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Edited by Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller and Jeffrey Paul

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INTRODUCTION

Autonomy is often recognized as a central value in moral and political philosophy. There are, however, fundamental disagreements over how autonomy should be understood, what its implications are for public policy, and even whether the concept itself is theoretically defensible.

Autonomy is generally understood as some form of self-regulation, self-governance, or self-direction. As some of the essays in this volume show, great philosophers of the past have shed valuable light on the subject of autonomy: including the ancient Stoics, modern philosophers such as Spinoza, and most importantly, Immanuel Kant. Theorists have disputed whether such a view can be reconciled with the most plausible accounts of human motivation. Some have tried to analyze autonomy in terms of the self being fueled by its higher-order desires, passions, or commitments. Others have argued that autonomy must be understood in terms of acting from reason or a sense of moral duty independent of the passions. Theorists have also questioned whether the ideal of autonomy presupposes a metaphysical theory of free will, or whether it is consistent with some version of determinism. The difficult question of whether the concept of autonomy can be reconciled with empirical scientific theories of human psychology is also a pressing concern.

The role of autonomy in moral and political theory is controversial too. Some theorists argue that human rights are essentially rights to autonomy, whereas others treat the right to welfare as fundamental and autonomy as derivative. Still others maintain that individual autonomy should be subordinated to often conflicting values, for example, those centering on race, class, gender, or local community. Autonomy seems to be closely related to the notion of freedom, but what sense of "freedom" is involved: freedom from coercion, from psychological constraints, or from material necessity? Some theorists have argued that autonomy and freedom should, after all, be sharply distinguished.

These various interpretations seem to have very different implications for public policy, that is, for how laws, customs, and social institutions should protect individual autonomy. For example, what role should legal institutions play in safeguarding autonomy? Is any particular economic system—capitalism, social democracy, or socialism—more favorable to autonomy? What is the relation between individual autonomy and autonomy viewed as a property of political systems?

The contributors to this volume explore these and other important questions regarding the concept of autonomy.

The first three essays in this collection take a historical approach to autonomy. In his essay, "Stoic Autonomy," John M. Cooper points out that

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the ancient Stoics did not use the term “autonomy.” (He does, however, identify one exception: Dio of Prusa, a first-century C.E. writer under Stoic influence, did use the term “autonomy.”) Nonetheless, the notion did play a central and crucial role in the Stoics’ conception of human nature, human rationality, and the basis of morality. On the Stoic view, perfected human beings live according to Zeus’s or nature’s law, and that law is also their own law, *qua* rational beings. In living in agreement with nature they live according to their own law, that is, they live autonomously. The similarities of autonomy as the Stoics conceived it to Kant’s much more familiar conception make the Stoics important forerunners of Kant—neglected though they are in this capacity. The Stoic conception presents interesting and important differences from Kant’s and, therefore, deserves attention in its own right, not just in comparison to Kant and the moderns.

“Autonomous Autonomy: Spinoza on Autonomy, Perfectionism, and Politics” engages in something of a quixotic enterprise, as Douglas Den Uyl points out at the outset of his article. Since the concept of autonomy was only developed in its modern form by Kant in the eighteenth century, the century after Spinoza’s death, treating *autonomy* in Spinoza is anachronistic. Complicating Den Uyl’s project, too, is Spinoza’s lack of a concept of metaphysical freedom, except for God/Substance/Nature. In addition to these historical and metaphysical hurdles to accepting Spinoza as a political philosopher with valuable insights on autonomy, Spinoza disassociates freedom (or autonomy, which Den Uyl argues is linked to freedom) from politics. This disassociation is unfashionable in modern political thought, Den Uyl maintains, yet he finds in Spinoza a self-perfectionist meaning of autonomy that is designedly in conflict with politics. Rather than politics being about autonomy, even as an aspiration, for Spinoza it is about securing peace and stability by appealing to the emotive side of human nature. Thus, Spinoza’s project is very different from the three leading Western political theories of modern times, which Den Uyl identifies as communitarian, liberal, and welfarist. Proponents of each of these views value autonomy for different but, in some cases, overlapping reasons: respectively, a concern that autonomy not be roped off from the political realm; that autonomy is necessary for politics or people might be treated as means to the ends of those in power; and that since autonomy is good for everyone it is the role of politics to promote this good. A modern Spinozist might use the language of autonomy employed by any of these three viewpoints, but he would be using it only as an instrument for promoting peace and security. The Spinozist, in other words, would use the language of autonomy for political purposes only if it served as an effective emotive device for persuading people to understand and perform their civic “duties.”

Paul Guyer’s essay, “Kant on the Theory and Practice of Autonomy,” offers an exegesis of Kant’s thought on autonomy, focusing on the sem-

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inal role of Kant's analysis in shaping future treatment of this concept to the present day. The first part of this essay analyzes Kant's concept of autonomy and argues for its independence from his transcendental theory of free will. The second part canvasses some of Kant's arguments for the value of autonomy that are suppressed in his published works, and shows how autonomy remains as a presupposition of moral imputation in Kant's mature works. The third part examines Kant's recommendation of methods by which persons may attain autonomy in the actual circumstances of human life.

Marina Oshana's "How Much Should We Value Autonomy?" grapples with the intriguing question: "What happens if we value autonomy too much?" She identifies three possible outcomes of such an overvaluation. First, we may believe that all persons deserve to have their autonomy respected, which may lead us to think that no incursions on autonomy are ever justified. This problem can be obviated, she argues, by modifying a negative test for desert based on John Stuart Mill's harm principle. Second, events in the world, such as the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City and Washington, may test our commitment to autonomy by underscoring the susceptibility of the freedom and independence that autonomy fosters to dangerous forces in the world that do not share this basic value with us. Thus, in dangerous times, autonomy may have to be weighed in the balance against security, for the two will be in constant tension. Third, and both more difficult to resolve and more pernicious than the first two, an overvaluation of autonomy may lead us to intervene paternalistically in the lives of persons whom we consider insufficiently autonomous. That is, we might attempt to force them to be free, to borrow Rousseau's locution. Oshana wrestles with these three dangers, through a series of devices, including such intriguing examples as the "Taliban woman" and the "schizophrenic artist." She concludes that autonomy—as individual freedom—"is not sacrosanct." Although she is not prepared to offer a definitive, bright line to distinguish between permissible and impermissible interferences with autonomy, she offers much that is illuminating on the quandary of balancing autonomy and other important values.

James Stacey Taylor writes, in his essay entitled "Autonomy, Duress, and Coercion," that contemporary discussions of both personal autonomy and what it is for a person to "identify" with his or her desires are dominated by the "hierarchical" analyses of Gerald Dworkin and Harry Frankfurt. At the core of these analyses is the claim that it is a necessary condition for a person to be autonomous with respect to (that is, to identify with) a desire that moves her to act that she desires that this desire so move her. Irving Thalberg argues that these analyses should be rejected. This is because, he contends, a person who is forced to perform an action through being subjected to duress will desire to be moved by her desire to submit, and so the proponents of these analyses will be forced to hold that such a person did not suffer from any impairment in

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her autonomy. And this is highly counterintuitive. Taylor evaluates and ultimately rejects Thalberg's critique, finding that his objections are based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the hierarchical analyses. Unfortunately, Taylor concludes, even when the hierarchical analyses are properly understood they *still* have counterintuitive implications when they are applied to a situation in which a person acts under duress. Thus, even though these analyses are flawed, they can still provide the key to answering one of the perennial questions in the philosophy of action: Does a person who is forced to perform an action solely in order to avoid a threatened penalty thereby suffer from impaired autonomy?

Michael E. Bratman, in "Autonomy and Hierarchy," locates the central feature of autonomous action in *agential direction*. In agential direction there is sufficient unity and organization of the motives of action for their functioning to constitute direction by the agent. *Agential governance* is agential direction that appropriately involves the agent's treatment of certain considerations as reasons. Bratman defends a model of agential governance—and so of autonomous agency—that highlights higher-order policies about the role of one's desires in one's motivationally effective practical reasoning. He calls such policies "self-governing policies" and argues also that they are an important kind of valuing, a kind of valuing that is responsive both to our need for management of our motivation and to our need to shape our own lives in the face of multiple values. His discussion constitutes a defense of the *autonomy-hierarchy thesis*, the thesis (roughly) that there is a close connection between autonomous agency and motivational hierarchy.

In Keith Lehrer's essay, "Reason and Autonomy," he states that philosophers have often thought that governing your life by reason or being responsive to reason is the source of autonomy. This leads to a paradox, however: *the paradox of reason*. It is that if we are governed by reason in what we choose, then we are in bondage to reason in what we choose and we are not autonomous, but if we are not governed by reason, then we do not govern ourselves in what we choose, and again we are not autonomous. The resolution of the paradox requires that whether we are governed by reason must itself be an autonomous choice. Which comes first, the choice to be governed by reason, or the governance of reason in the choice? The answer is to be found in a higher-order account of autonomous preferences that involves a power preference that loops back onto itself, thus avoiding a regress. The power preference is, then, the keystone of autonomy.

"Identification, the Self, and Autonomy" is the title of Bernard Berofsky's essay. He argues that the idea of personal autonomy would appear to be that of regulation or direction by the self, an idea that he distinguishes from self-expression or self-fulfillment. Although we also suppose that this direction must be undertaken for the most part through conscious decision-making, different conceptions of the self abound. Close

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examination of a prominent theory—the *Self-Constituting Decision Theory*—is undertaken. The central concept of the theory is an act of identification, which he analyzes in order to see whether it can bear the required weight. He concludes that autonomy cannot be understood in this way insofar as identification is conceived as overly abstracted from a psychic system that must play a more significant role in self-characterization. A surprising consequence of this result is his abandonment of the driving conception of autonomy as self-direction. For the self may direct action in a way that the agent repudiates when that repudiation is informed, uncoerced, rational, and healthy, that is, autonomous. Such an agent cannot be thought of as autonomous.

Jonathan Jacobs, in his essay entitled “Some Tensions between Autonomy and Self-Governance,” writes that it is a crucial part of a great deal of moral theorizing that rational agents have a distinctive moral status and are owed a distinctive kind of respect on account of being autonomous. At the same time, our estimations of agents and the regard we have for them depend upon their characters and the extent of their responsibility for their characters. While autonomy *demand*s respect, the ways in which agents are self-governing *merit*s certain sorts of regard; and these can be at odds with each other. This is particularly evident in the context of blame and punishment. Some agents, while rational and responsible, may have such vicious characters that they seem to merit loathing in a way that threatens the respect owed to agents. Jacob’s discussion explores the moral psychology and normative issues associated with this tension.

Howard Rachlin’s essay, “Autonomy from the Viewpoint of Teleological Behaviorism,” argues that the social purpose of classifying some subset of a person’s particular acts as autonomous is to give society a basis for attributing responsibility for those acts to the person. Responsibility, in turn, is the rationale for society allocating rewards and punishments to its members. Consistent with this purpose, the degree of autonomy of an act depends not only on the characteristics of the act itself but also on the characteristics of the more abstract pattern of acts of which this act is a part. Acts performed not for their own sake but for the sake of a more abstract pattern are defined as autonomous. For example, refusal of a drink by an alcoholic is an autonomous act, whereas indulging in the drink is nonautonomous. Rachlin’s concept of autonomy is, therefore, congruent with that of self-control.

Christopher Heath Wellman’s essay on “The Paradox of Group Autonomy” explores the prospects of developing a satisfying account of group autonomy without rejecting value-individualism. That is, he examines whether one can adequately explain the moral reasons to respect a group’s claim to self-determination while insisting that only individual persons are of ultimate moral value. In this quest, he reviews three possible accounts of group autonomy: (1) value-collectivism, (2) individual autonomy, and (3) individual well-being. In the end he finds none of these

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approaches fully adequate, concluding with what he terms the “Paradox of Group Autonomy.”

In “Abortion, Autonomy, and Control over One’s Body,” John Martin Fischer explores implications of autonomy for an important and controversial political issue. The core of his article is a critique of Judith Jarvis Thomson’s famous essay, “A Defense of Abortion.” In her essay, Thomson argues that it is perfectly permissible for you to unplug yourself from a severely ill violinist to whom you have been connected without your permission, even if the violinist’s survival depends upon remaining plugged into your body. Using the violinist case as an analogy to abortion, she concludes that abortion is permissible, even if the fetus is assumed to be a person from the beginning. Fischer takes up the violinist case, arguing that, despite the conventional wisdom, it is morally *impermissible* for you to unplug yourself from the violinist. This is because the violinist case is indistinguishable from various cases in which you do need to provide assistance to another person. But, disaggregating the violinist from a case of pregnancy due to rape, Fischer contends that it need not follow from his position on the violinist case that abortion is impermissible in a case of rape. He argues that there are important asymmetries between the violinist example and the context of rape.

Steven Wall’s piece, “Freedom as a Political Ideal,” treats the political aspects of freedom (or autonomy) and identifies the kind of freedom that the state ought to promote. The ideal that Wall endorses holds that the state ought to promote and sustain an environment in which its subjects are best able to carry out their plans and form new ones. More precisely, he argues that a freedom-supportive state will sustain a legal and economic structure that allows its subjects to coordinate their activities and plan efficiently. Furthermore, such a state will ensure that all of its subjects have access to a wide range of valuable options, and it will minimize the interference and domination that frustrate the plans of those who are subject to its authority. After describing this ideal and arguing that it is superior to its main rivals, Wall defends his freedom-supportive state from a number of objections and discusses implications for institutional design.

The essays in this collection complement each other and represent the many different approaches that are taken to the concept of autonomy among political philosophers.

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Steven Wall is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Bowling Green State University and previously taught at Kansas State University. He is currently on leave as a Laurence S. Rockefeller Visiting Fellow at The University Center for Human Values at Princeton University. His dissertation, *Liberalism, Perfectionism, and Restraint*, won the 1997 Sir Ernest Barker Prize for Best Dissertation in Political Philosophy from the Political Studies Association. He is the author of *Liberalism, Perfectionism, and Restraint* (1998) and co-editor, with George Klosko, of *Perfectionism and Neutrality: Essays in Liberal Theory* (2003).