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Autonomy as a Social Role and the Function of Diversity

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Abstract: In the ambit of the debate on “personal autonomy”, we propose to intend “personal autonomy” in a social sense. We undertake this move because we think that autonomy is compatible with socialization and we will give reasons for this claim. Moreover, we must consider the role of the wide variety of informational sources we are exposed to that influence our behavior. Social background represents the ontological ground from which we develop the capacity for autonomy; at the same time, interaction with others (real or virtual) enlarges the possibility for autonomous judgements. Our attempt is, first, to try to sketch a social notion of personal autonomy and, second, to elucidate the connection between autonomy and the exposition to informational and social diversity.

Keywords: personal autonomy; deontic statuses; deontic attitudes; informational diversity; social diversity

1. Introduction

We refer to autonomy as that human capacity to form a personal opinion and act according to it, where the confrontation with information deriving from different contexts is fundamental for developing it. The contemporary debate shows that most of the authors tend to overcome the metaphysical question of determinism and free will because they are oriented toward the concrete dimensions of individual choices and the role of socialization to develop capacities for critical reflection.

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 [1]. Personal autonomy means that we consider autonomy not only in a strictly moral sense (like the Kantian perspectives).

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 a substantive standard according to which we can recognize and criticize oppressive norms. In our opinion, a person is autonomous if she is able to recognize and to take responsibility for subjective reasons (i.e., desires and preferences) and objective reasons (moral norms) for acting. Moreover, if we adopt a pragmatic model, it 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 statuses (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 from 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 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 [2]. This happens in the interaction with other people, namely when we get in touch with points of view different from our own. This is the reason why we attribute a fundamental role also to informational and social diversity.

2. Substantial Autonomy versus Procedural Autonomy

Procedural personal autonomy requires the fulfillment of conditions for rationally deciding and acting, ranging over a wide spectrum of individual idiosyncratic desires and volitions (Dworkin, Frankfurt, Ekstrom). Gerald Dworkin and Harry Frankfurt introduced the higher-order desire approach to present the structural condition of autonomy as “authenticity”. 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. 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 ability to choose his mode of life [3]:

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.

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 that 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 her first-order motivations. 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 her life in a subservient way and who, also with the first order desires comprising such a life, we could easily conclude that she is not autonomous. According to the hierarchical model, she passes the test of autonomy since her higher-order desires are consistent with her lower-order desires and identifies with them. But, she may be a manipulated person if her values even at the second order are the mere product of her upbringing and conditioning.

The condition of procedural independence therefore introduces an infinite regress [4]: if the acts of identification must themselves be autonomous, there must exist another act of identification at a higher level. A 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.

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 [5]. Frankfurt’s model exposes itself to several critical observations. The most popular are the ones proffered by Gary Watson [6]. 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.

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 [7], 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 themselves.

Indeed, Frankfurt, in giving an account of the agential authorship, introduced the fundamental idea of “satisfaction”. Even if this idea is not sufficient for explaining 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 undermine important commitments [8]:

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.

The problem is to explain why these conative attitudes have the authority to ground the agent’s standpoint. 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 is not desires but “self-governing policies” motivationally effective in practical reasoning. Self-governing policies ground the agential authority through their “reflexivity,” which shows its efficacy in case the agent endorses the content of such activities, i.e., she is satisfied (in the sense of Locke) with them.

Several authors add “historical” conditions that examine the process of the formation of judgment or decision to act (Fisher, Ravizza, Christman). 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 that 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 she 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.

What is required for autonomous agency is a kind of “substantial” independence that plausibly requires investigations on the “social context” where an action could be considered as autonomous. Very interesting and powerful are the substantive theories, that in the individual variant start from the Kantian inheritance (Korsgaard, Hills, Wolf). The debate on autonomy presents several “substantive” perspectives (Wolf, Benson, Oshana, Mayer, Stolyar, among others) that, from different and original views, try to overcome the “regress problem” involved by the procedural theories (both in their structural or historical variants). First, why the regress to individual desires is a problem? As Noggle points out [9]:

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 . . . 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.

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 to the “unified 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 necessary condition for reflection. In Benson’s terms [10]:

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.

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 [11].

3. Social Conceptions of Autonomy

The Habermasian account of “communicative action” represents a good social model that relates autonomy to a linguistic normative competence, and even though it is intersubjective, it is still procedural. This communicative competence requires the acknowledgment of presuppositions or linguistic rules as conditions of universal validity of theoretical and practical claims [12].

Differently from other theories of “recognition” (Honneth, Taylor), he introduced the issue of “interpersonal recognition” related to the formal linguistic conditions of a rational and egalitarian dialog (communicative action). The development of the capacity for autonomy through communicative action is based on a well-known process of socialization explained also by reference to different disciplines (Piaget, Kohlberg). In this context, Habermas establishes a fundamental relationship between autonomy and “communicative action” [13]. He interpreted the Meadian concept of identity in a pragmatic sense. Mead maintains that the formation of the identity develops through the medium of linguistic communication. 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 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 at first 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 speech act. Ego cannot give up this “space of freedom,” even in the case of the playing of the social roles; indeed, the very internalized behavioral model implies the linguistic structure of the relationship between “responsible” (i.e., autonomous) agents.

In our opinion, Habermas does not provide a good explanation of 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 on the objectivity of linguistic validity claims. According to Habermas, an agent is autonomous only if she has the consent as her fundamental end. For an agent to reach this end, she must satisfy some structural conditions of the intersubjective linguistic practice: (a) pursue without mental constraints their illocutive ends; (b) subordinate their consent to the acknowledgment of validity claims, and (c) be available to undertake commitments that influence the development of the interaction.

We must consider the “nature” of values that come from the social context. For instance, Benson focuses on a fundamental point in order for understanding the normative source of autonomy. He addresses directly to the social and discursive dimension of “taking ownership” that explains how “internalized invisibility” (internalization of oppressive norms diminishing autonomy) can defeat an agent’s capacity “to take ownership” of what they do. The active dimension of taking ownership implies the capacity of the agent to give reasons for her actions, and therefore respond to potential “challenges” arising in the social context from her own point of view.

The active dimension of taking ownership implies the capacity of the agent of giving reasons for her actions and so of responding to potential “challenges” arising in the social context from her own point of view. The active character of ownership can be clarified in three central points:

- (1) Claiming authority for ourselves as ones who are in a position to speak for our conduct is not a matter of deliberate action;

- (2) Self-authorization arises partly out of our self-regard and it transpires within the reach of our capabilities to reflect, decide and act.
- (3) Taking ownership of our actions is also a matter of taking responsibility and this active dimension could not be the result of deliberation.

We maintain that Benson's account rightly points to the social and discursive dimension of autonomy. This move gives the possibility of taking responsibility in a public context and implies also the possibility of speaking for people who are marginalized.

4. Autonomy and Recognition

Starting from a social perspective, we 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. In this context, 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. Autonomy of the agent requires a peculiar sensibility 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 Brandom's account of "recognition", there seems to be a fundamental requirement for an agent to be autonomous, but reciprocal recognition is possible by virtue of "shared commitments" [14]. We underscore two theoretical points of Brandom's argument:

1. The basic form of "simple recognition," through which we recognize each other by virtue of our common intentionality toward the natural environment, where self-consciousness requires "robust" recognition. Simple recognition entails that we 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. She 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 statuses of authoritative (in the sense of probative, though still provisional and defeasible) commitments as to how things are. This second sense implies "reflexivity," because the agent recognizes oneself among those who she recognizes.
2. Starting from simple recognition, the agent can reach the dimension of "robust" recognition if she is disposed to acknowledge the simple recognitions of others and undertaking the consequent commitments by herself. Robust self-consciousness is achievable only through reciprocal recognition namely 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 recognitive community within which alone genuine (robust) self-consciousness is possible: the "I" that is "We" and "We" that is "I".

5. Autonomy as a Social Role

In the paper *Autonomy, Community and Freedom*, Brandom shows a tension between attitude-dependence and content-dependence when we consider autonomy and freedom [15]. Brandom tries to reconcile Kant and Hegel's classical opposition. Following Kant, we are genuinely *normatively* constrained only by the rule we adopt and acknowledge as binding on us. He moves from this thesis to the consequent idea that the capacity to *be* bound by norms and the capacity to *bind ourselves* by norms are one and the same. Authority and responsibility are symmetrical 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 [16]:

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 in that it 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”.

Brandom seems to collapse autonomy into positive freedom because he invokes Hegel when he underscores the nature and the content fullness of concepts. Hegel stresses on the fact that contents must have a kind of attitude-independence; consequently, the content acquires 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. Reciprocal recognition becomes dependent from the fact that we necessarily refer to joint commitments that have material inferential contents. This result entails that freedom and autonomy have the same meaning: agents are autonomous or free because they necessarily bind themselves to shareable commitments, i.e., commitments accepted by their community. According to this result, is the game of giving and asking for reason a game that agents play only within the boundaries of their community? What about the possibility of finding a universal pragmatic structure that favors the dialog among cultures?

Autonomy is an essential component of the self-realization of a subject living in a society that develops in communication, i.e., in the intersubjective acknowledgement of commitments or validity claims. Autonomy can be considered as that capacity human beings normally have of decentralizing their own point of view, thus of distinguishing subjective and objective reasons. 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 to the “social,” hence discursive “game of giving and asking for reasons”.

Autonomy can be thought 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. In this context, normative attitudes become relevant: our performances are not correct or incorrect according to various rules, but we can also “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 dialogical competence that could characterize the autonomous agent could again be defined in semantic and normative senses. The main thesis we derive from the Brandom perspective is that the ones who engage in every discursive practice must distinguish between materially right or wrong inferences, where the adjective material indicates that the presence of some non-logical vocabulary is essential to the classification (i.e., *we must know what is materially entailed in the use of our concept embedded in linguistic expressions*). The participation in the game of giving and asking for reasons is possible by virtue of the fact that the participants master the normative vocabulary in terms of “commitments” and “entitlements” together with the relations among them (committive-inferences, permissive-inferences, and material incompatibility).

The role of the autonomous agent indicates that when she is committed to some assertible content, she takes responsibility for integrating it in a full set of commitments. At the same time, she draws the suitable consequences and puts it under a rational criticism according to the criterion of material incompatibility. Again, this point shows a misleading interpretation of the intersubjective linguistic practice. We must take into account the dimension of responsibility in a social context where the deontic attitudes of the agents play a fundamental role. On the one side, it is important to consider the contents of the reasons we advance in the game of giving and asking for reasons; on the other side, we must understand “how” an agent can take part in this game and give her contribution by undertaking and attributing responsibility and authority to her (and others’) validity claims. Furthermore, if we relate only to the dimension of counterfactual robustness, it becomes difficult to explain the phenomenon of rational rectification when we meet reasons that do not belong to our community.

Even if we accept the inferential structure (based on material incompatibility) 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. In this context, we have two possibilities: (a) to rely on the recognitional model presented by Brandom, or (b) to rely on a kind of linguistic normative competence described in scorekeeping terms [2]. In our opinion, this latter possibility is worthy of consideration as it addresses a wide concept of justification of reasons for acting that does not require conditions that are too strong for autonomous agency.

According to (b), for an agent to be autonomous, she ought to internalize the normative structure of a “dialogical” rationality. Because of the participation in the game of giving and asking for reasons, we can master the communicative structure of justification by considering “default” and “challenge”. We propose a “relational” notion of autonomy that requires the consideration of two fundamental aspects: (1) the “semantic” aspect that entails the inferential commitments the agents must acknowledge, and (2) the “pragmatic” aspect that entails the normative structure of that acknowledgment as a social net of deontic attitudes expressed by speech acts.

On our view, the autonomous agent plays the social role of scorekeeper, thus she is able or becomes able to justify her assertions. The entitlement to a claim can be justified by giving reasons for it, or by referring to the authority of another agent, or 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 the capacity of participation to the game of giving and asking for reasons. 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’ll respond too.

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 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, query and 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 demonstrates to P that his/her inference implies incompatible entitlements; for example, that the response to the attack entails catastrophic consequences, incompatible with moral commitments. In this case, P can be forced to perform a different inference such as:

«If the dissidents attack, I'll find a diplomatic solution».

6. The Function of Diversity

Let us conclude with a brief reference to the accounts of Fisher and Ravizza [17], and of Wolf [18], about the contribution of diversity for developing autonomous agency. The theory of Fisher and Ravizza seems to solve the problem of autonomy 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 censure 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 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-five, 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 palate 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, oppressive norms restrict autonomy more than non-oppressive ones. This observation means that it is relevant to base a judgment on the content of the internalized norms, i.e., the fact that they can be good or bad for the right process of self-determination. In this sense, the values Ella adopted are oppressive in nature and [17] (p. 10):

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 by themselves’. 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.

It seems that the consideration of the level of autonomy based on the history of self-determination is not sufficient (namely the internalization of substantive values). 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 and choices of another. In this sense, we must focus on the development of autonomy not only with regard to the conditions of reasons-responsiveness and reasons-reactivity, but also as the necessity to

have of having a variety of options. This condition favors critical reflection because if a person cannot compare her 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, we are not entitled to consider her as responsible for not following them. According to Fischer and Ravizza's notion of reasons-responsiveness, a person is reasons-responsive when she is sufficiently responsive to possible reasons to do otherwise. But, if a person has limited options to choose from, then she is not sufficiently responsive to possible reasons to do otherwise. For this reason, she cannot be considered as a fully autonomous agent.

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 exist objective values in a Platonic sense we have the ability of recognizing. 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 between 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 the 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 side, normative pluralism involves a plurality not only of good moral outlooks, but also of good aesthetic values and good personal ideals; on the other side, a plurality of good ways to integrate 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 [18] (p. 137):

Appreciation of the Good need not be confined 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 reflected in one's life.

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 like, 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 contrast 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 [18] (p. 140):

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.

The ability to see whatever reasons there are favors the agent's control over her actions. A good reason does not generate an autonomous action automatically because it could be the case that the action is 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 that are 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, it must be presented the way in which we can see these very reasons and what the properties are pertaining to these reasons that qualify them as true and good.

A recent article on the positive effects of informational diversity "indirectly" shows arguments that also support the possibility of developing more autonomy when we are exposed to a wide variety of information that stimulates our thought and confrontation [19].

Phillips' thesis is that "[b]eing around people who are different from us makes us more creative, more diligent and 'harder-working'". This thesis is based on a huge amount of research conducted by organizational scientists, psychologists, sociologists, and economists, and demonstrates that socially diverse groups (that is, those with a diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation) are more innovative than homogeneous groups. Moreover, the results show that a group of people with diverse individual expertise would be better than a homogeneous group at solving complex, non-routine problems. Another important observation shows that social diversity also plays an important role in developing innovation and creativity. One obvious reason is that people with different backgrounds bring new information and stimulate the discussion. But more important is the fact that simply interacting with individuals who are different forces group members to prepare better, to anticipate alternative viewpoints, and to expect that reaching consensus will take effort.

The main notion to understand the positive influence of diversity is "informational diversity". When people interact to solve problems in groups, they bring different information, opinions, and perspectives. This is clear if we think to some forms of collective intentionality (a central topic in contemporary philosophy).

We have different parts and expertise in working as an interdisciplinary team (for instance building a car). It seems that "social diversity" works the same way (Deszö, Ross, Richard). "People who are different from one another in race, gender and other dimensions bring unique information and experiences to bear on the task at hand. A male and a female engineer might have perspectives as different from one another as an engineer and a physicist—and that is a good thing" [19].

Research on racial diversity in small groups not only shows the correlation between diversity and better performances; it shows that diversity causes better performances. The results are clear: for groups that value innovation and new ideas, diversity helps (Neale, Northcraft, Lising, Loyd, Wang, Freeman, Sommers):

"Diversity is not only about bringing different perspectives to the table. Simply adding social diversity to a group makes people believe that differences of perspective might exist among them and that belief makes people change their behavior. Members of a homogeneous group rest somewhat assured that they will agree with one another; that they will understand one another's perspectives and beliefs; that they will be able to easily come to a consensus. But when members of a group notice that they are socially different from one another, they change their expectations. They anticipate differences of opinion and perspective. They assume they will need to work harder to come to a consensus".

7. Conclusions

Our theoretical option is to introduce a notion of autonomy that is weaker than procedural theories because, at the same time, it tries to understand the role of the content for autonomous agency. Our theoretical proposal has attempted to show how autonomy develops in a social context; an intersubjective model is promising if we consider socialization from the point of view of the process through which we develop the cognitive and moral capacities necessary for autonomous agency. A fundamental role for developing autonomy is played by the cultural background, which can implement norms that can be oppressive in nature. So, substantive theories underscore the evaluation of these norms, values, and beliefs. But, in our opinion, autonomy depends more on intersubjectivity, namely, the “relational” aspect of socialization, through which we become able to discover constraints and bad norms. If we have the chance to participate in fruitful and open dialog, i.e., we are exposed to different reasons, we can reach an autonomous point of view, namely that point where we can accept or refuse validity claims. We can also observe the logic that clarifies the dimensions of informational diversity: people work harder in diverse environments, both cognitively and socially. It seems that this hard work can lead to better outcomes. In our opinion, the empirical research on informational and social diversity can be considered as an empirical example of what can happen when we interact to express our opinion and try to be innovative and creative. It is a way to develop the capacity for personal autonomy intended as a social notion, where it is important also the consideration of the “potential” good perspectives of our interlocutors.

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