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Autonomy, Recognition, and Social Dislocation

Abstract: In numerous accounts of both autonomy and freedom, social or relational elements have been offered as conceptual requirements in addition to purely procedural conditions. In addition, it is claimed that social recognition of the normative authority or self-trust of the agent is conceptually required for autonomy. In this paper I argue that in cases where people find themselves completely dislocated from the social and cultural homes that had provided them with the language in which to formulate and express their values, it is clear that social recognition of the sort defended in relational models is causally but not conceptually required for agency to be (re-)established. This is shown by noting that often victims of human trafficking or smuggling find themselves in foreign settings where it is quite up for grabs where and how they will attempt to reconstruct a life narrative which they can generally embrace. Therefore, seeing social recognition as conceptually required for autonomous agency or freedom would ignore the variability in the ways that such recognition must be expressed.

1. Autonomy, Recognition, and Social Dislocation

Philosophers and other theorists attending to the concepts of freedom and autonomy have become increasingly sensitive to the social dynamics of agency and, in turn, have emphasized the social and relational components of those notions. In the literature on both autonomy and freedom, greater emphasis has been put on the requirement of recognition of certain capacities by others, capacities concerning self-trust, one's status as a participant in social dialogue, and one's independent decision-making ability.¹ This has resulted in a complex debate concerning the question of whether such moves have turned the concepts of autonomy and freedom into normative notions, with substantive value commitments built into them.² Whether this is the case, theorists have continued to wrestle with the structure and implications of the social dimensions of freedom and autonomy.

In this paper, I want to continue these discussions by looking at some prominent cases of relational theories of autonomy and asking whether it is plausible to say that standing in social relations of the sort demanded is truly a conceptual requirement of autonomy or merely a contributing factor to its development. I

¹ See Mcleod/Sherwin 2000; Mackenzie 2008; Benson 2005; Anderson/Honneth 2005; for similar accounts of freedom, see Pettit 2001.

² See, e.g., Christman 2004; 2009, chap. 8; Oshana 2006, chap. 3; and Mackenzie 2008.

want to ask this question by way of examination of cases where people have been relocated, especially those relocated by force, to social settings to which they feel thoroughly alien. I want to use these cases to argue that social recognition of basic agential capacities such as normative authority, self-trust, or discursive status, is not a fundamental requirement of freedom or autonomy but rather is parasitic on more fundamental requirements concerning (individual) capacities themselves. This is important because in cases of social dislocation, the *form* of recognition that is expressed for the normative authority, self-trust, etc. varies according to the needs of the persons themselves concerning those agential capacities. This has, I argue, more than merely theoretical interest as it affects the ways that social practice and policy responds in cases of displaced persons in attempts to *restore* their freedom or autonomy rather than merely *protect* it.³

2. Autonomy, Normative Authority, and Social Recognition

On most current accounts of autonomy, it is claimed that being self-governing involves capacities to reflect and act as well as being moved by values, desires and attitudes that are authentic in some important way. ‘Authentic’ here refers to the way that autonomy-reflecting motivational factors are truly one’s own and not merely hoisted upon one by manipulating or oppressive conditions.⁴ My own account of these conditions can be summarized this way:

Relative to some characteristic *C*, where *C* refers to basic organizing values and commitments, autonomy obtains if:

1. The person is competent to effectively form intentions to act on the basis of *C*.
2. The person has the general capacity to critically reflect on *C* and other basic motivating elements of her psychic and bodily make-up;
3. Were the person to engage in sustained critical reflection on *C* over a variety of conditions in light of the historical processes (adequately described) that gave rise to *C*;
4. She would not be alienated from *C* in the sense of feeling and judging that *C* cannot be sustained as part of an acceptable autobiographical narrative organized by her diachronic practical identity; and
5. The reflection being imagined is not constrained by reflection-distorting factors. (Christman 2009, chap. 7)

³ This analysis is an exemplification of what some call ‘non-ideal theory’ in political philosophy, in that I look at core normative concepts against the background of non-ideal conditions of ongoing domination, oppression, and unequal power. The question of whether philosophy should proceed independently of such conditions, or whether it in fact must respond to them, is an interesting and complex issue which I don’t discuss directly, but my approach in the paper indicates where I stand on the issue. For discussion see Mills 2005. For general discussion see the essays in a special issue of *Social Theory and Practice* 34(3) (2008). Also, in what follows I speak mainly of autonomy, but I will sometimes refer to freedom as well. When I do I have in mind those conceptions of (positive) freedom which include conditions of social recognition similar to the models of autonomy I describe. An example might be found in Pettit’s work on a republican conception of freedom: see Pettit 1997; 2001; for discussion see Christman 2000.

⁴ For an overview of views of autonomy, see Christman 2002 and Buss 2002.

On views of autonomy such as this, it is claimed that self-government is a characteristic of individuals and could be defined without direct reference to relations with others or, more generally, surrounding social conditions. This is so even if it is accepted that the ‘selves’ at the seat of self-government are themselves socially structured or constructed in virtue of the dynamics of social identities, autobiographical histories, and group membership.

Models of this sort insist that although various interpersonal and social factors will figure importantly in the development and maintenance of autonomy, it is necessary to avoid making substantive connections with others a *conceptual* requirement of self-government.⁵ Some of the motivations for doing so include the following: Although social relations, interpersonal connections, and social support (among other things) will be required for autonomy in most cases, the structure and meaning of such relations will be variable, and different agents will require different kinds of social connections, so making particular kinds definitive of autonomy implausibly narrows the notion in precarious ways. Also, many attempts to construct a social conception of autonomy result in making the notion substantively normative, so that autonomy because a (contestable) ideal of a flourishing life rather than a minimal condition of social status, citizenship, and the grounds for ant-paternalism (see Christman 2004).

However, despite such considerations some theorists have continued to insist that autonomy should be defined in terms of (proper) social relations themselves, rather than being seen as an individual characteristic *simpliciter*. Many such writers are motivated by concerns (for example) that oppressive social circumstances have kept many people from developing and enjoying authentic self-determination in a meaningful sense. For example, McLeod and Sherwin argue that “women’s oppression typically involves circumstances in which the agent’s immediate interests appear to support her active participation in practices that actually promote her oppression” (McLeod/Sherwin 2000, 261; see also Stoljar 2000). This involves an internalization of a feeling of worthlessness that, in turn, disables the person from either adequately grasping or acting upon the oppressive nature of her condition.

The result is to view autonomy in fundamentally relational terms. This has taken various forms. One such approach sees autonomy as requiring certain normatively sanctioned social relations, where it is required for autonomy that the person be afforded certain prerogatives and powers by others.⁶ Others, however, have eschewed strongly substantive conditions of this sort and argued that even if a person does not stand in relations of equality and fully open options, especially if such an unequal status was chosen voluntarily by the person herself, she may still enjoy autonomy; but this will be so only if certain other, weaker, normative conditions are met relating to the social relations in which the person stands.⁷

⁵ For a recent discussion of this point see Baumann 2008.

⁶ This, broadly speaking, is the approach taken by Oshana 2006. For discussion, see Baumann 2008.

⁷ For discussion of weakly and strongly substantive accounts, see Benson 2005 and Mackenzie 2008.

These writers have taken this observation to imply the inadequacy of purely content-neutral accounts of autonomy—those that define autonomy merely in terms referring to the manner in which values (etc.) are formed and endorsed and maintain content neutrality concerning the values themselves.⁸ Many such theorists have claimed that among the conditions for autonomy, a capacity for self-trust should be added, in particular to take better account of the ways that oppressive social conditions destroy a person's sense of herself as a worthy source of judgment and action. Autonomous agents, they argue, must at least value their own abilities to formulate and act upon values, lest they fall victim to the internalization of oppression just mentioned and are rendered powerless to act for themselves.

Much of this emphasis on self-trust, however, could easily be absorbed by the individualist, procedural accounts of autonomy alluded to earlier. That is, under the competence conditions that express an agent's abilities to adequately formulate and make effective values and motives, could be listed those psychological capacities like self-esteem, minimal psychological effectance, and self-trust that are required to form and maintain one's own effective values.

But the theorists in question here add specifically substantive and relational aspects of self-trust that go beyond these procedural provisions. McLeod and Sherwin claim that a "level of support that the agent receives within her social environment" is relevant to autonomy. One kind of support involves being given the opportunities to develop and use one's capacities and thereby learn to trust them. These, however, are causal conditions and can be accepted by content-neutral models. In addition, however, McLeod and Sherwin claim that "constitutive" of autonomy is that the agent's trust in herself "exists in part because others reinforce that trust in their relationships with her" (McLeod/Sherwin 2000, 265). This means that the recognition from others that we are worthy of trust is a constitutive and not merely developmental or causal requirement for autonomy.

In a parallel manner, Catriona Mackenzie claims that autonomy requires that a person see herself and be seen as having 'normative authority' over her judgments and values. The normative authority that Mackenzie points to is the ability to self-validate one's judgments and reflections in order to make one's desires effective in action.⁹ Following others who have insisted that a capacity for self-trust is needed for autonomy, Mackenzie argues that it is not sufficient for an agent's actions to express her practical identity, the person must also regard herself as the legitimate source of the authority of the judgments leading to those actions (2008, 514).

To help us understand the requirement of normative authority, Mackenzie asks us to imagine a woman, 'Mrs. H', who has just been diagnosed with a serious disease and must decide on treatment. However, Mrs. H. has also recently been

⁸ Paul Benson, for example, argues that part of what it means to 'take ownership' of one's intentions and actions (of a sort required for autonomy) is to maintain a degree of self-worth. He argues that without a sense that she can use the power of her own judgments sanely, a person is not autonomous. See Benson 2000; 2005.

⁹ This idea echoes Rawls's claim that citizens of a well-ordered society must be recognized as self-authenticating sources of valid claims.

abandoned by her husband of many years who had always insisted on making the crucial family decisions. The termination of this traditional, patriarchal marriage was devastating to the woman, and she now feels powerless to decide the best treatment. As Mackenzie describes her, we are to imagine that she is “governed by the norms of traditional femininity that are taken as authoritative within her cultural community, and her husband’s abandonment has left her feeling worthless as a person and without a reason to live” (518).¹⁰ As a result she is not inclined to choose what (to others) is the obviously optimal medical course.

Mackenzie argues that such a person may meet the individualist, procedural accounts of autonomy mentioned earlier (in that she reflectively endorses her meekness and indecision) but lack a level of normative authority that is required for her judgments to be truly her own. Based on consideration of cases such as Mrs. H, Mackenzie claims that “an agent’s sense of herself as having a rightful claim to normative authority [...] are based in intersubjective recognition” by others. In this way, an agent’s status as having normative authority over her values and decisions has both “first-personal” and “relational” aspects. This substantive value element also underscores the more general political claim that “a just society has an obligation to promote autonomy by ensuring that its basic social, legal, political and economic institutions provide the [recognition] basis for its citizens to realize their autonomy” (524).

In a similar vein (and one to which Mackenzie herself alludes), Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth have developed a view of autonomy that stresses the need for social recognition in order to ensure that agents’ vulnerabilities to threats to their self-respect be obviated. Anderson and Honneth argue that in order to maintain the levels of self-respect required for effective autonomy, one must think of oneself as of equal moral status with others. They claim that in at least three spheres certain forms of social recognition relations—ones that establish self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem—are required for individuals to avoid particular vulnerabilities to which citizens in current contexts are systematically subject, vulnerabilities which their autonomy is meant to protect them against. Such relations of recognition, they claim, are therefore conceptually required for autonomy in a full sense. As they put it, proper relations of self-respect, trust and esteem are needed so that “full autonomy—the real and effective capacity to develop and pursue one’s own conception of a worthwhile life—is facilitated by relations-to-self (self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem) that are themselves bound up with webs of social recognition” (Anderson/Honneth 2005, 137).

(A brief aside: I referred earlier to one’s ‘practical identity’ in this discussion, and I should clarify what this means. In these contexts, the phrase emanates from the work of Christine Korsgaard who describes our practical identities as those cognitive and affective structures by which we orient our values, plans, and motives and which embody our fundamental normative commitments (Korsgaard 1996, 101). Practical identities express and organize our moral world, and as such our judgments about what is valuable for us are structured by these identities. In addition, practical identities shape our self-conceptions in ways that internalize whatever cultural, religious, and other social components to our identities

¹⁰ For a similar set of claims (which Mackenzie also discusses), see Atkins 2006.

and value perspective.¹¹ This means that the value languages we speak when we reflect on our most fundamental commitments are structured by our practical identities. Now Korsgaard is a Kantian, so she thinks that in the end all of us are also structured by a commitment to the value of humanity as such (and so committed to fundamental Kantian moral norms). But leaving that aside, the language of practical identities is used here in order to express the idea that who we are, and hence the ‘self’ of self-government, is structured by such identities and, in turn, such identities will be structured by the internalized cultural and social norms that form our self-concepts and shape our judgments, and which we (generally) embrace as giving meaning to our life trajectory.)

These various accounts of autonomy, then, are based on the insistence that self-trust must be not only manifested in the agent’s repertoire of personal capacities but must also be *recognized* by others; and this recognition is needed not only because it contributes causally to the development of self-confidence in the agent, but for its own sake, as a constitutive condition of autonomy. One could wonder, for example, why ‘full autonomy’ for Anderson and Honneth, is not simply ‘the real and effective capacity to develop and pursue one’s own conception of a worthwhile life’ but add that this capacity is ‘facilitated’ by certain relations. But these theorists stress that reference only to such ‘facilitation’ would fall short of the definitional tie that social recognition has to autonomy.

In order to inquire into this claim, it will be important to examine the notion of ‘recognition’ a bit more closely, for this refers to a social attitude of respect centering on specific aspects of the person’s identity, aspects which tie closely to her self-trust in ways that distinguish such an attitude from undifferentiated *respect* that people owe each other (perhaps) as moral agents, *tout court*. Recognition is always enacted under terms of *identity*: that is, one expresses or experiences recognition *as ...* this or that kind of person. Indeed, part of the reason that mis- or mal-recognition comprises a particular form of injustice is that when proper recognition is lacking, one’s identity and related commitments to a horizon of value are ignored, occluded, or marginalized in the broader dynamic of social power relations. Now recognition *need* not express itself in any of the familiar identity categories, of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality: it can be more general than this, but for the most part it will involve these social markers of identity.¹² Nevertheless, recognition of fundamental interests and capacities of this sort differs from the more generalized form of interpersonal respect precisely in the former’s dependence on categories of classification through which it is conveyed and the latter’s focus on only rational agency as such in a broad and amorphous sense. Therefore, identity markers of some sort define the terms of the relations instantiated by recognition.

¹¹ One common source for this way of looking at the development of identity is in the work of George Herbert Mead; for discussion, see Habermas 1990, 116–94.

¹² Honneth refers to this variability when he writes that his claim about recognition remain “a claim within philosophical anthropology, even though I now emphasize much more than previously the historical alterability of forms of recognition; it is still a matter of the invariant dependence of humans on the experience of recognition, even though its forms and contours can become differentiated in the course of historical transformations.” (Honneth 2001, 515)

However, we should also note that identity markers—which again are typically a reference to ethnicity, nationality, religious identity, gender or other elements of social categorization—are complex concepts whose meaning and connotations are rich and often highly contested.¹³ Recognition, then, may involve the use of contestable and contested social value categories, the expression of which often involves multifaceted complexities of language and history. For example, for a refugee to be recognized in ways that shield her from the vulnerabilities listed by Anderson and Honneth, she must be acknowledged in terms that reflect her view of herself, perhaps her status as a tribal member or citizen of her country of origin or her ethnicity. This will often involve communication with her in her own language and in modes that express respect for her as a speaker (and representative) of that language.

Therefore, to speak to and of a person in ways that express recognition of her normative authority is to utilize terminology and nomenclature that carries value implications and normative import. To speak to someone *as a woman*, or *as a Suni Muslim*, is to express an attitude of valuation for the connotations of that social identity—to express a regard for what it *means* to be a woman or a Muslim. (One would not speak to a person ‘as a Muslim’ for example by offering her alcohol perhaps.) Therefore, the recognition in question must be negotiated through a matrix of social concepts and value connotations. As we will see, the question of who or what defines the values inherent in such social classification will be a crucial element in the dynamic of securing the autonomy of certain agents whose connection to the social structures that had previously supported those values has been severed.

To sum up, the family of views I wish to examine, then, share the following claims in one form or another:

1. Autonomy requires some form of self-trust or normative authority;
2. Recognition of that capacity for self-trust is required for autonomy as one of its constituent conditions and not merely as a developmental or facilitating factor;
3. The terms of recognition of one’s capacity for self-trust will often need to be such as to express respect for the social identities that mark a person’s practical identity.

And I have argued that, given that recognition targets social identities, the following also holds:

4. The terminology of social identities—what it means to be this or that type of person—carries with it a set of value categories that will be implicated in the recognition required of autonomy.

In order to consider these claims, I want now to look at cases where an agent’s social context robs her of ready access to the language of self-identification with which she forms her practical identity. Similarly, such individuals often lack a

¹³ For discussion, e.g., see Appiah 2005.

degree of self-trust and sense of normative authority that would allow them to effectively formulate plans and purposes. Looking at such cases will allow us to better understand, I think, the nature and value of recognizing people's capacities for self-trust in the context of restoring autonomy to them.

3. The Complex Dynamics of Social Dislocation

It is estimated that over 185 million people live outside of their country of birth, 2.9% of the global population. Of this number, more than 17 million are refugees and 22 million internally displaced people (Haque 2006). Globalization in general and labor migration specifically has produced unprecedented numbers of people who live in communities separate from their geographical and cultural homes. Of greater relevance to discussions of freedom and autonomy are the huge numbers of individuals who are dislocated involuntarily, either from human trafficking, coerced smuggling, or refugee status.

In these latter categories are individuals who find themselves in conditions of social disorientation as well as dislocation. At least those who are fortunate enough to escape any immediate violence and coercion they might have previously faced, must attempting to find a way of life in a new location as an immigrant or internally displaced person, but who may not have realistic opportunities (in the short run) to return to their homeland. Many former victims of sexual slavery and labor trafficking are in this category, people who are freed from the most immediate conditions of bondage but who must now attempt to establish a stable life in a new place. It is these types of individuals that make questions of self-trust and social recognition become most complicated and poignant.

Consider for example two stories that exemplify the kinds of struggles such newly 'freed' individuals experience:

Irina answers an ad in her local newspaper in Romania for a live-in domestic helper in Hungary. When she responds to the ad she meets her handlers with whom she signs a 'contract' that promises high earnings but stipulates that her travel and living expenses will be deducted from her future wages. As security against this debt, Irina's passport is taken and she is told that the work for her is actually in Italy. After being smuggled into Italy she is made aware that the domestic housework she had envisioned was a fraud and that her brokers' plan all along was to force her into prostitution. She is taken to a brothel where she is forced to work as a prostitute. However, after a time she escapes from the brothel and makes her way to a local service agency who promises to help her. She speaks no Italian, however, has no passport, and more importantly, she does not know if she can return to Romania and her family for fear of the shame and ostracization she will face there as a former sex worker.

Although the service workers want to help her, she cannot remain in Italy since she is an illegal immigrant. She has no idea what to do.¹⁴

Second:

Nicholas Kristoff and Sheryl WuDunn report their experience of ‘rescuing’ girls who are forced to work in brothels in Cambodia. One such girl, Momm, told Kristoff her story of being tricked (and then kidnapped) into a life of enslaved prostitution, where her every movement was watched and where she faced the constant threat of beatings in addition to the daily rounds of sex with strangers. Kristoff arranged to ‘buy’ the girl’s freedom and brought her back to her village, where she was reunited with her family after an absence of 5 years. However, a week after she was set up there, Momm left the village and returned to Poipet and the brothel. Momm was addicted to metamphetamines, a common fact about prostitutes in this area, and could not sustain a life without the drug. She remained a prostitute after that and in fact later became part of the management of the brothel itself. (Kristoff/WuDunn 2009, chap. 2)

Many lessons might be gleaned from stories of this sort. First, and most obviously, oppression and domination are not relieved when one is simply extracted from the directly coercive constraints such victims live under; supportive and sustaining relations with others, especially those who make one feel needed and support one emotionally, are required for freedom in any meaningful sense. Second, being able to communicate meaningfully and with mutual respect is a condition of feeling at home in an environment. Domination, then, is often more than coercion and restriction of options, it often involves the absence of a social environment in which one’s self-understanding and status is recognized on its own terms, and without shame. Finally, coercive constraints operate both externally through threats and violence but also internally, through addictions, pathologies, vulnerabilities and incapacities that constrict the exercise of agency no matter what apparent life options are placed in one’s path.

Social and legal agencies can intervene into the violently restrictive world of those trapped in coercive working conditions, for example rescuing so-called sex-slaves in various parts of the world. When a person is ‘liberated’ from those coercive conditions, however, the process of securing meaningful freedom has only just begun. Most often the person is like Irinia: a foreigner (typically without a passport, which was taken by traffickers, brokers or ‘employers’), which may mean also that (a) she has little or no local language ability, (b) she faces deportation as an illegal immigrant (unless, and only in some jurisdictions, she can show she faces violence if returned home), but (c) she may not be able to return home without facing shame and social retribution, as well as the economic deprivation that this entails.

What this means is that the process of ending the enslavement of those in such abject social dislocation involves more than that the removal of restrictions;

¹⁴ This is a composite based on numerous similar accounts. See, e.g., Sulaimanova 2006, 64–66.

clearly the process also involves the actual provision of material, social, and cultural resources that would allow the person to formulate a life plan that she can embrace at some level. This may mean speaking to her in her own language, finding locales (perhaps also émigré communities) where she can find cultural camaraderie and social support, and providing other tools necessary for her to formulate, restructure and pursue an adapted practical identity.

At a theoretical level, however, what such cases tell us is that for a person to develop a practical identity by which to pursue a new or restructured life path, she may often have to be afforded specific resources required for that process. That is, the person may need language training or translation assistance; she may need access to communities that will offer her employment or lifestyle possibilities that would be meaningful to her. And crucially, this all may be part of a process of *alteration* of her identity from, first, the most recent one of being a sex worker with no physical options at all, and more distantly, a member of a particular village or country from which she was taken. If she must remain in the host country (as was the case with Irina and is all-too common), then she must conceive of a way of life that will be possible there and which she can in some way accept or embrace (without alienation). This means that a sometimes radical readjustment to a new cultural setting will need to be facilitated. This illustrates how restoring (or establishing) agential competences, including self-trust but also alleviating other pathologies, is required for meaningful freedom.

Recall, however, that all of the relational views of autonomy I surveyed claimed that proper social relations of recognition of the practical capacities of agents are conceptually required for autonomy; they are not merely important facilitators of its development but part of its meaning. And also, recognition of one's ability to pursue plans grounded in one's practical identity assumes that the object of that recognition—the type of person one is and the shape of that practical identity—is somehow fixed in place and knowable by others. I cannot recognize you as an exemplar of a value scheme unless I know, or presume to know, the value scheme by which you define yourself.

Now it is true that such theorists have included reference to self-trust and normative authority precisely to underscore the vulnerability and internalized oppression that is in evidence in cases of this sort. Mackenzie in particular argues that the reason we need an additional requirement of the attribution of normative authority is because a person's practical identity itself (reflection on which procedural autonomy requires) may be the result of oppressive circumstances, and so from the point of view of the evaluation of autonomy quite suspect (Mackenzie 2008, 513). I have argued elsewhere, however, that what such factors require is an attention to the circumstances in which that practical identity has developed so as to ensure that internalized but oppressive value systems are not seen as the seat of autonomy (Christman 2009, chap. 7). I don't presume that this settles the matter, and some have argued that merely requiring robust conditions of reflective self-endorsement will not weed out internalized but oppressive value commitments.¹⁵ But as I and others have noted (and I reiterate below), there is good reason to avoid simply labeling certain value structures *oppressive*

¹⁵ Again, this is Mackenzie's position; see also Oshana 2006, chap. 2.

and claiming that people who internalize such commitments are by that token heteronomous. It cannot be ruled out *in principle*, for example, that a person may, given her options, voluntarily choose to return to prostitution.

More importantly, however, I agree to this extent with defenders of relational autonomy: that securing a sense of one's own identity in a way that is free of the coercive and self-stultifying conditions that people of the sort I describe here live through is a requirement of autonomy. But I insist that this is either part of the competence conditions themselves—what it means to be an effective agent able to freely reflect on her values and options—or they will be part of the reflection on the historical, developmental factors that the agent must take into account to judge her own values. In the present context, I merely want to add the claim that seeing the interpersonal *recognition* of the capacity for self-trust as conceptually required for autonomy obscures the fact that gaining that ability itself is prior to, and more important than, being recognized or respected as having already done so.

In addition, it is important to reiterate that identity markers—typically a reference to ethnicity, nationality, religious identity, gender or other element of social categorization—are complex concepts whose meaning and connotations are rich and often highly contested. Recognition, then, involves use of contestable and contested social value categories, the expression of which often involves multifaceted complexities of language and history. For example, for a refugee to be recognized in ways that shield her from the vulnerabilities listed by Anderson and Honneth, she must be acknowledged in terms that reflect her view of herself, perhaps as expressed by her ethnicity or citizenship of her country of origin. This will often involve communication with her in her own language and in modes that express respect for her as a speaker (and representative) of that language. Certainly the dynamics of such an encounter are fraught but show the intricacies of securing the independence and self-direction that autonomy involves, and typically which forced migration dramatically supplants.

However, the socially displaced individuals who have recently escaped coercive conditions are in a disorientingly fluid position relative to their practical identities. The cultural settings which gave meaning to those identities, which quite literally provide the language in which it is expressed, are not (or may not be) currently available. Saying a person is free only when they are recognized as embodying a practical identity is based on the assumption that such an identity is in place and knowable.

In this way, views such as Mackenzie's and Anderson/Honneth's which place the capacity for normative authority and self-trust at the center of autonomy have moved in the proper direction. However, in my view they both place the cart of social *recognition* of these capacities before the horse of actually developing them. Their emphasis on the social recognition of these capacities overlooks the ways in which practical identities may well have to be re-formulated and renegotiated, often in a new cultural and literal language, before it is clear what the object of such recognition might be.

At the policy level, this means that insofar as agencies and rescue efforts are at all guided by the directive to restore a kind of freedom to the displaced

people rescued from the bonds of coerced labor, then such efforts should be directed toward the establishment of a viable value orientation feasible in the new social settings the immigrant finds herself in. This means of course speaking or translating into the person's language, but it may also mean finding cultural and social settings within which such person's can find a home, if not literally by living there, at least by working through the renegotiated life plan she or he may now want to establish.¹⁶ But seeing *recognition* of agency as required first would blind us to the need to provide support, resources, and conduits of communication by which such people can establish that agency itself.

An additional case can be mentioned that also raises questions about the definitional connection between self-trust and recognition, a case that also involves slavery but from a different perspective. Consider the many slaves in the American antebellum South for example who struggled to escape their bondage and fought against daunting odds to find a home where living as a free citizen was possible.¹⁷ Add to that consideration of rebellious slaves such as Nat Turner who refused to bend to the oppressive power of the slave system. In such cases, the slaves in question had to muster enormous resolve in order to carry out or attempt such resistance. They did so, as well, in the face of near universal disdain and threats of violence, all from a surrounding white population that clearly denied their status as full human beings. In such cases, self-trust was developed, and indeed developed to a heroic degree, without any sustained recognition by the general population. Does this not show that recognition can fail but self-trust obtain? Were not the struggles to escape and resist themselves autonomous?¹⁸

Now it should be noted that such individuals *did* receive ample recognition and respect from other slaves, free Blacks and other fellow travelers, and it may be that such interpersonal dynamics are sufficient for the recognition in question. But many resistant and fugitive slaves would have been cut off from the supportive communities that would have been the source of such recognition, so that at best we could say is that they received 'hypothetical' or 'representational' recognition from those communities. But this makes the requirement for social recognition—again the *conceptual* requirement of recognition—at least more complicated, since it becomes unclear *which* community must be located as the source of that recognition. And the types of people that McLeod and Sherwin and Mackenzie use as examples of those failing to recognize the normative authority of the agent are those who generally have power over that agent. In the parallel case I am sketching here, the group of people who held power over the resistant slaves were the very whites who denied their humanity. So it remains unclear how recognition is necessary for autonomy in such cases.¹⁹

¹⁶ As Mackenzie herself would of course insist; in fact she has done valuable work in this very vein: see Mackenzie et al. 2007.

¹⁷ Many such accounts are available in the slave narratives and histories of the period. See, for example Jacobs 1987.

¹⁸ Mackenzie mentions another problematic scenario, where a person claims self-confidence and self-trust without (yet) meriting it, as an overconfident teenager might (see Mackenzie 2008, n. 36).

¹⁹ It may be that this cases only shows the difference between 'local' and 'global' autonomy,

One final word of worry about seeing interpersonal recognition as constitutive of freedom in such (if not all) contexts: recall that I mentioned that practical identities which are the seat of self-government are structured by the natural and cultural languages and, more generally, the value schemes by which we structure our self-concept. Value schemes as such, of course, vary across the social geography of our pluralistic and culturally complex world. Encounters across borders (actual or figurative) often mean confrontation or communication across the boundaries of value constellations. Often such an encounter involves miscommunication and the assumption that only moral values familiar to those encountering the other will be recognized. Insofar as recognition of another's value orientation is required for autonomy, then, there will always be the danger that the object and substance of that recognition will be an *imposed* value orientation rather than a discovered one.

For example, Saba Mahmoud has argued that many women who embrace traditional Islam and who adopt what many others might see as self-stultifying and self-abnegating value formations occupy a precarious status in the standard accounting of who counts as an agent. Such women might internalize what many would see as the position of the oppressed and degraded woman. However, while there are many things to say about whether or the degree to which such social positions are indeed oppressed and degraded, when what it means to *have* a practical identity is understood as having one's own, independent, and equally powerful place in a social world, such women will not be seen as agents at all. The 'agency' that embraces traditional roles (as unfortunate as some of us might think such a moral perspective is) would not count as having a practical identity at all and hence lie outside of even the realm of possibility of autonomous agency (see Mahmoud 2005). This is a result that should at least give us pause.

I have argued elsewhere along similar lines (Christman 2009, chap. 8), and here only reiterate that where one sees recognition of one's specific value orientation as required (conceptually) for freedom, and value orientations are contestable and varied, one runs the risk of misidentifying, occluding, or simply defining out of existence, the actual moral orientation that is guiding the person whose freedom is being allegedly recognized.

For all these reasons, I view the capacity to formulate (or in the case of the displaced re-formulate and renegotiate) a practical identity which will give shape to one's value commitments as more fundamental in the conditions of free agency than the social recognition of that capacity, *contra* the particular views I have been surveying here. What this means is that seeing interpersonal recognition of status as conceptually required of freedom instead of seeing the establishment of a practical identity for oneself as the ultimate aim (and recognition of that identity as facilitating factor at best) blinds us to the ways that agency must often be re-established in order for a path to meaningful freedom to be paved. People who have had their formerly settled value orientations (and the social settings that gave them meaning) torn away from them cannot simply be recognized as

in that the resistant slaves clearly did not enjoy global autonomy—autonomy of themselves as persons in general—even if they enjoyed local autonomy vis a vis the decisions surrounding their resistance.

agents with value orientations ready to be executed but must be given resources to reconstruct such a value orientation first. This has direct implications for the particular practices and policies dealing with forcibly displaced persons in an attempt to restore meaningful freedom to them.

4. Conclusion

The argument I have constructed here is an example of what can be called ‘non-ideal’ theory, in that I engaged in the examination of a key philosophical concept in contexts where any number of idealizing conditions are lacking. Typically, moral and political philosophy proceeds by analysis of concepts as they might be instantiated in relatively ‘normal’ circumstances, where what is being explicated is a value or characteristic as it is enjoyed by those who have it, rather than how it might be established or sought by those who don’t. As such, it may well be claimed that the approach I take here is distorting, in that we could all agree that in conditions where a person’s needs are so great that we cannot meaningfully assume that a settled practical identity is functioning (yet) for her, it would be improper to attempt an attitude of recognition of that identity. But this merely points to the difference between the requirements for the *development* or *institution* of a value condition and its defining elements. The latter should be understood as what is involved when the course of development is successful, not merely what can or should be done to bring it about.

This is a fair point, but I suggest that the way we understand the role of interpersonal and social recognition in these kinds of cases shows what relevance it has in the ‘normal’ case. For seeing that role as causally rather than conceptually required for autonomy better informs us about the proper steps to take in that very development toward the unvarnished condition, in this case of full autonomy. Seeing recognition as not the goal to be achieved but a means to bringing about and sustaining that goal—the actual competence and reflective self-acceptance definitive of autonomy—helps shape both social policy and theory in non-ideal (and all too real) settings. The particular resources brought to bear on establishing agential competence and formulating a person’s restructured practical identity are different from those necessary to bring about social recognition of it, though I agree that the latter will be almost always crucial in doing so. However, as I noted in discussing resistant slaves, social recognition might be lacking when agency is very much in evidence. Therefore, if I am at all correct, this illustrates the ways in which we learn lessons about freedom from attention to those so horribly robbed of it.

To sum up, I have attempted to analyze some dominant trends in theoretical treatments of the ideas of autonomy in light of the phenomena of global migration in many of its most troubling forms. In particular, I have argued that those views of autonomy that see it fundamentally as relational and requiring interpersonal recognition should be re-thought in particular ways. Specifically, they are off the mark because they see autonomy as conceptually requiring the recognition of practical identities as a constitutive condition rather than seeing

such recognition as a contributing factor of the more basic condition of establishing and having a (perhaps re-formulated) practical identity. By looking at the way that coercively displaced people need the resources necessary to re-establish an identity before being recognized as having one, I have suggested that such inter-personal conditions need reformulation.

Now of course, defenders of these views could well amend their models to take full account of the dynamics I've been discussing. In particular, they can characterize the role that recognition plays as somehow part of the facilitation of agency which I have argued is more fundamental and required to establish autonomy in these kinds of cases. I would have great sympathy with such a move, as I generally agree with the trend in the literature in which interpersonal dynamics are seen as integral to autonomy. But the path to a more robust account would be much smoother if what I have argued is the proper position on the matter—that social recognition of self-trust is a facilitator but not a definitional requirement of autonomy—is adopted from the start.

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