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Holger Baumann

Reconsidering Relational Autonomy. Personal Autonomy for Socially Embedded and Temporally Extended Selves

Abstract: Most recent accounts of personal autonomy acknowledge that the social environment a person lives in, and the personal relationships she entertains, have some impact on her autonomy. Two kinds of conceptualizing social conditions are traditionally distinguished in this regard: Causally relational accounts hold that certain relationships and social environments play a causal role for the development and ongoing exercise of autonomy. Constitutively relational accounts, by contrast, claim that autonomy is at least partly constituted by a person's social environment or standing. The central aim of this paper is to raise the question how causally and constitutively relational approaches relate to the fact that we exercise our autonomy over time. I argue that once the temporal scope of autonomy is opened up, we need not only to think differently about the social dimension of autonomy. We also need to reconsider the very distinction between causally and constitutively relational accounts, because it is itself a synchronic (and not a diachronic) distinction.

0. The Debate about Relational Autonomy

The social environment a person lives in, and the personal relationships she entertains, have without doubt an impact on her autonomy. Any account of personal autonomy that negates this fact is untenable on descriptive as well as on normative grounds. Neither are we self-made or self-sufficient beings who exist in complete isolation from others; nor is an understanding of personal autonomy as self-sufficient independence an ideal to be aspired at, or a value that deserves the centrality it is given in modern Western societies.

As is widely known, many of the early feminist and communitarian critiques leveled against autonomy (and liberalism) originated from this identification of autonomous agents with self-sufficient rational choosers, who create their own principles and are substantively independent of others.[1] Against this picture, feminists and communitarians alike stressed the social embeddedness of persons: the identity-forming influence of others, the significance of intimate relationships

[1] Jennifer Nedelsky is maybe the most prominent case in point. She attacks "the liberal vision of human beings as self-made and self-making men" (Nedelsky 1989, 8).

and deep attachments, the important role that social forms (e.g. language and culture) play for an agent's deliberation, and several other ways in which social arrangements exert an influence on our lives.[2]

Some of the critics were led by such considerations to abandon the concept of autonomy altogether, claiming that modern preoccupation with autonomy was unwarranted and even harmful: autonomy is unrealizable for social beings like us, but this is no loss, since the underlying ideal denies valuable aspects of our lives and only gives expression to a misguided and potentially oppressive male ideal of leading one's life. Other philosophers of this tradition opposed to the dismissal of autonomy and instead called for its 'relational' or 'social' reconceptualization. They contended that "it is not autonomy as such, but the individualistic manner of its conceptualization which is problematic" (Friedman 1985, 158), and insisted that feminists in particular should "retain the value [of autonomy], while rejecting its liberal incarnation" (Nedelsky 1989, 7). These writers regard autonomy as vital to important (feminist) interests, and they highlight that the concept of autonomy does not imply self-sufficient independence, the latter only being one objectionable conception of autonomy.[3] In other words, autonomy—understood as self-government—must not be interpreted along the lines of substantively independent, 'Cartesian' selves. This move, in turn, paves the way for "reconceiving autonomy" in a more 'relational' or 'social' way.[4]

In what follows, I want to critically examine the prospects and problems of 'socializing autonomy', firstly by putting into perspective two different approaches to incorporate the social dimension of autonomy, and secondly by relating these approaches to the question of how to accommodate the temporal dimension of autonomy. I will thus sidestep any general arguments to the effect that autonomy should be abandoned or replaced by other values.[5] Nonetheless, several lessons can be learned from such arguments: on the one hand, theories of autonomy should to some extent be empirically informed, because they otherwise run danger of construing autonomy in a way that contradicts facts about our (social) existence; on the other hand, any theory of autonomy should be evaluated by asking whether it describes a valuable condition of persons that can, at the same time, serve the practical and theoretical role(s) the concept of autonomy is assigned in political, moral, legal and personal discourses. The

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[2] For helpful overviews of the vast literature, and further references, see Friedman 2003, ch. 4; MacKenzie/Stoljar 2000; Christman 2004.

[3] Cf. Friedman 2003 and Stoljar/Mackenzie 2000, 5.

[4] For the purposes of my discussion, I will use these terms interchangeably. But see Christman 2004, fn 15: "The terms 'relational' and 'social' do not mean the same thing, and it would be instructive to examine their different connotations and implications, given the variety of motivations for [. . .] non-individualized accounts. For example, 'relational' views seem to express more thorougly the need to underscore interpersonal dynamics as components of autonomy, dynamics such as caring relations, interpersonal dependence, and intimacy. 'Social' accounts imply, I think, a broader view, where various other kinds of social factors—institutional settings, cultural patterns, political factors—might all come into play."

[5] A very helpful discussion of such arguments can be found in Mackenzie/Stoljar 2000, 5ff.. They distinguish between "five major feminist critiques of autonomy: *symbolic*, *metaphysical*, *care*, *postmodernist*, and *diversity*" and try to show that "none of them justifies rejecting the concept of autonomy altogether" (ibid., 5).

importance of these requirements will hopefully become obvious in the course of this paper.

Before I can set out the specific concerns I have, a bit more needs to be said about the further development of, and shift of focus in, the philosophical debate since the 1980s.[6] In general, the question is no longer whether autonomy has social conditions, but rather what these conditions are and how they are to be conceptualized. In many recent accounts of personal autonomy the social dimension is acknowledged in one way or another. Hence, most theories are "relational" in the broad sense defined by Catriona MacKenzie and Natalie Stoljar, who characterize relational accounts as "sharing the conviction that persons are socially embedded and that agents' identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity" (MacKenzie/Stoljar 2000, 4). And although there are still some influential accounts of autonomy that neglect the social dimension altogether—e.g. those of Harry Frankfurt (1988) and Alfred Mele (1995)—, even these accounts are at least in principle compatible with a broadly relational outlook.[7]

To label an account "relational" in the broad sense is thus not—or no longer—particularly informative. It does not differentiate competing accounts of autonomy in an interesting way. But there *are* important philosophical differences between accounts that are relational in the broad sense, having to do in particular with the way in which they incorporate social conditions. In this regard, the distinction between 'causally relational' and 'constitutively relational' accounts has become crucial. It is traditionally explained along the following lines:[8]

Proponents of *causally relational accounts* hold that certain relationships and social environments play a causal role for the development and ongoing exercise of autonomy. Social conditions operate, on this view, as background conditions of autonomy or as contributory factors to its realization. Autonomy itself, however, is understood in an individualistic fashion. Being autonomous means that certain psychological states obtain or that a person has and effectively exercises relevant psychological capacities or competences. Hence, according to defenders of causally relational accounts, the question whether a person is autonomous can be fully answered with reference to her internal psychological states or capacities. Social conditions need not be mentioned in the definition of autonomy.

By contrast, those who put forward *constitutively relational accounts* deny that social conditions are background conditions only. Instead they believe that the relationship between a person's autonomy and the social environment she lives in is more intimate: Among the "defining condition" of autonomy are "requirements concerning the interpersonal or social environment of the agent"

[6] An instructive overview of these developments in the debate from a feminist perspective can be found in Friedman 2003, ch. 4. She speaks of a certain "convergence of feminist and mainstream conceptions of autonomy" (ibid., 87ff.).

[7] This is due to the fact that these accounts do not embrace a conception of autonomy as self-sufficiency or self-creation that is incompatible with the claim that social conditions play some role in developing, exercising or attaining autonomy.

[8] For the following, see especially Christman 2004, 144ff.; Friedman 2003, 57f.; MackKenzie/Stoljar 2000, 22; Oshana 1998, 96f.; 2006, 49 and 70.

(Christman 2004, 148). Social conditions are treated as "conceptually necessary requirements of autonomy" (ibid.). In other words, what it means to be autonomous, according to proponents of constitutively social accounts, cannot be spelled out without direct reference to a person's social environment, her social position or standing. The 'social' is written directly into the definiton of autonomy.

With this distinction in hand, I can now state the objectives of the subsequent discussion and my way of proceeding. In the first part of this paper, I want to examine two very influential takes on relational autonomy, namely those of John Christman and Marina Oshana. These philosophers have provided some of the most detailed analyses of autonomy that are explicitly relational in the broad sense mentioned above, and they have decidedly taken a stand on the question whether autonomy is or should be regarded as causally relational (Christman) or as constitutively relational (Oshana). In a first step, I will outline these views and explain why they qualify as causally or constitutively relational (1.). In a second step, I will investigate the commitments and motivations underlying the different approaches to the social dimension of autonomy. I regard the quarrel between Oshana and Christman as interesting in its own right, and it brings to light many important issues. Also, it yields a positive answer to the question whether the distinction between causal and constitutive accounts is practically important (2.).[9] In addition, it allows me to set out some general and methodological points for discussions about the concept of autonomy and its (relational re-) conceptualization (3.).

These general reflections on how to argue about (relational) autonomy crucially inform my discussion in the second part of the paper, in which I want to bring together two debates that too often have been led in separation from each other: the debate about the social dimension of autonomy (How are we to account for the fact that we are socially embedded beings?) and the debate about the temporal dimension of autonomy (How are we to account for the fact that we are "temporally extended" beings?).[10] More specifically, I want to ask how causally and constitutively relational approaches relate to the fact that we exercise our autonomy over time—that we have a history and a future, that we develop our identities and emancipate ourselves from others over time, that we sometimes change our minds and take different directions, that we find ourselves in changing relationships and social environments, etc. Are there any principal reasons to take one approach or the other? Again, I introduce and motivate this question in the context of Oshana's and Christman's respective treatments of autonomy (4.).

My rather bold claim is that once the temporal scope of autonomy is opened up, we need not only to reconsider how to incorporate social conditions of autonomy. We may also have to reconsider the very distinction between causally and constitutively relational accounts, which is itself a synchronic (and not a

[9] This question is raised, e.g., in Friedman 2003, 97.

[10] I borrow the term "temporal extendedness" from Michael Bratman who stresses that it is "a deep and important feature of our agency that it is temporally extended" (Bratman 2007, 4).

diachronic) distinction. Of course, within the limits of this paper, I will not be able to fully substantiate this claim or to develop a conception of 'diachronic autonomy' that does justice to what I call the 'social and temporal dynamics' of autonomy. But I hope to give at least some reasons why it might be a worthwhile task to reconsider relational autonomy from the perspective of our temporal extendedness, and to set the stage for further discussions (5.).

1. Two Models of Personal Autonomy

Christman's Historical Account

The basic idea underlying John Christman's account of personal autonomy is that a person is autonomous if she governs her behavior in accordance with motivational states that are expressive of her 'true' or 'authentic' self.[11] Two kinds of conditions are distinguished in this respect: *Competency conditions* include those conditions "that indicate that the agent is able to function adequately in judgments and choice" (Christman 2005a, 278), while *authenticity conditions* ensure that the motives "that move an agent to action are, in some sense, her true, authentic desires and motives" (ibid.).

This general characterization of autonomy is given the following interpretation: On the one hand, a person qualifies as *competent* only if her set of motivational and cognitive states does not involve manifest contradictions ("minimal rationality"), if she does not suffer from grave self-deception ("self-awareness"), and if she is able to effectively carry out her intentions in the absence of external barriers ("self-control").[12] On the other hand, a person's motivational state C counts as *authentic* if she would not "feel deeply alienated" from this state, "were she to engage in sustained reflection on C, and do so in light of the historical processes (adequately described) that gave rise to C" (Christman 2007, 21). Alienation is understood here as "feeling constrained by the trait and wanting decidedly to *repudiate* it" (Christman 2007, 12).[13]

On this account, autonomy is largely a subjective matter that is decided from within a person's perspective. Consider, e.g., Hanna and Peter who both have a strong and pervasive disposition to compete with others. Every time they face other persons who challenge them or who fare better than them in certain respects, they desire to take up the challenge and to trump them. Now, while Peter's reflective stance towards this disposition—in light of the historical processes that gave rise to it—is a feeling of alienation, Hanna does not undergo any such feelings. Hence, even though Hanna and Peter may share their 'objective condition' (social environment, education, etc.), only Peter does not count as au-

[11] The crucial point of reference with regard to this basic idea of autonomy—that underlies many accounts in the recent debate—is, of course, Frankfurt 1988, ch. 2.

[12] See, e.g., Christman 2005a, 278f. and 2007, 20f..

[13] See especially Christman 2001, 202f., for the reasons why he conceives of the relevant attitude that constitutes 'authenticity' in terms of 'non-alienation' (instead of 'endorsement' or 'identification' like Frankfurt and others).

tonomous relative to his disposition, because it is not expressive of his authentic self. Hanna, by contrast, 'owns' her disposition and the subsequent behavior.

Christman introduces two additional conditions that are meant to safeguard the basic conditions of competence and authenticity, and especially to secure that the reflection is expressive of the agent's own standpoint. *Firstly*, a person must be procedurally independent:[14] In developing and exercising her capabilities for self-reflection and self-control, a person must not be/have been under the influence of factors that subvert these very capacities *and* from which she would feel alienated were she reflect on them adequately.[15] For example, if Hanna's stance towards her disposition to compete with others is due to an upbringing that renders her unable to reflect on this disposition, *and* if she would feel alienated from this inability were she to reflect on the factors that gave rise to it, she is not autonomous, despite her state of non-alienation. As an epistemic test for the condition of procedural independence, Christman suggests that a person must be "able to realistically imagine choosing otherwise were she in a position to value sincerely that alternative position" (Christman 2007, 14). The *second* additional condition Christman puts forward is that a person must meet the condition of reflective non-alienation in a "robust manner". As an epistemic test for this condition, Christman suggests that the hypothetical reflection must yield the same results "repeated over a variety circumstances" (ibid., 18). If, for example, Hanna's stance towards her disposition constantly changes in different situations and at different points of time, her actual state of non-alienation does not yield autonomy because she does not meet the autonomy-guaranteeing conditions in a robust manner.[16]

How does the 'social' come into the picture, and why does this account qualify as causally relational? As to the first question, there are at least two points at which Christman explicitly addresses the social environment of a person. *Firstly,* in reflecting on the historical processes that gave rise to her motivational states, a person will certainly need to take into account the influence that other persons and her social environment exerted on her, if she is to conceive adequately of these processes. *Secondly,* the condition of procedural independence is specified with explicit reference to the social environment: the reflection must be such that "it is not the product of social and psychological conditions that prevent adequate appraisals of oneself" (Christman 2007, 14). This is the case, for example, if the person "has been denied all education, has been systematically punished when expressing curiosity about alternative conditions, [or] if her skills have been narrowly fashioned to accept only one role" (Christman 2001, 206).

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[14] In his more recent publications, Christman avoids using the term of procedural independence and instead speaks, e.g., of "effective reflection" (Christman 2005a, 280). I use the former term because it is somehow established in the debate. For more on the notion of procedural independence, see Dworkin 1976.

[15] The hypothetical/counterfactual formulation of this condition is important because it opens up the possibility that people can retain their autonomy (and procedural independence) even if they live under conditions that actually inhibit their self-reflective capacities. Oshana (2006, 38) raises some important questions with regard to this counterfactual condition.

[16] More recently, Christman has termed this condition the condition of SCR ("sustained criticial reflection"). See Christman 2007, 18.

Christman's account thereby qualifies as relational in the broad sense. It is a causally relational account, however, because social conditions are referred to as background conditions only. They are relevant to autonomy only insofar as they have an impact on a person's capacities for self-reflection or give rise to a feeling of alienation if reflected upon. Autonomy itself is defined solely with reference to a person's capacities and her psychological states, namely the capacities referred to in the conditions of competence/authenticity and the state of reflective non-alienation.

Oshana's Socio-Relational Account

Marina Oshana's account of autonomy strongly contrasts with the account given by Christman. To begin with, the basic idea underlying her account is that a person is autonomous if she is in control of her life and if she occupies a social position of authority over matters of fundamental importance to the direction of her life.[17] Like Christman, Oshana distinguishes two kinds of conditions in this regard: *Control conditions* guarantee that persons are "in actual control of their own choices, actions and goals", while *authority conditions* ensure that persons "own" the "management of [their] choices, actions and goals" (Oshana 2006, 3f.).

At first sight, these conditions seem to mirror the general conditions set out by Christman, although reference to the social position of a person is already made in this basic definition of autonomy. The crucial differences become apparent once the content Oshana gives to these conditions is spelled out.[18] Both conditions include internal (psychological) and external (social) elements. While *being in control* entails that a person must be competent—she must have the capacities for self-awareness, self-understanding and self-evaluation, as well as the capacities for instrumental rationality, means-end rationality and critical rationality (see Oshana 2006, 76ff.)—, this does not suffice. In addition, a person must enjoy "regulative control": she must be in a social position from which she is able to control her social environment in the sense that she can actually "manage key aspects of her life against other persons or institutions that might attempt to wield coercive control over her" (ibid., 84). This comprises having access to an adequate range of options, where adequacy is specified independently of a person's perspective and requires at least that the person has one option that is different from choosing non-autonomy (ibid., 84ff.).[19]

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[17] For similar accounts that draw on the idea that a person's autonomy is partly constituted by the objective social position she occupies, see also Leist 2005, ch. 2; Santiago 2005; Kauppinnen 2009.

[18] Note, however, that in finally setting out the necessary and sufficient conditions of autonomy (Oshana 2006, ch. 4), Oshana does not explicitly assign these conditions to the two kinds of conditions she distinguishes at the beginning of her book; consequently she might object to my way of presenting her account in this regard, but this is only a matter of interpretation.

[19] The condition that a person must have a relevant range of adequate options has prominently been defended by Joseph Raz (1986, ch. 14). This condition is an objective and external condition because the adequacy of options is not determined from the person's own perspective: Even if a person happily accepts a situation in which she has no options, her range of options is not adequate and she therefore does not count as autonomous.

As to the second condition, having authority requires at the same time more and less than enjoying 'authenticity' in Christman's sense. In order to own (the management of) her desires and values, a person does not have to be in a state of non-alienation. It rather suffices that she acknowledges crucial aspects of her identity, where acknowledgment is compatible with feelings of alienation (ibid., 69).[20] On the other hand, a person must—as an internal condition—regard herself as being worthy of directing her life (ibid., 81).[21] More importantly, she must not only be free from factors that inhibit her self-reflection and thus prevent it from being effective in a procedurally independent sense (ibid., 78f.). She must also occupy a social position that renders her substantively independent. This includes, e.g., that she is supplied with certain material and psychological resources; that she "can have, and can pursue, values, interests and goals different from those who have influence and authority over her, without risk of reprisal sufficient to deter her in this pursuit", and that she is "not required to take responsibility for another's needs, expectations, and failings unless doing so is reasonably expected of [her] in light of a particular function" (ibid., 87).

Autonomy, on this account, is at least partly an objective matter that is decided independently from the person's own perspective and her internal states. Consider, again, the case of Hanna and Peter. Even if Hanna meets all internal conditions, she might still not count as autonomous. Say, for example, that Hanna lives in an environment where competition is regarded as indispensable, and that she has no realistic option of leaving this environment. Because in this scenario, Hanna is not allowed to give up her disposition to compete with others, she would qualify, on Oshana's account, as non-autonomous because of her social position. Peter, by contrast, might prove to be autonomous despite his state of alienation, provided that he fulfills the internal conditions and, more importantly, the external conditions of regulative control, an adequate range of options, and substantive independence.

As should be obvious, the 'social' is assigned a very different place in this account than in Christman's. Crucially, both control and authority conditions make explicit reference to a person's social status and to external social criteria that are independent of her psychological make-up. Rather than merely causally contributing to the development and ongoing exercise of capacities that are relevant to autonomy, a person's social position is regarded as (partly) constituting her autonomy. In Oshana's own words: "Autonomy is not a phenomenon merely enhanced or lessened by the contingencies of a person's social situation [...]. Rather, appropriate social relations form an inherent part of what it means to be self-directed." (ibid., 50)

[20] See also Oshana 2005 and 2007.

[21] This condition has been stressed by Paul Benson in several articles. See Benson 1994; 2005a and 2005b.

2. Entering the Debate about Causally vs. Constitutively Relational Approaches

Up to this point, I have only outlined the accounts given by Oshana and Christman, and I have explained how the distinction between causally and constitutively relational accounts applies to them. I now want to investigate the commitments and motivations that underlie these different approaches to the social dimension of autonomy. It will become clear that the prevailing reasons differ significantly. Christman's defence of a causally relational approach is crucially informed by the "conceptual requirement" of content-neutrality, while Oshana makes her case for a constitutively relational account primarily by appeal to intuitive judgments about paradigmatic cases. I will roughly outline the crucial lines of argument and raise some critical questions. Drawing on these questions, I will then, in the next section, analyse the quarrel between Oshana and Christman in a more general and systematic way.

Oshana's Case for a Constitutively Relational Approach

Oshana contends that any account of personal autonomy that does not incorporate external social conditions yields counterintuitive results and should therefore be rejected. Drawing on detailed case studies she spends much time on showing that persons can fulfill all the conditions proposed by causally relational accounts, while intuitively judged these persons lack autonomy. She then goes on to argue for her socio-relational account, by indicating that only within this account our intuitive judgments concerning such cases can be captured.

To illustrate Oshana's reasoning, let me sketch two of her examples: A slave might not feel deeply alienated from his commitment or situation and thus count as autonomous on Christman's account. Intuitively judged, however, he lacks autonomy (Oshana 2006, 56ff.). This can be explained, Oshana claims, only with reference to the condition of *regulative control.* Because the slave is not "empowered to challenge others who might attempt to direct [him] against [his] wishes" (Oshana 2006, 84) and has no access to an adequate range of options, he fails to be autonomous. Similarly, a subservient woman, who always lives up to the wishes of others and is not recognized as being someone who can choose for herself (ibid., 57ff.), may meet all the conditions set out by Christman and others. Notwithstanding, we consider her to be non-autonomous, according to Oshana, because she is not *substantively independent*: It is not true of her, e.g., that she is not illegitimately required to take responsibility for the needs of other persons (see section 2). Both conditions refer to an agent's social position or status and are thus constitutively social conditions.

Several questions can be raised with regard to Oshana's case for a constitutively relational approach to the social dimension of autonomy. To begin with, it is at least questionable that the intuitions converge on the cases to which Oshana alludes, and it is always open to defenders of causally relational approaches to refine and amend their conditions in order to better capture our intuitive judgments. In general, it seems to be a hard task to justify the shift from a

causal to a constitutive account by appeals to intuitive plausibility (although, in fairness to Oshana, it must be emphasized that at some point one must appeal to intuitions, because this is the only way to motivate a shift at all). At least two more questions suggest themselves with regard to the practical and theoretical implications of the socio-relational account: *Firstly*, does Oshana conflate the notions of autonomy and positive freedom, which should be kept conceptually separate, because otherwise the notion of autonomy looses its conceptual distinctiveness and can be substituted? And, *secondly*, does an account of autonomy that excludes those ways of life that are incompatible with the socio-relational conditions lead to an objectionable form of paternalism and an elitist understanding of who can participate in democratic processes? It is exactly at this latter point at which Christman enters the discussion.

Christman's Case for a Causally Relational Approach

The crucial argument Christman offers in favor of a causally relationally approach is that constitutively relational accounts are not content-neutral, while content-neutrality is a "conceptual requirement" of personal autonomy, provided that this concept is used in "certain political contexts, in particular as fundamental to the specification of who is the subject of justice and what the basic interests of such subjects are" (Christman 2005a, 293, 285). According to Christman, accounts of autonomy that exclude as non-autonomous certain desires, values, or ways of life for conceptual reasons—and thus violate the requirement of content-neutrality—should be rejected because autonomy is thereby rendered a perfectionist "ideal for individuals to relate to or to reject" (ibid.). It thus cannot serve the role of a basic value that it is assigned in political contexts. For example, a 'content-laden' notion of autonomy results in the problematic exclusion of those who pursue other ways of life and reject the ideal of autonomy. Since constitutively relational accounts yield substantive restrictions on the content of desires, values, or ways of life persons might entertain, Christman contends that one should embrace the causal approach.

How does the divide between causally and constitutively relational accounts relate to the question of content-neutrality? More specifically, why do constitutively relational accounts qualify—*qua* being constitutively relational—as substantive or content-laden? The answer is implicit in the definition of these accounts. As I have explained, their defining characteristic is that in order to count as autonomous, a person must find herself in *specific* social relations or environments. In Oshana's view, e.g., a person must have access to an adequate range of options and be substantively independent. In consequence, neither a person who only has the option of choosing non-autonomy nor a person who lacks minimal material or psychological resources can possibly be autonomous. Christman's account, by contrast, allows for the possibility that even such persons qualify as autonomous. What is crucial to autonomy is the reflective stance a person takes towards herself, i.e. whether she feels deeply alienated from her commitments or from her situation under conditions of procedural independence. This yields the result that even a slave or a subservient woman can in principle be labeled

autonomous.[22] While Oshana's theory is a substantive theory, then, Christman's account is content-neutral.

As in the case of Oshana, several critical questions can be raised with regard to this line of argument. To begin with, it is questionable whether the requirement of content-neutrality can be derived from the role the concept of autonomy is meant to serve in political contexts. Does the relevant notion of autonomy really have to be content-neutral, or does it suffice that no *problematic* normative restrictions on who can count as autonomous are invoked?[23] If so, can a constitutively relational account be defended against the charge put forward by Christman?[24] Another way to challenge Christman's argument is to raise worries with regard to the notion of procedural independence: Does this notion, once it is spelled out in some detail, already introduce certain conceptual restrictions on who can count as autonomous, because, e.g., it excludes living in a community where persons are systematically punished when expressing curiosity about alternative conditions etc.?[25] Finally, it might be asked whether conceptions of content-neutral autonomy describe a valuable condition of persons. Put differently, does an account of autonomy that allows for the possibility of autonomous slaves or subservient women loose its distinctive role of providing a standpoint from which the institutions of a society can be judged as just or as providing the opportunity for human flourishing?[26]

3. How to Argue about (Relational) Autonomy

At least some of the issues I have raised in the last section concerning Oshana's and Christman's case for a constitutively respectively causally relational approach have received much discussion in the literature (see footnotes). Instead of entering these substantive debates, however, I want to take a step back and extract several general methodological points from the quarrel between Oshana and Christman. My aim is to provide something like a framework for discussion against which the prospects and problems of different (relational) approaches to autonomy can be evaluated. This framework will crucially inform my discussion in the next two sections, but I think that it is also informative and of avail in its own right.

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[22] Though Christman, like other defenders of content-neutral accounts, suggests that it might often not be the case that such persons fulfill the procedural conditions he regards as necessary and sufficient for autonomy.

[23] On the notion of content-neutrality and the possibility of "weakly substantive accounts", see especially Benson 2005a and Kristinsson 2000.

[24] For arguments along these lines, see for example Oshana 2006, ch. 5, and Westlundt 2009.

[25] Cf. Oshana 2006, 43. In a similar fashion, John Santiago has argued that "in fact, the CPI [conditions of procedural independence] stipulate that autonomy requires an agent to inhabit something like a positive social position" (Santiago 2005, 96). He goes on to embrace a view very similar to Oshana's. Interestingly, in specifying the "nature of the autonomous space" he extrapolates backwards Christman's conditions of procedural independence in order to "achieve positive conditions" (ibid., 97).

[26] See Christman 2004, 153, and Oshana 2006, 80.

Practical Interests, Appeals to Intuitions, and the Conceptual Distinctiveness of Autonomy

In presenting how Oshana and Christman argue for their different takes on the social dimension of autonomy, I have implicitly distinguished two different approaches: appeals to intuitive plausibility and reflections about the practical and theoretical role of autonomy. While Oshana rests her case primarily on reflections about specific cases, Christman starts from a certain practial interest in the notion of autonomy, from which he derives the conceptual requirement of content-neutrality that is incompatible with constitutively relational accounts. This way of presenting the accounts has without doubt been one-sided, since neither does Oshana rely *exclusively* on intuitions, nor does Christman base his account and his stance towards constitutively relational accounts *exclusively* on conceptual considerations about the concept of autonomy.

However, my way of presenting the accounts helps me to motivate the general question how one should approach discussions about autonomy. By dwelling on paradigmatic cases? Or by reflecting on the concept of autonomy in the light of the practical and theoretical role it is meant to play (what I call the *practical interest* in autonomy)? Assuming for a moment that this is a real alternative, I want to opt for the latter:[27]

Firstly, if one does not specify one's practical interest in the notion of autonomy, one might end up criticizing a conception of autonomy that is not intended to capture the sense of 'autonomy' in which one is interested. The notion of autonomy is used in many different legal, political, moral and personal contexts, and one should not take it for granted that there is a unified account of autonomy that can be applied to all of these contexts (though there certainly must be some overlap because otherwise it becomes unintelligible why to use the term 'autonomy' anymore).[28] *Secondly*, the practical interest one has in autonomy already informs the intuitions concerning specific cases. If one is interested, e.g., in autonomy as a concept relevant to questions of moral responsibility, how one judges a person's autonomy might importantly differ from one's judgment about the same case in a different context, e.g. in the context of autonomy as a personal ideal of living. A person may count as autonomous in the sense relevant to moral responsibility, while she might lack autonomy in the sense of autonomy as a personal ideal. *Thirdly*, by setting out the practical interest in autonomy, one can derive some general requirements or adequacy conditions that inform one's discussion and set the limits within which one might explicate the concept of autonomy. Christman's stance towards constitutively relational accounts illustrates this point very nicely, but one can also mention Oshana's worries that content-neutral conceptions of autonomy do not describe a valuable condition

[27] I have greatly benefitted from discussion about these general questions with John Christman and with Christian Seidel, who works independently on these issues (see Seidel 2008).

[28] One might also want to appeal to the notoriously vague notion of 'family resemblance' in this context. What I want to emphasize at this point is that one should avoid a complete fragmentation of autonomy. For example, Arpaly (2003, ch. 4) distinguishes eight senses of autonomy and treats them as being more or less completely independent from each other. This is, in my view, unsatisfying from a theoretical perspective.

of persons, and thus are of no use in the shaping of just institutions that enable the members of a community to flourish.

These considerations raise the immediate suspicion that by specifying a certain practical interest, one can dissolve all possible disagreements and render immune from criticism any conception of autonomy. But this, of course, is not what I aim at. What I want to emphasize is that intuitions about specific examples are always informed to some extent by a certain practical interest in autonomy.[29] By making explicit this interest, one can then begin to argue about the following questions:[30] Is the interest an *interest in autonomy*? (Can it be related to the basic idea that autonomy means to be self-governed?) Is it a *legitimate* interest in autonomy? (Does the distinction between autonomy and non-autonomy serve any worthy purpose?) And does the practical interest yield a notion of autonomy that is conceptually distinct and that cannot be substituted by other concepts? (Can the role that such a notion of autonomy plays better be articulated with appeal to other notions?)

Instead of appealing to "free floating intuitions" (Christman 2005a, 282) about allegedly paradigmatic cases, then, one should start by specifing a certain practical interest in autonomy—what is the notion of autonomy meant to accomplish?[31] In a second step, one should make clear why this is a legitimate interest in a notion of autonomy that is both conceptually distinct and that cannot be substituted by other concepts.[32] Against this background, one can take a further step and attend to the question whether the practical interest one has yields certain constraints on the concept of autonomy. And only then, in a last step, one should investigate whether one or the other conceptualization of autonomy better fits with certain intuitive judgments concerning specific cases, where these examples qualify as relevant only if considered from a shared practical interest in autonomy and if there is a certain agreement on the constraints this interest yields.[33]

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[29] Double (1992) ignores the possibility that the conditions of autonomy might be context-dependent. Starting from the interesting observation that any account of autonomy faces at least one counterexample, he suggests that one should 'subjectivize' autonomy, i.e. understand conditions of autonomy as relative to individual persons. I would suggest, by contrast, that one should 'contextualize' autonomy, i.e. understand conditions of autonomy as being relative to practical contexts that are individuated by practical interests.

[30] I would like to thank Susanne Boshammer for helping me to see more clearly that discussions about different notions of autonomy may be redescribed as discussions about the legitimacy of practical interests in autonomy and about the conceptual distinctiveness of the conceptions that are informed by such different interests.

[31] See Christman 2005, 282f..

[32] As I have indicated, Oshana needs to keep separate her notion of autonomy from of the notion of positive freedom; similarly, one might suggest that Christman needs to keep the notion of autonomy separate from a notion of basic respect owed to each adult person.

[33] The description I am giving here of how to approach discussions about autonomy is certainly a highly idealized one. In practice, discussions will often, and necessarily, be initiated by specific examples that generate conflicting intuitions. What is important, however, is that such disagreements should always lead one back to the questions about practical interests that I have set out. Only then one will avoid engaging in endless discussions about conflicting intuitions, while in fact the disagreements arise at a much deeper level.

Keeping in mind this admittedly abstract schema for approaching discussions about autonomy, I am now, on the hand, in a position to redescribe in a concise way the quarrel between Oshana and Christman: first and foremost, they disagree about the conceptual requirement of content neutrality and not about certain intuitions concerning 'paradigmatic cases'. On the other hand, I can set out my own way of entering discussions about the social dimension of autonomy. In short, I will draw on a specific practical interest in autonomy and relate this interest to the question of how to conceive of the social dimension of autonomy.

4. Reconsidering Relational Autonomy—Putting the Temporal Dimension into Perspective

Very roughly, I am interested in personal autonomy as a regulative ideal that informs the ways in which persons can strive for leading a 'life of their own'. Autonomy, on this understanding, is applied to a person's life, or her way of living, as a socially embedded and temporally extended being. Hence, my interest in autonomy opens up both the social and the temporal dimension of autonomy. The question I want to raise with regard to the divide between causally and constitutively relational approaches is the following: Are there any principal reasons to take one or the other approach, given that what one is interested in is a notion of 'diachronic autonomy' that applies to persons who are leading their lives in changing social environments over time?

Let me begin to explain this way of approaching the question by relating it to the accounts given by Oshana and Christman. Crucially, both endorse *additive views* of what it means to govern one's life over time. According to Christman, a person is always autonomous relative to a *particular* desire or trait *at some time*.[34] He thus construes the concept of autonomy in a local fashion in two senses: Autonomy is primarily a property of particular motivational states (instead of being a property of persons), and it is a property that applies to this particular state at some time (instead of applying to a person over extended periods of time). Speaking more globally of a person's autonomy is to be understood derivatively. A person is globally autonomous if she is autonomous relative to a sufficient number of motivational states, and if this former condition holds over extended periods of time.[35]

Oshana, by contrast, applies the property of autonomy to *persons*. According to her, there is no "natural transition" from local autonomy—as a property of particular motivational states at some time, constituted by a person's psychological states—to global autonomy as a property of persons who exercise their autonomy in a social context, and whose autonomy is partly constituted by their social position *at some time*. But her account is still additive with regard to the diachronic or temporal dimension: A person is autonomous over time if she enjoys synchronic 'global autonomy' in the socio-relational sense throughout

[34] For a clear statement of the additive view, see Double 1992, 69, and Friedman 2003, 4.

[35] Although I regard this description as adequate, some important qualifications are to follow.

her life. Hence, both Christman and Oshana conceptualize *diachronic autonomy* additively.

In the remainder of this section, I want to indicate that the additive understanding of diachronic autonomy embraced by Oshana and Christman does not provide us with an adequate conception of what leading an autonomous life (in the relevant sense) amounts to, because both accounts are too *static*. This is due to their synchronic conceptualization of autonomy. In the next section, I will then relate this claim to the question how the social dimension is to be incorporated.

To avoid misunderstandings, let me emphasize that my discussion of the views that Oshana and Christman provide is not primarily intended as a criticism of these accounts. As I have indicated in the last section, it is a lively possibility that they have different practical interests in the concept of autonomy and thus might not want to provide a notion of 'diachronic autonomy' as an ideal that describes one worthwhile way of living one's life among others. Nonetheless, examining how their accounts fare with regard to this latter interest might prove helpful to take first steps towards a conception of autonomy that is meant to fit this interest.

Synchronic vs. Diachronic Accounts of Autonomy—Setting the Stage

Implict in a synchronic understanding of autonomy is the claim that we can fix a person's autonomy at every single point of time. Sometimes, it might be necessary to look at how a person behaves over extended periods of time and over a range of different situations, but only for epistemic reasons, i.e. in order to determine whether a person really meets the relevant conditions in a robust manner, as Christman puts it. By contrast, the suggestion that autonomy is a property of a person's way of living, which I want to make plausible, is the view that whether a person is autonomous cannot—for conceptual and not for epistemic reasons—be determined by looking at single points of time. Autonomy is conceived of as essentially diachronic. It is regarded as a diachronic property of persons.[36]

As I have said in connection with how Oshana puts into view the constitutively relational approach, drawing on examples is, at the same time, a hard task and the only way to motivate a shift in focus (be it social or temporal). For my purposes, convincing examples need to be found in which a person's autonomy can only be fixed over time. In other words, what needs to be shown is that judgments about a person's autonomy in a synchronic fashion fail to capture our intuitions (that are informed by the practical interest I have specified), and that we can only make sense of our intuitions by thinking of autonomy as a diachronic property that describes a person's way of living over time.[37]

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[36] Meyers draws a distinction between "episodic autonomy" and "programmatic autonomy". The former notion of autonomy applies to single decisions or desires at some time, while the latter notion applies to a person's way of living (see Meyers 1989, 48ff.). However, Meyers does not take a stand on whether (a certain notion of) autonomy is essentially diachronic in the sense that I have described.

[37] I would like to thank John Christman for helping me to formulate the challenge in an apt way.

Oshana's Additive, Socio-Relational Account of Diachronic Autonomy

As regards Oshana's account, the following kind of examples suggests itself: Imagine a person who accidentially gets into a situation where the socio-relational properties Oshana considers as essential to autonomy are absent. For example, a person becomes unemployed and lacks the material resources that partly constitute substantive independence, or she suddenly finds herself in a social environment where she is illegitimately required to take responsibility for another's needs, or she is treated as someone who is not being able to competently judge her situation. According to Oshana, this settles the question of autonomy. As long as the person does not enjoy the social position of substantive independence, she cannot be labelled autonomous

But now imagine that the person, in the course of managing her life, exhibits a great level of creativity in dealing with her unemployment. She adapts to her disastrous financial situation and takes steps towards supplying herself with a minimal level of financial self-sufficiency, so that she is not dependent upon the good will of others. Or imagine that she opposes to the undue expectations to take responsibility, and changes her situation by getting out of the relationships. Or she refutes the ascription of being incompetent and insists on deciding for herself. In these cases, it seems counterintuitive to label the person non-autonomous. To the contrary, her way of dealing with the situations seems to indicate that she enjoys a great level of autonomy in the sense that interests me here.[38] This yields a picture of the autonomous person as being able to adapt to changing environments, to imagine alternative possibilities, to take necessary steps to change (unlucky) situations, to distinguish those expectations or ascriptions that are legitimate from those that are not, and to oppose to others if necessary.[39]

What conclusions can be drawn from these examples? To begin with, I claim that Oshana's theory produces counterintuitive results when applied to persons who continue to exercise skills or competencies for adaptation, imagination, the realistic evaluation of their situation, and for emancipation in environments that are problematic for some reason or another. By saying that these environments are 'problematic', I happily concede to Oshana that such environments are potentially autonomy-threatening. But I want to suggest that being autonomous in the sense that interests me means that, among other things, a person can resist and emancipate herself from such environments.

Furthermore, the counterintuitive results seem to be directly related both to the synchronic and to the socio-relational conception of autonomy that Oshana embraces. On the one hand, it seems that whether a person has the relevant competencies cannot be determined at some time. One must instead look at the manner in which she leads her life over time. On the other hand, describing autonomy as being constituted by specific socio-relational properties at some

[38] Similar considerations are to be found in Meyers' review of Oshana's book (see Meyers 2008).

[39] In general, my way of describing autonomy in this section bears great similarities with the view that Meyers (1989) embraces. For the condition that a person must be able to imagine alternative possibilites, see MacKenzie 2000.

time yields a conception of autonomy that is too *static*. The socio-relational account does not allow for the possibility that persons retain their autonomy under circumstances in which the socio-relational properties are absent. But in the light of the examples I have given, and I take these not to be unrealistic in a damaging sense, this is counterintuitive.

What cannot be concluded from these examples is that the constitutively relational approach should be rejected in general, for the reason that the 'temporal dynamics' of autonomy cannot be accounted for within such an approach. There might well be other ways of setting out such an account, a question that I will attend to in the next section. Also, one should refrain from claiming that Oshana's socio-relational account is to be abandoned altogether. As I have mentioned above, it might well serve a practical interest in autonomy that is different from the one that I have in autonomy.

Christman's Additive, Causally Relational Account of Diachronic Autonomy

The account given by Christman can be confronted with different kinds of examples. Consider again Peter who feels deeply alienated from his disposition to compete with others (see section 2.). At some time, Peter moves places because he has obtained a new job, and in his new social environment, being competitive is a trait that is regarded as highly valuabe. Now imagine that, all of a sudden, Peter's feelings of alienation fade away. He cannot fully explain this transition to himself, but he now enjoys competing with others and happily registers his constant desire to do so. All of this happens under conditions of procedural independence, and there are no reasons to doubt that Peter meets the conditions for self-reflection in a robust manner. Before and after his transition, his reflection yields the same results repeated over a variety circumstances. According to the conditions for autonomy that Christman puts forwards, Peter is non-autonomous relative to his desire before his transition, while he counts as autonomous after the transition. The question of autonomy is settled by the reflective state of alienation/non-alienation at some time.

However, this way of treating the example strikes me as inadequate. In order to answer the question whether Peter is diachronically autonomous, it does not seem to suffice that we know that at some point of time $t1$, or over some period of time $t1$–$t2$, he feels alienated from his desire, while at $t3$ and from then on he does not undergo any feelings of alienation. What needs to be known in addition, I claim, is how the 'change of mind' has come about. It is mere luck that Peter undergoes the change? Is it mere adaption to his environment (provided that he is aware of the way in which his environment influences him and that he does not feel alienated from these factors)? In both cases, I suggest, we would not regard him as autonomous in the sense that is at stake here.

What seems relevant to the question of Peter's diachronic autonomy is how he approaches his new environment and relates to himself over time. The change in environment and the support that he is provided when expressing his disposition to compete with others allows Peter to take a new perspective on himself. Put crudely, other persons provide him with the opportunity to change his attitude towards his disposition. In order to count as autonomous, it seems, a

person must be able to encounter new situations, to listen to others and to allow them to provide new perspectives. But an autonomous person must also be able to emancipate herself to some extent from the immediate reactions of others, and to resist the opportunity for a change in order to stay 'true to herself'. If Peter merely succumbs to the reactions or expectations of his environment, we would not count him as autonomous. Exercising capacities for what might be called 'self-exploration' and 'emancipation' seems to be necessary for leading an autonomous life. Crucially, this will be an ongoing process that is necessarily temporally extended, and the capacities themselves are diachronic properties of a person that cannot be fixed at some time.

What lessons can be drawn from this example? To begin with, I would like to emphasize that (in contrast to Oshana) Christman has much to say about the temporal dimension of autonomy, albeit in a synchronic way. On the one hand, a person must take into account the historical processes that gave rise to her motivational states and that influenced her capacities for self-reflection. On the other hand, a person must meet the conditions in a robust manner in that she exercises them repeatedly over varying circumstances. Unfortunately, I cannot do full justice to these views. However, I believe that there are quite general reasons why there is no room for change, and for describing change as being autonomous or non-autonomous, within Christman's account. On the one hand, he wants to conceptualize autonomy in a *synchronic* fashion. If my above considerations are plausible, this yields counterintuitive results when applied to specific cases, exactly because we need to look at the way in which a person leads her life over time in order to assess her autonomy, since the relevant capacities or competences are themselves essentially diachronic. On the other hand, the impossibility of autonomous change has to do with the way in which Christman conceives of the capacities that are relevant to autonomy. In his view, the social environment of a person only causally contributes to the development and exercise of these capacities, while their exercise can be described at some time and without direct reference to other persons. I have suggested, by contrast, that in order to exercise the relevant capacities for, e.g., self-exploration, we must engage in temporally extended and dynamic interpersonal relationships with other persons that provide us, e.g., with new perspectives on ourselves.

Similar to Oshana's case, it cannot be inferred from my considerations that causally relational accounts are to be rejected in general, because there might be other ways of defending such accounts. Nor should one reject Christman's account in general. Again, it might well serve a different practical interest in autonomy than I have—something to which Christman might happily agree.

5. Reconsidering Relational Autonomy—The Social and Temporal Dynamics of Autonomy

The basic 'liberating' idea underlying the account I have hinted at in the last section is that we need not conceive of autonomy as a property that is instantiated at some time, applied to particular motivational states or to persons and constituted by psychological or social states (synchronically described). We can rather think of autonomy as a property that is applied to a person's way of leading her life over time, and that is constituted by capacities and skills that are themselves diachronic properties of persons and therefore cannot be fixed at single points of time.[40]

Before I finally turn to the question how the practical interest in diachronic autonomy (and an account of autonomy conceived of as essentially diachronic) relates to the question whether to endorse a causally or a constitutively relational account, let me shortly place my account of diachronic autonomy into the framework for discussion that I have provided in section 4, in order to rebut some immediate objections and worries.

Diachronic Autonomy

The concept of autonomy I am interested in is meant to describe an ideal that informs persons who strive for leading a life of their own. This practial interest seems different from the interests that Oshana and Christman have, who both aim at a concept of autonomy that is relevant in the context of political theory. For this reason, I have repeatedly emphasized that my discussion of their views should not primarily be understood as a criticism. Their accounts have rather allowed me to develop a different perspective on autonomy and on its relational reconceptualization.

Having said this, it should also be clear that a view of diachronic autonomy is not directly vulnerable to criticisms that question how such a concept might

[40] This view connects with the suggestion that has been signified by Gerald Dworkin (whose specific conception of autonomy is very different from the one I have foreshadowed here), who claims that "autonomy seems intuitively to be a global rather than a local concept. It is a feature of persons that evaluates a whole way of living one's life and can only be assessed over extended portions of a person's life." (Dworkin 1988, 16) In an unpublished manuscript (Christman 2004), that has partly moved me to regard autonomy as essentially diachronic, Christman has also pointed at such a view. While in his most recent publication (Christman 2007) he seems to have taken a step back (understanding autonomy in a synchronic way, albeit with important qualifications; see above), Christman has emphasized in correspondence that he now wants to conceive of autonomy as essentially diachronic (in Christman 2009). He is moved to this position because he regards *selves* as essentially diachronic. If autonomy is government by one's authentic self, and if selves are essentially diachronic, then autonomy also has a diachronic element. Although I cannot substantitate this claim here, I suppose that this position is still different from the one I wish to embrace. I tend to think that the competences or capacities that are relevant to autonomy are essentially diachronic, while in Christman's view (only) the self is regarded as essentially diachronic. Now, Friedman has argued that there is an important gap between the claim that selves are socially constituted and that autonomy is constitutively social (Friedman 2003, 94ff.) which yields the slogan: 'social selves, individual autonomy'. Similarly, one might possibly subscribe to the claim of 'diachronic selves, synchronic autonomy'.

usefully be applied to contexts where questions like 'Is interference with a person's decision legitimate?' or 'Is the person responsible for her actions?' arise. It is not directly intended to be applicable to such contexts. Also, an account of diachronic autonomy will not be under pressure to be content-neutral, because it is explicitly introduced as a valuable ideal to which persons might relate.

I contend that the interest that underlies my discussion of autonomy is legitimate because there are many people who desire to lead a life of their own. More to the point, it seems to be an intrinsic desire that is informed by the first-personal perspective of persons (the accounts given by Oshana and Christman reflect, in contrast, a third-personal interest). In addition, the desire seems to be implicit in the conception of a good life, because although there might be good ways of leading one's life that do not exhibit autonomy, these will not qualify as a person's (in an emphatic sense) *own* good ways of living.

What has to be shown is that a conception of diachronic autonomy as an ideal yields a notion of autonomy that many persons can connect to, i.e. that they identify as a worthwile or desirable way of living, although they might choose to pursuit other values. Also, it must be shown that this conception of autonomy can be distinguished from the notions of authenticity (in the sense of self-realization[41]) and of the good life in order to qualify as conceptually distinct. This cannot be accomplished in the context of this paper.

Are there any constraints on a conception of autonomy that derive from the practical interest I have began to make explicit? My discussion in the last section has yielded two such constraints: to allow for, and to be able to describe, the *possibility of autonomous change* (what might be called the condition of *change*); and to allow for the possibility of *resistance and emancipation* within social environments (what might be called the condition of *emancipation*). An account of diachronic autonomy must avoid the consequence that persons are 'caught up in themselves'[42] as well as that they are 'caught up in society'. These conditions are motivated by the examples I have given and by more general reflections on intuitions about what makes for a life of one's own. They lead me to the question how the social dimension is to be incorporated into an account of diachronic autonomy in the sense that interests me.

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[41] In her discussion of Meyers' account, Oshana presents a criticism along these lines (Oshana 2006, 40). In my view, this criticism reflects the fact that Oshana does not take seriously enough the possibility that there might be more than one notion of personal autonomy in which one might have a legitimate interest.

[42] In a paper presented at the *Workshop on Bratman* in Bern in September 2007, I have tried to show that Bratman's account of autonomy (and temporally extended agency) yields the counterintuitive result that persons who are 'caught up in themselves' qualify as *exemplars* of autonomy. I explain this unwelcome result (partly) by Bratman's neglect of the social dimension of autonomy (see Baumann 2007). In reply to this charge, Bratman has claimed that my notion of autonomy really is a notion of 'thoughtfulness'. But this move seems inadequate, because it merely stipulates that a certain conception of autonomy is the only one. A more adequate move available to Bratman, that is congenial to my considerations in section 4, would be to argue that he pursues a different practical interest in autonomy.

Is Diachronic Autonomy Causally or Constitutively Relational?—Reconsidering the Distinction

Interestingly, the conditions of *change* and *emancipation* mentioned at the end of the last paragraph seem to pull one into different directions. The condition that an account of diachronic autonomy should be able to describe how persons can resist to and emancipate themselves from their social environment suggests a causally relational approach. If a person's autonomy is constituted by facts about her social environment, it becomes impossible to describe her as being autonomous despite her unfortunate condition. I would agree with Oshana that certain social conditions are potentially autonomy-threatening and often yield non-autonomy. But talk of autonomy-threatening (instead of autonomy-undermining) conditions can only be made sense of if one does not conceive of autonomy as being constituted by the social environment at some time.

The condition that an account of diachronic autonomy should allow for the possibility of autonomous change, by contrast, seems to motivate a constitutively relational account. If autonomy is conceptualized in a manner that describes autonomy in a purely internal way—as something that happens within a person—, the possibility of change seems to be foreclosed, since only by interacting with other persons and one's social environment one can, as I have suggested, discover new perspectives on oneself.

In fact, similar considerations have led some philosophers to subscribe to a causally or a constitutively relational account. By emphasizing that persons often demonstrate their autonomy in oppressive and potentially autonomy-threatening contexts, Diana Meyers motivates a causal approach to the social dimension of autonomy. Joel Anderson (2003), by contrast, points out the impossibility to distinguish between "self-betrayal" and "change of mind" within models that describe autonomy as an internal affair of a person. He contends that only within a constitutively relational account that draws on the notion of 'giving an account of one's actions to others' the distinction between self-betrayal and change of mind, that is crucial to the notion of autonomous change, can be preserved.[43]

I cannot even begin to examine these interesting accounts that are importantly different from the accounts given by Christman and Oshana. What I want to suggest, however, is that one might pause a moment before settling on the question whether autonomy is or should be regarded as causally or constitutively relational, because the distinction itself seems to be a *synchronic distinction* that is applied at some points of time. Coming back to the beginning of this paper, it is meant to distinguish those accounts that treat social conditons as backgrounds conditions from those that require a person to stand in specific relations or in a specific social position. This distinction is implicitly given a synchronic reading: a person's autonomy, proponents of the former approach claim, can be settled with reference to her psychological states or capacities *at some time,* while defenders of the latter approach argue that a person's autonomy must be specified with reference to her social position or standing *at some time.*

[43] Similar views to the one defended by Anderson can be found in Westlundt 2003 and in Benson 2005a and 2005b.

The synchronic character or reading of the distinction yields the result that it cannot be easily applied to a conception of autonomy that regards autonomy as a diachronic property of a person's way of living her life over time. This explains why the conditions of change and emancipation pull one into different directions. Now, in my discussion in the last section I have already carefully suggested that what is important to autonomy are certain interpersonal relations to others over time. These relations are, I suggest, essentially diachronic relations that cannot be described as synchronic states of affairs, neither of the external social environment nor of the person's internal psychology. Consider, e.g., relations of trust or of friendship. It is impossible to adequately describe a property of trust or friendship that applies to single points of time, be it in an internalist or in an externalist fashion.[44] One must rather understand these relations in a diachronic way. And if these diachronic relations are of importance to the autonomy of persons, as I have indicated, it becomes at the same time even more plausible to conceive of autonomy as essentially diachronic.

In order to be autonomous in the sense that interests me, a person must not stand in specific relations to others at every single point of time. She can retain her autonomy while being in contexts that are inimical to autonomy. But she cannot stay in such contexts forever, for then she will loose her autonomy. This can be explained by the fact that we need to stand in diachronic and dynamic relations to other persons in order to be capable of adapting to changing environments, of engaging in self-exploration and self-definition, of imagining alternative possibilities, of distinguishing legitimate expectations from those that are not, and of emancipating ourselves from particular persons or environments. Whether these capacities should be understood as causally or constitutively relational, and whether this distinction is of practical importance in this context,[45] must be left open until the distinction between such accounts is given a different, diachronic reading that at the same time captures practically important differences.

By way of conclusion: we may not only need to reconsider how to conceptualize the 'social' in the light of a practical interest in autonomy as an ideal of living that opens up both the social and the temporal scope of autonomy—we may also need to reconsider the very distinction that underlies the quarrel between defenders of causally and constitutively relational accounts, and re-evaluate its practical and theoretical importance.[46]

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[44] For helpful discussions I would like to thank Christian Budnik who is working on an account of personal identity that puts into its place the first-person perspective and that fits well with my approach to autonomy. On the relevance of trust and self-trust for autonomy, see Anderson/Honneth 2005; Benson 1994 and 2005; Govier 1993.

[45] In my description of the quarrel between Christman and Oshana it has become clear that whether one conceptualizes autonomy as causally or constitutively relational *can* become practically important in some contexts, for example if it has certain problematic theoretical implications (it marks the divide between content-neutral and substantive accounts).

[46] Parts of this paper were presented in different settings, including the Philosophy Departments at the Universities of Berlin, Bern, Tübingen and Zürich, the 9^{th} *Meeting of the Swiss Graduate Students in Philosophy* in October 2006, and a *Workshop on Bratman* in September 2007. I would like to thank Anton Leist, Peter Schaber, Monika Betzler, Sabine Döring, Thomas Schmidt and the organizers of the conferences for providing me with the opportunity

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