefore, this axis identifies agents' attitude of being in a position to speak and answer as a condition for autonomy. That is, autonomous persons «must have a certain sense of their own worthiness to act, or of their status as agents, which is not guaranteed by their abilities to act freely by reflectively authorizing their wills and their actions»⁷³. Specifically, Benson observes how self-authorization requires three different features: one's objective fitness to play the role of the answerer, but also one's regard for their abilities and, consequently, social recognition. For instance, it is possible to consider someone who is treated as socially invisible on a gender-based basis or due to his ethnicity. Benson supposes that these discriminatory practices undercut agents' eligibility to actively participate in different relations, such as citizenship, friendship, or familial love. Examining the example of internalized invisibility presented in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Benson notices how due to the awareness of his invisibility the main character does not see himself as socially worthy.

His concern is also that he cannot speak or answer for his action since, having incorporated his invisibility to others in his own attitudes toward himself, he cannot take up the social position of answer for his conduct⁷⁴.

To provide a more detailed understanding of how self-authorization can undermine autonomy, Benson also presents the example of shame. He defines it as a phenomenon that «tends to be disorienting, disrupting behaviour and pro-

ducing confusing in thought. It often leaves the subject feeling helpless»⁷⁵. Thus, shame can lead agents to be dissociated from their cognitive skills because they cannot see themselves as competent anymore. Furthermore, in *Free Agency and Self Worth*, Benson considers the 1944 movie *Gaslight*. In this movie, Ingrid Bergman does not possess self-trust, and she can not value herself as being capable of choosing on her own because she was exposed to manipulative processes. Instead, she is dissociated from her reflective abilities and she does not see herself as a competent agent, even though she might reflect over her commitments. Thus, even if in this movie Bergman possesses self-governance and is «able to commit herself to her effective desires through the higher-order endorsement of them. She feels desperately disoriented, but she need not be wanton, unreflective, or deeply ambivalent»⁷⁶, she has nevertheless lost her consideration as a worthy agent.

Additionally, Benson points that autonomous agents should hold themselves answerable because this means that they have actively embraced these commitments instead of passively absorbing them. Consequently, the theoretical test for self-authorization has the form of a dialogue – real or imagined one – where different points of view face each other. However, this does not mean that agents must value all their commitments to be autonomous. Self-authorization is more a kind of disposition that requires «readiness to engage in critical reflection. Indeed, having such a disposition means positioning oneself as always a potential member of a reflective or deliberative dyad, which is one aspect of the relational view»⁷⁷. Furthermore, this reason-responding model of self-authorization is not a mere rational one. The kind of reasons provided by the autonomous agent can relate to interpretations of relevant personal experiences, or «tell parables or other stories that are chosen and recounted in

73 P. Benson, *Free Agency and Self-Worth*, in "The Journal of Philosophy", (1994), n.12, p.650.

74 P. Benson, *Authority and Voice in Autonomous Agency*, in J. Christman and J. Anderson (eds.), "Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays", New York, 2005, pp.111-112.

75 P. Benson, *Free Agency and Self-Worth*, in "The Journal of Philosophy", (1994), n.12, p.658.

76 Ivi, p.656.

77 A. Westlund, *Reconceiving Relational Autonomy*, in "HYPATIA a journal of feminist philosophy", (2009), n.24(4), p.35.

a way that demonstrate responsiveness to the question; and probably much more besides»⁷⁸. As it was already pointed out, autonomy is a matter of degree. So, this means that an agent's self-authorization could be debilitated in a specific normative context and yet, the same agent, might be able to speak for her reasons within another normative context.

After defying self-authorization through Paul Benson's work, the chapter specifies its feature through Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth's work. As said before, relational autonomy is an account of autonomy that stresses the importance of social relationships in the development of the autonomous agent. Anderson and Honneth observes that, consequently, a rigorous analysis of autonomy requires to focus on the fact that «autonomy is vulnerable to disruption in one's relationship to others»⁷⁹. Therefore, they turn to self-authorization as a necessary component of autonomy because it illustrates how it «is the result of an ongoing intersubjective process, in which one's attitude toward oneself emerges in one's encounter with another's attitude toward oneself»⁸⁰.

Anderson and Honneth have also identified three relations-to-self that characterise autonomy: self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem. Self-respect is «the affectively laden self-conception that underwrites a view of oneself as the legitimate source of reason for acting»⁸¹ and it is determining to autonomy since, if this condition does not apply «it is hard to see how one can take oneself seriously in one's practical reasoning about what to do»⁸². Therefore, agents whose self-esteem has been impaired are less likely to picture themselves as bearers of legit claims. In listing what diminishes self-respect, Anderson and Honneth mention phenomena such as subordination, marginalisation, or exclusion. For instance, in

⁷⁸ Ivi, p.40.

⁷⁹ J. Anderson, and Honneth A., *Autonomy, Vulnerability, Justice*, in J. Christman and J. Anderson (eds.), "Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays", New York, 2005, p.130.

⁸⁰ Ivi, p.131.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² Ivi, p.132.

contemporary liberal societies, those practices threaten autonomy denying the social status of legitimate co-legislators to some agents.

The second dimension of self-authorization is represented by self-trust, and it «has to do with the affectively mediated perceptual capacities by which what is subjectively felt becomes material in the first place»⁸³. Consequently, agents whose self-trust is diminished are not able to live according to their deeper convictions since they do not recognise those desires as worthy. In other words, they doubt themselves as a legit source for desires, convictions, or beliefs, hence they will end up abandoning them or substituting them with others derived from external sources. Moreover, self-trust displays two features of relational autonomy. First, autonomy is a matter of acquisition and maintenance, and not a permanent achievement. Second, autonomy is deeply influenced by agents' relationships. This specific axis of autonomy highlights the connection between an agent's autonomy-related competencies and the social context since it is «essential to self-understanding, critical reflection, and thus autonomy»⁸⁴.

The third feature of self-authorization is self-esteem or the fact that «for the self-interpretative activity central to autonomous reflection presupposes not only a certain degree of quasi-affective openness but also certain semantic resources»⁸⁵. The semantic tools that agents use to define themselves can effectively compromise their autonomy if they are negatively loaded – both from general social standards and from the agent's perspective⁸⁶. Anderson and Honneth consider the example of the stay-at-home dad, if in such case it is associated with unemployed rather than caring, it might be difficult to see oneself as worthwhile, especially in a society that pictures man as the primary source of income in

⁸³ Ivi, p.133.

⁸⁴ Ivi, p.134.

⁸⁵ Ivi, p.136.

⁸⁶ For further remarks on how languages and at-issue content, and not-at-issue content influence agents' perception, see Jason Stanley's *How does propaganda work*, Princeton, 2016.

a family, or that overlaps one's job with one's worthiness. Considering these three facets of autonomy allows to define self-authorization as «an emergent property of individuals as bearers of certain socially situated capabilities»⁸⁷. Therefore, in a nutshell, self-respect, as well as self-trust or self-esteem represent the way persons use to relate to the demand of answers moved by other agents. They constitute a requirement, held from within, of a general disposition of being answerable.

For as much as self-authorization is a constitutive axis of autonomy, I would just point at the fact that, on its own, it does not provide a determining criteria for autonomous actions. Particularly, I do not think that self-authorization alone considers the relation between agents' self-authorization and internalised oppressive dynamics or the case of brainwashing that can occur in totalitarian societies – or more subtle ways even in consumeristic societies. In these cases, agents might feel like they are authorised to promote certain behaviors rather than others. If the propaganda is well-organised and widespread, then agents might even be able to justify their beliefs and to provide reasons. It would be counter-intuitive to define as autonomous an agent who has been exposed to and invasive and propaganda, even if he/she or they might satisfy the criteria of autonomy as self-authorization.

1.6 CONCLUSIONS

After defining the three axes that constitute autonomy, to simplify one could say that: self-authorization constitutes the connection between self-determination (the external conditions) and self-governance (or internal condition). As Andrea Westlund has noticed, self-authorization is «a feature of the agent's psychology, and thus internal to the agent. But it is nonetheless a disposition to be engaged by what is external to the agent, that is by points of view other than

⁸⁷ Anderson J., and Honneth A., *Autonomy, Vulnerability, Justice*, in J. Christman and J. Anderson (eds.), "Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays", New York, 2005, p.137.

her»⁸⁸. Roughly, self-determination analyses the relation between agents and the opportunities they face in a social context, self-governance represents the relation between agents and their decision-making process. Self-authorization constitutes how a specific social context and its opportunities, or its mechanism of oppression, interact with the agent's ability to govern itself, proving how a multidimensional approach to autonomy is flexible enough to analyses situations in their complexity.

I would like to conclude by recalling two considerations made in the previous two chapters to frame a multidimensional approach to autonomy. That is, autonomy is a capability, it is not an inherent property of subjects. Thus, it requires exercise. The account of autonomy sketched in this work denies the existence of autonomy as permanent property. Instead, it refers to the fact that the autonomous agent is autonomous in a contingent situation. This also specifies that autonomy is a matter of degree. A multidimensional account of autonomy considers that the same agent might be more or less autonomous based on a situation. Additionally, agents might also possess a higher or lower degree of autonomy in different moments of their lives. Concluding, I would just remark that highlighting the role of social contexts in the development of autonomy implies a reconceptualization of the concept of responsibility as well.

Lisa Bin - dopo aver conseguito la laurea triennale in Filosofia presso l'Università degli studi di Trieste, ha frequentato il corso di laurea magistrale in Filosofia presso l'ateneo pavese, laureandosi con una tesi sul concetto di autonomia relazionale e le possibili applicazioni.

lisabin96@gmail.com

⁸⁸ A. Westlund, *Reconceiving Relational Autonomy*, in "HYPATIA a journal of feminist philosophy", (2009), n.24(4), p.33.