Autonomy in Feminist Theory:

The Contemporary Relevance of an Old Concept

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the conditions of Doctor of Philosophy,

School of Government and Public Policy, University of Strathclyde

September 2010

Declaration

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Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks goes firstly and mostly to my supervisor, Catherine Eschle, for her guidance, patience and care during the research process. This thesis would not have seen the light of day if it were not for Catherine's insight and support. Indeed, *I* probably would not have seen the light of day if it were not for her support.

I would also like to thank members of staff at the School of Government and Public Policy for their constructive feedback on my work and their advice on being a researcher. I have learned much from David Morrice, David Judge, Mark Shephard, and Bill Paterson. I did not know it then, but much of what they told me really revolved around the idea that it was okay to *take my time*. For providing a different kind of support, I forever salute Fiona MacIntyre. Thanks to the School for providing me with the time, resources and academic freedom to complete this thesis.

My friends gave me invaluable encouragement as well as space to vent my frustration and worries. Elaine and John, I'm so glad we made it to the other side together! Keith and Andy, thank you for helping me make sense of academia and pretty much everything else. Mr, you arrived on the scene in good time. Dave, thanks for reminding me that the world needs changing. Lauren and Louise, how did you tolerate the little politics geek? And for the much needed and loved P bubble, I have to thank Pamy.

Although they still don't know what this thesis is about, my family provided their usual unconditional love and encouragement while I was writing. Claire, ta for the support straight fae South Africa! Mum and Dad, Nana and Papa, thank you for the opportunity to study and for keeping me afloat. I appreciate it to so much. It has been a privilege. This thesis is dedicated to you.

Abstract

This thesis explores the meanings and value attributed to the idea of autonomy in feminist theory. It asks: should autonomy be considered a valuable concept for feminist theory?

In response to this question this thesis argues that feminists are rightly wary of how autonomy is constructed in the liberal tradition, particularly in the approaches grounded in the work of John Locke and Immanuel Kant. However, the thesis locates fruitful feminist engagement with autonomy in the work of John Stuart Mill, and shows that his approach to autonomy continues to provide tools for contemporary feminist theory.

Looking to contemporary feminist engagement with autonomy, this thesis explores how the idea features in four feminist approaches: care feminism, egalitarian feminism, postcolonial feminism and poststructuralist feminism. I show throughout this thesis that despite anxieties about autonomy in the liberal tradition, feminists believe autonomy is a valuable concept, albeit in different ways. For care feminists, the concept of autonomy is reconfigured in relational terms, and is valuable in the sense that it is viewed as an essential aspect of a self that is socially embedded but should not be determined by relations of domination. For egalitarian feminists, autonomy is a political value, bound to their vision of a participatory, democratic and just society. For postcolonial feminists, autonomy is valued in the sense that it contributes to the project of contesting colonial, racist discourses and social practices. Finally, poststructuralist feminists value autonomy for the role it can play in destabilising gender and allowing sexual self-determination. Overall, I argue that autonomy is indispensible for feminist theory.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the meanings and value attributed to the idea of autonomy in feminist theory. It asks: should autonomy be considered a valuable concept for feminist theory? In response to this question I argue that feminists are rightly wary of some ways autonomy is constructed in the liberal tradition. Nonetheless autonomy remains not only valuable but crucial for feminist theory.

1. Autonomy in Feminist Theory

At root autonomy means self-rule or self-government (Dworkin, 1988: 12). Asking after the value of autonomy for feminist theory suggests this idea is *in question* in feminist theory, and indeed the impetus for this study partly arose from my observations that autonomy seems to arouse aversion and admiration in equal measure. Strong scepticism toward autonomy seems to have flourished in and since the 1980's. In her seminal feminist text *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* Alison Jaggar remarked that some feminists regard 'the ideal of autonomy as characteristically masculine as well as characteristically capitalist' (Jaggar, 1983: 131). Around the same time, feminist moral psychologist Carol Gilligan warned that at least for some women autonomy might be an 'illusory and dangerous quest' (Gilligan, 1982: 48). Poststructuralist feminists in particular have tended to stress the 'illusory' character of autonomy, being not so much adverse to the idea but instead perplexed about its possibility (Butler, 1990).

In the wake of such scepticism Christine DiStefano wondered if autonomy would 'gradually wither away from lack of use' in feminist theory (DiStefano, 1997: 12). She suggested we were witnessing 'the vanishing point of autonomy as a normative political concept' (DiStefano, 1996: 98). And yet DiStefano seemed to hold out for a different strategy: 'Perhaps we are in the midst of its revival' (DiStefano, 1997: 12). Indeed, it would seem that we are in the midst of its revival, as feminist defenders of autonomy have noted (Meyers, 2000b: 152). For those feminists who see autonomy as too valuable a concept to reject, theirs has been a project of reclaiming autonomy

for feminist theory (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000; Meyers, 1989, 2000b, 2002; Freidman, 2003, 2005; Griffiths, 1995; Nedelsky, 1989). This seems to have dovetailed with renewed interest in the idea in philosophy and political theory more generally (e.g., Taylor, 2005; Christman and Anderson, 2005; Colburn, 2010).

Of course feminist theorists who have sought to reclaim autonomy have addressed their critics (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000: 3-31; Friedman, 2003: 30-55). But – and here we reach another impetus behind this thesis - it seems to me the feminist dialogue about autonomy has thus far been hampered in two ways. On the one hand, it has not cast its net wide enough to capture how feminists across a range of theoretical positions engage with the idea. For example, philosopher Diana Meyers responded to Jaggar's early critique of autonomy, where it was described as 'masculine' and 'capitalist'. Although Meyers's work does a fine job disassociating autonomy from hegemonic masculine discourse, readers are left wondering why autonomy has been construed as capitalist (Meyers, 1989: 208; 2002: 16). Meyers does not fully explain why some, in this case, socialist feminists, might view autonomy as imbued with capitalist norms. Similarly, in her affirmation of autonomy Jean Curthoys provides a 'quick reply' to feminist theorists who critique autonomy for assuming it requires 'subordination to a transhistorical, disembodied reason' (Curthoys, 1997: 30). Readers are left wondering what it is about autonomy that others have said might require this sort of reasoning power.

On the other hand, feminist dialogue on autonomy has been clogged by a 'straw [wo] man fallacy' (Talisse and Aikin, 2006). There is a tendency for feminists to talk past one another and misrepresent each others' arguments. For example, Marilyn Friedman comments that feminists influenced by 'postmodernism, deconstructionism, psychoanalysis and other movements in contemporary philosophy…will have little interest in the concept of autonomy' (Friedman, 2000: 220). These movements are known for querying the possibility of selfhood, and Friedman rightly states, 'The claim that there are no such things as selves, if true, would undermine the entire autonomy project. Autonomy is self-determination. Obviously, if there were no selves, then there would be no selves who could

determine themselves' (Friedman, 2003: 30). Friedman specifically targets the work of Judith Butler as having little interest in autonomy, but in turning to Butler's work itself I found a valuation of autonomy, specifically 'sexual autonomy' (Butler, 2004: 17-39). No doubt such instances of talking past one another have much to do with disciplinary boundaries acting as barriers to further understanding, but it also points to the fact that the feminist dialogue about autonomy is clouded with perceptions and assumptions that need to be aired and worked through.

In sum the rationale for this study stems from what I believe is a need to capture a clearer and broader picture of contemporary feminist engagement with autonomy. If there is a 'revival' of autonomy happening in feminist theory, it is important to analyse why this is so and to *be open* to the diverse locations where it is happening. It is my hope that being open to diverse strands of feminist theory will enable me to make better sense of feminist engagement with autonomy and to ask after its value in a more comprehensive and inclusive way. I would like to elaborate on this by turning to an explanation of the methods adopted in this thesis.

2. On 'Making Sense' of Autonomy in Feminist Theory

My approach to making sense of feminist engagement with autonomy has three elements: opening up conceptual debates; historicising debates; and contextualising arguments in terms of rival traditions of political theory.

In the first place I seek not to find the essence of autonomy and advocate interpretive closure on the subject, but rather to treat my subject matter as open ended and to find out which of many possible meanings of autonomy are in circulation in contemporary feminism. In his work on 'the anatomy and morphology of political thinking', Michael Freeden clarifies that 'making sense of something is quite different from endorsing its validity or moral status' (Freeden, 2008: 199, 209). The aim 'is to reveal and decode patterns of thinking rather than to argue within, promote, defend or reject substantive ethical and intellectual positions' (Freeden, 2008: 208; see also Bell, 1999: 5). Integral to this method of 'making sense' is the

recognition that ideas are indeterminate, ‘porous and open to challenge’ (Freeden, 2008: 201). In other words I approach this study readily accepting that autonomy is ‘essentially contested’ (Gallie, 1956). This is, needless to say, in keeping with feminist logic which recognises ‘the inevitably ideological character of language’ and embraces the notion of essential contestability (Hirschmann and DiStefano, 1996: 1).

Making sense of a contested idea like autonomy is greatly aided by historicising it. This is the second dimension of my method. As Philp suggests, ‘Historical understanding…can be a powerful source of illumination and can contribute dramatically to the self-awareness with which we engage with difficult conceptual and theoretical problems’ (Philp, 2008: 148). In line with this view, this thesis takes as its starting point modern political thought, and specifically the meanings and value attributed to autonomy in the liberal tradition. The intersections and tensions between liberal and feminist thought have been well-documented, and I am not really concerned with making claims about whether or not liberalism and feminism are compatible (Jaggar, 1983; Eisenstein, 1986; Baehr, 2004; Schwartzman, 2006). Instead, I adopt a historical perspective to locate early feminist engagement with autonomy within liberalism, and to better understand contemporary feminist approaches to autonomy. As will become clear in this thesis, contemporary feminists overwhelmingly react and respond to constructions of autonomy within liberalism, in large part because of the monopoly this tradition has on the idea of autonomy and because of its current political hegemony. Following Vikki Bell, my point is that to make sense of feminist engagement with autonomy it is necessary to recognise ‘the way in which feminist debate is conducted is not purely an ‘internal’ conversation, but is also about the political horizons and limits that have been the changing political landscape of th[e last] century’ and, of course, our current era (Bell, 1999: 139).

The third element of ‘making sense’ involves contextualising concepts in political traditions. This means that one must go beyond simply describing and mapping the meanings of autonomy in isolation. Description is, in any case, impossible since ‘we

always connect what we see and hear to an interpretive scheme' (Freeden, 2008: 211). In trying to make sense of feminist engagement with autonomy I will at the same time be making sense of feminist thought itself and the varying strands within it as well as its battles with liberalism as a philosophical and political tradition. Bell (1999) has framed this sort of approach in terms of pursuing a genealogical analysis of 'the feminist political imagination' in the context of the twentieth century. Although I do not employ the Foucaultian genealogical approach Bell uses, the thesis has a similar emphasis on being attentive to the feminist political imagination and the place and role of autonomy within it.

This contextualisation strategy assumes there is more to political thinking than rational argumentation. Bell, for example, suggests that we need to recognise the sentiment and utopian visions that are bound up in feminist thought (Bell, 1999: 9, 5). After all, political thought is shaped by and displays combinations of 'reason, emotion and imagination' and 'passion, rhetoric and truth-claims' (Freeden, 2008: 213; Philp, 2008: 140). In relation to my analysis of autonomy, this aspect of the 'making sense' method will help broaden the focus and form of conceptual analysis in terms of analysing how rival political traditions create visions of autonomy.

By attempting to make sense of feminist engagement with autonomy in this way the thesis is broad in scope and covers theoretical approaches which are not always considered side by side in feminist theory and in the literature on autonomy. I have thus attempted in some small way to contribute to the recent calls for the development of 'radically different styles of presenting feminist ideas and viewpoints' as an alternative to the 'combative idea of argument' (Stanley and Wise, 2000: 275, 277).

3. Outline of the Thesis

This thesis maps the idea of autonomy as it features in four contemporary feminist approaches. For each approach, I first look to how theorists critique the idea of autonomy before, second, showing how they rethink and reclaim autonomy. The

third section of each chapter assesses the approach in light of criticisms of, and responses to it.

I begin to make sense of contemporary feminist engagement with the idea of autonomy from Chapter Two onwards, looking at how the idea features in care feminism. Care feminists are critical of autonomy when it is understood in light of its liberal heritage. In particular they scrutinise the construction of the autonomous self, which is perceived to be masculinist in its reasoning as well as its denial of human dependencies. Far from rejecting the idea of autonomy outright, care feminists instead reconceptualise the idea through their attempts to rethink the self. Highlighting this shift in the meaning of autonomy, I discuss why and how the care feminist approach to autonomy is pinned to the notion of the 'relational self' before considering criticisms of this approach.

In Chapter Three I explore the meanings and value of autonomy in a feminist approach I call 'egalitarian feminism'. I show why egalitarian feminists are critical of autonomy as it is constructed within liberalism, specifically libertarianism and Rawlsian liberalism. Egalitarian feminists argue the idea of autonomy functions ideologically in these two approaches, especially as it relates to the ideal of political autonomy, or democratic self-government. I show how and why egalitarian feminists seek to reclaim the idea of autonomy in the context of their visions of democracy and social justice. In light of criticisms that egalitarian feminists are totalitarian, I argue rather that egalitarian feminism shows us why autonomy requires a transformative political project.

Following this discussion I turn in Chapter Four to postcolonial feminism. The postcolonial feminist critique of autonomy is bound up in their opposition to the colonial and imperialist heritage of liberal and feminist thought. Yet here too I find postcolonial feminists reclaim the idea of autonomy, emphasising its importance in relation to processes of decolonization. Postcolonial feminists also theorize autonomy in relation to the complexities of subjectivity and identity formation in community contexts. I consider and reject criticisms of the postcolonial feminism,

and also find that their approach has more affinities than is immediately obvious with the feminist arguments they critique.

The final chapter of the thesis examines the ways autonomy features in poststructuralist feminism. This approach has been misinterpreted by other feminists as eschewing autonomy altogether. Certainly, as I show in the first part of the chapter, poststructuralist feminists do have a critique of autonomy which I situate within the more general poststructuralist 'critique of the subject'. However, I then show how autonomy has been reclaimed and reconfigured in the work of Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell. I argue the limits of this approach are balanced by the contributions it makes to understanding how autonomy, relative to context and person, can be a difficult but worthy achievement. I conclude by reiterating the point that critics have been too quick to think poststructuralist feminists have little interest in the idea of autonomy.

Before beginning this analysis of contemporary feminist engagement with the idea of autonomy, I turn in Chapter One to the liberal tradition and explore the roots of contemporary understandings of autonomy in the work of John Locke, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill. Discussing each in turn, I show why feminists have been sceptical of the construction of autonomy in the liberal tradition, but also why Mill's approach provides tools for understanding autonomy that continue to be valuable for feminism today.

Chapter 1
Autonomy and the Liberal Tradition

Introduction

Making sense of an idea like autonomy is greatly aided 'by considering how it came to be' (Gallie, 1956: 198). By inquiring into the past meanings of autonomy I will be able to shed light on contemporary feminist engagement with autonomy in later chapters. Adopting this historical perspective almost inevitably brings me to the liberal tradition in western political thought. Liberalism is not the only tradition which attributes value to autonomy, but it is, as feminists well know, 'the source of our language of freedom and self-determination' (Nedelsky, 1989: 9). Liberalism has 'been responsible for translating the…ideal of freedom into the common collective consciousness of the modern West' and beyond (Hirschmann, 2008: 1). As such it is widely regarded as presenting persuasive visions of autonomy which have dominant, some might say hegemonic, status today.

The primary aim of this chapter is to explore the roots of feminist ambivalence about autonomy as a concept in their ambivalence about the liberal tradition. After all, feminists have critically examined liberalism almost since its inception and have continually alerted one another about the pitfalls and promises of a feminist-liberal alliance (e.g., Eisenstein, 1986; Okin, 1989, 1992; MacKinnon, 1989, 2002; Coole, 1993b; Cornell, 1998; Baehr, 2004). They have scrutinized liberal visions of autonomy at least since Mary Astell tore into John Locke's work in the seventeenth century (Springborg, 1995; Perry, 1990; Kinnaird, 1979). Feminist critiques of these foundational texts of liberalism share the core claim that the subject of autonomy is generally 'gendered masculine' (Brown, 1995: 157). This gave, and still gives, feminist theorists to doubt the value of autonomy.

The secondary aim of this chapter is to show that there are tools in foundational liberal texts which feminists have drawn on to develop a more 'woman-friendly' conceptualization of autonomy. In making this claim I will be countering an

entrenched perception in some feminist quarters that liberalism offers one approach to autonomy (see for example, Peiss, 1995: 162; Donner, 1993; Gerson, 2002). Moreover, I want to challenge the tendency in feminism to only allude to the bases and sources of their critiques, for example, mentioning ‘the liberal subject’ or ‘the liberal conception of autonomy’. In my mind this does not give the reader a very good idea of what framework or which theorist is being critiqued. If I am to make sense of feminist engagement with autonomy, I need to clarify the different meanings it carries.

Concretely, this chapter considers three approaches to autonomy found respectively in the work of John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill. The works of these three thinkers are vast, and here I can only discuss key arguments and elements of their work pertaining to the subject of autonomy. These theorists share a place in the liberal tradition, and as feminists have shown, their ideas of autonomy are shaped by a gendered and heterosexist mindset. But there are also quite stark divergences in their approaches to autonomy and their gendered implications. Although I am not searching ‘for the right answer to the woman question’ (Zerilli, 1994: 141), I do want to suggest that Mill’s approach to autonomy offers a more appealing basis than Locke or Kant for feminist efforts to rethink autonomy. I turn to the work of John Locke first, then to Kant and finally Mill.

1. 1. Locke’s Approach to Autonomy

The idea of autonomy which informs Locke’s ‘liberalism of natural rights’ is deceptively simple (Shklar, 1998: 8). In this approach, to be self-governing one need only follow natural law. That Locke constructs natural law as a reflection of God’s law reveals something of the socio-historical context within which this strand of liberalism was developed. Locke’s work tells of the immense social changes which occurred during seventeenth century Europe, where Protestantism and capitalism emerged to challenge Catholic and feudal ideologies. As Locke actively joined this challenge, his writings contributed to the ‘moderate Enlightenment’ which furnished justifications for the limited overthrown of established authority (Israel, 2006: 3-42).

The idea of autonomy lies at the centre of these justifications. Of course, what exactly Locke's account of natural law stipulates begs all the important questions about what this visions of autonomy entails. In this section I examine key aspects of Locke's approach to autonomy by considering first the relationship between natural law, equality and autonomy, before discussing the limits of this, particularly regarding the autonomy of women.

1. 1. i. Natural Law, Equality, and Autonomy

According to Locke, human beings are 'the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign master, sent into the world by his order, and about his business' (Locke, 1996: 313). Despite being created by God, Locke argues He has not implanted a moral compass into our souls, therefore, it remains our task to try and establish those natural laws God wants us to follow. As Letwin (1988: 7) puts it, Locke 'deni[es] that human reason has a creative power to invent laws for itself…conformity to law given by a superior will is…the essence of moral conduct'. For Locke, we are able to grasp morality through the interplay between our sensory experience and the faculty of reason. Though reason itself must be developed, the important point here is that most adult humans have 'intellect enough' to be abstractly aware of themselves and others, and of God as their creator (Waldron, 2002: 78-81; Schneewind, 1998: 146). Since all are made in God's image and endowed with reasoning capabilities Locke believes this is justification enough to assert that human beings are morally equal. Indeed, the strength of Locke's 'biblical egalitarianism' has been noted (Carver, 2004: 161; Waldron, 2002: 6).

This conception of moral equality represented a radical challenge to patriarchalism, the dominant political ideology in Locke's day. Patriarchalism justified configuring political, economic and social relations according to a particular idea of natural subordination. For patriarchalists, natural subordination had its home in biblical scripture, illustrated by Adam's legitimate fatherly rule. They 'recalled the divine grant of paternal, monarchical power to Adam' evidenced in the first instance by Adam's dominance of Eve; otherwise put, patriarchalists 'hoped to show that human

hierarchy was established in the *very* beginning' (Butler, 1991: 76; original emphasis). In the course of picking apart patriarchalism as it was expressed in the works of Robert Filmer, Locke in his *First Treatise* meticulously interrogates the theological-patriarchal construction of power relations. In essence, Locke rejected the idea that paternal power was all-encompassing with respect to human relationships, and extended this critique to the patriarchal construction of gender relations. It is this context that Locke's 'sexually egalitarian framework' emerges grounded in the argument that *both* Adam and Eve were made in God's image and endowed with reasoning faculties (Coole, 1993b: 71).

More specifically, Locke's understanding of moral equality assumes that what we all possess, men and women, is 'an equality of conscience and a duty of salvation' (Israel, 2006: 533). This view of equality shapes the foundations of Locke's idea of moral autonomy, as he uses it to make an argument in favour of living in 'accordance with one's own critically reflective moral judgement' (Kuflik, 1984: 274, 277). With respect to equality of conscience, Locke appeals to human understanding and will, as he claims that God has given 'man an understanding to direct his actions, has allowed him a freedom of will, and liberty of acting…within the bounds of law that he is under' (1996: 328). Consequently, Locke is able to argue that 'the care of each man's salvation belongs only to himself', and that 'everyone should do what he in his conscience is persuaded to be acceptable to the Almighty' (Locke in De Roover and Balagangadhara, 2008: 529). In this way Locke unites the ideas of moral equality and autonomy in relation to the duty of salvation; since 'obtaining the favour of God' and 'doing those things in life' that 'are prescribed by God to that end' constitute the 'highest obligation…upon mankind', salvation should structure and shape what one does in this life (Locke in De Roover and Balagangadhara, 2008: 529).

Patriarchal logic denied these ideas of liberty of conscience and moral autonomy, claiming that the free exercise of reason ran contrary to the necessary submission to human authorities who were to guide individuals to salvation and truth. But for Locke, natural law is not innate, so he points out that human authorities cannot legitimately administer the 'truth' about natural law or the 'right' path to salvation.

Locke was fully aware of the abuse of power in this regard and the logic underpinning it: ‘to claim that a set of principles is innate is to claim that there is no need for further thought about such matters they cover; and this in turn is an excellent tactic for anyone who wants those principles taken on authority, without enquiry’ (Schneewind, 1998: 145).

Locke therefore disrupts the patriarchal vision which connects human hierarchy, authority and morality, by insisting the only inescapable authority humans are faced with is that of God. Only God can make and take human life, which is why natural law includes the principles of equality, preservation and freedom from absolute, arbitrary power:

> This freedom from absolute, arbitrary power, is so necessary to, and closely joined with a man’s preservation, that he cannot part with it, but by what forfeits his preservation and life together. For a man, not having the power of his own life, cannot, by compact, or his own consent, enslave himself to any one, nor put himself under the absolute, arbitrary power of another, to take away his life, when he pleases. (Locke 1996: 318)

By critiquing the patriarchal view that some individuals ought to have this kind of power due to their unique insight into natural law, Locke seeks to challenge the notion that patriarchalism settled the political identification of ‘specific individuals who have authority over others’ (Waldron, 2002: 18). Indeed, when theorising about political authority, Locke begins by substituting the assumption of human hierarchy with that of equality; ‘this *equality* of men by nature’ is the ‘foundation of that obligation to mutual love amongst men’ (Locke, 1996: 313; original emphasis). He continues, ‘the state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: And reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all *equal and independent*, no one ought to harm another in his life, liberty, or possessions’ (Locke, 1996: 313). In this context, Locke uses his view of moral equality to claim that ‘life, liberty and possessions’ are ‘natural rights’ which

are integral to natural law. These rights are, moreover, necessary for the free exercise of autonomy.

Locke's ideal political community further reflects his conception of natural law, natural rights and the importance he places on individual autonomy. In light of the rejection of patriarchal political power, 'the exercise of power beyond right', or tyranny, is opposed in the *Treatises*, and in its place is a conception of political power that is limited since it is designed only to uphold natural law (Locke, 1996: 372). Making use of social contract theory, Locke claims the only right individuals would agree to give up when uniting in a political community is their right to execute natural law (that is, to punish those who break the law). This right is transferred to a common political authority, which is to be trusted *because* it is established with the agreement and consent of the citizen body. Specifically, Locke argues government ought to be to a set of representative institutions wherein the supreme power lies with the legislative body. Autonomy is therefore secured by the citizens of Locke's community since they consent to the principles and processes which constitute legitimate political authority.

The value of autonomy in Locke's theory can be further illustrated through his argument concerning citizens' right to resist government. The end of government is 'the mutual preservation of [the citizens] lives, liberties and estates' (1996: 349). Should the scope of government exceed that which is laid out in natural law, Locke argues the people reserve the right to resist and dissolve government. In light of the terms of political obligation set out in the social contract, political autonomy is clearly defended by Locke when he states,

> there remains still *in the people a supreme power to remove or alter the legislative*, when they find the legislative act contrary to the trust reposed in them…thus the *community* perpetually retains *a supreme power* of saving themselves from the attempts and designs of any body…whenever they shall be so foolish, or so wicked, as to lay and

> carry on designs against the liberties and properties of the subject. (Locke, 1996: 357)

The right to resist government is consistent with the autonomy of the community and the moral autonomy of each citizen. The people have 'reserved that ultimate determination' as to whether or not their resistance is justified, and 'this judgment' Locke states, 'they cannot part with, it being out of a man's power so to submit himself to another, as to give him a liberty to destroy him' (1996: 363).

Importantly, Locke believes both citizens and government ought to be subject to the rule of law, rather than the arbitrary will of a patriarch. He asserts, 'Freedom of men under government is, to have a standing rule to live by, common to everyone of that society, and made by the legislative power erected in it' (1996: 318). In essence, 'the law of nature is the civil law writ large' (Letwin, 1988: 15), and in this way, civil law guarantees the autonomy of citizens through protection of their natural rights (Meyers, 1989: 10-11). Locke states that the rule of law establishes 'a liberty to follow my own will in all things, where the rule prescribes not…' (1996: 318). Indeed, Locke is quite clear that the purpose of the rule of law, as with natural law, '*is* not so much the limitation, *as the direction of a free and intelligent agent* to his proper interest…the end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to *preserve and enlarge freedom'* (1996: 328; original emphasis).

As government ought to be limited and its end ought to be the enforcement of natural law, Locke's conception of civil society leaves ample room for freedom. The autonomy afforded by the rule of law 'defines a private sphere in which individuals are free to pursue their own projects in their own way' (Meyers, 1989: 10). For Locke, there are two 'pursuits' which have particular significance. The first pursuit stresses the importance of the duty of salvation and the importance of a limited state to satisfy this duty. Locke suggests there is, at heart, no reason why government should dictate matters of religion; 'Men cannot be forced to be saved whether they will or no. And therefore, when all is done, they must be left to their own Consciences' (Locke cited in Jones, 1963: 206). Even if the state did enforce

religious belief, it would only enforce an outward conformity. Salvation requires genuine belief and only men's conscience can dictate the extent of this. Further, Locke believes limiting the state with respect to the enforcement of religious belief would help cultivate toleration, at least between certain Christian sects.[1] He states it is not 'the Diversity of Opinions, (which cannot be avoided) but the Refusal of Toleration to those that are of different Opinions,…that has produced all the Bustles and Wars, that have been in the Christian World' (Locke cited in Jones, 1963: 203). This highlights not so much a right to religious liberty as a key aspect of moral obligation; the principle of toleration appeals to the intolerant, and their obligation not to contradict the natural rights of citizens.

The second pursuit which Locke deems to be of significance is the acquisition of private property, including the possession of land. Locke considers the right to private property to be a natural right derived from the view that those who mix their labour with land and resources thereby come to own them. He argues that the value of property derives not from the land and resources themselves, but 'from human industry' (1996: 324). Natural resources are explicitly conceived in instrumental terms which allows Locke to argue that although God gave the world to mankind in common, he 'hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life, and convenience' (1996: 319). Under both natural and civil law, the development of economic autonomy is considered a key aspect of liberty within the private sphere of civil society.

That these two pursuits – the duty of salvation and the accumulation of private property – are considered outside the sphere of government interference points towards 'the art of separation' at work within Locke's theory. It is widely recognised that he 'drew lines, marked off different realms, and created the socio-political map with which we are still familiar' (Walzer, 2007: 53). By considering the interconnections between all of Locke's 'realms', we begin to see why his moral egalitarianism crumbles. In the next section, I consider how Locke practises the art of separation in relation to male dominance and the market, and show the implications this has for his approach to autonomy.

1. 1. ii. The Art of Separation and Male Dominance

Locke gives us good reason to assume it is the standpoint of the 'citizen property owner' (Nye, 2004: 55) which functions as the lens through which family relations and private property are theorised in his work. Several times in the *Second Treatise* he uses 'the master of a family' and all the 'subordinate relations of wife, children, servant and slave, united under the domestic rule of a family' to illustrate the differences between different types of authority and power (Locke, 1996: 336, 312). All these relations fall 'short of political society' (Locke, 1996: 334) and indicate who is likely to be included within Locke's rational citizenry. Evidence that Locke's primary audience is the citizen property owner can be seen in his writing on the ties between parental and paternal authority, marriage, and private property.

Locke's critique of patriarchal logic fell on revealing its inconsistency as well as its normative inadequacy. Where patriarchalists saw in the Bible justification for fatherly rule, Locke saw the obligation to honour both mother and father. Patriarchal theorists had established fatherly rule most easily by looking to the fifth commandment in scripture; Filmer had argued that this commandment created political obligation based on the directive 'honour thy father'. Locke demonstrated that it actually directs us to 'honour thy father and thy mother' (Locke, 1996: 357). In both *Treatises* Locke advocates parental equality and questions whether paternal power 'might not be properly call *parental power*' (Locke, 1996: 327, 363). He explicitly states that mothers have 'an equal title' to authority over their children and that 'the father's authority cannot dispossess the mother of this right' (Locke, 1996: 327, 330, 332). Feminist and gender theorists have argued by breaking 'with one of patriarchy's strongest traditions' (Butler, 1993: 83), Locke introduced a significant challenge to male gender hierarchy. He deflated the ideal of masculinity as an 'irrational' 'warrior absolutism' and constructed his own biblically sourced 'portrait of a kindly' or 'nursing' father (Carver, 2004: 169; Locke, 1996: 331, 334).

Similarly, Locke overturns the patriarchal reading of Genesis and the Fall to suggest that women are not bound by their implied subjection from Eve's curse. Extending the terms of social contract theory to gender and sexual relations, Locke argues that marriage ought to be contractual. That is, 'conjugal society' ought to be 'a voluntary contract between man and woman' (Locke, 1996: 335). Locke is clear that the 'chief' purpose of marriage is procreation but that 'mutual support and assistance, and a communion of interests' also results from the union of man and woman (1996: 335). The marriage contract leaves 'the wife in the full and free possession of what by contract is her peculiar right' and entails 'the liberty to separate from him, where natural right or their contract allows it' (1996: 336). As well as advocating divorce (once parental duties are met) and a wife's right to her own property, Locke asserts marriage 'gives the husband no more power over her life than she has over his' (1996: 336). Conjugal society ought to be consistent with natural law, and this means that neither man nor woman can subject one another to absolute, arbitrary power.

Feminist commentators have noted that, on the one hand, Locke consistently applied his 'individualist principles…women were free to overcome their natural limitations; each woman was permitted to strike a better deal for herself wherever possible' (Butler, 1991: 83). Indeed, this reflects 'the novel and revolutionary core of liberalism: every individual is at liberty to compete for autonomy and success through exertion of will' (Coole, 1993b: 65). On the other hand, the terms of conjugal society indicate that Locke's own logic displays inconsistencies. Locke appears to justify the power of a husband using the idea of 'natural authority':

> But the husband and wife, though they have but one common concern, yet having different understandings, will unavoidably sometimes have different wills too; it therefore being necessary that the last determination, i.e. the rule, should be placed somewhere; it naturally falls to the man's share, as the abler and the stronger. (Locke, 1996: 336)

Despite his insistence that the power of a husband is conditional and must be consistent with natural law, heterosexual marriage is the one case where Locke finds it unproblematic to justify 'a difference of authority among two adult human wills on the basis of natural differences' (Waldron, 2002: 34). Locke not only violates his own principle of equality but also fails to realise the tension between advocating a *voluntary* marriage contract which entails the 'natural' power of a husband. Feminist theorists have argued that Locke must infer that a husband's authority is granted by the wife's *tacit consent*, and, further, that he uncritically supported the 'conjugal, masculine patriarchal right' (Pateman, 1987: 37). In theory then, this means that a wife's independence is curtailed and her autonomy diminishes once she consents to marriage. For many theorists, this represents the 'glitch in foundational liberal theory' (Nye, 2004: 54) which leaves us with a 'residual domestic patriarchy' (Carver, 2004: 161) or a 'patriarchal patriarchalism' (Eisenstein, 1986).

Yet, 'It is no accident that Locke persistently forgets his own distinction between 'parental' and 'paternal' authority' because the *Two Treatises* is not designed to assert the importance of sexual equality (Brennan and Pateman, 1998: 103). Rather, Locke's wants to justify the acquisition of private property and a limited government which would protect such property. The *Second Treatise* famously states that 'the great and *chief end*…of men's uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, *is the preservation of their property*' (Locke, 1996: 349).[2] One way Locke thinks men should be able to preserve and enlarge their property is through inheritance. Therefore, he focuses on *paternal* authority and property rights as they relate to the relationship between father and son. Father's have the power to 'bestow their estates on those who place them best' (1996: 332), and 'every man' has '*a right* before any other man, *to inherit with* his brethren *his father's goods'* (1996: 396). Wives and daughters are conveniently bracketed in this context, and it can be surmised that the marriage contract forms the background to maintaining the right of inheritance in civil society.

Locke's defence of inheritance not only reveals the gendered exclusions within his framework, it also points toward the class dynamics in his approach to private

property more generally (Macpherson, 1954, 1962). Establishing, preserving and enlarging private property seems to be a skill best suited to a certain class of men. Despite having argued that God gave the world to men in common, Locke states, 'it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational…not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious' (1996: 321). Those who are rational and industrious are, through mixing their labour with resources and claiming property for themselves, more likely to acquire property than those who are less rational. The inequality arising from such use of resources and land is further compounded yet justified, according to Locke, through the introduction of money into the market. Although exchanges involving money prevent the wasteful accumulation and hoarding of resources, Locke argues that these exchanges also allow individuals to legitimately enlarge their possessions and wealth. To legitimate these market relations and inequalities, Locke leans on the discourse of social contract theory: 'it is plain that men have agreed to a disproportionate and unequal possession of the earth, they having, by a tacit and voluntary consent, found out a way how a man may fairly possess more land than he himself can use the product of, by receiving in exchange for the overplus, gold and silver, which many be hoarded up without injury to any one' (Locke, 1996: 326).

Spurred on by the recognition of this 'possessive individualism' in Locke's theory (Macpherson, 1962), feminist theorists have argued that it is a key element in Locke's approach to autonomy. For some, Locke's 'ideology of liberal individualism and personal freedom applied only to men in the market' (Eisenstein, 1986: 47). In contrast to the view of autonomy idealized within the religious realm, the form of autonomy valued within civil society seems to morph into a masculinised ideal, tied to the notion that 'individuality…can be realized fully only in accumulating property' (Macpherson, 1954: 21). Locke's assumptions about differential rationality and private property based on class and gender highlight the line of thought that only those men with sufficient rationality and a good degree of economic autonomy could qualify as full, consenting citizens (Coole, 1993a: 195; Hirschmann, 2008).[3]

Nonetheless, Locke implies that the terms of political obligation still hold for all members of the political community. That is to say, even those who do not explicitly consent to the decisions and laws made within the legislative chamber remain bound to those them since they more closely reflect natural law. After all, civil law is 'a corrective for those who are incapable of exercising their faculties adequately enough to perceive and abide by the law that God has made manifest, and it follows that the more nearly men approach perfect rationality, the less need they have for civil law' (Letwin, 1988: 15).

1. 2. Kant's Approach to Autonomy

While Locke's idea of autonomy leans on the law of God, for Kant, this does not indicate how and why human beings are morally autonomous; moral law originates from a source elsewhere, related but ultimately apart from the individual. Locke may have told us how to be self-governing according to a natural law, but he did not, according to Kant, tell us how to be self-governing in relation to our own self-imposed moral law. Kant broke with the idea of morality as obedience and was indeed the first to offer the view of morality *as* autonomy (Schneewind, 1998).

1. 2. i. The Moral Autonomy of Man

Kant sought to ground the possibility of moral autonomy in the law of reason alone. Using the analogue of a 'holy will', he aims to establish that the dictates of this 'perfectly rational will' point towards what is required of us in moral terms; whatever such a will 'necessarily *would* do is what we imperfectly rational agents *ought* to do' (Schneewind, 1992: 317). Kant accepts that humans are not purely rational beings and that we do not have anything nearly as morally flawless as a holy will. It is rather the *idea* of this perfectly rational agent that enables him to begin to think about moral autonomy.

To demonstrate how reason can be a law unto itself, Kant works with a view of epistemic possibilities derived from his account of an agent. An agent can think of

himself has having two related standpoints, one Kant refers to as being derived from the sensible or phenomenal world, the other he calls the intelligible or noumenal world. Kant accepts that we cannot have a perfectly rational will in part because we are enmeshed in the phenomenal world, wherein our 'behaviour would have to be assumed to conform wholly to the natural laws of desires and preferences and thus to the heteronomy of nature' (Kant, 2008: 46). Heteronomy is the term Kant uses to describe how an agent's will is determined by something other than itself and is therefore not morally autonomous.

However, heteronomy can also characterize an agent's willing when he thinks of himself as a member of the noumenal world. From this standpoint, Kant argues human beings engage in practical reasoning and have the power of choice through willing certain ends. Specifically, Kant calls reasons or motives for acting 'maxims' which are purely subjective principles. For example, one might act on the maxims 'I want to exercise more', 'I want to become rich and famous', or 'I want to care more for my family this year'. Maxims are usually bound up with the pursuit of happiness, and Kant expects that happiness will be pursued in various ways. Maxims are, in other words, principles that rest on recognizing and acting on the means to a particular end.

Maxims cannot form the basis of moral law. Among other things, Kant argues that the 'principle of one's own happiness is the most objectionable of the empirical bases of morality' (2008: 38). Three reasons are given to support this claim. First, good conduct and good will cannot be based on well-being, because well-being is not always synonymous with such conduct and will. Second, it therefore follows that 'making a man happy is very different from making him good and making him prudent and sharp in seeing what is to his own advantage is far from making him virtuous' (2008: 38). Lastly, Kant argues that if maxims were used as the basis of morality, it 'puts the motives to virtue and vice in the same class' (2008: 38). Robbing a bank to satisfy the maxim of wanting to become rich and famous surely cannot be considered similar to the means which allows me to satisfy the maxim of caring for my family. Kant recognizes that this later maxim and ones like it are based

on ‘moral feeling’. Such feeling is ‘nearer to morality and the dignity of morality’ but still cannot form the basis of moral law (2008: 38). He says, ‘there are endless differences in degree between different kinds of feeling, so that feelings can’t give us a uniform standard of good and bad; and anyway one can’t validly judge for others by means of one’s own feeling’ (2008: 38). Thus, in Kant’s eyes, the subjective and contingent nature of maxims runs contrary to what is required of moral law.

To get closer to Kant’s understanding of moral autonomy it is necessary to consider his notion of an imperative. An imperative is a maxim or rule that is additionally couched in terms of an ‘ought’. Whereas maxims are subjective, imperatives are objective in that they could apply to all rational agents and should elicit obedience because they are considered to have a law-like form. When such obedience is *conditional*, Kant calls imperatives ‘hypothetical’. For example, if I considered caring for my family to be a hypothetical imperative, I would will both the end (caring for my family) and the means to this end (devoting less time to socializing and more time at home). I should devote more time at home because I want to care for my family. Hypothetical imperatives are considered by Kant to be heteronomous when measured against the principle of moral law; specifically, the end which is willed is still depended on the agent’s conception of what is good.

It should be evident by now that Kant is keen to establish that the principle of morality cannot be based on contingent and subjective ends and so cannot be partial to anyone’s interests. The principle of morality must be a self-imposed law as well as universal and thus impartial. Kant does not aim to tell us what constitutes the substance of morality but what the principle of morality is. He claims that the ‘principle of autonomy…is the sole principle of morals’ (2008: 37). Otherwise put he says, ‘Morality is thus the relation of actions not to anything external to the person, but *to the autonomy of the will*…’ (2008: 37).

Kant argues only ‘categorical imperatives’ are consistent with the autonomy of the will. Categorical imperatives tell us what we ought to do in moral matters, and they must be both ‘law-like in *form* and universal in *scope*’ (O’Neill, 2003: 15).

Regarding their law-like form, Kant claims 'categorical imperatives must abstract from every object [or end] thoroughly enough so that no object has any *influence* on the will; so that practical reason (the will), rather than catering to interests that are not its own, shows its commanding authority as supreme law-giving' (2008: 37). It is the autonomy of the will based not on arbitrary and subjective preferences or interests, but on practical reason alone that helps us to see categorical imperatives as law-like. Categorical imperatives are 'objectively necessary' and do not refer to any subjective or contingent end to give them force; they point toward action that is *good in itself* (2008: 19).

If the will is to be morally autonomous, it must be supplemented and is in fact reinforced by the universality of what it wills. To illustrate, Kant says, 'To employ one's own reason means simply to ask oneself, wherever one is urged to accept something, whether one finds it possible *to transform the reason for accepting it*, or the rule which follows from what is accepted, *into a universal principle* governing the use of one's reason' (1991b: 249fn; my emphasis). Reasons that help point towards moral principles must therefore be 'followable by others', meaning the principles are 'potentially principles for all' (O'Neill, 2003: 16). Thus, Kant expresses the categorical imperative as follows: 'Always choose in such a way that the maxims of your choice are incorporated as universal law in the same volition' (2008: 37).

Indeed, Kant argues it is the 'form of volition' which 'is autonomy' that helps motive rational beings to act according to categorical imperatives (2008: 40). Specifically, it is *respect* for form of volition vis-à-vis moral law that is the sole motive for acting rightly (Schneewind, 1992: 326). We are not moved to act based on our knowledge about the ends we are pursuing or moral feeling, as stated above. Rather, we are motivated to act by the respect we have for the law of reason which is self-imposed. Whereas Locke argued that motivation to obey natural law stemmed from the duty of salvation, Kant argues respect for the law is sufficient to motive rational beings to act and obey. All rational beings, 'in principle', have within themselves 'an adequate motive for compliance' (Schneewind, 1992: 327).

Kant further adds that when rational beings act according to self-imposed moral law they must also *presuppose* their own freedom and free will (2008: 42). Human beings have one foot in the phenomenal world and the other in the noumenal world. For Kant, we are wholly determined by our phenomenal being but must think of ourselves as free when we consider ourselves as noumenal beings. Further, he says 'if I were a member only of that [noumenal] world, all my actions would always conform to the autonomy of the will; but since I confront myself also as a member of the world of sense, my actions *ought* to conform to it' (2008: 46). This is why Kant argues freedom is both negative and positive. Negative freedom is characterized by the absence of external constraints or causes relative to the will and is therefore partly indicated by our moving beyond the phenomenal world. But, free will without law would be 'random and chaotic' and 'would not allow for responsibility, nor consequently for praise or blame' (Schneewind, 1992: 328). Thus positive freedom has to be characterized by willing and acting in accordance with one's own self-imposed moral law. This is why for Kant 'the free person is the moral person' (Williams, 1983: 35).

Kant's conception of moral autonomy is based on theorizing from the perspective of the perfectly rational being and his 'holy will'. The categorical imperative tells rational beings what they ought to do to fulfill their moral duties towards themselves and others. Rational beings can never attain a holy will but they can act strive to act virtuously in the hope of satisfying categorical imperatives. In addition, although Kant's principle of morality is formal in that it abstains from specifying what is intrinsically good, it nevertheless yields political and social implications regarding the structure of a just state.

1.2. ii. Personal Autonomy and Political Man

One formulation of the categorical imperative in particular indicates Kant's guiding light in his political philosophy: 'act in such a way as to treat humanity, whether in

your own person or in that of anyone else, always as an end and never merely as a means' (2008: 29). He refers to the realm or kingdom of ends as 'the systematic union of rational beings through shared objective laws' (2008: 32). Kant envisages this particular kingdom using the *idea* of the social contract where moral duties are translated into civil laws and shape the principles constituting his ideal civil state. These a priori principles are '1. The *freedom* of every member of society as a human being. 2. The *equality* of each with all the others as a subject. 3. The *independence* of each member of a commonwealth as a citizen' (1991a: 74). Unpacking these principles reveals Kant's masculinist logic which bridges his moral and political philosophy.

The first principle of freedom corresponds to what Kant established in his moral philosophy, that rational beings are free and capable of acting autonomously. In line with the dignity accorded to each rational being simply because of their rational status, the state must protect their freedom. The protection of freedom is structured by *Right*, or the harmonization of each individual's freedom with the freedom of everyone else (1991a: 73). Kant paints the principle of freedom in now familiar terms:

> No-one can compel me to be happy in accordance with his conception of the welfare of others, for each may seek his happiness in whatever what he sees fit, so long as he does not infringe upon the freedom of others to pursue a similar end which can be reconciled with the freedom of everyone else within a workable general law – i.e. he must accord to others the same right as he enjoys himself. (1991a: 74)

Commentators have argued Kant's principle of freedom is akin to the contemporary liberal conception of personal autonomy (Waldron, 2005; Taylor, 2005). The significance of and respect granted to happiness in the principle of freedom 'evokes the image of a person in charge of his life, not just following desires but choosing which of his desires to follow' (Waldron, 2005: 308). Kant appears to tie freedom in the political context to 'the importance of a person's taking responsibility for his own

individuality and for the overall shape of his life and career' (Waldron, 2005: 313). Indeed, this interpretation is further supported by Kant's division of moral duties into those which are enforceable by right and those that are not.

As members of a civil state, each individual is required to respect and further the ends of other members; in other words, the ends of others act as constraints on each individual's action. As long each member obeys the law of the state and respects the rights of others they will act lawfully, regardless of the motive involved. Unlike moral duties structured by right, the state cannot enforce, let alone 'teach virtue' (1991a: 134). Virtue depends on motive, and the state should not concern itself with this. Kant argues that the state which does teach virtue renders its citizenry passive in the face of moral judgment and in relation to their happiness. Kant's state therefore aims to protect the moral and personal autonomy of its members.

The second principle of Kant's state – 'the *equality* of each with all the others as a subject' – refers to the idea of civil equality where all members are equal before the law and subject to the public right of coercion. Kant claims that the 'uniform equality of human beings' is 'perfectly consistent with the utmost inequality of the mass in the degree of its possessions, whether these take the form of physical or mental superiority over others, or of fortuitous external property and of particular rights to others' (1991a: 75).

This construction of formal equality which rests on the acceptance of substantive inequality is buffered by Kant's support for equality of opportunity. We can see this more clearly from his third principle – 'the *independence* of each member of a commonwealth as a *citizen*'. Although all members are obliged to obey the civil law, only citizens are entitled to vote and therefore actually exercise political autonomy. One qualification for citizenship is that a member 'must be his *own master*, and must have some *property* to support himself' (1991a: 78). Here we see a repeat of Rousseau's anxiety about economic autonomy being crushed by oppressive dependences between men; for Kant as with Rousseau, a man loses his economic autonomy or independence when they allow 'others to make use of him' in terms of

labour (1991a: 78). Any man that works in a ‘skill, trade, fine art or science’ ought to be considered economically autonomous and thus qualified for citizenship (1991a: 78). Equality of opportunity is favoured however, in the sense that men who ‘work their way up from their passive condition to an active one’ can become a full citizen (1991a: 140).

Nonetheless, men who are property-less and economically dependent on others are ‘mere auxiliaries to the commonwealth, for they have to receive orders or protection from other individuals’ (1991a: 140). Kant’s concept of citizenship clearly intersects with his idea of economic status. Economic status appears to affect the extent to which one is considered rational otherwise it would not be a qualification of citizenship. Nowhere in Kant’s discussion of economic status does he suggest women have an independent economic status distinct from men. Instead, ‘women in general’ are considered to lack ‘civil personality’ and are indefinitely passive citizens (1991a: 139). They are always to be conceived of as ‘mere auxiliaries to the commonwealth’, and they are explicitly ruled out of qualifying for citizenship because the first qualification is being an adult male, and therefore not being female (1991a: 78).

Like Rousseau, women emerge for discussion in Kant’s work primarily in the context of marriage and anxieties about sexuality. Kant justifies male dominance within marriage with the argument that the physical and mental superiority of the husband gives him ‘a right to command’ (Williams, 1983: 119). It is fair to say that this right to command effectively blocks the possibility that women might gain a civil personality; forever being traded between father and husband, woman will never break free of ‘receiving orders or protection from other individuals’. In light of Kant’s first principle of the civil state regarding freedom and happiness, it is doubtful women will attain the satisfaction of their own happiness, or personal autonomy, if they are compelled ‘to be happy in accordance with’ their husbands conception of what is good.

Indeed, Kant's view of marriage and (hetero)sexuality recalls the distinction between our phenomenal being and noumenal being. Sexual expression is a fundamental expression of phenomenal being in that it is based solely on heteronomous desire and lust. Given that Kant saw human status reflected in our noumenal standpoint, sex is considered 'amoral and inhuman' because it rests on using another human being as a means to an end (Williams, 1983: 116). In Kant's mind, heterosexual marriage is the only way both man and woman can overcome the lack of morality inherent in sexual expression. A marriage contract revolves around the reciprocal and harmonious union of a man and woman, and entails the right to equal possession. This right somehow cancels out sexual expression as an illegitimate force, and allows man and woman to recuperate their human status.

Accordingly, Kant places much emphasis on sexual honour to keep order within the state. Sexual honour is a duty to be upheld by women and should be instilled in them through proper education. A woman's education should reflect her proper function as a mother and wife, instilling in her feminine virtues of modesty, restraint and chastity (Nye, 2004: 21). And so, like Rousseau's Sophy, Kant's women are not to develop reason in such a way that leads to enlightenment, which is so vital for men's happiness and moral autonomy. Although Kant famously encourages men to have the courage to use their own reason and to reason in public with others, he readily accepts that 'the entire fair sex' might fail to make use of theirs (1996: 573). Kant had little respect for the intellectual capabilities of women, saying that those who actively sought an academic education 'might as well have a beard; for perhaps that would express more obviously the mien profundity for which she strives' (cited in Lloyd, 1995: 76).

In his early work, Kant suggests that this is largely because women have 'a beautiful understanding' in light of their feminine virtues and as such are less inclined to reason (Lloyd, 1995: 75; Nye, 2004). Although in some respects complimentary to reason, such a beautiful understanding fails to equip women with the necessary requisites for moral autonomy. Action based on feminine virtue 'has still no genuinely moral worth. It stands on the same footing as other inclination' (cited in

Hirschmann, 2008: 201). With this, Kant constructs a gendered 'moral division of labour' which recalls the distinction between noumenal and phenomenal standpoints (Lloyd, 1995: 76).

Kant therefore practices the liberal art of separation in more ways than one. In terms of theoretical structure, the separation of morals from politics, principles from practice, noumenal from phenomenal, enables him to reach a level of abstraction that appears to embody no political and gendered significance. However, as I have discussed these distinctions reveal that reason as well as freedom are thoroughly gendered. Kant also employs the art of separation within his political philosophy, reifying a particular class-based vision of domestic harmony, the division of labour and sexual mores. The public-private distinction works in domestic-market, market-state and domestic-state terms with respect to women as well as men who are not yet independent. Ultimately, Kant failed to apply his own reason and enlighten himself on issues of gender. Mill, on the other hand, considered it nonsensical to refuse to think about gender in a manner consistent with enlightenment.

1. 3. Mill's Approach to Autonomy

Mill's utilitarian-liberal-feminist framework shapes his approach to autonomy and gender. In contrast to Locke's liberalism of natural rights, and Kant's emphasis on moral autonomy, Mill's approach to autonomy is embedded within his 'liberalism of personal development' (Shklar, 1998: 8). Contrary to Locke and Kant, Mill intends for his discussion of autonomy to apply to women and men as individuals deserving of equal treatment with the context of a democratic society. It is this that makes Mill a helpful source of feminist theorizing on women's autonomy. Yet contemporary feminist theorists are divided over the extent to which Mill's view on gender moved sufficiently away from masculine norms.

1. 3. i. Utility, Autonomy, Democracy

Mill remarked more than once that in his time moral theories based on a priori principles were 'exploited by the conservative to stamp existing practices with a philosophic seal of approval' (Skorupski, 1989: 31). In *The Subjection of Women* Mill claims 'For the apotheosis of Reason we have substituted that of Instinct' (Mill, 2008c: 474). He saw through the idea which is evident with Kant and was pronounced in his time that there is such a thing as 'innate' gendered virtue. For Mill, moral goodness is 'uniform for both sexes' and does not rest on any notion of a priori knowledge (Okin, 1992: 220).

Mill offers a utilitarian liberalism that has the principle of utility as its moral foundation. 'Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness' (Mill, 2008b: 137). Happiness is taken to be synonymous with pleasure and absence of pain as well as 'the prevention and mitigation of unhappiness' (2008b: 143). 'As a directive rule of human conduct', the principle of utility does not rest on 'the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether' (2008b: 142). Mill's framework is explicitly inclusive of feminist concerns given that the happiness of women must be included in theorising about the 'greatest happiness'. Furthermore, Mill breaks with natural rights liberalism and social contract theory to offer a distinct kind of liberalism based on the principle of utility. If Mill cannot ground liberal concepts in abstract categories, he makes it his task to ground them in the principle of utility.

In this framework, 'Justice is a name for certain classes of moral rules, which concern the *essentials of human well-being more nearly*, and therefore of more absolute obligation, than any other rules for the guidance of life' (Mill, 2008b: 195; my emphasis). Moral rules do extend beyond the realm of justice, however, within the political context only those rules which are tied to justice can be enforced. Moral obligation binds all in that it 'forbid[s] mankind to hurt one another' including through 'wrongful acts of aggression, or wrongful exercise of power over some one'

or ‘withholding from him something which is his due’ (Mill, 2008b: 200, 196). These ‘duties of perfect obligation’ ought to be legally enforced by the state, according to Mill, because from them ‘a correlative *right* resides in some person or persons’ (Mill, 2008b: 185). The impartiality necessary to this conception of moral duty leads Mill to conclude the ‘*right* to equality of treatment, except when some recognized social expediency requires the reverse’ must be the ‘highest abstract standard of social and distributive justice’ (Mill, 2008b: 200, 198).

Since rights imply moral obligations, both protect the ‘essentials of human well-being’. Mill believes the ‘free development of individuality’ is ‘one of the leading essentials of well-being’ (Mill, 2008a: 63). Individuality is fostered by the development of those characteristics and sentiments that a person judges to be best suited to herself. He argues that it is ‘the privileged and proper condition of a human being, arrived at the maturities of his faculties, to see and interpret experience in his own way. It is for him to find out what part of recorded experience is properly applicable to his own circumstances and character’ (Mill, 2008a: 65). What Mill alludes to here is what he calls elsewhere ‘rational freedom’ (2008c: 576). Rational freedom is closely equated with the notions of autonomy and individuality; specifically, Mill says, ‘the only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain in’ (2008a: 17). Autonomy aids this process since it signifies the ‘ability to reflect on, choose, and revise one’s own conception of the good as well as the character, relationship, projects, and life plans that go with it’ (Donner, 2007: 256). Therefore, for Mill, autonomy is an object of value because it ‘is a means to the development of individuality’ and so human well-being (Young, 1982: 37).

To protect free self-development Mill advocates a broad ‘region of human liberty’ encompassing the ‘inward domain of consciousness…in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects…liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like’ (Mill, 2008a: 16). This also requires ‘freedom to

unite, for any purpose not involving harm to others: the persons combining being supposed to be of full age, and not forced or deceived' (Mill, 2008a: 16, 17). Consequently, Mill shows support and seeks to justify tolerance towards 'different experiments in living' (Mill, 2008a: 63). Unsurprisingly, Mill also heaps criticism on 'custom' or the abuses of custom for quashing individuality, yet, he says 'it is desirable people should exercise their understandings, and an intelligent following of custom, or even an intelligent deviation from custom, *is better than a blind and simply mechanical adhesion to it*' (Mill, 2008a: 66; my emphasis).

Nonetheless, Mill consistently emphasises the notion and perils of judgement, binding it to what he perceives to be the injustice that is the 'wrongful interference with each other's freedom' (Mill, 2008b: 196). Quite wisely, Mill remarks it is 'one of the most universal of all human propensities', 'to extend the bounds of what may be called the moral police, until it encroaches on the most unquestionably legitimate liberty of the individual' (Mill, 2008a: 94). His main point however, is that when state and society do interfere with 'purely personal conduct', the 'odds are that it interferes wrongly, and in the wrong place' (Mill, 2008a: 92). Even if society 'should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong', it cannot justify interference or compulsion to act otherwise (Mill, 2008a: 14). This is the case, according to Mill, because the interest an individual has in his own well-being far outweighs the interest that others ('except in strong cases of personal attachment') and society has in him (Mill, 2008a: 85). Thus, for the individual 'his own mode of laying out his existence is the best, *not because it is the best in itself, but because it is his own mode*' (Mil, 2008a: 75).

This non-judgemental approach to autonomy and individuality runs in tandem with Mill's very clear assertion that 'some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others' (Mill, 2008b: 138). Given that Mill is an empiricist, his criteria for determining which kinds of pleasures are more valuable than others is experience, and specifically, the thoughts and deliberations of those who have experienced both higher and lower pleasures. He is confident that those who have experienced the 'pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral

sentiments' will accord them more value than the pleasures of 'mere sensation' (Mill, 2008b: 138). It is likely, according to Mill, that for those individuals who are familiar only with the lower pleasures, or have not yet had the opportunity to develop their higher faculties, they will be easily satisfied and 'content'. Mill argues it tends to be the case that when individuals have developed their higher faculties, they tend to seek (knowing the risk of failure) individuality and autonomy, and hence their own well-being. In light of this, Mill argues that those 'who only know their side of the question' are not sufficiently informed to decide on which kinds of pleasures are better than others (Mill, 2008b: 140). In other words, they cannot compare between pleasures that rest on desire and pleasures that promote well-being (Sugden, 2006).

Contrary to his own insistence on the perils of judgement, Mill seems to make a judgement regarding the proper exercise of personal autonomy. Indeed, many critics argue that he advocates a particular conception of the good which implies intolerance, with some interpreting Mill as arguing that the state ought to interfere with freedom to make individuals realise higher pleasures (e.g., Mendus, 1989). However, the distinction between desire and well-being actually stems from Mill's conception of virtue, and is entirely consistent with his non-interference principle. This conception of virtue is conceived in terms that suggest the value of autonomy is not just instrumental but 'worth *having* for its own sake' (Young, 1982: 41).

On Mill's account, 'Virtues are characterised as admirable character traits that are productive of happiness and that have become habitual through association with pleasure' (Donner, 2007: 253). In other words, they cohere with aspects of higher pleasures that are conducive to well-being. So, for example, in *The Subjection* Mill says,

> the true virtue of human beings is fitness to live together as equals; claiming nothing for themselves but what they as freely concede to everyone else; regarding command of any kind as an exceptional necessity, and in all cases a temporary one; and preferring, whenever possible, the society of those with whom

> leading and following can be alternate and reciprocal. (Mill, 2008c: 518)

In light of the right to equal treatment, this virtue would lend a hand to the realisation of justice. Indeed, 'The multiplication of happiness is, according to utilitarian ethics, the object of virtue' (Mill, 2008b: 150). Much like Kant, Mill is aware that individuals must *want* to act virtuously however, he does not see this as a self-regarding obligation. Virtue and justice part ways in this sense, for the latter necessitates coercion and moral obligation and the former does not. Regardless of the extent to which virtue bolsters utility, it is not a moral obligation and therefore cannot ground the claim 'that people can be coerced or sanctioned or treated intolerantly for choosing certain forms of character' (Donner, 2007: 271).

Nonetheless, Mill does call 'for extensive and positive encouragement and engagement with others as part of the process of development of virtue' (Donner, 2007: 271). For individuals, virtue can then become 'desired and cherished, not as a means to happiness, but as part of their happiness' (Mill, 2008b: 170). The same logic holds for autonomy, and indeed many other objects, in the sense that they can become a part of happiness. In other words, autonomy can become desired for its own sake and experienced as a good in itself (Mill, 2008b: 171; Young, 1982: 38). If this occurs, autonomy becomes a character ideal valued by an individual.

Importantly, Mill's approach to autonomy and individuality, and its ties to virtue, should be seen in the context of his democratic theory. Mill's anxiety regarding the extension of suffrage to the working classes, and his elitism have been well noted (Baum, 2000). At the same time, it is significant that in advocating forms of representative and participatory democracy, Mill's understanding of autonomy 'encompasses not only people's choices and actions as independent individuals but also domains in which people share with others in practices of *mutual self-government* with respect to the social and political institutions that govern their lives' (Baum, 2007: 102; my emphasis). Indeed, Mill's emphasis on participatory norms is well highlighted in his advocacy of workplace cooperatives and local-level

government participation on the part of citizens (Pateman, 1970). Notably referring to such contexts as 'schools' and their educative functions, the virtues developed through, and sustained by, participation in forms of mutual self-government and public deliberation were regarded by Mill as centrally linked to autonomy and individuality. In these contexts, Mill highlights the sense of political efficacy and personal confidence that individuals develop, as well as the 'intellectual virtues' such as humility, empathy, and scepticism (Zakaras, 2007). Hence the interpretation of his notion of autonomy as linked to 'democratic individuality', which notably contrasts with the Lockean idea of autonomy as tied to possessive individualism (Zakaras, 2007: 215, 201). These themes of autonomy, individuality and virtue are further emphasised in Mill's thoughts on family life and gender, as discussed in the next section.

1. 3. ii. Utility, Gender and Women's Autonomy

In his approach to autonomy, Mill refutes 'the patriarchal sexual ethic' (Morales, 2007). Mill denies 'that anyone knows, or can know, the nature of the two sexes' (Mill, 1996: 685). Unlike Locke, Mill thought it absurd to try and 'isolate a human being from the circumstances of his condition, so as to ascertain experimentally what he would have been by nature' (Mill, 1996: 713). Very much in line with his emphasis on autonomy and the non-judgemental attitude, Mill considers 'it presumption in any one to pretend to decide what women are or are not, can or cannot be, by natural constitution' (Mill, 1996: 706). He therefore critiques many of the constructions Locke and Kant deployed with respect to 'woman' and 'man' whilst arguing in favour of women's autonomy.

Yet, Mill is also certain that whatever women are, they are not what they could have been. The institutionalisation of male dominance and the pervasiveness of gendered social and cultural norms have kept women, 'as far as regards spontaneous development, in so unnatural a state, that their nature cannot but have been greatly distorted and disguised' (Mill, 1996: 706). Indeed, for Mill, 'social tyranny' can be much 'more formidable' than in its political form, since 'it leaves fewer means of

escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself' (Mill, 2008a: 9). Since patriarchal norms help shape and constitute men and women's sense of identity, challenging such norms is not merely a case of challenging law or establishing political equality; gender norms and interpersonal relations as well as the functioning of power must change if women are to achieve that which is essential to their own well-being.

Most strikingly, Mill makes the theoretical move of treating political tyranny and despotism as similar to that of 'domestic tyranny' and 'despotism in the family' (Mill, 1996: 692, 693). He launches a critique of male patriarchal and sexual power which has 'no other source than the law of the strongest' (Mill, 1996: 676). Just as Locke and Kant argued against the institutionalisation of arbitrary power, Mill applies the same logic to the patriarchal family. He puts it that 'the less fit a man is for the possession of power, *the more does he hug himself in the consciousness of the power the law gives him*, exact its rights to the utmost point which custom will tolerate, and take pleasure in using the power, merely to enliven the agreeable sense of possessing it' (Mill, 1996: 699; my emphasis). In particular Mill repeatedly emphasises domestic violence and rape within marriage as the most abhorrent instances of male dominance, where women are subject to 'bodily ill-usage' and reduced to 'being the personal body-servant' of husbands.

Furthermore, challenging Locke and Kant on the issue of the marriage contract, Mill believes 'it is not true that in all voluntary association between two people, one of them must be absolute master, still less that the law must determine which of them it shall be' (Mill, 2008c: 512). With this, he targets despotic husbands as rightful subjects of state coercion, using them to exemplify his point that 'liberty is often granted where is should be withheld' (Mill, 2008a: 116). Mill extends this critique arguing 'that the presumed consent of women to marry was not, in any real sense, a free promise, but one socially coerced by the lack of meaningful options' (Shanley, 1991: 168). Thus Mill considered the English marriage contract and slavery as unjust; those who seek to continue such contracts fail to consider the interests of others, namely the wife and the slave, and moreover, undermine the 'moral freedom'

of the less powerful party by preventing them from exiting the contract (2008a: 115). Contracts should not be fulfilled if the 'happiness of the reluctant party' is in question (Mill, 2008a: 115).

Mill's critique of the patriarchal family also regards gender identities and roles as they are learned at an earlier age. He despairs that in all classes it seems, 'by mere fact of being born a male he is by right the superior of all and every one of an entire half of the human race…what must be the effect on his character, of this lesson?' (Mill, 1996: 720). Conversely, Mill believed 'all women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal character is the very opposite to that of men; *not self-will*, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All moralities tell them that it is the *duty of women,* and all the current sentimentalities that *it is their nature, to live for others*' (Mill, 1996: 681; my emphasis).

Those who argue in favour of the patriarchal sexual ethic, including the state authorities, are not only 'champions of power' but also fail to fulfil their obligations to women. 'The obligation' to treat women equally 'is almost entirely disregarded in the case of family relations, a case, in its direct influence on human happiness, more important that all other taken together' (Mill, 2008a: 116; my emphasis). Under this ethic, gender does not fit with requirements of justice and it certainly does not square with Mill's approach to autonomy, based as it is on the free development of individuality. In line with the requirements of justice, Mill advocates the replacement of legal subordination of women with 'a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on one side, nor disability on the other' (Mill, 1996: 673). Mill challenges the static, gendered public-private distinction that Locke and Kant held on to so dearly, and considers all manner of institutions and interpersonal relations through the lens of equality.

However, Mill specifically has his eye on the reformation of the patriarchal family: 'The family, justly constituted, would be the real school of the virtues of freedom' (Mill, 2008c: 518). Thus Mill regarded the family in a similar light to that of other

social and democratic institutions, emphasising their educative functions vis-à-vis the development of autonomy and individuality. Further, it is telling that Mill's ideal family is discussed in gender-neutral terms and specifically linked to virtue. The egalitarian family is painted as 'a school of sympathy in equality, of living together in love, without power on one side or obedience on the other…It would then be an exercise of those virtues which each requires to fit them for all other association, and a model to the children of the feelings and conduct which is designed to render…natural' (Mill, 2008c: 519; my emphasis).

At the same time, Mill is also rethinking virtue (and gender) for men in sharp contrast to Kant. For example, he says, equality would 'abate the exaggerated self-abnegation which is the present artificial ideal of feminine character, and *a good woman would not be more self-sacrificing that the best man...men would be much more unselfish and self-sacrificing that at present*, because they would no longer be taught to worship their own will as such a grand thing that it is actually the law for another rational being' (Mill, 1996: 697; my emphasis). Carefully considering the day to day realities of the family home, Mill concludes that consent, compromise and sympathy based on the interests of the persons involved, rather than custom and law, should determine the division of duties within married life. More broadly, Nadia Urbinati speculates that Mill's model of personal autonomy and self-development was underpinned by the metaphor of androgyny, which was, in his day, 'synonymous with *Humanity* or *Human Being* and transcended any sort of historical or physical distinctions' (Urbinati, 1991: 634).

> [Mill t]ransformed the androgynous metaphor into a universal value in keeping with is idea of liberty. Sexual equality became a precondition of individual free choice and self-determination. In breaking the connection between sex and gender, Mill liberated human beings…from the rigid distinctions imposed by sex roles…Properly speaking, his androgyne is the Individual, the human being's exemplary, the subject of what in *On Liberty*, he called individuality. (Urbinati, 1991: 631, 632)

Mill believes the 'most direct benefit of all' would be 'the unspeakable gain in private happiness to the liberated half of the species; the difference to them between a life of subjection to the will of others, and a life of rational freedom' (Mill, 1996: 730). Mill imagines '*the mere consciousness a woman would…have of being a human being like any other, entitled to choose her pursuits*' would be greatly enhanced by the 'mere getting rid of the idea' that employment, education, political participation, and anything 'not solely of private interest, are men's business' (Mill, 1996: 722: my emphasis). This would contribute to 'the *power* of earning' which is 'essential to the dignity of a women, if she has not independent property' (Mill, 2008c: 523), since it enables her to break the oppressive dependency on an abusive relationship if need be. According to some feminist theorists, as an ideal, 'Millian rational freedom is a specifically feminist value' given it 'is, ultimately freedom *from patriarchy'* (Morales, 2007: 59). This is a 'rich ideal of freedom' since the principle of non-domination concerns not only non-interference but zones in on the variety and often subtle causes of 'autonomy deprivation' (Urbinati in Morales, 2007: 60).

At the same time, Mill's utilitarianism ensures he considers not just the individual benefits of equality and women's autonomy but also the social advantages in line with the principle of utility. For example, an advantage of opening up all occupations to women 'would be that of doubling the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity' (Mill, 1996: 722). However, it is in light of these considerations, while donning his utilitarian-political economist hat, that many theorists see Mill's feminism flounder. Arguably the most scrutinized of his arguments is as follows: all things being equal, 'Like a man when he chooses a profession, so, when a woman marries, it may in general be understood that she makes choice of the management of a household, and the bringing up of a family, as the first call upon her exertions' (Mill, 2008c: 523). Made in the context of broader arguments about the undesirability of women earning *and* caring, Mill seems to 'expect most women to realise their autonomy as enlightened mothers' (Gerson, 2002). In turn, he 'essentially limits women's equality to single women' as only they are independent earners (Hekman, 1992: 684). Feminist theorists who have looked

beyond *The Subjection* to Mill's other texts effectively support Okin's claim that this surely indicates Mill is concerned with 'middle and upper class women, and it is the bourgeois family that is his ideal' (Okin, 1992: 226; Hirschmann, 2008; Coole, 1993b). On these accounts, Mill does not push the promise of his arguments about women's autonomy far enough. He idealizes both the family and the sexual division of labour but also calculates the utilitarian benefits of them both in relation to the market. Clearly, in many ways Mill moves away from Locke and Kant in terms of gender and gives ample justification for valuing autonomy. Still, feminist theorists remain divided over the limitations of Mill's approach.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine the meanings of autonomy within the liberal tradition, specifically in the work of Locke, Kant and Mill. I also set out to critically discuss the theoretical and conceptual relationships between autonomy and gender. Connecting the concept of autonomy and the question of its value to assumptions about male dominance allowed me to effectively demonstrate that the asymmetrical and inflexible construction of 'men' and 'women', and the demarcated realms they move within, are tied the structure of liberal approaches to autonomy. From each theorist's work, we can ascertain three approaches to autonomy that are gendered to various degrees and in different ways.

Locke's approach to autonomy is anchored in his liberalism of natural rights. In line with the moderate Enlightenment, the value of autonomy can be read as being synonymous within the value given to liberty of conscience and the duty of salvation. The exercise of autonomy thus depends on reason as well as the absence of arbitrary political and religious authority. This face of autonomy in Locke's approach appears to be gender-neutral. Nonetheless, autonomy here is highly regulated in the sense that it is applicable only to certain Christian subjects and those who live within the confines of morally appropriate behaviour. In light of the art of separation, Locke's approach to autonomy stems from the distinctions made between the private spheres of domesticity and civil society, and both of these in relation to the state. Gender

shapes the meaning given to autonomy here, which is tied to the independence achieved by privileged, propertied men. The exercise of autonomy in this sense is partly structured by qualified male dominance within marriage, and so a loss of women's autonomy, and partly dependent on a whole host of 'others'.

Kant's approach to autonomy features two related forms of autonomy, and both are structured according to gender. Through Kant's philosophical and epistemological investigations into the possibility of a self-imposed moral law, he concluded that the value of moral autonomy is that it grounds the respect owed to all rational human beings solely by virtue of their rational status. Each rational man is thus conceptualised as a morally competent agent and is thereby free, in contrast to the way men were understood when guided by the morality of obedience. In light of their 'beautiful understanding' women are excluded from the realm of Kant's moral autonomy. Women do not qualify for the respect that is owed to rational men because they are not morally competent agents. The second form of autonomy, personal autonomy, is grounded in Kant's work on the ideal, liberal state. Equal and independent citizens are permitted to seek happiness according to their own conception of what is good, as long as this does not interfere with the freedom of others. Again, women are denied this form of autonomy since they are viewed as passive citizens due to their subordination within marriage; women lack 'civil personality'. Much like Locke, Kant does a fine job practicing the art of separation.

Mill's approach to autonomy is embedded within utilitarian-liberalism and was the only approach discussed that is feminist in outlook. Instrumentally, autonomy is considered valuable because it is a key ingredient of human well-being and is necessary for the development of individuality. Insofar as this is true, Mill argues that autonomy should be considered valuable for women; the patriarchal sexual ethic is illegitimate and should no longer dictate to women what is in their best interests. Mill also argued that autonomy may be intrinsically valuable if it is considered to be an inherent part of a person's happiness. When autonomy is desired for its own sake, it morphs into a character ideal. As a character ideal, autonomy is then linked to the structure of virtues that help to promote and sustain democratic, participatory norms.

In light of Mill's feminist arguments, autonomy is thought to contribute to the shift towards equality between the sexes, and at least in principle, helps reconstitute the family as an egalitarian sphere of virtue. Despite the promise of his feminist arguments about the value of autonomy for women and feminist politics, Mill seems to cling to his gendered mindset in light of his assumptions about the sexual division of labour. However, as we shall see in contemporary chapters, there are several elements of Mill's approach that reappear in contemporary feminist thought.

The next chapter begins my examination of contemporary feminist engagement with the idea of autonomy, by turning to the way autonomy features in the feminist ethic of care.

Notes

[1] Toleration is required to allow for liberty of conscience and moral autonomy, but because toleration is highly regulated, so too is autonomy. Lockean toleration permits liberty of conscience for certain Christian sects but 'as a system it not only *did* not, but inherently *could* not, concede full equality of religious status and expression to agnostics, Buddhists, Confucianists, Hindus, or Muslims' (Israel, 2006: 139; original emphasis). Locke also 'emphatically rejects liberty of lifestyle…repeatedly endors[ing] the suppression by the sovereign of what Christians consider debauchery, licentiousness, adultery and sodomy…plainly curtail[ing] freedom of the individual [and] the right to sexual freedom' (Israel, 2006: 142). In other words, practices and relationships which did not conform to natural law could not be 'autonomously' pursued.

[2] When Locke reiterates that by property he means 'that property which men have in their persons as well as goods' or their 'lives, liberties, and estates', it would seem that all individuals have an interest in consenting to political authority (Locke, 1996: 365, 349). However, Locke also discusses property in narrower terms, referring to estates or land, and in fact considers this 'the chief matter of property' (Locke, 1996: 321). When Locke goes on to construct the principles underpinning legitimate government, and says government '*must not raise taxes* on the *property of the people, without the consent of the people*' (Locke, 1996: 355), following C. B. Macpherson (1954) it appears 'the people' here refer specifically to those who own land or estates.

[3] As Locke writes, in a much-cited passage: 'The greatest part of mankind have not leisure for learning and logick, and superfine distinctions of the schools. Where the hand is used to the plough and the spade, the head is seldom elevated to sublime notions, or exercised in mysterious reasoning. 'Tis well if men of that rank (to say nothing of the other sex) can comprehend plain propositions, and a short reasoning about things familiar to their minds, and nearly allied to their daily experience. Go beyond this, and you amaze the greatest part of mankind' (Locke cited in Macpherson, 1954: 7).

Chapter 2

Autonomy and Care Feminism

Introduction

In this chapter I look to the meaning and value of autonomy in the context of the feminist ethic of care. Care feminism is now widely recognised as an 'alternative moral orientation' to the natural rights tradition, utilitarianism and Kantian moral theories, which, as we saw in Chapter One, underpin dominant conceptions of justice and political community (Friedman, 2000: 207). Thus the critique of autonomy found within care feminism is embedded within a much broader and deeper critique of the moral and political principles of the liberal tradition. In section one I set out this care critique of autonomy. I show that care theorists present a compelling and weighty rejection of autonomy as it features in the approaches of Locke and Kant.

Nonetheless, care theorists do not abandon the idea of autonomy nor do they wholly reject liberalism. In section two I explain the care conception of autonomy known as 'relational autonomy'. I also argue there are some affinities between Mill's idea of autonomy coupled with individuality and the idea of 'relational autonomy' within this approach. Recalling the distinct strands of liberalism is therefore important to avoid positing a dichotomy between liberalism and feminism, and specifically, liberal and contemporary feminist ideas of autonomy. Care feminists show that, when properly reconceptualised, autonomy ought to be considered a valuable concept for feminist theory. In the final section of the chapter, I assess the idea of relational autonomy with a view to decipher its significance as a critical, political value for feminist theory. By way of a succinct focus on the themes of choice, inequality and oppression, I show that relational autonomy offers necessary, nuanced insights into the political implications of valuing autonomy.

2. 1. The Care Feminist Critique of Autonomy

Care feminists see the need to move care, as a practice and value, 'from its current peripheral location to a place near the centre of human life' (Tronto, 1994: 101). In light of the human relationships it sustains and necessitates, care is considered to be fundamental to moral and political thought. However, such thought has traditionally downplayed or completely ignored the value and practices of care, in part, because of their association with women and that which is considered 'feminine'. Instead, precedence has been given to those values most admired by privileged men and their particular knowledge and experience. Feminist care theorists therefore take issue with the 'normative primacy' given to the value of autonomy in the liberal tradition (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000: 9). In this section I set out two strands of the care critique of autonomy. I focus on the way care theorists challenge the ethic of justice and the rational self in which it is grounded, and the denial of dependencies which actually sustain the rational self.

2. 1. i. Questioning the Ethic of Justice and the Rational Self

Care theorists argue that the moral psychology informing the ethic of justice is rooted in a masculine conception of the self. Carol Gilligan gave this argument its first thorough elucidation in her research into moral reasoning and human development presented in *In a Difference Voice* (1982). The conception of moral maturity integral to the ethic of justice was found to be constructed from a masculine approach to moral reasoning and relationships. From Gilligan's empirical research it is evident the idea of autonomy as rational self-governance shapes this approach.

Conceiving themselves as rational persons, men's moral reasoning was viewed as a substantively independent process. Gilligan captures this by noting how, when presented with a hypothetical moral dilemma, one of the research participants relied on 'his emergent capacity for formal thought, his ability to think about thinking and to reason things out in a logical way, [which] frees him from dependence on authority and allows him to find solutions to problems by himself' (Gilligan, 1982:

27). The idea of autonomy as rational self-governance also found expression in the way relationships were viewed through a lens of abstract encounters. Through this lens individuals were imagined as equal and independent beings, possessing a moral responsibility to self first and others thereafter (Gilligan, 1982: 37). This approach to relationships, coupled with the process of moral reasoning, meant that moral maturity was achieved when participants' reached 'a principled understanding of fairness that rests on the free-standing logic of equality and reciprocity' (Gilligan, 1982: 27).

Otherwise put, on this account, moral maturity was achieved when the approach to reasoning and relationships revolved around the ethic of justice, which embodies a 'rights conception of morality…geared to arriving at an objectively fair or just resolution to moral dilemmas upon which all rational persons could agree' (Gilligan, 1982: 21).The ethic of justice is central to the social contract tradition and finds its boldest expression in Kant's idea of moral autonomy. Contemporary inheritors of this tradition continue to postulate that principles of justice can be ascertained by adopting the standpoint of 'theoretically defined individuals' who are rationally self-governing (Rawls, 2010: 143).

Gilligan's conclusions about the ethic of justice were reached by way of a comparative analysis of moral reasoning. She found that men and women viewed the integration of rights and responsibilities in divergent ways, and that women tended to reason according to the ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982: 100). Nonetheless, Gilligan is careful to note that the different ethics she describes are 'characterised not by gender but by theme'; the association of women with the ethic of care is 'not absolute' and her distinction between the two ethics merely highlights 'two modes of thought' rather than a 'generalization about either sex' (Gilligan, 1982: 2).

Nonetheless, as an idea that ought to structure moral reasoning and relations, Gilligan argues that autonomy is in fact *eschewed* by women; as Gilligan puts it, 'women portray autonomy…as the illusory and dangerous quest' (1982: 48). In contrast to the ideals of substantive independence and abstraction, women reasoned with 'a contextual mode of judgement' (Gilligan, 1982: 22). For example, when

thinking through certain moral dilemmas women's concerns lay with the dangers of hurting others and the possible 'despair…arising from the sense of disconnection' (Gilligan, 1982: 57). According to Gilligan, this greater 'awareness of interconnection' (Gilligan, 1982: 56) is rooted in the different understanding and experience of relationships women had. Compared with men who stressed 'replacement and separation', Gilligan concludes 'women's development points toward a different history of human attachment, stressing continuity and change in configurations', 'illuminating life as a web rather than a succession of relationships' (Gilligan, 1982: 48). Consequently, women tended to view moral responsibility through a different lens compared with men. Acting positively from obligations that arise to care for others was a primary concern for women when faced with moral dilemmas. The moral imperative for women 'is an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the "real and recognisable trouble of this world"' (Gilligan, 1982: 100).

Gilligan argued moral maturity could be achieved by following a route other than that suggested by the ethic of justice. Customarily dismissed by leading moral psychologists (and political philosophers) as morally immature, women's 'different voice' reflected the ethic of care. Gilligan thus overturned an instance of 'epistemic injustice' (Fricker, 2007: 160). In the social contract tradition and moral psychology, women have not been 'counted as knowers'; their credibility as moral agents has been undermined by patriarchal power relations and claims about gender (Langton, 2000: 132). Once the ideal of rational self-governance was displaced from the centre of moral theorizing, Gilligan could restore to moral thought some epistemic justice by naming women's moral voices as such.

Putting Gilligan's conclusion into sharper focus, Sara Ruddick suggests theorists who utilise the idea of the rational self 'promulgate views that are inimical to the values of caring. They imagine truth abstracted from bodies and a self detached from feelings' (Ruddick, 1999: 407). Benhabib agrees, stating that in effect the abstraction and detachment necessary to construct the 'autonomous self' of the social contract tradition 'leaves us with an empty mask that is everyone and no-one' (Benhabib,

1987: 89). Feminist care theorists thus argue that the concrete experience and contextual knowledge that is central to the ethic of care is in short supply in the ethic of justice. In light of this, it is possible to comprehend why the idea of autonomy receives such weighty criticism and rejection since it lies at the heart of the epistemic injustice Gilligan reveals.

This raises critical questions about the impetus behind such abstraction and detachment, and the move away from context and attachment. Benhabib finds no innocence in the 'ideal of autonomy conceived in the image of a disembedded and disembodied male ego', since it ends up 'removing from reflection' the 'domestic, intimate sphere' within which needs, emotions and relationships are presumed to be contained (Benhabib, 1987: 95). The negation of concrete, embodied selves, identities, and relationships which actually create and sustain the rational self is necessary for the idea of moral autonomy to make sense, but simultaneously ensures its incoherence. Next I look to the second strand of the care critique of autonomy, which overlaps with the first in that it focuses specifically on the negation of human dependencies evident in the social contract tradition.

2. 1. ii. Questioning the 'Disavowal of Dependency'

Care feminists critically question the value attributed to 'substantive independence' in moral and political thought (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000: 9). They see that independence of this sort has been a prerequisite for full citizenship. For example, in Chapter One it was made clear that Locke and Kant shared a fundamental concern with achieving and maintaining independence *for* and *between* particular male subjects. Scrutinizing this desire for independence, Joan Tronto recognises it rests on a specific conception of dependency imagined as 'the character destroying condition' (Tronto, 1994: 163). It is thought to be character destroying because it is equated with arbitrary power and slavery. As Tronto explains, 'To become dependent *is to be without autonomy*…to learn how to act on behalf of others, not on behalf of self. Dependent people lose the ability to make judgements for themselves, and end up at the mercy of others on whom they are dependent' (1994: 163; my emphasis). This

conception of dependency is set up in stark opposition to autonomy, and in the social contract tradition, it functions as a regulator of behaviour in the public sphere. Men are presumed to be autonomous.

Care feminists highlight another conception of dependency at play in this tradition, one that works to complement the idea that men are independent in the public sphere. This second conception of dependency carries no connotations of arbitrary power or slavery; it is associated with those familial relationships and bonds within the domestic sphere. From the perspective of the independent male citizen, human dependencies in this context are considered natural, private, and necessary. For instance, in the *Second Treatise* Locke argues that familial relations are covered by natural law. He says that since we are 'all born infants, weak and helpless, without knowledge or understanding', parents are 'by the law of nature, *under an obligation to preserve, nourish, and educate* the children' (Locke, 1996: 328; original emphasis). The reverse is also true, for children have a 'perpetual obligation of *honouring their parents*' (Locke, 1996: 331).

In the liberal social contract tradition the 'public sphere presupposes *but backgrounds* the private' (Plumwood, 1993: 153; my emphasis). It is the 'backgrounding' of familial dependencies that care theorists scrutinize. As a result of this, they make two points about the conceptual ties between the idea of autonomy and dependency within this tradition. First, as Virginia Held puts it, 'The liberal portrayal of the self-sufficient individual enables the privileged to falsely imagine that dependencies *hardly exist*, and when they are obvious, to suppose they can be dealt with as *private preferences*, as when parents provide for their infants' (Held, 2006: 86; my emphasis). If the idea of autonomy goes hand in hand with imagining that human dependencies hardly exist or that they can be considered private preferences, then it is an idea that is entirely unconvincing from the care perspective. More precisely, it is the *individualism* inherent to the idea of autonomy that is considered to be both gendered and plainly false; it 'creates a conceptual illusion that dependencies do not exist – or at least are not a political matter' and seeks to escape the vulnerabilities that are part of the human condition (Kittay, 1997: 222).

Second, and relatedly, care feminists underscore the presumption of women's mothering and care work central to the second conception of dependency applied to the private sphere. They argue such a presumption reveals a masculinist vision of care practices. As Sara Ruddick says of malestream political theorists, 'Beset by needs they are ill equipped to name or satisfy and faced with an anarchically lively, caring world on which they fearfully depend, they misdescribe in abstractly sentimental or demeaning ways what they insist on labelling "women's work"' (Ruddick, 1999: 407). Furthermore, the naturalization and privatization of care practices enables men, as husbands and fathers, to take up their independent, public status. Care theorists unpack this idea of independence and find that it can only apply to 'adults *who are not care-givers for dependents*' (Kymlicka, 2002: 419; original emphasis). While natural and private dependencies do not impinge on the autonomy of men, such dependencies curtail the autonomy of women; women, as wives and mothers, are considered dependents themselves, and care-givers for other dependent persons. The first conception of dependency, which lies in stark contrast to autonomy, thus applies to women, but not men, when *both* are placed in the context of the private sphere. 'Male autonomy' can be seen to rest on 'a myth of masculinity', 'a fantasy of a creature who is self-sufficient and self-made from birth to death', in light of 'the disavowal of dependency, the disavowal of the relations that nourish and sustain the subject' (Brown, 1995: 157).

The care critique of autonomy suggests care theorists believe the idea of autonomy should not be considered valuable for feminist theory. Yet such a conclusion would be mistaken. Care theorists accept that there is *something* about autonomy which is worth salvaging; the ideas of self-governance and self-determination are viewed as intuitively appealing and of value. In the next section I show how care feminists have sought to reclaim the idea of autonomy within the context of the ethics of care.

2. 2. Reclaiming Autonomy in Care Feminism: Introducing 'Relational Autonomy'

Care theorists were among the first to adopt the approach to autonomy that is now commonly referred to as 'relational autonomy' (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000; Moody-Adams, 1998). In this section I first explain what relational autonomy means, and how it is said to differ from the idea of autonomy that is so heavily criticised in section one. Part of this entails demonstrating the importance feminist care theorists accord to 'care' as well as autonomy. Second, I establish some of the reasons care theorists offer in support of valuing the concept of autonomy, and I do this by way of comparison with Mill's idea of autonomy coupled with individuality. Although these two approaches to autonomy are not identical, they share some features that I argue are noteworthy. If my analysis is convincing, it also shows that care theorists cannot entirely shake off traces of liberalism in their view of relational autonomy. Such a comparison therefore yields important insights about the value of autonomy within the care ethic and for feminist thought more generally.

2. 2. i. The Relational Self and Autonomy

Carol Gilligan borrowed from Nancy Chodorow's (1989) object-relations theory the concept of 'relational individualism' when describing the moral reasoning and attachment patterns in women's self-conceptions. As Gilligan put it, women conceived of 'life as a web rather than a succession of relationships' (1982: 48). Although care feminism has developed and matured since Gilligan's original formulation, the influence of this conception of the self in feminist theory has been remarkable. Any reclamation of autonomy 'would have to be reconcilable with an understanding of the self as relational, feasible within the sphere of interpersonal relations, and compatible with a more differentiated conception of moral life' where 'relationship-oriented values are important' (Keller, 1997: 152, 153).

Such relationship-orientated values have been more fully explained by contemporary care theorists. For example, in her account of the care ethic, Held regards 'the values

of trust, solidarity, mutual concern, and empathetic responsiveness have priority; in practices of care, relationships are cultivated, needs are responded to, and sensitivity is demonstrated' (Held, 2006: 15). Since such values, rather than abstract rights and rules, are considered integral to the ethics of care, a relational conception of the self shifts emphasis away from the exclusive focus on rationality as the definitive indicator of moral personhood. If relationship-orientated values are morally important, then the cultivation of, say, moral emotion, is required in order to show trust, mutual concern and empathy. As Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar note, care theorists have helped 'focus attention on the need for a more fine-grained and richer account of… autonomous *agent[s]…*who are emotional, embodied, desiring, creative, and feeling, as well as rational creatures' (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000: 21; original emphasis). Care theorists argue this richer view of the self is needed if rationality is not the epicentre of the self or the only worthy human quality.[1]

Indeed, advocates of the ethic of care congregate around the idea that 'care' ought to be considered as one of the most fundamental moral and political values. These feminist theorists make the case for realizing that care is a pivotal value because of its centrality in creating and sustaining human lives, relationships and activities, and in tending to human vulnerability and alleviating human suffering. They seek to move the value of care beyond the scope of personal and familial relations and argue, where appropriate, it ought to be a core principle structuring wider social, economic and political relations and institutions. Theorists define 'care' in different ways, but to illustrate, Tronto argues care comprises 'a reaching out to something other than the self' (Tronto, 1994: 102, 103). She characterizes care by detailing four ways care materialises in human relations: we 'care about others', we 'take care of' others, and in doing so we practice 'care-giving' and 'care-receiving' (Tronto, 1994: 105-108). Thus, even though care feminists reclaim autonomy for themselves and for feminist theory, they argue autonomy is not the only value in moral and political thought; indeed, they begin with the presupposition that autonomy is not necessarily the most important moral, political or even personal value.[2]

With this in mind, care feminists seek to redefine the meaning and value of autonomy within a 'relational ontology' which 'yields its own version of autonomy' (Clement, 1996: 35). Pausing on the question of ontology reveals a key difference between the idea of autonomy rejected in section one and the idea of autonomy endorsed here. Care feminists, like many other feminist theorists, claim that the social contract tradition harbours the metaphysical assumption, synonymous with abstract individualism, which assumes 'human individuals are ontologically prior to society' (Jaggar, 1983: 28-29). But it is, I believe, more accurate to say that care theorists regard 'the liberal assumption of individual independence' to be 'an ideological and unexamined starting point with no more support than its familiarity' (Held, 2006: 101).

In any case, by contrast, the idea of autonomy in the ethic of care is based on a relational ontology which underscores the interdependence of human beings. This can be taken to mean two things. First, relational autonomy is underpinned by a 'motivationally social conception of the self', 'motivated by care and concern for others' (Barclay, 2000: 61). This claim defeats the idea that autonomy can only be associated with rational self-interest or rationality more generally. Second, relational autonomy offers a constitutively social account of autonomy (Friedman, 2003: 96). This is evident, for instance, by the way Jennifer Nedelsky reconceptualises autonomy by emphasising 'relatedness is not…the antithesis of autonomy, but a literal precondition of autonomy, and interdependence a constant component of autonomy (Nedelsky, 1989: 12). Further, she puts it that 'The value of autonomy will at some level be inseparable from the relations that make it possible; there will thus be a social component built into the meaning of autonomy' (Nedelsky, 1989: 36). To illustrate more concretely the idea of the constitutively social self, Held explains:

> Children do not develop adequately when others merely go through the motions of meeting their basic needs, although even this requires enormous amounts of care and relatedness. Children need to experience social relations of trust and caring. Arguably, then, caring relations are in some sense normatively prior to individual

well-being in families. *But the priority is not just developmental or causal. Without the social relations within which persons constitute themselves as individuals, they do not have the individuality the liberal seeks.* (Held, 2006: 102; my emphasis)

In section one I have demonstrated that social contract theorists 'background' those interdependencies care theorists want to bring into the spotlight. By grounding autonomy in a more adequate ontological frame, care theorists want to change the way autonomy is conceptualised in feminist theory. More than this, care theorists offer a number of reasons for valuing autonomy which do not rely on the social contract tradition. Instead, these reasons for valuing autonomy have more in common with Mill's endorsement of individuality and women's freedom.

2. 2. ii. The Value of Relational Autonomy: Individuality and Freedom

Care theorists find value in the idea of autonomy partly because it stands in opposition to the traditional ideal of women's self-sacrifice. Gilligan's research illuminates women's experience of self-sacrifice in intimate relationships and the knowledge they had of their own mothers' 'endless giving' (Gilligan, 1982: 54). Held too acknowledges the problematic theme of 'overcommitment' in caring relationships, suggesting 'excessive empathy with others leads to a wrongful degree of self-denial', leaving both care-giver and care-receiver without a distinct sense of self (Held, 2006: 49, 11). Like contemporary care theorists, Mill claimed that 'If women are better than men in anything, it surely is in individual self-sacrifice for those of their own family' (Mill, 2008c: 516). He observed that self-sacrifice, as one of the ideals of femininity, could act as a barrier to the development of women's autonomy, individuality and exercise of freedom.

Contemporary care theorists share Mill's insight that self-sacrifice is not conducive to autonomy. Grace Clement elaborates on this point. She states the conception of moral maturity within the ethic of care necessitates considering the self as of 'equal worth to the other…recognising that is it not selfish but responsible to attend to one's

own needs…in attending to one's own needs, one is honest to oneself and thus able to take responsibility for one's decisions' (Clement, 1996: 36-37). 'The ethic of care can allow for autonomy if it…prioritizes maintaining (and creating) *healthy* relationships with others' (Clement, 1996: 35; original emphasis). Thus this shift away from self-sacrifice does not imply Mill thinks 'relationship-orientated values' are not worthy or meaningful themselves or in relation to autonomy. It means that certain forms of relationships are more conductive to respecting and enhancing autonomy.

For example, Mill viewed marriage as a friendship and had hoped for a shift toward a healthier set of norms governing heterosexual relations: 'a good woman would not be more self-sacrificing than the best man…men would be much more unselfish and self-sacrificing than at present, because they would no longer be taught to worship their own will as such a grand thing that it is actually the law for another rational being' (Mill, 2008c: 516). As Mary Lyndon Shanley makes clear, Mill's

> …vision of marriage as a locus of mutual sympathy and understanding between autonomous adults stands as an unrealized goal for those who believe that the liberation of women requires not only formal equality of opportunity but measures which will enable couples to live in genuine equality, mutuality, and reciprocity. (Shanley, 1991: 165)

Importantly, what Mill says about marriage and the family is tied up with his account of virtue ethics. As explained in Chapter One, he identifies values also lauded by the care feminism as morally and political significant (Donner, 1993: 157).

It could therefore be argued there is no definite reason to conclude that the value of autonomy needs to be justified in a way that is entirely devoid of liberal arguments, if we pay proper attention to the fact that 'there is no one unified liberal theory' (Donner, 1993: 155). Indeed, Shanley's analysis of Mill is telling in that it critiques the way perceptions of liberalism have overshadowed Mill's contribution to feminist

thinking about the value of women's autonomy. She rightly points out that Mill's view of marriage as friendship 'emphasizes the value of non-instrumental relationships in human life', which runs counter to the perception of liberalism as 'encouraging the disintegration of affective bonds and replacing them with merely self-interested economic and contractual ties' (Shanley, 1991: 165).

Much like Mill, care feminists value the idea of autonomy when it is combined with the free development of individuality. For example Nedelsky values the idea of autonomy because it is 'what freedom is for, the exercise of that capacity' (Nedelsky, 1989: 8). Autonomy is 'a value that takes its meaning from the recognition of (and respect for) the inherent individuality of each person' (Nedelsky, 1989: 36). This echoes Mill's claim that 'the only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way' (Mill, 2008a: 17).

Further similarities are evident between the two feminist approaches to autonomy in light of the way the value of autonomy is set up to challenge oppressive relations. Indeed, Nedelsky acknowledges that 'the image of humans as self-determining ... remains one of the most powerful dimensions of liberal thought', which can be utilised for the sake of arguing in favour of women's freedom 'to shape their own lives, to define who we (each) are, rather than accepting the definition given to us by others (men and male-dominated society, in particular)' (Nedelsky, 1989: 8). Likewise, Mill's critique of feminine self-sacrifice is part of his broader critique of patriarchy and his argument in favour of women's freedom. Maria Morales convincingly shows that what Mill called 'rational freedom' means '*freedom from domination*, and specifically for women, it is freedom from *patriarchal* domination' (Morales, 2007: 47; original emphasis).

In this section I have shown that care feminists reclaim and rethink the idea of autonomy in ways that are rooted in the ontological assumptions and normative commitments of the care ethic. The concept of autonomy has been reconceptualised by feminist care theorists in a way that echoes Mill's valuation of individuality. Care theorists have sought to argue that autonomy should be considered a valuable

concept for feminist theory. However, the value of autonomy is not fully established by replacing an inadequate conception of autonomy with another, feminist conception. In the next section I critically assess the idea of relational autonomy with a view to decipher its political value as a critical tool in feminist political analysis.

2. 3. Assessing the Care Feminist Approach to Autonomy

In this section I critically assess the idea of relational autonomy as it has been conceived in care feminism. I first briefly consider the rather unfair criticism that care theorists have extrapolated from women's caring practices to build an ethic of care, whilst insufficiently emphasising that 'women's practice of care frequently undermines women's autonomy' (Keller, 1997: 151). I then consider at length the criticism that the idea of relational autonomy is overly imbued with normative feminist commitments that consequently render the idea of relational autonomy perfectionist. While this criticism is designed to slight the idea of relational autonomy, I argue that it actually does the opposite, and reinforces the political value of this feminist conception of autonomy. It does so because of the way it points toward the complexities of respecting and enhancing women's autonomy when conditions of inequality and oppression are explicitly analysed.

2. 3. i. Relational Autonomy and Women's Burden of Care

Some feminist theorists have asked whether care feminism is inattentive to women's autonomy in the context of inequality as it structures caring practices and care labour. This is partly what invites Catharine MacKinnon's critique of the care ethic: 'Women are said to value care. Perhaps women value care because men have valued women according to the care they give' (MacKinnon, 1989: 51). Jean Keller sums up feminist critiques of this sort:

> ...one might argue that while care and autonomy might be reconcilable in theory, given the realities of women's subordinate social position, they currently are not reconcilable in

> practice…the practice of care undermines women's autonomy – not because of shortcomings internal to the ethic, but because of socio-political factors external to the ethic. (Keller, 1997: 156)

Most care feminists are aware of this critique and do not ignore it. Rather, they use it to argue that 'the distribution of care is itself an issue of justice' (Kymlicka, 2002: 418). For example, Diemut Bubeck is careful to note the 'oppressive association of women and care' both in theory and 'social reality' (1995: 13). That is why, on her account of an ethic of care, it includes a materialist analysis of the *exploitation* of women's care work with the demands of 'fairer, universal distribution of care' (Bubeck, 1995: 13). Similarly, Eva Feder Kittay argues that any adequate theory of justice would include the principle of 'social responsibility for care' (1997: 252). This critique, then, is one that is rather misplaced.

2. 3.ii. Relational Autonomy and the Charge of Perfectionism

Far more serious is John Christman's claim that the idea of relational autonomy is 'unacceptably perfectionist' and 'carries the danger of exclusion and overarching paternalism that attention to autonomy should well protect against' (Christman, 2004: 158). Otherwise stated, the idea of autonomy carries a particular meaning and has a specific job to do in the context of theorizing justice, which the idea of relational autonomy perverts.

On Christman's account, the meaning and value of autonomy finds its home in the liberal social contract tradition. Autonomy has value 'simply because it constitutes, in part, the human agency and capacity for authentic choice that grounds respect for ourselves and other persons' (Christman, 2004: 153). This capacity for 'authentic choice' is explained by reference to the procedural, content-neutral idea of autonomy. Here, autonomy requires individuals to satisfy both authenticity and competency conditions. Authenticity conditions 'are typically built on the capacity to reflect on and endorse (or identity with) one's desires, values, and so on', and competency conditions 'specify that agents must have various capacities for rational

thought, self-control, self-understanding…and that they must be free to exercise those capacities, without internal or external coercion' (Christman and Anderson, 2005: 3). So understood, autonomy is procedural in that it refers to the 'internal' processes of reflection and endorsement, and 'refuses to prejudge what values and practices autonomous people can endorse' (Meyers, 2000a: 489).

For Christman, 'the usefulnesss' of autonomy is that it is 'a marker of the (equal) moral and political status that principles of social justice (of a certain sort) depend upon' (2004: 156). Autonomy is thus tied to citizenship, to equal and inclusive rights of participation in the political process, and to the principle of tolerance in light of value pluralism. Relatedly, autonomy 'marks out the parameters within which a person is immune from paternalistic intervention' (Christman, 2004: 157). With this in mind, Christman argues the idea of autonomy must be seen as an inclusive value that holds for all minimally rational individuals, regardless of the 'content' of their authentic choices.

Christman finds the idea of relational autonomy troublesome because it 'threatens to rob' autonomy of its political usefulness (2004: 156). The root of this critique is the recognition that relational autonomy embodies the view that certain social relations and conditions are *constitutive* or *definitive* of autonomy; thus autonomy is 'a property, not merely of an individual and her capacities, but of the relations that comprise those conditions' (Christman, 2004: 156). Claiming that autonomy is constitutively social means that individuals have to value certain forms of relationships, or certain relational conditions have to be existent – such as those which embody equal treatment – to be considered as autonomous. For Christman, this sneaks a perfectionist ideal of autonomy into the equation, which means 'agents must have certain value commitments and/or must be treated in certain normatively acceptable ways' to *actually qualify as autonomous* (Christman, 2004: 151). Welcoming the feminist effort to show how social-relational ties actually cultivate and help develop the exercise of autonomy, Christman is still unconvinced by the notion that 'interpersonal and social factors are *conceptually necessary* for autonomy' (2004: 149; my emphasis).

Relational autonomy is found to pervert the political usefulness of autonomy on several counts. It undoes the principle of tolerance and equal respect since 'viewing non-authoritarian relations as constitutive of autonomy implies that certain values – egalitarian ones of this sort – are valid for individuals even if they (*ex hypothesi*) authentically and freely reject them' (Christman, 2004: 152). In a way that reveals relational autonomy's perfectionist overtones, this is especially problematic in light of the fact that 'there are any number of women and men who have accepted value systems that inscribe traditional and severe hierarchies of power and authority' (Christman, 2004: 158). Christman here is underlining the exclusionary consequences of relational autonomy; if individuals are labelled as lacking autonomy (on the relational account) then this excludes them from political participation, since autonomy is, for Christman, the qualifier of participation. Furthermore, relational autonomy embodies as 'overarching paternalism'; using the example of the 'subservient housewife', Christman argues if she is identified as lacking relational autonomy because she is embedded within authoritarian socio-relational ties, this ushers in the idea that political institutions can legitimately interfere in private contexts to 'relieve her of this burden and to restore her autonomy (at least in principle)' (Christman, 2004: 157).

Thus on Christman's view, autonomy is valuable as a political concept when embedded within an ethic of justice. 'Adding' to the definition of the concept certain value commitments such as equality in personal relationships threatens to undermine the job autonomy is meant to perform in thinking about political legitimacy. Indeed, doing so transforms the concept into a 'dangerous' political idea. It is my view however that Christman overstates his critique and I will try to show in the final section how the care feminism presents a more nuanced account of the political significance of relational autonomy than he has suggested.

2. 3.iii. Choice, Oppression, Inequality

In Christman's critique of relational autonomy the issue of attending to an analysis of

autonomy in the context of oppression or conditions of inequality is recognised but bracketed. Since autonomy is a political value only, Christman can safely say, 'Insofar as a person has authentically embraced *even (what we might call) oppressive social status or subservient roles*, that person deserves respect insofar as her judgement about those roles has the same formal features as our own judgement about our own lives' (2004: 153; my emphasis).

Like most political liberals, Christman invokes 'choice' as 'a normative transformer, rendering an outcome just by its mere presence' (Chambers, 2008: 167). Thus, the 'authentic embrace' of an oppressive social status or subservient role is rendered just because it has been autonomously chosen. He derives the claim about interpersonal respect from giving due recognition to the idea that regardless of the different socio-relational ties different people are embedded within, all individuals' choices are structured by the 'same formal features'. This implies that individual choices which are made in the context of oppressive relations have 'the same formal features' as choices that are made by individuals who embedded within non-oppressive relations. From the relational perspective, this does not make sense. Splitting individual choice from the relational context in which choice is made ignores all those factors that work to make certain preferences, desires and options conceivable and legitimate in the first place. Taking seriously the idea of relational autonomy 'suggests that people may be less autonomous than they appear, since their decisions are profoundly shaped by their social context' (Chambers, 2008: 171). Care feminists accept such a conclusion; they accept that autonomy is a matter of degree and that some circumstances and relationships work to render the possibility of an autonomous life unlikely.

Is it possible to 'authentically embrace' an oppressive social status or a subservient role, or 'value systems that inscribe traditional and severe hierarchies of power and authority?' It obviously depends on how this status or role is further defined but 'severe hierarchies of power' usually signify unequal access to resources and opportunities which are autonomy-enhancing. If we agree with Christman and use individual choice as a normative transformer in such cases, then it is possible to

authentically embrace such roles or hierarchies. However, from the relational perspective, it is not just the choser who is in the analytical frame, but the people around her and the norms which partly constitute her sense of self and enable certain preferences and options to be conceivable. Care feminists embrace the possibility that relations of oppression make it possible that a woman could 'authentically embrace' the idea of feminine self-sacrifice; still, they suggest this is problematic for many reasons, and at least suggests people around her would be engaging in exploitation.

Christman's analysis of the political consequences of valuing relational autonomy is bleak indeed. It suggests, among other things, that it leads to endorsement of opportune state intervention in any and all contexts so as to 'make' people value relationships and choices consistent with the value of autonomy itself. In chapter one, a similar claim was made about Mill's view of autonomy and his framework was tarred with the perfectionist brush too. However, a closer analysis of Mill's position revealed a more nuanced approach to state paternalism that Christman suggests.

That Mill is not paternalist in this way is, I would argue, evident from his considerations about Mormon polygamy. Mill clearly does not believe this practice is by any means virtuous: 'far from being in any way countenanced by the principle of liberty, it is a direct infraction of that principle, being a mere riveting of the chains of one-half of the community, and an emancipation of the other from reciprocity of obligation towards them' (Mill, 2008a: 102). Nonetheless, Mill argues the voluntary participation of women in marriage must be considered in the current context. Further, 'it is difficult to see on what principles but those of tyranny' Mormons can be 'forced' to be 'civilized' and change their laws according to the laws of the surrounding community (2008a: 102). Among other things, Mill claims as long as Mormons maintain a respect for autonomy by 'allow[ing] perfect freedom of departure to those who are dissatisfied with their ways', they ought to be left alone (2008c: 102). Having said that, Mill believed that women in these communities could not experience freedom, that is, freedom from patriarchy. Mill argued in all probability women's capacity for autonomy and their individuality would be less developed than if they had lived in an egalitarian community. Yet, he argued as long

as Mormon communities upheld women's *rights* to autonomy and liberty through respecting their *right of exit*, the state should not interfere with this Mormon practice.

I would submit it is Mill's awareness of the relational and social constitution of selves, and the significance of interdependencies, which informs his nuanced judgement in this particular case. Mill acknowledges Mormon women's self-identity is partly constituted by communal ties and norms; if *the state* pulled women away from their communities 'for their own good' it would probably do damage to their sense of self. If a Mormon woman exercised her right of exit after autonomous reflection and asserted her individuality, she would be 'the final judge' regarding her own behaviour; a loss of sense of self would be less likely.

Care theorists adopt a position that is closer to Mill's than Christman allows. To understand this, it is helpful to recall one key difference between the ethic of justice and the care ethic. Care theorists admire moral reasoning and judgement that is contextual and attentive to the needs and perspectives of participants in any given moral dilemma or situation. Often they argue that this contextual and attentive approach yields insights for theorizing women's autonomy which are overlooked from a justice perspective. Nonetheless, in some cases, care theorists argue it is necessary to utilize both justice and care perspectives when thinking about state paternalism.

For example, Held argues the justice ethic should inform the state's legal response to such domestic violence: 'the liberal state should through its legal system treat domestic violence, like other violence, as a crime against society…the law should prosecute batterers whether or not their victims press charges' (Held, 2006: 146). However, in terms of public policy and welfare provision, Held argues the state response 'should be guided by different values...Professional caregivers should aim to help the actual victim of domestic violence, should presume she knows what she wants better than they do, and should accept her interpretation of the situation without attempting to override her decisions' (Held, 2006: 146-147). Contrary to Christman's claim, this approach relies on the caregiver largely bracketing 'the

substantive content' of the victim's choice, that is, to set aside the fact that the woman has chosen to stay with her abuser and maintain a relationship that is intrinsically dangerous and might 'diminish her future autonomy', and indeed end her life (Friedman, 2003: 158).

This latter approach, which Marylin Friedman (2003: 152) calls the 'uncritical support approach', is akin to the implementation of a care ethic since it is informed by caring responsibilities and attending to women's immediate and long-term needs. Echoing Mill's anti-paternalistic stance, one reason for this is that professional caregivers 'seldom know best how abused women should live their lives' (2003: 158). Friedman also notes that if a caregiver relates to an abused woman in a way that suggests she has confidence in the woman's ability to cope and make decisions, it can 'boost' the woman's self-esteem and 'promote the psychological conditions that are necessary for someone's autonomy in the long run' (2003: 157). Using this case, it is possible to see how the care feminist approach and its endorsement of relational autonomy offers a more nuanced approach to state paternalism than Christman allows. Indeed, care feminists are acutely aware of the 'dangers of care' as Tronto calls them, which includes illegitimate paternalism/maternalism (Tronto, 1994: 170).

Still there are cases where paternalism is rightly called for and where judgement of others' choices can be seen as an element of moral obligation. Friedman also considers the 'rational persuasion approach' whereby caregivers attempt to rationally discuss and where appropriate criticise a woman's decision to return to or stay with her abuser. Friedman advocates this approach only in those 'rare' cases when 'a caregiver best understands an abused woman's life or the abused woman is strong enough to handle rational criticism of her own choices' (2003: 159). This approach 'aims to change a women's mind so that she will choose substantively to live in manner that will best promote her autonomy in the long run' (2003: 158). Friedman recognises this approach rests 'squarely on the assumption that there is something wrong with the content of her choice…the obvious wrongness of the choice consists

in the fact that she thereby subjects herself to abuse and undermines her own autonomy' (2003: 153).

Ultimately, Christman's critique of relational autonomy and its political implications seems short-sighted. It measures the political value of relational autonomy using only benchmarks set within the liberal social contract tradition. As a result it reifies the traditional liberal view of the public-private distinction, which entails a sharp dichotomy between protecting individual choice and limiting state power. Advocates of relational autonomy suggest 'such despair about individual freedom in the face of collective power reflects a poverty of imagination about the possibilities for protection and control' (Nedelsky, 1989: 15). Relatedly, whilst acknowledging oppression exists, Christman's analysis fails to give serious consideration to the relationship between autonomy and a more substantive idea of equality than formal equality. From a feminist perspective this is needed, as Clare Chambers makes clear,

> …individual choices can never be assessed in isolation from the cultural context in which they take place…More specifically, the justice of a practice or a choice is not usually determined by the individual who initiates it but relies in large part on the role it plays in the overall system of (in)equality. Liberal focus on the individual fails to notice how individual actions fit into social structures of (in)justice. (Chambers, 2008: 44)

Conclusion

Within the context of care feminism, it is evident there are very different interpretations of what 'autonomy' means. The care critique of autonomy is a thorough and systemic challenge to the idea of autonomy found within the social contract tradition. Care theorists unravel the untruths permeating the construction of the autonomous rational self and his fear of dependencies. Understood in this light, autonomy is devalued as an ideal and seems, quite rightly, to be rejected by feminist theorists. However, care theorists retain some idea of self-determination and self-

governance, and I argued the 'relational self' and the emphasis placed on individuality reveals a considerable overlap with Mill's view of autonomy coupled with individuality. Thus I found that there are some common threads which unite historical and contemporary feminist accounts of the value of autonomy, as well as liberal and care perspectives on autonomy. There is then no reason for feminist theorists to entirely abandon liberal theory since it is not defined solely by the social contract tradition, if it helps to reveal common feminist arguments about the value of autonomy.

Moreover, I argued in this chapter that the idea of relational autonomy as it is embedded within care feminism offers nuanced insights about the political relevance of autonomy. Far from being a 'dangerous' idea once posited at the level of political analysis, as Christman claimed, relational autonomy cuts through some entrenched dichotomies (notably the political liberal view of the public-private distinction) which hamper an appreciation of the work autonomy can perform for feminist theory vis-à-vis theorizing women's autonomy. I made this argument primarily through a discussion of the themes of choice, inequality and dominance. In the next chapter I aim to develop this discussion as I consider the meaning and value of autonomy in feminist theory centrally concerned with the value of equality.

Notes

[1] Indeed, 'with Kant out of the picture, there is no justification for placing such weight on the exercise of reason in our account of autonomy. After all, introspection suggests that there are other motivations which seem, as much as acting on reason does to derive from the 'self'. So, if our core concept of autonomy is that of self-governance, it is unclear why those other motivations mightn't also count' (Colburn, 2010: 8).

[2] To dispel the sense that care theorists are the only family of theorists who make this clear, it is important to note that mainstream contemporary philosophers also share this view. For example, writing at the same time as the early care theorists, Gerald Dworkin rightly identified the 'intellectual error that threatens to arise whenever autonomy as been defended as crucial or fundamental: This is that the notion is elevated to a higher status than it deserves'. He goes on to say 'Autonomy *is* important, but so is the capacity for sympathetic identification with others, or the capacity to reason prudentially, or the virtue of integrity. Similarly, although it is important to respect the autonomy of others, it is also important to respect their welfare, or their liberty, or their rationality. Theories that base everything on any single aspects of human personality, on any one of a number of values, always tends toward the intellectually imperialistic' (Dworkin, 1988: 32; original emphasis).

Chapter 3
Autonomy and Egalitarian Feminism

> Unless and until gender, in all its manifestations *including the physical*, is seen as a social construction, action that will radically change our incorrigible propositions cannot occur. People must be confronted with the reality of other possibilities, as well as the possibility of other realities.
>
> (Kessler and McKenna, 1978: 164, original emphasis)

> A just future would be one without gender…If we are to be at all true to our democratic ideals, moving away from gender is essential.
>
> (Okin, 1989: 171, 172)

Introduction

This chapter looks at a feminist approach to autonomy I am calling 'egalitarian feminism', which foregrounds the need to transform the conditions in which autonomy is exercised. Egalitarian feminists are not content with 'the experience of what is', which is to say they are hugely critical of existing social relations and material conditions in the global context (Young, 1990: 6). The normality of domination, oppression, and human vulnerability is cause for concern. Egalitarian feminists are, therefore, troubled by evidence which suggests 'egalitarian commitments' have withered away in the wake of the 'post-socialist condition', a condition which they see as constituting the 'horizon of contemporary political theorizing' (Fraser, 1997: 3). In particular, they lament the 'hegemony of equality of opportunity', which is, as its status suggests, now the 'common sense' way of thinking about equality and justice (Armstrong, 2006; Gramsci, 1973: 424). Their approach to autonomy, then, is partly shaped by 'a projection of what could be' (Young, 1990: 6). As I will show, this approach is shaped by a vision of a

'participatory society' where processes of democratisation are integral to the development and safeguarding of autonomy (Pateman, 1970: 35).

'Egalitarian feminism' is not a common category of feminist thought and so my understanding of it deserves a brief explanation up front. I am using the label to indicate a theoretical approach which encompasses perspectives united in their focus on inequalities and their consequent effort to build equality in the context of democracy and social justice.[1] The theorists whom I regard as egalitarians often adopt two personas in the literature. In one guise, they appear as critical theorists, looking to intersections between gender, sexuality, class and race in the context of global capitalism.[2] Their common focus is on historical and contemporary gender divisions within and between paid and unpaid labour, formations of sexuality, including normative heterosexuality, and masculine domination. In their other guise, egalitarian feminists are theorists of equality, democracy and social justice. While there are different perspectives at work here and tensions between these feminists, all egalitarians use their diagnosis of forms of inequality to make normative arguments about the importance of democratisation in social life. It is this latter commonality which binds them together in their approach to autonomy.

To make sense of and critically assess the egalitarian feminist approach to autonomy in this chapter I follow the three part structure introduced in the previous chapter. First, I look to the egalitarian feminist critique of contemporary liberal approaches to autonomy, which I break down into two: libertarianism and Rawlsian liberalism. Egalitarian feminists recognise the monopoly the liberal tradition has on the idea of autonomy, and it is worth pointing out up front they share the care feminist critique of liberal autonomy. Second, I show that these feminists, like those emphasising care, also want to reclaim the idea of autonomy. Indeed, the value of autonomy is never in question in for them, but rather the premises from and method through which they build their vision of autonomy is fundamentally different from the liberals they critique. I discuss this vision in terms of three elements: democratic self government, which these theorists describe variously as political autonomy and public autonomy; civil society, and specifically autonomy in the workplace and in terms of democratic

culture; and the family and intimate freedom. In the final part of the chapter, I evaluate this way of thinking about autonomy by turning to responses to feminist egalitarianism, looking specifically at charges of totalitarianism and utopianism.

3. 1. The Egalitarian Feminist Critique of Autonomy

Egalitarian feminists argue the idea of autonomy functions ideologically in contemporary liberal theory. When ideas function ideologically, they 'excuse, permit, legitimate and provide justifications for relations of ruling' (Thompson, 2001: 24). The way liberals use the idea of autonomy to theorize about justice, and the way is it envisioned as a value for citizens, is therefore deemed to be problematic. Consequently, egalitarian feminists argue liberal approaches to autonomy are methodologically ill-equipped to theorize autonomy. The real brunt of the feminist egalitarian critique of autonomy is the primacy given to individualism and the method of abstraction in liberal thought ensures domination and oppression too often fail to register on the liberal radar. As Liza Schwartzman puts it, 'Beginning from the assumption that it is the needs and interests of individuals that are primary, liberals have a difficult time detecting and analyzing cases of oppression' (Schwartman, 2006: 7). This problem in their frameworks is bolstered by the method of abstraction liberals use to think about justice: 'the real problem is that the appearance of abstraction allows quite concrete (albeit generalised) assumptions about key social institutions to be assumed without adequate defence, even though these institutions are often hierarchical in nature' (Armstrong, 2006: 296).

This critique is primarily directed against contemporary liberal frameworks, namely, libertarianism and Rawlsian liberalism. These can be seen as forms of 'classic liberalism' and 'social liberalism' respectively (Vincent, 2007: 134). Libertarianism has particular significance for egalitarian feminists because, in its economic form, it enjoys hegemonic status, and at least in western regions its philosophy is tied to the New Right (Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005; H. Eisenstein, 2009). The second, more social liberal approach to autonomy is also of political significance for egalitarians because of the way it maps onto justifications of 'welfare capitalism' and the

depoliticization of liberal welfare societies, thus removing from political debate the kind of social change that egalitarians think is necessary for meaningful autonomy (Young, 1990: 66-95). The way egalitarian feminists view the political significance of these liberal frameworks suggest it is not only the idea of autonomy they take issue with, but also the visions of good society these frameworks create. I turn to libertarianism first, and then Rawlsian liberalism.

3. 1. i. Autonomy and Justice in Libertarianism

Egalitarian feminists recognise that the libertarian approach to autonomy is a contemporary variant of Locke's approach to autonomy, which was set out in Chapter One (Duggan, 2003; Goodman, 2004; Okin, 1989). The distinctiveness of the libertarian approach is partly revealed by pointing out a key difference between it and its predecessor. With Locke, 'the assumptions of possessive individualism are not unalloyed...Locke…refused to reduce all social relations to market relations and all morality to market morality' (Macpherson, 1985: 269). This was primarily because the dictates of natural law helped fashion Locke's views on self-government. In the libertarian approach, in contrast, the assumptions of possessive individualism *are* unalloyed. As Nancy Hartsock points out, this view of autonomy relies on the ideal of 'interest-driven rational economic man' whose passions are reduced 'to the desire for economic gain' (1985: 48). This reduction occurs because libertarians fill the void left by abandoning natural law with an account of the human condition found in neoclassical economics (Harvey, 2005).

From Locke, libertarians borrow the idea that each individual has 'property in their person' and each individual has rights over their property (Nozick, 2010). Property includes one's natural endowments as well as what one legitimately acquires and receives through exchanges (Nozick, 2010: 330). Each moment of social exchange is enabled by the creation of a voluntary contract, and whatever each individual exchanges via contract – whether labour power, goods or other resources - is considered legitimate. This is because contracts and moments of exchange are taken as indicators of the subjective interests of the parties involved. Moreover, if, from

contractual exchanges, there is a resultant uneven distribution in resources and goods, this is also considered legitimate. For libertarian Robert Nozick, as long as the *procedure* of acquisition is just, individuals are entitled to whatever they come to possess in terms of commodities, resources and goods; 'Justice exists where everyone has their entitlements' (Vincent, 2007: 115).

Susan Okin's analysis of the gendered assumptions informing the libertarian approach to autonomy reveals the concept's dubious foundations. With respect to Nozick's theory of just entitlement, when Okin applies it to women's reproductive capacity and labour it falls 'into a morass of incoherence and self-contradiction', and ultimately, leads to 'matriarchy, slavery and dystopia' (Okin, 1989: 86, 80). If women are viewed as proprietors of their own person, and they own the fruits of their labour, the implication is that they should own their children. Since Nozick is hell bent on prioritising 'legitimately acquired property rights over all other claims, including basic need and the right to life', his theory justifies the following reasoning: 'If I am (already) my mother's property, I cannot claim a conflicting right to own myself' (Okin, 1989: 82). Additionally, Nozick prioritises the claims of property rights holders over those who may be affected by the action of rights holders. Therefore, Okin contends, Nozick would be 'hard-pressed to label as unjust a situation in which one mother generously decides to give her child the gift of self-ownership while another chooses to keep hers as a slave' (Okin, 1989: 82). Okin concludes that Nozick's view of autonomy, much like Locke's, could only have been constructed with an autarkic male subject in mind.

Arguably, what troubles egalitarian feminists most about this approach to autonomy is the way it simultaneously masks and justifies relations of domination and oppression. This is achieved primarily through the 'exchange abstraction' in the libertarian account of social life (Hartsock, 1985: 101). The exchange abstraction in Nozick's work fails to admit of the social institutions which structure relations of power and opportunities. For example, with respect to employment contracts, Carole Pateman sees the idea of 'property in the person' as a 'political fiction' as it rests on the pretence 'that what is up for sale, or, more accurately for rent, is not a person but

a factor of production (labor power)' (Pateman, 2002: 36). The exchange abstraction obscures the fact that 'the wage labourer does not decide how the property contracted out is to be used [and] they agree that the employer should direct them in the use of their capacities' (Pateman, 2002: 33). Since the capitalist does not rent out his labour power and does not alienate his right to self-government he is able to view contractual exchanges as voluntary; they indicate *his* interests and preferences. As Hartsock clarifies, commodity exchanges are conceptualised 'only at the level of circulation rather than production (i.e., from the point of view of the capitalist)' (1985: 102). What this points to is the way the epistemology informing the exchange abstraction works to erase the oppressive nature of social institutions, such as formal markets, from the frame of reference.

Libertarians also borrow from Locke the idea that the only form of state able to protect individual autonomy is a limited state. As 'rule-maker and umpire' the state ought to maintain law and order, enforce contracts, define and protect rights, and provide a monetary framework within which individuals can act; its job is to 'determine, arbitrate, and enforce the rules of the game' (Friedman, 2010: 293). Indeed, for Friedrich Hayek, the minimal state is the only just state because it 'maintains the procedural rules to provide the conditions for individual freedom' (Vincent, 2007: 114). Only government intervention which follows the rule of law is legitimate and consequently 'Any systematic attempt to regulate the lives and activities of individuals is perforce oppressive and an attack on their freedom: a denial of their right to be the ultimate judge of their own ends' (Held, 1996: 254).

Egalitarian feminists view this idea of the state as 'profoundly anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian' (Duggan, 2003: 12). To make sense of this aspect of the critique, it has to be noted how libertarianism plays 'the judicial trick of defining corporations as individuals before the law' (Harvey, 2005: 21). The 'individual' of autonomy refers to corporations as well as human individuals. More precisely then, egalitarian feminists critique what might be called corporate autonomy on the grounds that it is anti-democratic. Libertarians advocate corporate autonomy by defending the virtues of free market competition, privacy rights and a limited state. In practice, this means

they advocate the privatization of public goods and services and the deregulation of industries and financial institutions (Friedman, 2010: 294). In various state contexts, egalitarian feminists have witnessed the implementation of and damage caused by corporate rights 'to transform the public into commercial spaces for private profit' without the consent of citizens (Goodman, 2004: 29; Duggan, 2003). Internationally, egalitarian feminists have tracked how transnational corporate autonomy has been defended and promoted by 'First World' financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in particular through Structural Adjustment Policies and Trade-Related Property Rights associated with the political project of neoliberalism (Eisenstein, 2009: 135-160; Fraser, 2008). In this context too, egalitarian feminists argue the freedom of corporate autonomy, legally enabled by international governance structures, has generated 'a new kind of democratic deficit', which Nancy Fraser terms 'meta-political misrepresentation' (Fraser, 2008: 27). Akin to the state-level democratic deficit, meta-political misrepresentation is partly produced by the processes which allow corporate autonomy to flourish at a transnational level without the consent of vast populations who are subjected to their actions.

The flipside of this critique is the egalitarian feminist belief that processes of privatisation and the minimisation of the state undermine the kind of democratic self-government that they value, as I will show in the second part of this chapter. Libertarians, in contrast, associate autonomy for individuals with economic independence and self-sufficiency. The idea of independence essentially rests on 'the valorised concepts of *privatisation* and *personal responsibility*' (Duggan, 2003: 14, original emphasis). Conforming neatly to the Lockean idea of possessive individualism, the libertarian approach to autonomy also signifies the freedom to consume. As Mary Dietz points out, this view promotes an 'unremitting consumerism that we confuse with freedom, and a capitalist ethic that we take as our collective identity' (Dietz, 1998: 392). In this sense, libertarian autonomy is for egalitarian feminists no autonomy at all; it is 'politically barren', merely an ideological justification for contemporary capitalism (Dietz, 1998: 382).

3. 1. ii. Autonomy and Justice in Rawlsian Liberalism

The work of John Rawls offers an alternative contemporary liberal approach, one which ties autonomy to social equality. Indeed, he offers the most prominent recent defence of impartial and distributive justice. Methodologically, autonomy lies at the heart of Rawls's, as he uses the tools of the social contract tradition and seeks to maintain 'the spirit of Kant's ideal of autonomy' to theorise about principles of justice (Munro, 2006: 6; Rawls, 1971: 251-257).[3] To arrive at these principles, Rawls employs the hypothetical scenario of the 'original position', where individuals have a wealth of knowledge about society, but know nothing about what their own social position would be in a well-ordered society. He imagines what conclusions 'free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association' (Rawls, 1971: 11). Rawls maintains the spirit of Kantian autonomy by conceiving of persons in this scenario as equals in a moral sense, 'as creatures having a conception of their own good and capable of a sense of justice' (Rawls, 1971: 19).

The first principle of social justice which Rawls derives from a consideration of the original position establishes equal political and civil liberties for all citizens, and Rawls suggests that these liberties are best upheld by constitutional, representative democracy (Rawls, 1971: 60, 222). Rawls defends political liberty and equal rights of participation by pointing to the value of political self-government (Rawls, 1971: 233). While not wholly opposing this form of democracy, egalitarian feminists are critical of the way this features in Rawls's theory and how it is attached to the idea of moral autonomy. Carole Pateman argues Rawls's method of approaching politics using 'moral argument and moral reasoning', sweeps 'the problem of democratization – of reducing subordination and creating a more democratic society', under the carpet it (Pateman, 2002: 22). She argues it functions to endorse a minimalist view of democracy: 'while moral capacities are necessary for autonomy, they are insufficient for political autonomy. Moral personality needs to be developed to maintain democratic institutions and citizenship, but a robust democratic citizenship and democratization requires more than moral autonomy' (Pateman,

2002: 43). Similarly, Nancy Fraser underscores the relative 'neglect' of political autonomy in Rawls framework, and sees this as one way dominant theorists take it upon themselves to determine 'the frame of democratic legitimacy' (Fraser, 2008: 41). What both Fraser and Pateman ask are questions liberals are keen to avoid: 'Citizens may *think* of themselves in certain ways, or have a certain image of themselves – as autonomous beings enjoying equal rights, for instance – but do the conditions exist in which citizens can be autonomous; does the structure of the institutions within which they interact support self-government?' (Pateman, 2002: 42; original emphasis). In light of this, it emerges that egalitarian feminists are concerned less with theorising what respect for moral autonomy necessitates within a political community, and more with forms of oppression and domination that act as barriers to political autonomy.

Arguably Rawls's approach prioritises this first principle of justice so as to ensure a set of rights that enable individuals to determine their own good and live in accord with their own life plan. For example, Rawls particularly emphasises the importance of state neutrality and toleration with regard to equal liberty of conscience. He wants to accommodate the fact that individuals, in a well-ordered society, would have 'fundamental religious, moral, and philosophical interests' they would want to pursue freely and autonomously (Rawls, 1971: 206). In step with his egalitarian commitments, Rawls introduces a second principle of justice to compliment the first, which captures the idea of 'fair equality of opportunity'.[4] In addition to these two principles, which would govern the basic institutions of a well-ordered society, Rawls argues persons in the 'original position' would find it in their best interests if 'all primary social goods – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect' were distributed equally (Rawls, 1971: 303). In sum, emphasising the rights and duties which 'define the appropriate distribution of benefits and burdens of social cooperation' Rawls seeks to construct a vision of a liberal society which 'affirms the autonomy of persons' against a backdrop of social equality (Rawls, 1971: 4, 520).

Although egalitarian feminists see this idea of justice as more palatable compared the ideas of justice within libertarianism, they critique the way assumptions are made about what does and does not constitute *in*justice and inequality. Consequently, they critique the way Rawls ignores particular social institutions and relations of power which adversely affect autonomy. Again, egalitarian feminists argue the method is fault here. As Clare Chambers puts it, 'the liberal focus on choice is a focus on the mental, ideological and intellectual at the expense of the physical, practical and everyday' (Chambers, 2008: 43).

To take one enduring example, the inequalities pertaining to productive labour and specifically women's paid and unpaid labour are issues liberals tend to ignore. Egalitarian feminists raise doubts about the extent to which women are free to 'pursue their own life plan' in light of such gender inequalities. As Susan Okin puts it:

> …in societies characterised by gender (all current societies) a much larger proportion of women's than men's labour is unpaid and is often not even acknowledged as labour. It also obscures the fact that the resulting disparities in the earnings of men and women, and the economic dependence of women on men, are likely to affect power relations within the household, as well as access to leisure, prestige, political power, and so on, among its adult members. (Okin, 1989: 95)

Egalitarian feminists who follow this diagnosis of the 'gendered cycle of vulnerability' argue it continues to have relevance in various contexts in the twenty first century (Young, 2009). Especially if Rawls is concerned to tell of how to 'distribute the appropriate benefits and burdens of social cooperation', this oversight regarding labour is a serious one. Diemut Bubeck's response to Rawls's theory gets the point across well: 'Nothing hinders liberal theorists from concerning themselves with the work people do, but usually they do not' (Bubeck, 1995: 4). Because Rawls abstracts from 'from the relations of power in which individuals live' to think about

justice, a whole range of inequalities and social institutions slip beneath the liberal radar (Schwartzman, 2006: 7).

In sum, egalitarians are opposed to the way abstract theorising is utilised in libertarianism and Rawlsian liberalism. What these two approaches share is the view that it is possible to think about justice as a reflection of reasoned judgement, which can tell us what justice *is*. Thus libertarians argue justice is procedural, and liberals argue justice is impartial and distributive. As I have shown, this sort of reasoning affects the construction of autonomy in both political and personal forms. For egalitarian feminists, autonomy functions ideologically in libertarianism and liberalism, albeit in different ways. They themselves approach autonomy using different methods and assumptions, since they believe that the:

> method of employing an ideal that is situated in social analysis is more likely to succeed in identifying and challenging unjust structures of power…an analysis of social structures of power must supplement discussions of rights, equality, liberty, and autonomy and these concepts must be situated within a more radical social critique than the one provided by liberalism. (Schwartzman, 2006: 91, 11)

By rejecting the way autonomy functions in these two dominant strands of liberalism, then, egalitarian feminists rethink autonomy with a different logic, one that attempts to take seriously oppression and domination as a feature of social life. With this in mind, in the next section I look to the ways egalitarian feminists approach the idea of autonomy.

3. 2. Rethinking Autonomy in Egalitarian Feminism

In what follows, I show that autonomy for egalitarian feminists is embedded within a vision of a 'participatory society' where processes of democratisation and social justice are deemed integral to the development and safeguarding of autonomy (Pateman, 1970). There is, it should be acknowledged, some divergence in how both

justice and democracy are approached in the literature. It seems to me that some egalitarian feminists have only recently redefined social justice in terms participation and democratic self-government (Fraser, 2008; Young, 2000), while other egalitarians have remained committed to democratic theory without feeling it necessary to tied this to the more abstract concept of justice (e.g., Phillips, 1991; Dietz, 1998; Pateman, 1970, 2002). Similarly, there is some disagreement between egalitarians about whether it is necessary and appropriate to theorise equality and inequality in ways accompanied by notions of justice and injustice respectively. Some feminists believe liberalism can be reworked to accommodate feminist equality in its accounts of justice (Okin, 1989), while others think feminist equality 'leaves Aristotle in the dust' (MacKinnon, 2006: 108). In short, egalitarians approach the idea of democratic self-government and a more just order from various angles due to their various theoretical commitments, but in my mind they all arrive at similar conclusions. First I discuss why and how egalitarian feminists value autonomy in relation to public political processes. I then consider the way they have theorized autonomy in relation to civil society, and finally, in relation to family and intimate life.

3. 2. i. Autonomy, Democracy and Justice

In egalitarian feminism the idea of autonomy is imagined as more than the attribute of a private individual and as more than an attribute of a moral individual. Rather, autonomy is a political and specifically democratic value for these feminists, and as such can be seen to draw on the tradition of John Stuart Mill. It is worth noting, then, that autonomy and democracy are conceptually tied; *autonomia* was first used to describe the self-rule of the Greek city-state (Dworkin, 1988: 13). Autonomy and democracy are both are pinned to the idea of self-government, or 'equal self-determination' (Elstub, 2008: 14). In the spirit of modern political thought, egalitarian feminists understand autonomy in relation to individual selves, but it is their emphasis on collective, public – democratic – self-government which brings them to bind individual autonomy to the notion of participation. Simply put, the political value of autonomy stems from the way its exercise allows people to

contribute to constructing the conditions which shape their existence. With this in mind, egalitarian feminists argue the idea of autonomy is inextricably bound to the notion of political equality, particularly in the form of equal participation in democratic self-government (Pateman, 1970: 43).

Like conventional liberal approaches, egalitarians recognise the protective functions of participation; in accordance with the rule of law, states and governments need to be kept accountable and limited in important respects. However, egalitarian feminists take a leaf out of Mill's approach to autonomy by arguing participation is an 'important means for the development and exercise of capacities' (Young, 1990: 92). As noted in Chapter One, Mill promoted the 'educative' functions of a participatory society. Like Mill, egalitarian feminists draw attention to the ways in which democratic participation has an impact in all areas of an individual's life; in other words, it builds not only political autonomy but also personal autonomy. As Pateman puts it: 'One might characterise the participatory model as one where maximum in put (participation) is required and where output includes not just policies (decisions) but also the development of the social and political capacities of each individual, so that there is 'feedback' from output to input' (Pateman, 1970: 43).

For some egalitarian feminists, the participatory dimensions of autonomy are given even more expansive qualities, becoming an important aspect of their conceptions of social justice. Nancy Fraser, for example, argues social justice 'is parity of participation…justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life' (Fraser, 2008: 16). Fraser expresses the ideal of democratic self-government using the concept of 'public autonomy,' which is 'the freedom of associated social actors to participate with one another in framing the norms that bind them' (Fraser, 2008: 41). Similarly, Iris Young affirms the value of self-determination as part of her view of social justice. Mirroring Fraser's notion of public autonomy, Young's writes that self-determination 'consists in being able to participate in determining one's actions and the condition of one's action' (Young, 2000: 32). Young in particular in her approach to autonomy has been influenced by the notion of relational autonomy, introduced in Chapter Two. She takes the idea of

relational autonomy and turns it into a democratic ideal: 'A person is free if she able to pursue her life in her own way [in] the absence of…relations of domination' (Young, 2000: 32). On Young's account, domination occurs when 'Persons live within structures of domination if other persons or groups can determine without reciprocation the conditions of their action, either directly or by virtue of the structural conditions of their actions' (Young, 2000: 32). Thus self-determination includes, but is not reducible to, '…participation in making the collective regulations designed to prevent domination' (Young, 2000: 33).

In the context of these theorists' work, the idea of autonomy is truly radical in that the democratic context in which it is situated is no longer tied to the state. Instead, it ranges from local political processes and institutions to transnational ones. In a sense, it has to be radical in this way, for egalitarian feminists recognise that the current global era is one marked by 'abnormal justice' (Fraser, 2008: 48-75; Young, 2000: 236-275). Meta-theoretical questions about justice which are being posed in various political contexts are disrupting the 'dogma' of liberal and egalitarian theory which assumes a bounded polity, an identifiable, more or less homogenous citizenry, and prefixes what claims of justice are (Fraser, 2008: 30). As I understand it, the ideal of autonomy is designed to smash this dogmatic mindset. As a concept it captures aspirations to open up public decision-making processes and social institutions with a view to strengthening their legitimacy. By 'opening up' such processes and institutions, egalitarian feminist have in mind not only an increase in people demonstrating consent to agendas set by elites or representative bodies. They also envisage participatory norms structuring the framing and agenda setting processes themselves. For egalitarian feminists, strengthening legitimacy and reducing domination go hand in hand; this ideal of autonomy 'is contrary to domination' (Young, 2000: 32).

Concretely, egalitarian feminists argue there are multiple ways of enhancing autonomy. They recognise that institutionalising forms of direct participatory democracy may be difficult or even undesirable in some cases. However, egalitarian feminists tend to make the assumption that changes in forms of political

representation are ‘part of a wider project of increasing and enhancing democracy’, which ‘reveals a more ambitious programme of dispersing power through a wider range of decision-making assemblies, and changing the balance between participation and representation’ (Phillips, 1998: 238). For example, in the global context, Fraser underscores the importance of a ‘transnational politics of representation’ (Fraser, 2008: 112-115). She highlights the lack of democratic accountability in transnational governing bodies and economic institutions which are recognised as having a massive impact on the quality of life of diverse populations across the globe. One of the necessary conditions of autonomy, at least for Fraser, then would be the ‘invention of new global democratic institutions’ which could be in consistent dialogue with transnational civil society, to hold accountable dominant bodies like the World Trade Organisation and transnational corporations (Fraser, 2008: 69). These institutions would, in theory, affirm the autonomy of all those affected by the policies of transnational institutions.

Egalitarian feminists also advocate strategies imagined to remedy the injustices of ‘ordinary-political misrepresentation’, or those which occur within the state boundaries (Fraser, 2008: 19). What is central to these strategies is a challenge to the assumption that public spheres must be structured according to the idea of Kantian impartiality, which submerges particularly and difference in the name of a united, homogenous citizenry. Young at least advocates ‘the ideal of a heterogeneous public, in which persons stand forth with their differences acknowledged and respected, though perhaps not completely understood, by others’ (Young, 1990: 119). Indeed, this ideal is deemed necessary for participation to be of a more inclusive nature. In this light, some egalitarian feminists have advocated social group representation within legislatures as well as representation pertaining to the formulation and implementation of public policies (Young, 2000: 121-153; Phillips, 1998).

In addition to challenging the form and substance of representation, egalitarian feminists argue the political ideal of autonomy can be realised through the interplay between social movements, democracy, and legal change. While libertarians attempt to render social movement and unionization unnecessary and liberals tend to reduce

movements to the category of private associations or interest groups, egalitarian feminists view social movements as integral to the democratic culture within which autonomy can be fostered. Catharine MacKinnon puts it well when she argues the legitimacy of existing law in most contexts has historically been in question with respect to women's consent: 'Women have never consented to its rule – suggesting that the system's legitimacy needs repair that women are in a position to provide' (MacKinnon, 1989: 249). If law is always a reflection of social life, then it matters *whose* lived experiences law reflects (MacKinnon, 2006: 141). MacKinnon points to the international human rights movement suggesting 'what might be termed the women's model of human rights – not because it is exclusive to one sex but because it is predicated on women's distinctive experiences of violation and of denial of that violation – are beginning to make human rights an honest term' (MacKinnon, 2006: 2). Similarly, Susan Okin and Brooke Ackerly account for the important legal changes in international women's rights brought about by grass-roots activism and international NGOs, as part of the 'women's right as human rights movement' (Okin and Ackerly, 1999: 135, 151). In this context too egalitarian feminists suggest while greater participation results in greater legitimacy of political processes, at the same time domination is confronted.

By making sense of the value of political autonomy in this way, I think it is possible to see how egalitarian feminists endorse the idea of a participatory society in more general terms. In the next section I examine this in relation to civil society and democratic culture.

3. 2. ii. Autonomy, Civil Society and Democratic Culture

Within egalitarian feminism there is some contestation about how best to characterise civil society. What egalitarians feminists share, however, is the view that the kinds of activities that occur within civil society contribute to the development of citizens' autonomy, in a political and personal sense. Some regard economic activity as distinct from civil society (Young, 2000: 160), while others see the two as mapping on to each other (Okin and Ackerly, 1999: 157; Anderson, 1999: 317). Taking the

latter view for the purposes of this chapter will enable me to demonstrate why and how the idea of autonomy relates to productive labour in this approach. Egalitarian feminists do not let forms of productive labour slip beneath their radar. In contrast to the liberal view of redistribution which is concerned with a fair distribution of goods, feminist egalitarians are additionally concerned with 'the relationships within which goods are distributed' (Anderson, 1999: 314). In other words, relations of production as well as those of distribution and consumption are considered in this feminist approach to autonomy. Elizabeth Anderson argues that the productive labour within a participatory society should be reconceptualised in terms of 'cooperative, joint production' (Anderson, 1999: 321).

For some egalitarian feminists, reconceptualising productive activity in this way is centrally linked to the idea of autonomy. For Carole Pateman, the right of self-government ought to be viewed as *inalienable* within political systems, including firms. Contrary to the hegemonic view that labour power is like any other commodity, she argues that 'labour power is not separable from its owner and so is not alienable' (Pateman, 2002: 51). To defeat the 'civil subordination' that is enacted by employment contracts, where the right of self-government is alienated to some extent to employers, Pateman advocates practices of workplace democracy. In this view, forms of economic autonomy can be justified by recalling 'the right of citizens to exercise self-government in their workplaces' (Pateman, 2002: 51). Workplace democracy and collective production units exemplify economic autonomy; workers do not sell themselves via contracts, but are instead 'members and partners in a democratic productive unit' (Pateman, 2002: 47).

When understood within the vision of participatory society, forms of economic autonomy are argued to augment the sense of political and personal competence individuals have as worker-citizens. As a result they tend to enhance the overall democratic operation of society. Drawing on Mill as well as on empirical studies of workplace democracy and participation, Pateman finds that 'People who have a sense of political efficacy are more likely to participate in politics than those in whom this feeling is lacking and it has also been found that underlying the sense of

political efficacy is a sense of general, personal effectiveness, which involves self-confidence in one's dealings with the world' (Pateman, 1970: 46). The underbelly of this argument is, of course, that workplaces which embody strict, hierarchical authority relationships tend to undermine the sense of political efficacy and personal confidence of employees. Furthermore, part of the political efficacy argument rests on the increased sense of responsibility for workers when they actively engage in construction of the conditions which shape their working practices. Elsewhere feminists have drawn attention to the experiential connections between autonomy, self-worth and 'the social character of responsibility'; social contexts which engender self-doubt often undermine autonomy (Benson, 2000).

Convincing as Pateman's arguments are, some egalitarian feminists have raised questions about the desirability of workplace democracy and conceiving of autonomy as an inalienable right. Regarding workplace democracy, some have been suspicious about its 'perennial masculine bias' on account of the assumptions underpinning the notion of 'the worker' (Phillips, 1991: 44; Fraser, 1997: 231). Other egalitarians are concerned not so much with the contracts per se, but with the exploitative relations and conditions they often serve to justify (Fraser, 1997; Okin, 1990). This issue signifies a key debate within egalitarian feminism: whether or not the participatory society they endorse requires the eradication of contracts. For Pateman, the right of self-government cannot be alienated through contracts, but for other egalitarian feminists, contracts can be instrumental to the enhancement of autonomy in other social contexts. As Fraser puts it, 'At the very least, one must balance the subordination in paid work against the potential for relative freedom outside it' (Fraser, 1997: 230).

Nonetheless, it would seem that, within a broader, contemporary context, practices of economic autonomy and workplace democracy have taken on a renewed significance. For example, Okin and Ackerly point out this form of self-government is valued in contexts where women are concentrated in informal economies. They discuss the positive changes brought about for autonomous women workers made by non-governmental organisations such the Self-Employed Women's Association in

India (Okin and Ackerly, 1999: 143-144). Similarly, Iris Young sees the democratisation of workplaces as one way of enhancing the representation of oppressed social groups as part of the broader project of participatory society (Young, 1998: 417).

Aside from economic activity and institutions, egalitarian feminists argue civil society engenders other kinds of activities which can augment autonomy. In particular they highlight the importance of activities which operate 'parallel to dominant politics', as Young observes, 'subordinated social groups such as workers, poor people, ethnic minorities, racialized groups, and women historically have sometimes organized their associational life in such a way that they created *subaltern counter-publics'* (Young, 2000: 171; original emphasis). In this context the notion of collective or organisational autonomy is central. Much like Pateman's emphasis on workplace democracy, I think such collective autonomy calls attention to the overlaps between political and personal forms of autonomy. Young notes that subaltern counter-publics tend to be in communicative interaction with dominant political actors, so that they are not 'cut off' from the broader processes of democratisation. But in addition, they provide safe spaces for members of marginalized social groups to communicate with each other, enabling forms of self-development.

This takes me to the importance of consciousness-raising practices in social groups (Young, 1990: 152). An integral part of the women's movement in parts of North America and Europe during the second half of the twentieth century, consciousness-raising continues to be a crucial aspect of democratic culture. Egalitarian feminists argue that 'the goal of consciousness-raising' does not simply 'belong to another era' (Bordo, 1993: 30). Indeed, Stacy Sowards and Valerie Renger (2004) suggest the forms and dynamics of contemporary consciousness-raising practices in the US retain some elements of the earlier group-based meetings whilst responding to and being shaped by generational, technological, cultural, educational and other changes. A key purpose of consciousness-raising practices, in classic and contemporary forms, is to critically question pre-reflexive, or habitual, aspects of self and of relationships

(Chambers, 2008: 52; MacKinnon, 1987: 99).[5] In its classic forms, a key element of consciousness raising practices involves 'getting at' habitual aspects of self and relationships by relaying lived experiences in group-meeting contexts: 'Realities hidden under layers of valued myth were unmasked simply by talking about what happens every day' (MacKinnon, 1987: 89). In its contemporary forms, sharing of personal testimonies and lived experiences takes place through more public venues such as educational and institutional settings (Sowards and Renger, 2004). One aim of consciousness-raising is to achieve some degree of self-knowledge, self-definition and self-direction, which Diana Meyers argues is integral to the achievement of personal autonomy (Meyers 1989, 2002). When consciousness-raising practices are situated within a broader societal context, egalitarian feminists argue they can contribute to 'cultural revolution' (Young, 1990: 154), and can aid the 'political resuscitation' of 'our democratic selves' (Deitz, 1998: 392-393).

3. 2. iii. Autonomy, Families and Intimate Freedom

> The family is dead, long live the family.
>
> (Greer, 1999: 329)

Egalitarian feminists extend their analysis of autonomy to the most intimate of social institutions, the family. They conceive of patriarchal family forms as detrimental to the proper workings of participatory society for a number of reasons. The interconnections between the political ideal of autonomy and democratic citizenship are of particular importance in this respect. Egalitarian feminists argue if women are to have equal political power, that is, to be able to exercise political autonomy, there must be a fairer distribution of the burdens and benefits of domestic labour, particularly in heterosexual marriages or partnerships. Evidence suggests that in a variety of contexts wage-earning women and women who work in informal economies continue to perform more domestic labour, including housework and carework, compared with their male partners or husbands (e.g., Beagan *et al*, 2008; Okin, 2003). Egalitarian feminists argue many women are *overworked* and that one 'imperative of democracy' should be to promote the democratisation of productive

labour between men and women within families, and to reduce the economic vulnerability of women (Phillips, 1991: 157; Okin, 1989). They are, therefore, supportive of 'policies that would enable and give incentives to women and men to participate fully in both domestic and nondomestic life' (Okin, 1992: 321; see also Brighouse and Wright, 2008).

Moreover, they argue that with an increase in men participating in domestic labour, the benefits of sharing in the upbringing of children and caring for elderly family members would have a knock on effect on the construction of gender relations and identities. To the extent that care work aids the realisation of human dependencies and vulnerabilities, egalitarian feminists argue it would contribute to changes in hegemonic masculinities, which regard these as signs of inherent personal weakness. It might help more men value forms of nurturing activity (Okin, 1989; Segal, 2006). Indeed, egalitarian feminists have persistently argued that men's, particularly father's, participation in care work, en masse, would help raise the value of care work itself (Hochschild, 2004).

Egalitarian feminists further suggest egalitarian households enhance the autonomy of children. In a way that echoes Mill's idea of a virtuous family, egalitarian feminists argue egalitarian parental relationships 'would provide a far better example of human relations for children than the domination and dependence that often occur in traditional marriage' (Okin, 1989: 185). Indeed, it is argued egalitarian families where authority structures are democratised would provide the ideal 'school of moral development' and ready children for participatory society (Okin, 1989: 185). Relatedly, egalitarian feminists underscore the notion 'that children of both sexes in gender free-families would have (as some already have) much more opportunity for self-development free from sex-role and sex-typed personalities than most do now' (Okin, 1989: 184).

Although egalitarians see families as social institutions, they recognise families constitute a distinct form of social institution which requires a degree of privacy. Beate Rössler argues that in liberal democratic societies *the* reason individuals' value

privacy is because they value personal autonomy (Rössler, 2005). Rather than define privacy using a rigid public-private distinction, egalitarians suggest notions of 'control and of unwanted access' should define feminist understandings of privacy (Rössler, 2005: 8). They argue the democratisation of productive, domestic labour would create more private time and space for women, particularly those who shoulder the brunt of such labour. What Rössler calls 'local privacy', meaning privacy within one's home or dwelling, is considered to be a vital space for 'self-invention' and 'self-presentation' (Rössler, 2005: 148; Okin, 1998). Local privacy in this sense overlaps with autonomy, as it is viewed as necessary 'to develop our mental and creative capacities' in solitude and alongside others (Okin, 1998: 134). Another key tie between privacy and autonomy stems from the space it provides for the 'development of intimate personal relations', often a space defined in its freedom from the moralistic gaze of society (Okin, 1998: 134).

In this light, it is possible to underscore the interconnections egalitarian feminists see between challenging patriarchal family forms and enhancing 'freedom of intimate association' (Struening, 1996; Okin, 1996). One broader implication of challenging patriarchal family forms is that the reality and sheer diversity of families and intimate associations comes to the fore. Giving full recognition to families in this way, egalitarian feminists hope to challenge heterosexism and gender ideology, which propagates 'the intact two-parent family' as 'the morally laudable mode of life [and] the most civilly responsible' (Struening, 1996: 133). Their point, then, is not that egalitarian heterosexual marriages or partnerships provide the model democratic family, but that democratic, egalitarian norms ought to structure any household. The implications of this for autonomy are best captured by Ann Oakley's proposal to 'abolish the family' and substitute it with 'more open and variable relationships' allowing people to 'liv[e] together in a chosen and freely perpetuated intimacy, in a space that allows each to breathe and find her or his own separate destiny' (Oakley, 1974: 236).

I want to end this part by emphasising that the egalitarian feminist approach to autonomy can only be properly understood by situating it within their vision of hope

for a transformed society. This is a vision of a world in which sexual difference no longer structures peoples' lives, and egalitarian feminists frequently couch this vision in terms of 'moving beyond gender' and 'ending gender' (e.g., Okin, 1989; Phillips, 1991; Segal, 2006). Stevie Jackson asks why imagining 'the end of gender hierarchy and the collapse of institutionalised heterosexuality appear unthinkable' 'these days' (Jackson, 2001: 291). She advocates recovering 'feminism's transformative vision' with a view to imagine 'not only a world without gender, but also a world without the myriad inequalities and injustices that constrain women's lives today' (Jackson, 2001: 291). In a similar vein, Okin offers a vision of what a participatory society would look (and feel) like:

> A just future would be one without gender. In its social structures and practices, one's sex would have no more relevance than one's eye color or the length of one's toes. No assumptions would be made about "male" and "female" roles; childbearing would be so conceptually separated from child rearing and other family responsibilities that it would be a cause for surprise, and no little concern, if men and women were not equally responsible for domestic life or if children were to spend much more time with one parent than the other. It would be a future in which men and women participated in more or less equal numbers in every sphere of life, from infant care to different kinds of paid work to high-level politics…If we are all to be true to our democratic ideals, moving away from gender is essential. (Okin, 1989: 172)

To summarise this section, I have characterised the egalitarian feminist view of autonomy in terms of political autonomy through democratic participation, extending this vision to civil society. On this view, the connections between democracy and families are equally important, but egalitarians recognise the ties between the value of privacy and that of personal autonomy. In the next section I consider two responses to the egalitarian feminist approach.

3. 3. Assessing the Egalitarian Feminist Approach to Autonomy

In this, the final section of the chapter, I attempt to assess the egalitarian feminist approach to autonomy. I draw on criticisms that accuse egalitarian feminists of, on the one hand, being wholly insensitive to the importance of moral autonomy in claims about democratisation and social change. I highlight the totalitarian imaginary infecting this critique. I argue, however, that this relies on a liberal understanding of the public-private and fails to account for the fact egalitarian feminists accept the value of privacy. On the other hand, egalitarian feminists can be seen as utopian. I argue that they are, but that their utopianism should be understood in processual terms, which is both necessary and realistic.

3. 3. i. Are Egalitarian Feminists Totalitarian?

Some criticisms of egalitarian feminism converge in such a way that they highlight the perception it embodies totalitarian impulses. Before discussing these criticisms, it is worth stating that the totalitarian imagery permeating this critique obviously calls attention to the historical frame of reference in which they are made and in which egalitarian feminism resides (Bell, 2002; Pateman, 1970). The fascist regimes of the twentieth century, particularly those within the European context, are ever-present in the memory of political theorists concerned with autonomy and social change, and for good reason. Totalitarianism seeks to abolish citizens' autonomy in a number of ways, but especially through the eradication of privacy by 'ensuring the total surveillance of the individual' (Rössler, 2005: 146). For totalitarians, autonomy can also be justifiably curtailed in the name of purifying society of all those who do not fit with an ideal of human unity, usually based on homogeneity. Pluralism, diversity, and difference can be quashed in blatant enactments of censorship, intolerance and violence. Against totalitarianism in theory and practice, it should be clear that any approach that values the idea of autonomy has to value privacy and has to promote tolerance in the face of pluralism.

The spectre of totalitarianism has been raised in relation to egalitarian feminist claims in two ways. First, those egalitarian feminists who oppose the production, distribution and consumption of particular forms of pornography have been dubbed 'Big Sisters' by feminist and non-feminist critics alike (Boyd, 2004). The totalitarian imaginary infecting this critique no doubt stems from events in the US during the l980's, when Catharine MacKinnon and others drafted a city ordinance which would have enabled women directly harmed by pornography to make a legal case against its producers and distributors (Kelly, 1988). The attempt to use law to challenge the production and distribution of some forms of adult pornography in this way has been branded censorious ever since, and considered an attack on freedom of speech and expression (Chester and Dickney, 1988). The critique here is that at least some egalitarian feminists do not respect the autonomy of those who produce (while holding the camera) and distribute, and consume pornography, nor do they respect the autonomy of those who engage in sex acts to produce pornography. Further, Neil Boyd has mapped how the logic behind this ordinance has influenced the constructions of laws in other contexts, with the consequence being the criminalization of various publications which represent forms of sadomasochism and non-heterosexual sex deemed by courts to be 'dehumanizing and degrading' (Boyd, 2004: Ch. 1).

It is, as far as I can tell, the move to use law to instigate social change and the unintended consequences of legal directives which are seen as undermining of individual autonomy. Critics also argue the conception of male domination and of sexuality informing moves for legal change are questionable. Importantly, however, even those egalitarian feminists who in fact share this critique of MacKinnon's approach (Segal, 2004) do not escape the totalitarian critique.

The spectre of totalitarianism has also been raised in relation to egalitarian feminist arguments for greater autonomy within family life. By extending democratic self-government to the domestic and family realm, egalitarian feminists have been interpreted as overstepping the mark. The proposals they advocate to redistribute

labour and to move away from traditional forms of family life have been interpreted as intolerant and disrespectful of ethical pluralism. This critique is well captured in Celia Wolf-Devine's review of Susan Okin's work, which is worth quoting at length to capture the totalitarian imagery:

> Rather ironically, then, Okin is prepared, in the name of autonomy, to prevent other people from carrying out what they regard as their most important parental obligations, if the traditional practices they value are ones she regards as "sexist". Not allowing other women to pass on cultural and religious practices that she regards as sexist is, among other things, an attempt by Okin and other elite women to control less powerful women who prefer traditional patterns, many (but by no means all) of whom are less educated, articulate, and well-placed to make their views heard in the public arena. Such women might well perceive Okin's policies as designed to liberate women from male control in order to subject them to control by feminists who claim to know what is best for them better than they do. (Wolf-Devine, 2003: 54)

There is much to unpack in this critique, but what I want to underscore is that both Wolf-Devine and Boyd share the perception that egalitarian feminists would, if they could, 'make' people more autonomous by forcing them to conform to the dictates of an egalitarian feminist vision of the good life. If this critique is put in Rawlsian liberal parlance, the egalitarian feminist approach to autonomy is seen as undermining the Kantian distinction between Right and the good, and consequently, the public-private distinction regarding the proper bounds of state power.

I would argue that this interpretation of egalitarian feminism is wrong-headed. Indeed, some egalitarian feminists are aware of the totalitarian imagery their position seems to carry and work hard to defeat it. For example, Susan Bordo's critical discussion of the hazards of the cosmetic surgery industry reveals this awareness when she writes, 'proposals to ban or even regulate silicone breast implants are often

viewed as totalitarian interference with self-determination, freedom and choice' (Bordo, 1993: 20). In a similar vein, Margaret Benston suggests that proposals to change patterns of labour, including domestic labour, will likely be viewed as totalitarian in capitalist societies due to the historical frame of reference and the limits of collective consciousness: 'For most North Americans, domestic work as "public production" brings immediate images of a Brave New World or a vast institutions – a cross between a home for orphans and an army barracks – where we would all be forced to live' (Benston, 1997: 19). Clearly, egalitarian feminists do not suffer from political amnesia when thinking about strategies for social change.

With this in mind, egalitarian feminists are sensitive to the fact that advocating social changes and processes of democratisation should not solely entail making appeals to the state. As Iris Young suggests:

> …societal discrimination, processes of segregation and marginalization enacted through social networks and private institutions must be confronted in their non-state institutional sites. While law can provide a framework for equality, and some remedy from egregious violations of rights and respect, the state and law cannot and should not reach into every capillary of everyday life. (Young, 2007: 85)

What Young's point highlights is that egalitarian feminists stress the importance of a democratic culture to challenge inequality, whilst acknowledging the need to limit state power and retain privacy rights. For Young, then, the egalitarian position 'is not tantamount to calling the culture Gestapo to police every joke or bathroom design' (Young, 2007: 85).

What egalitarian feminists do argue however is that public policies can help to reduce socio-economic inequalities and the likelihood of vulnerability, especially for dependent caretakers (Anderson, 1999: 324). Hence Okin's suggestion that in traditional gendered marriages or partnerships, women who are full time caretakers

ought to have an equal legal entitlement to household earnings (Okin, 1989: 180-182). A key motivation behind this suggestion is to reduce the economic and psychological exploitation of dependent partners and their children, especially in cases where marriages or partnerships breakdown. Other egalitarian feminists argue public policies that would give incentives to fathers to participate in child care would help change the entrenched gendered division of labour (Brighouse and Wright, 2009). In this light, egalitarian feminists do challenge the strict non-interventionist stance that accompanies the liberal view of 'the state' as a coercive power that stands apart from society. But this challenge is based on the claim that peoples' lives are already heavily regulated, and that regulation through policies can often alleviate the worst forms of vulnerability.

A similar response can be made in relation to the critique made by Wolf-Devine above, which suggested egalitarian feminists want to prevent parents from carrying out what they feel are their most important obligations towards their children if this involves 'traditional' gendered practices. At issue here is the moral autonomy of parents and the power of proxy consent they have in relation to their children's lives (Dworkin, 1988: 85-99). Insofar as proxy consent results in the physical harm and abuse of children, egalitarian feminists challenge the logic of the 'parental obligation'. In relation to the broader issue of the gendered upbringing of children into blue and pink worlds, egalitarian feminists reserve the right to question this, without calling on the state to enforce 'gender-free' families. What critics of egalitarian feminism forget, I think, is that it is possible to theorize about questions of social change and of what egalitarian relationships would entail without leaping to the conclusion that the state has to act. As MacKinnon suggests, 'Liberals often seem unable to interpret the world in other than liberal terms' (MacKinnon, 2002: 710).

Rather than recalling totalitarian imagery to make sense of egalitarian feminism, I would argue this approach to autonomy would be better understood in light of the feminist slogan 'the personal is the political'. Egalitarian feminists do not seek to eradicate privacy nor do they seek to undermine the conceptual and ethical ties between privacy and autonomy. Chris Armstrong insightfully picks up on this

argument when he states the feminist position 'is very often that the personal is political *and should not be*, and it hardly needs to be said that the clear implication is that the personal is not categorically political, but is so as the result of imbalances of power often imported from men's and women's relative standings in other sectors of society' (Armstrong, 2002: 79; original emphasis). Armstrong draws on the classic work of Shulamith Firestone to demonstrate what is at stake. As she suggests, love 'becomes complicated, corrupted, or obstructed by an *unequal balance of power*...the destructive effects of love occur only in the context of inequality' (Firestone, 1979: 124). She goes on, 'Thus, it not the process of love itself that is at fault, but its political i.e. unequal *power* context: the who, why, when and where of it is what makes it now such a holocaust' (Firestone, 1979: 127). I would contend that such insights structure egalitarian feminist arguments about autonomy, privacy and proposals for social change. Egalitarian feminists recognize 'It is often precisely those oppressions which occur in the private sphere that are the most damaging to the freedom and autonomy of the individuals who suffer them' (Chambers, 2008: 131).

Making sense of the egalitarian feminist approach to autonomy in this way also helps me respond to the critique that it is an intolerant approach. To express my point I recall Audre Lorde's response to a question that suggested her critique of lesbian sadomasochism was intolerant. When asked 'What about the doctrine of 'live and let live' and civil liberties?' Lorde replied: 'I don't see that as the point. I'm not questioning anyone's right to live…This is complex. *I speak not about condemnation* but about recognizing what is happening and questioning what it means. I'm not willing to regiment *anyone's* life, but if we are to scrutinize our human relationships, we must be willing to scrutinize all aspects of those relationships' (Lorde, 1988: 242-243; original emphasis). I would suggest the egalitarian feminist approach to autonomy is informed by a similar logic and impetus. Knowing that the personal can be political, egalitarian feminists scrutinize human relationships and critically question 'what is happening', especially where imbalances of power are evident. Understanding this approach in such a way that only questions of tolerance and intolerance enter the debate leads to a quite severe misinterpretation of it. As well as

being characterized as totalitarian, some egalitarian feminists have been characterized as utopian. The next section looks to this response.

3. 3. ii. Are Egalitarian Feminists Utopian?

Egalitarian feminists have been described as utopian. Mary Lyndon Shanley has characterised Okin's work as such, particularly in relation to her idea of 'the end of gender' (Shanley 2009). Such a characterisation of an approach to autonomy brings with it good and bad connotations. In her critical analysis of utopian political theory, Erin McKenna (2001) shows that utopian theorising does have oppressive and troublesome strains. Specifically, those 'end-state models' of utopia which are grounded in 'the rational direction of all action toward human perfection…toward a predetermined end or goal - that is, the good' and which believe 'we will be able to achieve the right ordering of individuals in society and achieve a lasting harmony' are inherently and unwaveringly oppressive (McKenna, 2001: 17, 18).[6] End-state models deny pluralism, 'experimentation, discovery, and hope' and ironically, end utopianism itself (McKenna, 2001: 18). In the first critique discussed above, this is the type of utopia that some argue the egalitarian feminist view of a 'gender-free' society entails.

This charge represents a major misreading of egalitarian feminism. This approach does not aim for end-states; in fact it criticizes the normative understandings of gender and sexuality that currently exist as entrenching the idea that *these* are the only end-states available to people. For example, Okin draws attention to the historically variant but no less general '*compulsion* to separate out human beings into two sexes' (Okin, 1996: 31; my emphasis). Egalitarian feminism instead opens up the possibilities for what gender might become without domination and inequality impeding on these possibilities. It aims to end the assumptions that currently exist about gender and sexuality which shape our identities and self-realisation, our understandings of proper family life and other social institutions, thereby opening the possibilities of autonomy that cannot yet be realised.

I would argue that egalitarian feminism and its vision of a participatory society embodies what McKenna calls the 'process model of utopia'. This model is based on feminist and pragmatist visions of social change and transformation, themselves based on an intermingling of theory and practice. Although different in many respects, both feminism and pragmatism, 'privilege social and political practice over abstract theory, they evaluate theory from the point of view of its concrete effects on marginalized groups, including women, and both share a common emphasis upon the development of theory from subjects' grounded experience' (Mottier, 2004: 323).

Developing the connections between these perspectives, McKenna argues that pragmatism is not 'valueless instrumentalism' but rather like feminism, accepts 'it is the process of transformation itself that needs to be addressed…and which keeps the possibility of change alive' (McKenna, 2001: 6). This parallels Nancy Fraser's emphasis on the contrast between affirmative and transformative remedies, which are not to be conceptualised as 'gradual versus apocalyptic change'. For Fraser, 'the nub of the contrast is end state outcomes versus the processes that produce them' and we must dwell on processes not outcomes (Fraser, 1998: 443). Therefore, process models of utopia 'function as inspiration and allow content and form to be more fluid' (McKenna, 2001: 8) while at the same time necessitating a focus on what is presently problematic and unjust. They aim to 'develop a critical method of directing [the future]' emphasising the social responsibility of citizens as situated and connected individuals. For example, if egalitarian feminists are viewed as process utopians, their arguments for increased representation of social groups in political processes in the name of political autonomy can be properly understood. Against the claim that such representation amounts to an essentialist 'freezing' of group identities (Nash, 1998) it is possible to see that representative measures are contextualised within a broader conception of processes of social change.

While this is only a sketch of McKenna's work, I would argue it accurately characterises the way in which egalitarian feminism justifiably binds the idea of autonomy to a utopian vision. To suggest that egalitarian feminists are *unrealistically* utopian is to suggest that people do not or could not live in ways that they describe.

One way to discredit this charge is to point out that people already live, and are *born*, in ways that defy gender or sex categorisation and that it is current assumptions, values and public discourses which erase (and sometimes literally end) their lives and limit their attempts at self-determination (Butler, 2004). For example, the Intersex Society of North America actively campaigns for public recognition and acceptance of the fact that a considerable minority of infants are born with 'ambiguous genitalia.' The Society raises awareness of the fact that the routine 'surgical "correction" of infants who genitals are deemed by medical professionals to be socially unacceptable' is both medically unnecessary[7] and contributes to 'the production of normatively sexed bodies' (Chase, 2005: 126).

Cheryl Chase has documented how the medical establishment has effectively 'hushed up the fact of intersex births' by 'using technology to normalise intersex bodies [causing] profound emotional and physical harm to intersex people and their families…leaving intersex people to recover as best they can, alone and silent, from violent normalization' (2005: 131, 132). In relation to sexual autonomy, the majority of enforced surgical procedures to 'determine' the sex of a child results in a loss of the capability to experience orgasm; for example, in order to 'normalize' 'enlarged' clitorises or 'inadequate' sized penises, the common course of action amounts to clitoridectomy and amputation. Chase notes that until 1993 no one disputed surgeon Milton Edgerton's incorrect reasoning that this was no cause for concern since 'not one has complained of the loss of sensation, even when the entire clitoris was removed' (2005: 131). Of course, as children intersex individuals cannot choose how to perceive their own bodies and live accordingly, and currently they are generally not given the option to do so. It is still assumed that parents will be so horrified with their child that surgeons often do not fully inform them either.

The Intersex Society draws attention to the ways in which, as adults, intersex individuals mourn their loss of autonomy and, through activism, coping and solidarity, create new spaces for living autonomously in the knowledge that they are not 'monsters' (Chase, 2005: 134). As one individual testified, 'All the things my body might have to grown to do, all the possibilities, went down the hall with my

amputated clitoris to the pathology department. The rest of me went to the recovery room - I'm still recovering' (Chase, 2005: 136). Chase herself admits her attempts to commit suicide when she discovered her hidden past. Intersexuality demonstrates, in the most pressing way, how rethinking autonomy with a utopian vision is crucial for those individuals who defy current rigid gender and sexual categorisations. Such a vision drives the activism of the Intersex Society in their hope of helping create a world where 'sex' does not matter, where informed choice for intersex individuals is priority and ultimately, where 'intersex individuals [are] not…violated for the comfort and convenience of others' (Chase, 2005: 137).

In light of Seyla Benhabib's worry that contemporary feminist theory now embodies a 'retreat from utopia' (Hirschman and DiStephano, 1996: 3) my final point suggests why retaining utopian feminist visions, of the sort that egalitarian feminism offers, is necessary and realistic. Drawing on the utopian political theory literature, it is possible to understand how and why egalitarian feminism offers a 'vivid imagination of the norms, institutions and individual relationships of a society meant to be regarded as qualitatively better in at least certain respects than that in which its originator lives' (Davis, 2001: 77).

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the way egalitarian feminists engage with the idea of autonomy. In the first section of the chapter, I set out their critique of libertarian and Rawlsian liberal approaches to autonomy. Egalitarian feminists argue the way autonomy is constructed within these two approaches functions ideologically, especially with respect to the value of political autonomy. More specifically, it is the way autonomy is bound to abstract notions of justice which is viewed as problematic. Egalitarian feminists, by contrast, argue the idea of autonomy has to be considered and constructed in light of situated social analyses that take structural inequalities and relations of domination into account.

For egalitarian feminists, autonomy is understood as a political and specifically democratic value. Foregrounding this meaning of autonomy, the value of autonomy is seen in light of the participatory norms which democracy requires. In the most basic terms, participation is viewed as an enabling and educative activity, which allows people to contribute to constructing the conditions which shape their existence. More than this however, egalitarian feminists argue that participation simultaneously strengthens the legitimacy of political processes and institutions whilst challenging entrenched forms of domination. Understood in this light, I argued egalitarian feminism has affinities with Mill's approach to autonomy, set out in Chapter One. Although not all egalitarian feminists see the need to bind the ideal of political autonomy to notions of social justice, some do, and thereby expand and arguably strengthen its normative appeal. I also demonstrated why egalitarian feminists embed autonomy within an overarching vision of participatory society, and that their claims about the significance of processes of democratisation extend through civil society and to family life. Although political autonomy is emphasised, egalitarian feminists retain an emphasis on privacy and its relationship to self-development and personal autonomy.

In assessing this approach I considered two responses to egalitarian feminism. I argued the critique of totalitarianism was overblown and tried to shoehorn the approach into liberal categories which are unhelpful. I also argued that this approach to autonomy should be seen in light of its processual utopianism. Understood in this light, some of the key claims egalitarian feminists make about enhancing forms of political autonomy through representation, and about the conditions of autonomy relative to gender take on great significance. I argued that their focus on transforming the conditions within which autonomy is exercised is a necessary and legitimate one.

Notes

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[1] My construction of egalitarian feminism follows Laden and Owen's (2007: 1) characterisation of a theoretical approach as 'an orientation in thinking, a framework of argument within which a number of different theoretical positions are situated against a

broadly common background of basic commitments concerning the appropriate character or shape of arguments in political philosophy'. To state the obvious, the title 'egalitarian' stems from the key focus on inequalities and the value of social equality. This term has been used by feminists, notably Nancy Fraser (1997), to categorise some of the theorists I am referring to here.

More precisely, egalitarian feminism has a materialist/socialist bloc (e.g., Jaggar, 1983; Hartsock, 1985; Bubeck, 1995; Jackson, 2001; Duggan, 2003; Young, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2009; Fraser, 1997, 2008; H. Eisenstein, 2009), a radical feminist bloc (e.g., MacKinnon, 1989, 2002, 2006; Thompson, 2001), and a liberal humanist and/or egalitarian bloc (e.g., Okin, 1989, 1996, 2003; Anderson, 1999; Chambers, 2008). For those egalitarians more commonly referred to as materialist or socialist feminists, divisions of labour and sexuality are vital for understanding historical and contemporary formations of gender inequality and domination. In my mind, very similar arguments and conclusions appear in the work of feminists more commonly recognised as liberal humanists, concerned with gender divisions of labour, exploitation and vulnerability. Other egalitarian feminists are commonly known as radical feminists or, being influenced by radical feminism, are situated within liberalism concerned with reconstructing it along radical lines. For these feminists, social power is organized according to formations of masculine domination, the key principle of hegemonic heterosexuality. What this points to is the fact that although egalitarian feminists share a social ontology they do *not* share an 'ontology *of* the social' (Jackson, 2006: 107; original emphasis).

[2] Critical theory 'is a mode of discourse which projects normative possibilities unrealized but felt in a particular given social reality' (Young, 1990: 6). Since each 'social reality presents its own unrealized possibilities,' it assumes, therefore, that normative reflection 'is historically and socially contextualized' (Young, 1990: 6, 5). For egalitarian feminists, who (to my knowledge) are primarily based in North American and European contexts, such normative reflection is based on processes that are both state-specific and transnational. For some egalitarian feminists, their insights and claims are grounded in the 'broader agenda of actual egalitarian movements,' such as women's movements, workers rights movements, LGBT movements, disability movements, and the like (Anderson, 1999: 288; see also Okin and Ackerly, 1999; MacKinnon, 2006). As I understand it, the ideals embodied within this feminist approach are constructed from the experiences, knowledge-claims, and values of such movements; they are constructed in order to capture the normative aspirations and collective goals of such groups.

In this context it is important to note how I am using the work of Susan Okin, since she uses Rawlsian liberalism to think about gender justice. Okin uses Rawls and the tools that his framework offers to think about gender justice, however, it is clear to me that Okin is more of a Millian than a Rawlsian, since elsewhere in her writings she is also a staunch democrat, which is to say she envisioned a participatory society much like Mill as the other egalitarian feminists in this chapter (see the afterword in Okin, 1992). As Elizabeth Wingrove points out, 'the idiom of analytic philosophy in which Okin works call lull readers into not noticing the extent to which she deploys a richly sociological and psychologically nuanced account of gender, and she challenges not only the substantive conclusions but the methodological commitments of much liberal theory' (Wingrove, 2009: 58). Okin wants to know what liberal's 'key concepts look like on the ground, so to say. Shuttling between concepts (equality, choice) and the facts of social scientific research (earning capacity, divorce rates), Okin's approach tethers justice theory to actual circumstances of the intended subjects' (Wingrove, 2009: 58). Further, it is this tethering which has caused critics to note how Okin's use of Rawlsian methodology is inconsistent (Schwartzman, 2006).

As will become clear, critical theory begins from different premises compared with libertarianism and liberalism. Lisa Schwartzman puts its simply: 'An examination of the structures of power – and the recognition that there *are* structures of power, oppression and inequality – must be the starting point of the *theory*. In contrast, liberals generally attempt to separate out the application of a theory from its conceptual origins, acknowledging structures of power primarily at the level of application' (Schwartzman, 2006: 169; original emphasis).

[3] Rawls drops the transcendental reason in Kant's approach, and 'reverses' the question of autonomy; 'it is no longer whether the individual wills the political norm as a universal rule, but rather whether the political norm can be amenable to be willed by the individuals with respect to their ethical existence (comprehensive doctrines). In effect, Rawls transfers the meaning of autonomy from the plane of metaphysical consciousness to that of socially embedded consciousness' (Munro, 2006: 7).

[4] In an attack on the libertarian notion of desert and entitlement, and Nozick's entitlement theory, Rawls finds that 'social and economic inequalities are to be arranged to they are (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all' (Rawls, 1970: 60).

[5] From this understanding of habitual thought and action it becomes possible to see why egalitarian feminists are at pains to conceptualise individuals as social agents, against the perception they see individuals as 'nothing but inert entities moved hither and yon by forces outside their control' (Thompson, 2001: 8). They do argue ideological formations are productive of social reality, as Nancy Hirschmann points out 'materialization' captures the sense in which 'the construction of social behaviours and rules takes on a life of its own, and becomes constitutive not only of what women [and men] are allowed to *do*, but of what they are allowed to *be*' (Hirschmann, 2003: 79: original emphasis). In this sense, egalitarian feminists recognise that men and women, as social agents in everyday life, 'collude' in the reproduction of normative forms of gender and sexuality (MacKinnon, 1989: 88; Bordo, 1993: 28; Hirschmann, 2003: 83). At the same time, egalitarian feminists view individuals as social agents, engaged in processes of cultural construction where social meanings of gender and sexuality are negotiated and contested. As Stevi Jackson puts it, social 'meaning is not simply *dictated* by cultural norms, but is also *negotiated in, and emergent from*, the mundane social interaction through which each of us *makes sense* of our own and others' gendered and sexual lives' (Jackson, 2006: 112; my emphasis). By emphasising the 'sociality of the self' egalitarian feminists are able to argue in support of viewing individuals are 'reflexive', social beings who negotiate and strive to make sense of their and others' lives (Jackson, 2006: 115).

[6] The devastating consequences of end-state models are illustrated by destruction and death of Hitler's regime and the rational planning of the Soviet era. These models are also represented in films such as *V for Vendetta* and *Equilibrium* and literature such as Orwell's *1984*.

[7] Cheryl Chase notes that although 'intersexual anatomy occasionally indicates an underlying medical problem such as adrenal disorder, ambiguous genitalia are, in and of themselves, neither painful nor harmful to health. The often debilitating pediatric genital surgeries are entirely cosmetic in function. Surgery is essentially a deconstructive process' (Chase, 2005: 131).

Chapter 4
Autonomy and Postcolonial Feminism

> It is time to move beyond the ideological framework in which even Marx found it possible to say: They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.
>
> (Mohanty, 2003b: 70)

Introduction

This chapter looks to the meanings and value of autonomy within postcolonial feminism. To make sense of this feminist approach, what constitutes postcolonial thought needs to be spelled out up front. Postcolonial thought is broadly characterised by a critical focus on the histories and legacies of European colonialism and imperialism from the 16th century to the present day, and an insistence on placing 'tricontinental' experiences and knowledges – those grounded in and emerging from Latin America, Asia and Africa – at the centre of theorizing (Young, 2003). While 'postcolonialism' and 'postcolonial feminism' are heavily contested terms, there is at least some consensus about the genealogies and substantive focus which constitute these bodies of thought (Krishna, 2009; Sunder Rajan and Park, 2005; Lewis and Mills, 2003). The postcolonial theoretical paradigm is said to be the product of two intersecting movements, poststructuralism and Marxist-inspired national liberation movements against colonial and imperial state systems (Alessandrini, 2005: 431-433). While this is also true of postcolonial feminism its genealogy is additionally rooted in the 'feminist anti-racist politics' of the second half of the twentieth century, a politics 'born out of recognition of the differences between women and out of the anti-imperialist campaigns of 'first-' and 'third-world' women' (Lewis and Mills, 2003: 4; Mirza, 1997). The intellectual and political alliances forged between black and third world feminisms exposed relations of rule and hegemonic discourse ignored by, but also operating within, dominant feminist frameworks.

Postcolonial feminism best explicates the claim that notions of autonomy can emerge from 'locations beside the West' and are 'not simply liberal individualist at their core' (Eisenstein, 2004: 184). Like the feminist approaches considered thus far in the thesis, postcolonial feminists recognise the philosophical and political monopoly the liberal tradition has on the idea of autonomy. What makes the postcolonial feminist engagement with liberalism distinct is the focus on liberalism's collaboration in European colonialism and neo-imperialism. Postcolonial feminists see colonial and imperial relations of rule and discourse as constitutive of liberal theoretical frameworks, past *and* present. They also argue that Western political thought, including feminist thought, is affected by this history more generally. The positive valuation of autonomy in postcolonial feminism tends to be rooted in philosophical and political traditions distinct from, and usually resistant to, the liberal tradition.

This chapter begins by setting out the postcolonial critique of liberal approaches to autonomy. The second section then makes sense of the way postcolonial feminists have reclaimed and rethought the idea of autonomy in the context of their theoretical and political commitments. I focus specifically on the themes of decolonization and intersectionality. In the final section of the chapter, I assess the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy.

4. 1. The Postcolonial Feminist Critique of Autonomy

When viewed through a postcolonial feminist lens the liberal tradition emerges as an ideology that historically justified colonial and imperial relations of rule and in its neoliberal guise currently justifies forms of neoimperialism. As part of their aim to '*understand* how inequality and unequal social, political and economic relations have been justified, rationalised and practised within European institutions', postcolonial feminists have looked to the liberal tradition to map continuities between historical and contemporary justifications for colonial and imperial relations (St. Denis, 2007: 42-43; my emphasis). This is why liberal notions of autonomy merit special attention for postcolonial feminists. While it may be 'absurd' to *reduce* liberalism to a justification for these relations of rule Bhikhu Parekh suggests its 'theoretical content

and self-understanding cannot be fully comprehended without taking account of its complex relationship with the colonial experience and subjugated 'other'' (Parekh, 2000: 34). With this in mind, I pay attention to the way postcolonial feminists perceive continuities between classic and contemporary forms of liberalism. First, I show how liberal autonomy is underpinned by a colonizing subject through a postcolonial reading of John Locke. I then look to the work of John Stuart Mill, and set out the postcolonial feminist critique of the imperialist discourse of autonomy and difference. As I will also show, this discourse is seen to infect western feminist thought more broadly.

4. 1. i. Identifying the Liberal Subject as a Colonizing Subject

Postcolonial feminists see the continuities between classic and contemporary liberal approaches to autonomy with respect to their colonizing imperative. It is specifically the connections between Locke's approach to autonomy, the ideology of possessive individualism, and the political project of neoliberalism which are scrutinized here. Thus, M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra T. Mohanty scrutinize the central 'myths' of neoliberalism, and ask why 'private property and ownership' are deemed to be 'constitutive of self-worth' (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997: xxxiii). They ask why 'ownership of land is conflated with the personal value, prestige, and evolution of the owner', and see this as inseparable from 'The myth of "private property as fundamental to human development"' (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997: xxxiii). In a similar vein, Vandana Shiva has draw attention to the similarities between the colonizing subject of the neoliberal approach to autonomy and the colonizing subject of Lockean autonomy (Plumwood, 1993: 111; Shiva, 2004a).[1] The significance of identifying the colonizing subject in this way is that it helps postcolonial feminists map justifications for multiple forms of dominance which are subsumed beneath the rhetoric of freedom and civility. It is, therefore, possible to making sense of the postcolonial feminist critique of autonomy through a postcolonial reading of Locke.

As Shiva recognises, Locke defended commercial slavery and English colonialism in America from the 1600's, providing economic justification for colonialism in his

theoretical writings (Arneil, 1994; Farr, 2008).[2] This justification was sought partly to aid and legitimise the enhancement of English wealth when its fortunes were ailing. Locke regarded commerce as preferable to the use of conquest or direct force in building empires:

> There are but two ways of growing Rich, either Conquest, or Commerce…no Body is vain enough to entertain a Thought of our reaping the Profits of the World with our Swords, and making the Spoil…of Vanquished Nations. Commerce therefore is the only way left to us…for this the advantages of our Situation, as well as the Industry and Inclination of our People…do Naturally fit us. (Locke in Arneil, 1994: 605)

Situating this take on commerce within Locke's Christian worldview and labour theory of value exposes the basis of his justification of colonialism. The argument that God had given men the earth in common, especially its land, merged neatly with Locke's view of American land as 'vacant' and 'waste', still constituting a state of nature (Locke, 1996: 322, 324, 325). Of course America was not vacant and Locke fully knew native Indians lived there, but he thought it was vacant in the sense that no one had claimed proprietorship of its parts. In Locke's eyes, no person had mixed their labour with the land *in the appropriate fashion*, enclosed it, and claimed a private right to it. The way Indians lived with and from the land did not meet the standards embodied in natural law for its proper appropriation and usage. This is why the land was seen as 'waste' or uncultivated and without value, falling out with the category of 'fixed property' (Locke, 1996: 323). This argument ran in tandem with the support of the *terra nullius* doctrine, which holds that land, and nature more generally, is 'available for annexation…empty, passive and without a value or directions of its own' (Plumwood, 1993: 111). What appeared to Locke as 'waste' land could legitimately become private property.

With this in mind, Locke and his contemporaries viewed English methods of labour to be properly 'industrious and rational', and even as far superior to the methods of

other colonial states (Arneil, 1994: 605). Hence the affirmative answer to his rhetorical question,

> For I ask, whether in the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America, left to nature, without any improvement, tillage, or husbandry, a thousand acres yield the needy and the wretched inhabitants as many conveniences of life, as ten acres of equally fertile land do in Devonshire, where they are well cultivated? (Locke, 1996: 323)

Locke argued it was only a specific form of agrarian work which could found claims of proprietorship. To sustain this labour in settler colonies Locke thought in terms of efficiency. It required a supply of tools and other resources, which, if made in England, would have to be shipped across the Atlantic. As Barbara Arneil notes, on this logic, 'employment will be created in England by colonization in both the manufacturing and navigational industries. The value in an acre of American land, therefore, when one includes *all* of the industry involved, is enormous' (1994: 608; original emphasis). In sum, Locke's labour theory of value helped to legitimate claims of ownership on the part of the colonizers and provided an economic justification for colonialism.

A postcolonial reading of Locke highlights two things about his approach to autonomy. First, it is underpinned by a colonizing subject whose defining features are rational egoism and instrumentalism (Plumwood, 1993: 141-164). The mode of rationality integral to Locke's autonomous subject is synonymous with economic self-interest and self-regard. In this sense the colonizers and English government are the rational 'selves' of Lockean autonomy, but so too was Locke himself, given his personal-political investments in American colonies and commercial slavery (Farr, 2008). The rational egoist depends on but excludes and backgrounds those subjects which make his commercial endeavours possible in the first place, for example, through contracted or forced labour. More than this, these 'other' subjects literally

become instruments of the rational egoist's colonial pursuits. Plumwood writes of instrumentalism as:

> a mode of use which does not respect the other's independence or fullness of being, or acknowledge their agency. Its aim is to subsume the other maximally within the sphere of the user's own agency. It recognises no residue or autonomy in the instrumentalised other, and strives to deny or negate that other as a limit on the self and as a centre of resistance. (Plumwood, 1993: 142)

Instrumentalising the native Indians who lived on American land, Locke did not respect their 'fullness of being' and their autonomy. 'It never occurred to Locke', for instance, 'that the very idea of owning land appeared odd and sacrilegious to those who saw themselves as inseparable from and defined their collective identity in terms of it' (Parekh, 2000: 38). As Raimond Gaita suggests, the types of argument witnessed in Locke's justification of colonialism and the doctrine of *terra nullius* are based on a 'racist blindness' to the self-understanding of indigenous populations, 'a kind of racism…that finds literally unintelligible the thought that its victims could seriously be wronged' (Gaita, 2000: 77, 79).

The second defining feature of Lockean autonomy is that it entails a vision of the good life which is ethnocentric. It never occurred to Locke that for native Indians 'self-determination' might have different meaning and significance, and might involve a more harmonious relation to people, land and other species. This is captured well in Locke's rather perplexed comparative evaluation of Indian and English ways of life.[3] Locke saw Indian ways of life as 'an expression of moral pathology', 'irrational' and 'tribal', and as Parekh notes, since moral monism 'cannot see any good outside its favoured way of life, it either avoids all but minimum contact with them or seeks to assimilate them by peaceful or violent means…' (Parekh, 2000: 49). Indeed, that Locke hoped to assimilate American Indians into civil society through 'peaceful' economic means, so as to reap the benefits of

'rational and industrious' living is testament to the colonizing character to his approach to autonomy.

Although Mill's work differs in very important respects compared with Locke's,[4] his work reproduces similar, imperialist discourse. In what follows I situate this discourse in the context of the postcolonial feminist critique of western feminism. Given Mill was a feminist he will be used to highlight the way postcolonial feminists perceive the continuities between historical and contemporary western feminisms with respect to their discursive representations of autonomy and 'other' cultures and places, and indeed, 'other' women's lives.

4. 1. ii. Discourses of Autonomy and Difference in Liberal and Western Feminisms

A postcolonial reading of Mill's approach to autonomy reveals how it is shaped by the discourse of liberal imperialism. A few pages into *On Liberty* a caveat is introduced to Mill's theory of freedom and by extension his view of representative government, within which his model of autonomy resides. His theory is not intended to apply to those who are not 'in the maturity of their faculties'. Along with children of civilized societies, Mill says, 'we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage…Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end' (Mill, 2008a: 15). Despotism was seen as a necessary and temporary means to national self-government and greater freedom. Such arguments are littered throughout Mill's work, and can be understood with reference to the 'conjectural history of the Scottish Enlightenment' which influenced Mill's vision (Kohn and O'Neill, 2006: 210). Central to the construction of this conjectural history is the language of 'civilization' and 'barbarism', terms which map onto geographical and temporal understandings of human progress.[5] Mill understood that some peoples and places progressed from barbarism toward civilization comparatively sooner than others. His approach to autonomy and theory of freedom and representative government were not intended to apply to those peoples and places that were

'backward', and which were more suited for paternal despotism as a temporary though necessary form of rule.

Mill's support for imperial rule in India points to his more general advocacy of civilized rule over territorial colonies that were less civilized or 'backwards' and in their 'non-age'. Mill argued against the 'despotism of custom' everywhere and anywhere but postcolonial theorists see his positioning of England and Europe as more civilized and less under the sway of such despotism compared with 'dark Africa' and the 'whole East' as a normative evaluation (Mill, 2008a: 78). It inferred that the people who resided in non-Europeans lands had 'no right to territorial integrity. The right to one's way of life and to territorial non-intervention only belonged to those who were 'mature' enough to think and judge for themselves' (Parekh, 2000: 45). Central to this discourse is the claim that certain peoples cannot walk the road to collective self-determination alone, that they need the assistance of a more civilized people to do this. But this also implied that forms of collective autonomy did not actually exist or follow the *right* road to collective autonomy. Much like Locke, Mill's ethnocentrism prevented him from seeing as valuable forms of collective organisation and autonomy that did not fit civilized models of self-government. Parekh is right to note that ethnocentrism is informed by a 'primarily judgemental' approach to difference; 'it only has limited interest in understanding' other ways of life, and as such 'grossly misunderstands' them, their 'specificity and complex internal structures' (Parekh, 2000: 49).

Postcolonial feminists argue contemporary western feminisms have inherited this discursive framework, knowingly or unknowingly, and that it continues to shape their discussions of autonomy in the context of difference, particularly differences between women (e.g., Ahmed, 1982; Amos and Parmar, 2001; Spellman, 1988; Charusheela, 2001). Postcolonial feminists see the notion of Western-led human progress still permeates western feminisms and their cross-cultural and cross-national analyses. In its contemporary guise, the categories 'civilization' and 'barbarism' are replaced by the categories 'modern' and 'traditional' (Ong, 2001; Razack, 2007). Deconstructing the binaries which constitute this imperial discourse, postcolonial

feminists recognise autonomy as a principle and trait mapped onto those contexts and lives which are deemed 'modern'. Autonomy is represented as something that is not only valued in modern contexts but as something which actually structures the lives of Western women in these contexts. By contrast, women lumped into the 'traditional' category are defined by their lack of autonomy. Mohanty calls the effects of such discourse 'discursive colonization' since it 'implies a relation of structural domination' and 'suppression of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question' (Mohanty, 2003b: 49). One effect of discursive colonization is that women who are placed 'under western eyes' are 'robbed of all *agency*' (Mohanty, 2003b; 1998: 261; original emphasis).

Mohanty finds in western feminism the production of '"an average third-world woman" [who] leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being "being third world" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-orientated, victimized, etc)' (Mohanty, 2003b: 53). Postcolonial feminists argue that while non-Western women are 'robbed of all agency' in the discursive production of difference, Western feminists investing in discursive colonization position themselves as autonomous agents. As Aihwa Ong puts it, 'feminist scholars have a tendency to proceed by reversal: non-Western women are what we are not…These self-validating exercises affirm our feminist subjectivity while denying those of non-Western women' (Ong, 2001: 114; Mohanty, 2003b: 53).

In light of this, postcolonial feminists argue that the discursive production of autonomy and difference in western feminism is accompanied by a paternalistic and judgemental approach to people and places located elsewhere. Robbed of all agency non-Western women become the objects of Western feminist concerns. Much like the ethical impulse informing Mill's imperial discourse, a 'rationality of rescue' is seen to inform western feminisms and their efforts in alleviating non-Western women's oppression (Razack, 2007: 7). As well as objecting to the patronising overtones of this rationality, postcolonial feminists argue the rationality of rescue is doomed to fail because it is built from highly questionable, usually inaccurate,

knowledge claims. In this sense the paternalism of western feminisms is underpinned by a judgemental approach to women located elsewhere. Postcolonial feminists find that 'When feminists look overseas, they frequently seek to establish *their* authority on the backs of non-Western women, determining for them the meanings and goals of their lives' (Ong, 2001: 108; original emphasis).

This postcolonial feminist critique of discourses of autonomy also applies to western feminist responses to multiculturalism. Again Mill can be used to show the historical roots of these responses. Dovetailing with the discourse of liberal imperialism in Mill's work is a 'liberal pluralist' approach to cultural and religious diversity in more civilized societies (Baum, 1997). Mill was a staunch defender of diversity, 'experiments in living', and freedom of association. But like most liberals, he tended to characterise groups or collectives as voluntary associations which individuals are free to join and exit, and which are valuable insofar as they embody and reflect this freedom. Liberals have usually skimmed over the significance of non-voluntary groups for their members and for political organisation more generally. This is particularly evident in Mill's comments on Mormon polygamy where his feminism and liberal pluralism come together.

What Mill had to say about polygamy points to two aspects of the discourse of autonomy and difference which, it is argued, are evident in contemporary western feminist responses to multiculturalism (Baum, 1997). First, because Mill views polygamy through a lens which renders it a patriarchal institution, he neglects to consider the importance of religious and cultural commitments on the part of Mormons, and how these commitments are equally constitutive of their self-conceptions and identities alongside gender. Second, Mill's approach to autonomy is seen to embody 'a secular modernist bias' which rests on 'freedom of choice' rather than 'freedom of conscience' and is therefore representative of 'only one possible mode of free agency' (Baum, 1997: 240, 241). Drawing on postcolonial feminist insights, Bruce Baum explains that Mill's approach to autonomy 'smuggles a particular conception of the good life into the criteria of what it means to be free'; it is argued he rejected the notion that autonomous reflection can be signified by

endorsing religious and cultural commitments based on 'traditional' grounds, that is, those not subject to critical reflection independent of traditional authority (Baum, 1997: 240).

Postcolonial feminists have argued the discourse of autonomy and difference fuses with liberal pluralism in contemporary western feminist responses to multiculturalism. For some postcolonial feminists this was especially evident in Susan Okin's (1999) much-debated *Is Multiculturalism Bad For Women?* In this work Okin critically questions the assumption that extending group rights to cultural and religious minorities is unproblematic from the perspective of gender equality, understood as a legal principle in liberal states and a moral principle signifying human equality. For instance, Bonnie Honig sees the Western-led human progress trope and the 'modern/traditional' (and 'civilized/barbaric') dichotomy in Okin's assumption that liberal states and their majority cultures are 'less' patriarchal than some minority cultures residing in liberal states (Honig, 1999: 38).[6]

Echoing Mill's liberal pluralism, Okin's take on multiculturalism seems only concerned with analysing collectives and practices on account of their patriarchal status and gendered dynamics. Postcolonial feminists argue this response squeezes very complex questions regarding subjectivity, identity, religion, culture, and politics into one overriding question about the operation of patriarchal power and its autonomy-restrictive characteristics. It is claimed western feminists like Okin discursively colonize women, robbing them of their agency. Thus one critic challenges the way Okin 'speak[s] in her dominant voice about the inessential Other…[who] is rendered remarkably indistinguishable and voiceless. It is allowed into the discussion only through the voice and perceptions of the dominant "I"' (Al-Hibri, 1999: 42).

The postcolonial feminist critique of autonomy signals a distaste for the idea as it has been formulated and theorized within liberal and western thought, past and present. In this section I have tried to make sense of the postcolonial feminist critique of autonomy by placing it in historical and political context, but also to better

understand and clarify how postcolonial feminists rethink and reclaim the idea of autonomy in the following section. They clearly wish to move away from the meaning of autonomy associated with the colonizing subject of capitalism, and the association of autonomy with imperial discourse based on paternalism and judgementalism. For postcolonial feminists who are aware of the monopoly liberalism has on the idea of autonomy, they turn away from liberal approaches to autonomy to construct their own and reclaim autonomy. For those unfamiliar with this liberal monopoly, or who care not to articulate a valuation of autonomy *against* liberalism, they theorize autonomy on their own terms and grounded in different intellectual and political traditions.

4. 2. Reclaiming and Rethinking Autonomy in Postcolonial Feminism

In this section I examine how the idea of autonomy has been reclaimed and rethought in postcolonial feminism. I focus on two themes that seem to me to be prominent in postcolonial feminist literature. These themes demonstrate the importance postcolonial feminists attach to the basic claim that women's autonomy has 'differing contextual roots/routes' (Eisenstein, 2004: 184). Part one looks to the theme of decolonization in the work of postcolonial feminists who endorse a notion of autonomy grounded in a conception of critical pedagogy. Part two examines how the concept of intersectionality has informed accounts of marginalized women's struggles for autonomy.

4. 2. i. Decolonization, Critical Pedagogy and Autonomy

The ethical and political importance of decolonization and its relationship to autonomy is largely the focus of anti-capitalist Third World and indigenous feminists (Mohanty, 1990; Alexander and Mohanty, 1997; Mohanty, 2003a; Shiva, 2004a, 2004b; Green, 2007). The advocacy of decolonization is preceded by a claim that challenges a central aspect of colonizing logic.[7] These postcolonial feminists challenge head-on the assumption that Third World women, and indeed, any colonized people, cannot represent themselves in intellectual, political, economic, and

culture life. Thus they reject the logic which justifies colonial and (neo)imperial rule in terms of the idea that those subject to colonization are not moral agents and therefore cannot represent themselves in a variety of domains. Postcolonial feminists also challenge practices of discursive colonization, where homogenising cultural presentations of Third World women are mediated through the colonizing gaze more than anything else. In opposition to colonizing logic, postcolonial feminists assert the need for understanding 'the complexity of our historical (and positional) differences and the need for creating an analytical space for understanding Third World women as the *subjects* of our various struggles *in history*' (Mohanty, 1990: 180; original emphasis).

With the dehumanizing effects of material and discursive colonization in mind, postcolonial feminists have made connections between processes of decolonization, critical pedagogy and the development of autonomy. Critical pedagogy theory conceives of public education in a broad sense, including but not limited to schools and academic institutions, and is informed by a liberatory vision to 'further democratic projects and economic redistribution' (Goodman, 2004: 8). Postcolonial feminists have been particularly influenced by the pedagogical approach constructed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993). Writing using the figures of 'the oppressors' and 'the oppressed', Freire theorizes the psychology of power and violence engendered by economic and cultural colonization, and the dehumanization that results for both the oppressors and the oppressed, albeit in different forms. The intended subjects of his critical pedagogy are the oppressed. They are the subjects who can 'liberate themselves and their oppressors as well', since it is unlikely the oppressors will give up their power and privilege, and because the oppressed are more likely to see the necessity of struggling against dehumanization (Freire, 1993: 26). Rejecting liberal paternalism which treats the oppressed as objects of concern, Freire's pedagogy is one 'which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation' (Freire, 1993: 30; original emphasis).

At the heart of this critical pedagogy is a model of human freedom comprising 'autonomy and responsibility' (Freire, 1993: 29). Freire claims the oppressed become 'human *in the process of achieving* freedom' (1993: 31; my emphasis). As I understand it, this process is constituted by dialogue and engagement through critical reflection and praxis. This process is therefore one of decolonization, which enables the development of a decolonized consciousness and a shift away from dominating relationships. Freedom is not a 'gift', as Freire (1993: 29) puts it, granted by states or powerful political and economic institutions. It is not an 'ideal' or a 'myth'. Rather, freedom can be a concrete element of human existence if it is pursued autonomously and responsibly by the oppressed in their engagement with each other and the oppressors. In a nutshell then, Freire argues colonization engenders dehumanization, and so decolonization is a call for humanization in relational terms and with respect to consciousness. It is in the struggle toward decolonization, which is a struggle of freedom, that autonomy is developed and exercised.

Postcolonial feminists Chandra Mohanty and M. Jacqui Alexander (1997) have reinterpreted Freire's critical pedagogy in the context of constructing their vision of transborder, participatory, feminist democracy.[8] Echoing Freire whilst being a little more specific about autonomy, Alexander and Mohanty understand 'agency' 'as the *conscious and ongoing reproduction of the terms of one's existence* while *taking responsibility of this process*…anchored in the practice of thinking of oneself as part of feminist collectivities and organizations' (1997: xxvii; my emphasis). As I interpret this, developing a critical consciousness of the conditions of one's existence then enables women to take control of the terms of their existence. For instance, through critical pedagogy women can challenge practices of discursive colonization: 'Third World women's self-conscious assumption of responsibility for how their identities and histories are represented constitutes an act of political agency, an act that…is necessary for them to begin to define the terms of their own lives' (Stone-Mediatore, 2000: 121).

Developing critical consciousness suggests overcoming ignorance and the development of self-knowledge on the part of marginalised women with respect to their social position and relations of power that structure their lives. But it also means struggling against 'interior colonization' (Fuss, 2000), or aspects of consciousness and identity that have been conditioned by experiences of colonization. For instance, Mohanty and Alexander note the psychic instability and dehumanization evident in behaviour suggestive of 'imitation of the colonizer, horizontal violence, self-depreciation due to internalized oppression, self-distrust, psychic and material dependency, desire to assimilate', and so on (1997: xxvii). Working through 'interior colonization' is not an isolated affair, however, and is not viewed as producing a loss of agency. In this vision of autonomy, women are always thought of as agents, and anti-capitalist, anti-colonizing feminist collectives and organizational practices are viewed as the loci within which women's autonomy can be developed. As Alexander and Mohanty state:

> Decolonization involves thinking oneself out of the spaces of domination, but always *within* the context of a collective or communal process (the distinction between identification as a woman and gender consciousness – the former refers to a social designation, the latter to a critical awareness of the implications of this designation). This thinking "out of" colonization happens only through action and reflection, through praxis. (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997: xxviii)

The continual contextualisation of critical pedagogy in relation to feminist collectives and transformative organizational practices is important for understanding this view of autonomy and model of human freedom. This is because the end of critical pedagogy is humanization, or the transformation of the human relationships, and this requires action (Freire, 1993: 31). With this in mind, Mohanty (1990) has sought to emphasise the public context of critical pedagogical practices, and their importance for creating and sustaining 'public cultures of dissent'. Against the background of theorizing such cultures within liberal educational institutions, Mohanty writes, 'a

public culture of dissent entails creating spaces for epistemological standpoints that are grounded in the *interests* of people and which recognize the *materiality* of conflict, of privilege, and of domination' (Mohanty, 1990: 207; original emphasis). The creation of public spaces for marginalized yet politicised voices, in which 'the oppressed' and 'the oppressors' engage in dialogue, is one way humanization can be achieved.

The idea of public cultures of dissent can be seen to inform Alexander and Mohanty's (1997) vision of a feminist, transborder participatory democracy. That they envision some feminist movements as *sites* and *sources* of democratization (Eschle, 2001: 141) helps to crystallize the radical reach and potential of critical pedagogy. It also helps to show how the Freirian model of human freedom, defined by autonomy and responsibility, sits at the heart of this democratic vision. Practising critical pedagogy within feminist movements enables them to become sites of democratization. It fosters an active challenge to racism, heterosexism and other exclusionary hierarchies and relations within feminist movements. As Alexander and Mohanty reiterate, 'Decolonization has a fundamentally pedagogical dimension - an imperative to understand, to reflect on, and to transform relations of objectification and dehumanization, and to pass this knowledge along to future generations' (1997: xxviii). In conjunction with wider public cultures of dissent and other movements, feminist mobilisations are also conceived of as sources of democratization and in this light are 'a practice of active decolonization' (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997: xxxvi).

The relationship between practices of decolonization and critical pedagogy as explicated by Alexander and Mohanty offer two crucial insights into the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy. First, they offer a notion of autonomy understood as the *conscious and ongoing reproduction of the terms of one's existence* w*hile taking responsibility for this process* attached to a Freirian model of human freedom. Because autonomy is imagined to be achieved via critical pedagogical practices in the context of transborder participatory democracy, Alexander and Mohanty reposition 'the people themselves…as the chief agents in defining the course of global and economic processes' against the view that the state is and ought to be the chief agent

(1997: xli). This argument therefore offers a radical challenge to the neoliberal approach to autonomy imagined as an attribute of 'private' individuals which is *protected by* the state. For these postcolonial feminists, states at present do not protect 'the people's' autonomy but actively shut it down by perpetuating militarism and war, and by shrinking the scope of citizen-driven (as opposed to corporate-driven) civil society and the importance of public institutions vis-à-vis citizens lives. The second related insight that Alexander and Mohanty offer about the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy is that achieving autonomy is not perceived as an individualistic endeavour. As this section has shown, the emphasis on collective and relational contexts shapes the approach to autonomy. In the next part I further examine this emphasis by turning to the concept of intersectionality, focusing on the way autonomy is theorized when women are conceived of as members of groups.

4. 2. ii. Intersectionality and Autonomy from the Margins

The idea of intersectionality has had a double impact on the way women's autonomy is theorized in feminist theory. Coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1998) to highlight the inadequacies of perceiving discriminatory practices in accord with 'single-axis frameworks' of gender *or* race, the concept of intersectionality signifies a commitment to viewing identity as 'formed by interlocking and mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality' and any other social group markers (Nash, 2008: 3). Theorizing women's autonomy with 'single-axis frameworks' or in a way that does not take intersectionality into account, is seen as a problematic move. In the context of feminist theory, intersectionality has problematized 'the theoretical hegemony of gender and the exclusions of white western feminism' (Davis, 2008: 72). Postcolonial feminists have argued that the interests of black and third world women are not, if at all, well-reflected in white, western feminism.

Against this backdrop, some postcolonial feminists have used the idea of intersectionality to theorize marginalized subjectivities in contexts where group-based inequalities are normalized (Nash, 2008: 10). The idea of intersectionality helps show how marginalised women are ascribed and categorized as members of

social groups. While ascription and categorization may be the product of classifications stemming from relations of domination and subordination, intersectional identities are also understood to create positive group identifications. Being a relative term 'marginalization' implies a focus on those subjects who, as part of social groups, are marginalized in relation to dominant groups. Arguably the idea of intersectionality allows for a better understanding of marginalized women's 'struggles for empowerment' (Davis, 2008: 71). Insofar as this is accurate it suggests postcolonial feminists offer *views of autonomy from the margins.* If postcolonial feminists offer such views, the 'imagery' they employ, as Diana Meyers points out, 'is suggestive of heretofore *buried agentic potential*' (Meyers, 2000b: 153; my emphasis). 'Buried' is an apt metaphor, for it suggests views of autonomy are lying hidden in feminist thought, perhaps as a result of practices of discursive colonization. Representing these views here will, I assume, help make sense of the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy.

Perhaps one of the most marginalized views of autonomy represented within postcolonial feminism stems from Indigenous feminist theory (Green, 2007).[9] Although there are multiple indigenous feminisms emerging from different locations across the globe, the convergences between them with respect to the idea of autonomy is the focus here. Andrea Smith notes Indigenous women 'address both colonialism and sexism through an intersectional framework', articulating the need for 'tribal sovereignty' as well as 'personal sovereignty' which signifies 'every woman's right to power and control over her body and life' (Smith, 2007: 101-102). 'Sovereignty' can be read as synonymous with 'autonomy', and in the context of tribes or indigenous nations refers to political self-rule. It has also been referred to as 'tribal autonomy' or self-determination (Johnson, 2007: 52; Holder, 2005). As far as I can tell, autonomy in this context means freedom from state and corporate domination, and the power of self-governance, including with respect to the administration of indigenous conceptions of justice (e.g., Coker, 1999; Stewart-Harawira, 2007: 136).

For Indigenous feminists, the reclamation of tribal autonomy, understood through the notion of collective rights, is set against historical processes of colonization and resistance to neo-imperialism (Stewart-Harawira, 2007: 130). As Locke's justification for colonialism partly illustrates, these processes have included colonization of Indigenous lands, genocide, assimilation of methods of subsistence, cultural formations, and spiritual ways of being, forced dispersion of families, and forced sterilization of native women. Movements for tribal autonomy therefore recall the theme and significance of decolonization for marginalised women. Indeed, some have framed decolonization and tribal autonomy as a matter of human rights, drawing on Freire's model of human freedom (e.g., La Rocque, 2007).

At the same time, for Indigenous feminists the reclamation of tribal autonomy is inseparable from their own personal and collective struggles of autonomy within their communities. 'Regardless of its origins in Native communities, according to Andrea Smith, 'sexism operates with full force today and requires strategies that directly address it' (Smith, 2007: 97). For example, the use of Navajo Peacemaking and practices of restorative justice have been employed in some Indigenous communities with a view to enhance women's autonomy in cases of domestic violence (Coker, 1999).

Indigenous feminist theory highlights the collective dimensions of women's autonomy by foregrounding the importance of tribal autonomy. Other postcolonial feminists who invoke the idea of intersectionality have similarly highlighted the collective or group-based dimensions of women's autonomy, but not in the sense of form of political autonomy. Like postcolonial feminists who theorize decolonization, those who focus on intersectional identity and subjectivity invoke a distinction between the realm of consciousness and that of relationships in their accounts of autonomy. This is perhaps best conceptualised using the distinction between 'intrapsychic autonomy' and 'interpersonal autonomy' (Saharso, 2000: 235). Intrapsychic autonomy refers to 'the ability to maintain enduring mental representations of sources of self-esteem and conform, permitting more flexible adaption to the vicissitudes of the immediate environment', and 'the ability to

maintain a conscious awareness of one's inner thoughts and feelings when these differ from one's overt actions and may be socially unacceptable' (Ewing in Saharso, 2000: 235, 236) Interpersonal autonomy refers to the ability and right to act in a self-determining manner in social contexts.

This distinction between intrapsychic autonomy and interpersonal autonomy is alluded to in Patricia Hill Collins's critical analyses of the journeys of 'self-definition' experienced and articulated by African-American women in the US context (Collins, 1990: 91-114). Self-definition is recognised as being a key ingredient to autonomy, closely accompanied by self-knowledge (Meyers, 1989, 2002). Drawing on Black women's experiences, Collins argues, 'Identity is not the goal but rather *the point of departure* in the process of self-definition. In this process Black women *journey toward an understanding* of how our personal lives have been fundamentally shaped by interlocking systems of race, gender, and class oppression' (Collins, 1990: 106; my emphasis). For Collins, self-definition and self-knowledge are intimately related; garnering an understanding of their social position is deemed to be a vital part of building Black women's self-knowledge. With self-knowledge Collins argues Black women work toward developing a sense of self which they interpret and authorize, whilst simultaneously resisting oppressive racial and sexist ideology.[10] In light of this, Collins suggests intrapsychic autonomy may be a vital element of Black women's everyday lives, using the idea of 'consciousness as a sphere of freedom' and 'self-knowledge as a sphere of freedom' (Collins, 1990: 111). In social contexts where racism and sexism thrive, intrapsychic autonomy may be a woman's fortress: 'If a Black woman is forced to remain "motionless on the outside," she can always develop the "inside" of a changed consciousness as a sphere of freedom. Becoming empowered through self-knowledge, even within conditions that severely limits one's ability to act, is essential' (Collins, 1990: 111).

Collins suggests in social contexts where interpersonal autonomy may be severely restrained it should not be assumed intrapsychic autonomy is absent. But what is helpful about Collins's analyses is that it also emphasises the necessity of having some degree of interpersonal autonomy. Indeed, her argument about the value of self-

definition only makes sense when placed in the context of 'safe spaces' and a 'realm of relatively safe discourse' (Collins, 1990: 95). Thus Collins writes, 'self is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from others. Instead self is found in the context of family and community…connectedness among individuals provides Black women deeper, more meaningful self-definition' (Collins, 1990: 106-107). Indeed, a connected, relational self is said to enable journeys toward self-definition that are 'more fully human' and thus 'less objectified' (Collins, 1990: 105). Extended families, church organisations, African-American institutions, the blues tradition and Black women's literature are argued to provide positive safe spaces and discourse which Black women can draw on. However, Collins is careful not to romanticise Black communities as safe spaces. She writes that 'self-reliance and independence' including economic self-sufficiency, have been central to Black women's 'vision of womanhood' (Collins, 1990: 109). It is worth pointing out this is not the same idea as Lockean autonomy, where rational egoism and instrumentalism underpin the pursuit of economic gain. Rather, Collins finds that Black women have tied economic self-sufficiency and self-reliance to 'issues of survival' and the freedom to break away from restrictive or oppressive relationships if they develop.

The distinction between intrapyschic and interpersonal autonomy is also present in the work of Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa and her use of the idea of mestiza consciousness (1997). Anzaldúa writes of intersectional identities in a different way than Collins, for she emphasises the experiences of la mestiza, or 'any subject who…has a subjectivity characterized by a diversity of different identities and worldviews that mingle and collide within the self in both conflict and mutual influence' (Barvosa-Carter, 2007: 7). To illustrate, Anzaldúa's own sense of self comprises of a variety of identifications and cultures: born into a poor Chicana family situated at the borderlands between the US and Mexico, she straddles Mexican, Native, and Anglo cultures; she is a lesbian 'disowned' by her own people; and a feminist who is 'cultureless' as she challenges 'the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos' (Anzaldúa, 1997: 237). Anzaldúa's thinking about mestiza subjectivity and the collective character of autonomy therefore offers a different view of autonomy from the margins.

The idea of mestiza subjectivity offers important insights about the formation of selves and intrapsychic autonomy. For Anzaldúa, the journey toward self-definition is far from smooth or easy: 'Craddled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of the flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war' for she is 'torn between ways' (1997: 234). These struggles are, furthermore, characterised by ambivalence and ambiguity towards oneself and the multiple communities or groups one identifies with, as she puts it, 'The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The mestiza's dual or multiple personality is plagued psychic restlessness' (Anzaldúa, 1997: 234). However, it is these very states and processes, of ambivalence and ambiguity, which offer important insights about autonomy. A main element of Anzaldúa's rethinking of subjectivity is her critique of the view 'that consistency and wholeheartedness in thought and action are *always* the necessary basis for sound moral and political thought and free will' (Barvosa-Carter, 2007: 8; original emphasis).

This understanding of mestiza subjectivity highlights the complex ties between intrapsychic and interpersonal autonomy, and the possibilities of both. In light of the mestiza's intersectional identity (her varied, often incompatible but nonetheless valued relational and communal identifications), consistent and wholehearted identification in one direction or the other is likely to be an unsuccessful strategy in terms of self-definition. Anzaldúa sees the poverty in 'convergent' and 'rigid' critical reasoning:

> Rigidity means death.[11] Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and towards a more

> whole perspective, *one that includes rather than excludes*….The mestiza copes by developing a *tolerance* for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity…She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality. She operates in a pluralistic mode. (Anzaldúa 1997: 235; my emphasis)

Because of the conditions of mestiza subjectivity and the struggle toward self-definition, interpersonal autonomy is something that has to be negotiated.

In particular, tolerance and ambivalence may enable mestizas to negotiate their way through and between different relational and community contexts. For example, Chicana lesbians may leave their sexual identity at the door, so to speak, when they visit their families or attend community gatherings which are heterosexist. Yet they may be able to live out of the closet in urban Anglo-dominated centres, and in this context, their racial and cultural difference may invite a valuation of difference, solidarity with other Chicana queers or racism.[12] Anzaldúa therefore shows how personal and social relationships are both enabling and constraining for la mestiza. She also shows how it makes little sense to conceptualise autonomy in ways that make total, definite, and/or exclusionary identification with relational and communal commitments necessary conditions. As Edwina Barvosa-Carter suggests, 'mestiza autonomy' is a dynamic and complex achievement. Self-definition 'involves the process of choosing and syncretically creating one's own set of outlooks from the variety of elements within one's array of social relations and identities' (Barvosa-Carter, 2007: 7). Interpersonal autonomy is enabled to the extent la mestiza can act on her 'hybrid set of endorsements' (Barvosa-Carter, 2007: 9).

The notion of la mestiza subjectivity points toward the role that the development of critical consciousness plays in the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy more generally. In the first part of this section, I showed why, for some postcolonial feminists, the development of critical consciousness is central to pedagogical practices which aim to advance processes of decolonization. For others, decolonization is a central theme in the context of demands for forms of collective

autonomy. Turning to more views of autonomy from the margins, the notion of intrapsychic autonomy appeared to be particularly relevant for postcolonial feminists. In the next section, I assess this postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy.

4. 3. Assessing the Postcolonial Feminist Approach to Autonomy

In this final section of the chapter, I consider three responses to postcolonial feminism and its engagement with autonomy. First, I consider the criticism that postcolonial feminists seek to romanticise marginality in their understanding of subjectivity. Second, I consider the extent to which the postcolonial feminist approach may be characterised as one that is part of what has been called an 'emergent humanism', due to its emphasis on decolonization and autonomy. In the third part I consider the postcolonial feminist approach in light of its troubled dialogues with western feminists.

4. 3. i. Questioning 'Autonomy from the Margins'

The emphasis on marginality in postcolonial feminism has been interpreted by some critics as excessive and unproductive, and this critique impinges quite significantly on the way postcolonial feminists present views of autonomy from the margins. Jennifer Nash's (2008) review of the notion of intersectionality captures this critique well. She argues when intersectionality is used to explore experience and identity there is a tendency for some postcolonial theorists to romanticise marginalised experiences and identities. Specifically she argues black feminists often suggest 'that black women are *inherently resilient* subjects who *retain an innate creativity* even in the midst of the opposition that a patriarchal white-dominated culture produces'. Nash goes on, theorists who focus on marginality 'ultimately *romanticize and idealise positions of social subordination* and *reinstall* conceptions that black women's bodies are sites of 'strength' and 'transcendence' rather than complex spaces of multiple meanings' (Nash, 2008: 89; my emphasis). Although Nash focuses on black women as subjects of intersectional theory, her critique is equally

applicable to postcolonial feminists who theorize intersectionality and decolonization in relation to various subject positions.

In this critique there is a worry that in documenting and theorizing autonomy from the margins, postcolonial feminists 'reinstall' essentialist conceptions of experience and identity. This worry can, I think, be shelved by recognising the prevalence of standpoint epistemology in postcolonial feminism and the way it informs the construction of views of autonomy from the margins. Rather than seeking to reinstall or reproduce essentialism, postcolonial feminists want to 'reveal *other ways of knowing* that challenge the normative discourse…the distorted ways in which the dominant groups construct their assumptions…we see from the sidelines, from our space of unlocation, the unfolding project of domination' (Mirza, 1997: 5; original emphasis; Mohanty, 2003a: 232). Other ways of knowing are 'achieved through opposition struggle' and are not merely dependent on being a marginalised subject; it 'requires the formulation of challenges to conceptions of reality that uphold the status quo. It means that subordinated groups must systematize and interrogate their own world views and identify key forms of power and strategies for change' (Eschle, 2001: 11).

With this is mind, I find it difficult to see how postcolonial feminists present marginalized women as 'inherently resilient', and where the romantic and idealized visions of social subordination are in postcolonial feminism. However I can understand why this impression might arise. Postcolonial feminists argue that by overcoming ignorance of one's social position(s) and developing self-knowledge in this respect, marginalised subjects can *become* resilient. Their emphasis on intrapsychic autonomy, consciousness as a sphere of freedom, critical consciousness, and the like, is an important reminder about the human ability to quietly and often silently retain a firm sense of self against those who seek to dominate. Even if women are at times surrounded by oppressive or constraining *relationships* it is possible, having developed their self-knowledge and self-definition in the context of more egalitarian relationships, that they are intrapsychically autonomous. Audre Lorde captures this point well when, in the midst of addressing 'those who stand

outside the circle of [American] society's definition of acceptable women', she writes, 'those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference – those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older - know '*survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled' (Lorde, 1988: 160). This distinction between intrapsychic and interpersonal autonomy also shows that postcolonial feminists do not romanticise social subordination. They well know that the *freedom to act* autonomously is often absent or reduced in the context of dominance and oppression, especially where relations of power are institutionalised.

In this view it seems that intrapsychic autonomy and critical consciousness are not easily accomplished. Postcolonial feminists who follow Paulo Freire would, I assume, subscribe to his argument that 'the oppressed' often suffer from 'a fear of freedom' (Freire, 1993: 28). Instead of seeking autonomy and responsibility, and 'consciously creating the terms of one's existence', as Alexander and Mohanty put it, the oppressed may imitate the oppressor or find comfort in the role of being oppressed, thereby abdicating responsibility for themselves. This existential dilemma is well captured in Simone de Beauvoir's discussion of 'the metaphysical risk of liberty' and the 'anxiety of liberty'; as she puts it, 'along with the ethical urge of each individual to affirm his subjective experience there is also the temptation to forgo liberty and become a thing' (Beauvoir, 1997: 21, 730). If one forgoes liberty then one risks being caught in a relation which entails subjection. Recognising this risk and anxiety for 'the oppressors' and 'the oppressed' respectively, Alexander and Mohanty reflect on the 'emotional terror produced by attempts to divest oneself of power and privilege and in the struggle for self-determination' (1997: xlii). The pedagogical model of autonomy they advocate, within the context of transformative feminist collectives, is partly designed with a view to constructing 'an ethical commitment that aims to transform terror into engagement based on empathy and a vision of justice of all' (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997: xlii). The materialization of this ethical commitment is far from inevitable, according to these postcolonial feminists. Recognising the 'risk', 'anxiety', and 'terror' which accompanies psychic and relational processes of decolonization strongly suggests postcolonial feminists do

not romanticise positions of social subordination or conceive of marginalised subjects as 'inherently resilient'.

The perception that some postcolonial feminists idealize marginal subject positions may also be explained by their argument that these subject positions are the potential source of an ethical vision, contra the view that it is those with power and wealth who are 'more' autonomous. This is especially true for postcolonial feminists who adopt the Freirian model of human freedom and for those who look to marginalized subjectivities via the concept of intersectionality. 'The oppressors' or dominating subjects might well think and behave according to the neoliberal approach to autonomy. They might well be rational egoists who pursue material and economic gain and in the process turn other human beings into instruments. Postcolonial feminists like Mohanty and Alexander would argue, however, that this way of knowing and being dehumanizes dominant subjects *because* they dehumanize others. Neoliberal autonomy is ethically hollow; dominant subjects cannot be ethically autonomous as long as they invest in 'a strictly materialistic conception of existence' (Freire, 1990: 40).[13] The idea that marginalised subjects offer the potential source of an ethical vision has been led some to argue that postcolonial thought embodies an 'emergent humanism'. In the next part I ask to what extent this is an accurate characterisation of the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy.

4. 3. ii. Toward an 'Emergent Humanism'?

It has recently been suggested postcolonial thought embodies the ingredients of an 'emergent humanism' (Alessandrini, 2005) or 'a new humanistic paradigm' (Robbins, 2005). Reviewing the work of key postcolonial thinkers Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, Anthony Alessandrini finds Fanon advocates a 'transnational consciousness, and…what might be called an emergent transnational humanism' (2005: 438). Similarly, feminist Jean Curthoys draws on Fanon and the work of Paulo Freire and comes to similar conclusions. She is more specific about the connections between these anti-colonialist thinkers, humanism, and the value of autonomy. What these thinkers argued, according to Curthoys, is 'that the possibility

of genuine human respect (equality on this account), the possibility of autonomy and the abolition of relations of power are interdependent' (Curthoys, 1997: 31). In particular, Curthoys argues that the value of autonomy stems from a more fundamental human need. She states 'as a value and as a human capacity [autonomy] is said to be dependent on the drive for recognition'; 'the necessity of autonomy' derives from 'the necessity of love' (Curthoys, 1997: 30). Reflecting on the way Fanon and Freire emphasise the importance of decolonization as an aspect of *human* liberation, Curthoys concludes, 'It is in the course of the movement of resistance to power that the drive for respect or love becomes a drive for autonomy or self-determination' (Curthoys, 1997: 31). I would argue this conclusion accurately characterises the ethical impulse underpinning the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy.

Postcolonial feminists routinely discuss self-determination as something that emerges from 'the movement of resistance to power' and the 'drive for respect or love'. For example, Patricia Hill Collins notes, 'In a society in which no one is obligated to respect African-American women, we have long admonished one another to have self-respect and to demand the respect of others' (1990: 107). She also ties respect and autonomy to the humanity of Black women: 'Regardless of the actual content of Black women's self-definitions, the act of insisting on Black female self-definition *validates Black women's power as human subjects'* (Collins, 1990: 107: my emphasis). But the connection between humanism and autonomy is more easily seen in the work of Alexander and Mohanty and their adoption of Freire's critical pedagogy and model of human freedom. Their emphasis on decolonization shows how they tie resistance to colonizing forms of power with the idea of self-determination. Through critical pedagogy they hope to foster the conditions in which autonomy can be realised and also human equality can be made real through learning the necessity of respect. Given that Alexander and Mohanty also link the importance of critical pedagogy to a feminist transnational participatory democracy it could be argued they hope to foster a transnational feminism which is informed by an emergent humanism.

The possible controversy with my argument arises from the fact that liberalism is often regarded as the modern home of humanism, with its ideals of autonomy, freedom and equality purported to be universal values. But as this thesis has shown, and as postcolonial feminists well know, liberal theorists like Locke and Kant advocated a 'Eurocentric humanism' based on 'false universalizing and masculinist assumptions' (Mohanty, 2003a: 224). My argument could therefore be seen making a claim about postcolonial feminism's inconsistency. Alessandrini notes that this is one criticism flung at postcolonial thinkers: in the end, they 'return to the very "neo-liberal universalism"' they purport to reject, and advocate a 'residual humanism' derivate of 'the model provided by European humanism' (2005: 448). My argument could also been seen as somehow trying to reduce postcolonial feminism to liberalism or as conflating the two. Indeed, it is interesting to note Curthoys makes this very mistake by merging the humanism in Locke's liberalism with the humanism in Fanon and Freire's anti-colonialism (1997: Part 1). By clarifying what is wrong with Curthoy's merging of these two positions, my claim that the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy is informed by an emergent humanism will be more convincing.

The first difference to note between Locke's liberal humanism and 'emergent' humanism regards equality. As Chapter One of the thesis explained, Locke's idea of moral equality is fundamentally a spiritual one. In his view, all humans are equal because they are God's creatures and therefore can achieve 'a spiritual equality before God', however, 'the work of saving our immortal souls…has no bearing on civil status' (Israel, 2006: 604). On this view, Locke could consistently promote the commercial enslavement of Black people and the colonization of Native Americans whilst thinking of them as moral equals. Emergent humanism is rooted in a different concept of moral equality, one which entails a broader definition of what constitutes 'human'. Moral equality in this form of humanism means equality of respect, and is based on the normative claim that every human being ought to be treated respectfully. Raimond Gaita eloquently gets this idea across when he writes that equality of respect

> …cannot be adequately captured in talk of equal access to goods and opportunities. Treat me as a person, see me fully as a human being, as fully your equal, without condescension – these are not demands for things whose value lies in the degree to which they enable one to get other things. These are calls to justice conceived of as equality of respect, calls to become part of a constituency within which claims for equity of access to goods and opportunities may be appropriately pressed. It is justice of the kind often called social justice because of its insistence that our state and civic institutions should, to the degree that is humanly possible, reveal rather than obscure the fully humanity of our fellow citizens. (Gaita, 2000: 72)

As I hope to have shown above, postcolonial feminists advocate equality of respect; it is the principle from which their theorizing about autonomy springs. They hope to make moral equality real by refusing 'the dominator politics of power-over' and rejecting 'the greed that is now called freedom', as Indigenous feminist Makere Stewart-Harawira puts it (Stewart-Harawira, 2007: 136). Moreover, moral equality on this view does not require, or even admit of the idea of denying 'difference'. On this view, differences are not seen as 'causes for separation and suspicion' and are not to be merely tolerated, but are seen as 'forces for change' where empowerment is central (Lorde, 1988: 159). The moral community postcolonial feminists imagine 'must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist' (Lorde, 1988: 159). As emergent humanists, postcolonial feminists put their faith in the idea that 'a certain openness to the perspectives of an open-ended list of significant actors is coming to seem like transnational common sense' (Robbin, 2005: 567).

This view of moral equality points to two other differences between Locke's liberal humanism and emergent humanism. The way autonomy and freedom have been conceptualised in liberalism tends to be informed by an idealism, which can be partly explained by the fact that its primary audience tend to be 'the oppressors', to use

Freire's figure, or those who are dominant and privileged. By contrast, emergent humanism conceives of autonomy and freedom as achievements, the products of political and oppositional struggle. Emergent humanism's primary audience consists of 'the oppressed' and those who support movements for equality of respect. This is so, partly because 'the oppressors' are usually unwilling to give up the privilege their freedom entails: that of oppressing other humans. This point takes me to the final difference between liberal and emergent humanisms I want to note.

Emergent humanism does not believe in the unfolding, linear vision of universal progression which is often noted to inform liberal humanism. Emergent humanism is so-called because of its self-awareness regarding the historical and geographical conditions of its emergence (Alessandrini, 2005). This view is mirrored in Mohanty's work. She emphasises 'the temporality of struggle' and the importance of location in theorizing change. As she puts it, the temporality of struggle 'defies and subverts the logic of European modernity and the 'law of identical temporality' (Mohanty, 1998: 267). It is this very subversion which also enables the vision of transnational feminist solidarity, because experience and collective visions become historically and geographically located. Thus Mohanty argues for 'a politics of engagement' defined by 'an insistent, simultaneous, non-synchronous process characterized by multiple locations, rather than the search for origins and endings' (Mohanty, 1998: 267).

If my argument is convincing, I would argue the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy should be seen as a form of, and being informed by, an emergent humanism. The common equation of humanism with Locke's liberalism of natural rights should not stand in the way of feminists recognising the ethical vision postcolonial feminism offers in its approach to autonomy. It is a truly radical ethical vision, resting on a 'collective hope' (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997: xli), which exposes how empty the promises of the Lockean and neoliberal approaches to autonomy are. To put this point more strongly, the ideal of autonomy at the heart of emergent humanism embodies the 'logic of life' while the idea of autonomy espoused by Locke and neoliberalism carries 'the logic of death' (Shiva, 2004a: 32; see also Hartsock, 1985; Freire, 1993: 41).

Although I have been largely supportive of the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy thus far, the final part of my assessment considers some problems with the approach which have arisen in the course of dialogues between postcolonial feminists and western feminists.

4. 3. iii. Frames of Reference and Tangled Webs of Feminist Judgement

To make sense of how postcolonial feminists theorize autonomy it is necessary to appreciate the historical-political 'frame of reference' which is ever-present in their minds and shapes their insights and arguments (Bell, 2002: 580). Colonialism, neo-imperialism and racism together constitute the frame of reference which informs both their critique of liberal visions of autonomy and their reclamation and positive valuation of autonomy. I want to question the effect this frame of reference has on the way postcolonial feminists engage in debate with other feminists about autonomy and how they theorize women's autonomy.

As section one of this chapter demonstrates, postcolonial feminists claim that strands of contemporary western feminism are shaped by the colonial and imperial discursive frameworks of classic liberal traditions. I focussed on the work of Susan Okin because of the well-known furore her essay on multiculturalism produced and because it was a clear moment where postcolonial and western feminists engaged in debate with one another. Theorizing in a postcolonial mode Zillah Eisenstein (2004) has joined critics of Okin by branding her arguments and her view of autonomy as 'neoliberal'. Eisenstein asserts that 'Individualism is bourgeois and autonomous for' Okin, and equates her critique of multiculturalism with 'Neoliberal and imperial feminism' which 'mass market a selfish individualism and silence concerns with racial and economic equality' (Eisenstein, 2004: 200-201, 195). What puzzles me about this branding is that Okin was a staunch critic of economic libertarianism, the global hegemony of neoliberalism and economic inequality (e.g., Okin, 1989, 2003; Satz and Reich, 2009). Indeed, as I discussed Okin in the previous chapter as an

egalitarian feminist, I showed her idea of autonomy and specifically of what autonomy ought to mean for women was definitely not 'neoliberal'.

This misreading might be explained by Okin's inattentiveness to the liberal tradition's embroilment in colonialism and imperialism in her query about group rights, which probably goes some way to explaining her bafflement at critical responses to her argument.[14] But I would contend Eisenstein's inaccurate branding can also be explained by the 'rhetorical contextualisation' she practices, where, 'in the course of making an argument, certain figures, stories, and historico-political moments are recalled and deployed as contexts that act as fuel for persuasion' (Bell, 2002: 578). By rhetorically contextualising Okin's work using the postcolonial frame of reference, Eisenstein and others effectively cast her as the 'totalitarian interloper' in debates about women's autonomy in a postcolonial world (Bell, 2002).[15] By erroneously branding Okin's idea of what autonomy ought to be 'neoliberal' and 'bourgeois', postcolonial feminists can easily foreclose any engagement with what Okin or other western feminists have to say about the way women's autonomy is enabled, facilitated or restricted by gendered power relations which structure cultural and religious communities, as well as the power relations between these communities and liberal states. Some postcolonial feminist can do this, because they paint Okin as the modern day John Locke.

In trying to clarify what has gone wrong here, I am not suggesting the postcolonial frame of reference is irrelevant. Clearly, colonialism, neo-imperialism and racism ought not to be sidelined in feminist thought. I am suggesting this frame of reference has limited the way feminists judge one another's visions of autonomy. Critics of postcolonial feminists note the particular form of argumentation witnessed in Eisenstein's critique of Okin is frequently used in their critiques of western feminist approaches to theorizing women's autonomy (e.g., Tharu, 2000; Gunbar, 1998; Thompson, 2001; Nanda, 2004; Chambers, 2004). At issue here is not only the way conceptions of autonomy get caught in tangled webs of feminist judgement. The issue regards *who* makes judgements about 'non-Western' cultures and about women's autonomy within specific contexts.[16] Denise Thompson's interprets postcolonial

feminists as 'saying that the cultures in question are not as male dominated as 'Western feminists' say they are' (Thompson, 2001: 125).

According to Susan Gunbar the 'critical election' of feminist authorities is endemic to contemporary feminist debate and stems from 'An assumption of moral superiority on the part of scholars convinced of their ability to speak for those despised and rejected by everybody else' (Gunbar, 1998: 900).[17] Meera Nanda makes a similar point: 'the postcolonial intellectual justifies her presumption of radical difference toward the West *in the name of the subaltern*' but asks, 'Can we simply *assume* the consent of the subaltern for embracing 'their own' knowledge?' (Nanda, 2004: 213; original emphasis). Indeed, Okin alludes to the trend of critical election in the reply to her critics:

> Am I the silencer of [women's] voices, in taking into account that hundreds of millions of women are rendered voiceless or virtually so by the male-dominated religions with which they live? Or are the silencers those feminists who downplay the patriarchy of many variants of their religions, but who enjoy every moment of their own lives' freedoms that are unthinkable to those "Others" whose voices they think I am drowning out? (Okin, 1999: 123)

Well reflected in Okin's questioning is Gunbar's claim that critical election fosters an 'atmosphere of censorship that silences or policies our feminist debates' (Gunbar, 1998: 900).

I would like to suggest ways beyond this impasse about where ideas of autonomy are coming from and what is done with them. One purported aim of postcolonial feminism to offer 'a conceptual space in which constructs of East and West, margins and centre, as purely discrete and opposed locations, are problematised' (Gedalof, 1999: 5). Arguably Eisenstein's caricature of Okin's fails to problematise constructs of 'Western feminism' by presenting her views on women's autonomy as equivalent to Locke's. Underpinning this move is some sort of reification of difference, and

merely bolsters the unfruitful view that different feminist positions are incommensurable. Postcolonial feminists ought to avoid these kinds of moves in their dialogues about models and visions of autonomy.

The phenomena of critical election may be understood as a response of postcolonial feminists to what they interpret as practices of discursive colonization within feminist theory. By recuperating the agency of women 'from elsewhere' at the theoretical-discursive level postcolonial feminists seek to counteract representations which rob women of agency. But I would argue a good move for feminist theory would be to see past the idea that only 'white, Western feminists' judge 'non-Western' women to suffer from autonomy-restrictive relations and psychic conditions. My interpretation of the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy actually shows that this is not the case. Beyond the discursive realm in feminist theory, there is a degree of convergence between postcolonial feminists and feminists like Okin with respect to theorizing women's autonomy, understood as a social, lived experience, rather than a discursive construct.

To offer an example, Mohanty and Okin agree intrapsychic autonomy and interpersonal autonomy can be undermined by unjust conditions in specific historical contexts. As stated above, Mohanty recognises the psychic instability and dehumanization inflicted by colonization, resulting in 'imitation of the colonizer, horizontal violence, self-depreciation due to internalized oppression, self-distrust, psychic and material dependency, desire to assimilate' on the part of the oppressed (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997: xxvii). Drawing on critical liberal theorists, Okin uses the concept of 'adaptive preferences' to make similar claims: 'One need not rely on the Marxist theory of false consciousness to recognize that persons subjected to unjust conditions often adapt their preferences so as to conceal the injustice of their situation from themselves' (Okin, 1999: 126). Other convergences can be seen in the way both these feminists emphasise unequal and exploitative divisions of labour in global and local contexts, and argue for greater political participation of women and against heterosexism. That feminist theorists ground their approach to autonomy in intellectual and political traditions which are resistant to one another should not be

ignored, but neither should points of convergence be actively erased. My point, I think, is that postcolonial feminists may well have more in common with the feminists they criticise.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to make sense of the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy. Setting their reclamation and rethinking of autonomy against their critique of liberalism generated an understanding as to why postcolonial feminists reject liberal approaches to autonomy. In particular, postcolonial feminists reject liberal capitalist values which infect the Locke's approach to autonomy, and they reject liberal imperial discourses of autonomy and difference which embody a paternalistic and judgemental approach to a whole host of 'other' peoples and places. My task of making sense of how postcolonial feminists approach the idea of autonomy was greatly aided by considering the perceived continuities in classic and contemporary liberalisms. History matters for postcolonial feminists and their critique of liberalism ought to be taken seriously for many reasons, one of which is that it clearly shows why their valuation of autonomy is not grounded in the Western liberal tradition.

Making sense of the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy via their critique of liberalism enabled me to properly comprehend how and why they reclaim and rethink the idea of autonomy. The two themes I focussed on – decolonization through critical pedagogy, and intersectionality – offer convincing and astute insights about the ethical importance of autonomy and about the complex connections between intersectional identity, subjectivity and journeys of self-determination. By tracing the heritage of Alexander and Mohanty's work back to Freire's model of human freedom and critical pedagogy, I was able to reveal the radical conception of autonomy which sits at the heart of their vision of transborder participatory democracy. The ethical and political necessity of processes of decolonization for enhancing the autonomy of marginalised women cannot, I think, be understated.

Furthermore, I argued that the postcolonial feminist valuation of autonomy is informed by, and part of, an emergent humanism. Because emergent humanism is grounded in the idea of moral equality as equality of respect, there is no contradiction between the way postcolonial feminists' value autonomy in an ethical sense and the way they theorize autonomy as part of women's social, psychic and lived experience. Otherwise put, equality of respect is not a reality and postcolonial feminists theorize marginalized women's autonomy with this in mind. They do not offer idealistic and romanticized views of autonomy from the margins; on the contrary, movements for autonomy are emphasised as *struggles*. From intrapsychic autonomy to political self-rule, the development and achievement of autonomy is conceptualised in ways which emphasises struggle. At the same time, this emphasis sits alongside the radical and hopeful view that autonomy is something that is taken by 'the oppressed' rather than something that is bestowed upon them by 'the oppressors'. The careful optimism and collective hope which characterises the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy sits alongside a critical awareness of the cruelty and destructiveness of human thinking and being, past *and* present.

Notes

[1] To illustrate this contemporary colonizing imperative, Shiva has documented how neoliberal ideology and Western scientific epistemology justifies corporate theft of indigenous and Third World women farmer's collective knowledge and land, as well as the criminalization of their seed and food production methods and exchanges. This imperative is facilitated by enabling mechanisms such as the World Trade Organisation's Trade-Related International Property Rights and state-enforced 'pseudo-hygiene laws' which shut down local food economies (Shiva, 2004a; for more examples see Shiva, 2004b).

[2] Although Locke's theoretical writings offer no justification of commercial slavery he partly penned and endorsed the *Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* which regulated slavery in the area. The Constitutions allowed that 'Every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and Authority over his Negro slaves, of what opinion and religion soever' (cited in Farr, 2008: 499). So while Locke thought absolute monarchical power was the very symbol of enslavement in England he had no qualms about literal commercial slavery involving Africans in America. There has been some debate about the possibility of Locke being racist which would explain his blatant incoherence on the question of slavery. James Farr (2008) and Parekh (2000) argue Locke was not racist in a modern sense of believing in the natural inferiority of non-white races, since he held the Christian world view that all men descended from Adam and where therefore of the same ilk.

While this may be true, I am reminded of Bhavnani and Coulson's critique of the way 'ethnocentrism' is used to overshadow racism and the way racism intersects with class inequality. As they put it, 'the role of the state and international capital in creating and

perpetuating inequalities between black people and white people is lost through the use of the term such as ethnocentrism. Further, the word and indeed the concept seem to imply that the problem is one of cultural bias, supported by ignorance. It then follows, if more sociological information is presented, the problem can be overcome' (Bhavnani and Coulson, 1997: 59). Locke had enough first-hand experience of and information about colonialism and commercial slavery to overcome any sort of cultural ignorance, but he didn't flinch at the thought of these institutional processes and power relations, and the harm they caused.

[3] According to Locke, 'There cannot be a clearer demonstration of any thing, than several nations of the Americans are of this, who are rich in land, and **poor in all the comforts of life**; whom nature having furnished as liberally as any other people, with the materials of plenty, i.e. a fruitful soil, apt to produce in abundance **what might serve for food, raiment, and delight**; yet *for want of improving it by labour*, have not one hundredth part of the **conveniences we enjoy**; and a king of a large and fruitful territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad **worse** than a day labourer in England' (Locke, 1996: 324; bold emphasis added).

[4] Writing and politically active in the 1800's, Mill's work includes arguments and reflections about the British Empire when it was full swing. In general, Mill supported economic colonialism. Edward Said hears the 'ruthless proprietary tones of the white master' in Mill's view of West Indies, where he characterises the colonies as mere conveniences for English commodity production and consumption (Said, 1993: 69). However it would be a mistake to argue Mill believed the capitalist, colonizing imperative to be the defining mark of human rationality that would lead to greater happiness, as Locke seemed to. Nor would it be accurate to say Mill was indifferent to commercial slavery, forced labour, and the brutalities of white supremacist rule. He supported black emancipation, native forms of agriculture, and publicly challenged the arbitrary violence of imperial government in the West Indies (Kohn and O'Neill, 2006: 210, 211).

[5] According to Mill's interpretation of this vision of history, progress towards 'civilization' takes two usually interrelated routes. The first is signified by 'economic development and societal complexity' and the extent to which there is a move away from barbarism or tribal savagery, itself characterised, for example, by primitive forms of agriculture, social relations, and a lack of political infrastructure (presumably measured against representative democratic norms) (Kohn and O'Neill, 2006: 210). This sounds very much like the state of nature/civil society distinction Locke worked with. The second route marking progress was seen in normative terms, and could be measured by the extent to which society was 'happier, nobler, and wiser' in a more holistic sense (Kohn and O'Neill, 2006: 210). Mill argued economic development does not automatically bring about social and political development; for example, his critique of commercial slavery and the violence of imperial rulers in the West Indies grounded his view that moral, social and political progress (black emancipation and implementing the rule of law, for example) does occur and ought to occur in spite of the 'setbacks' this might have regarding economic development (Kuhn and O'Neill, 2006: 211).

[6] Honig critically interrogates Okin's 'faith that Western liberal regimes have advanced further along a progressive trajectory of unfolding liberal equality prevents her from engaging in a more selective and comparative analysis of particular practices, powers, and contexts that could well enlighten us about ourselves, and heighten our critical awareness of some of the limits, as well as benefits, of liberal ways of life' (Honig, 1999: 38).

[7] This colonizing and imperialist logic should have been made clear in section one through the discussion of Locke and Mill. For instance, with respect to Indigenous peoples, Cindy

Holder notes, 'Over and over again, one of the first steps in denying that indigenous persons have rights at all has been to deny that persons who are indigenous are capable of making decisions for themselves. Hostility to self-determination for indigenous peoples and violations of rights to physical security, political participation, equality before the law other basic rights…tend, as an empirical matter, to go hand in hand' (Holder, 2005: 314).

[8] It is notable, I think, that Shari Stone-Mediatore (2000: 121) recognises a similar move to this intellectual and political tradition in Alexander and Mohanty's work, but for fear of using the term 'autonomy' – which she links on the same page to 'Enlightenment notions of the unified, autonomous subject' - Stone-Mediatore does not actually admit in her analyses that they use the term 'autonomy'. Instead, Mohanty and Alexander are represented, not erroneously I must say, as theorizing 'agency' and 'oppositional consciousness'. The fear of being interpreted as siding with the enemy – the Enlightenment as it is viewed through the liberal tradition – stands in the way of acknowledging that postcolonial colonial feminists have reclaimed autonomy, that they challenge liberalism's monopoly with respect to it, and offer a conception of autonomy grounded in an anti-colonial, intellectual and political tradition. Stone-Mediatory's refusal to use autonomy in this sense is representative of the confusion in feminist theory about conceptualisations of autonomy, and it is something that we need to move beyond if a more accurate understanding of how feminists theorize autonomy is to emerge.

[9] I focus on the Indigenous feminist thought partly to show up the difference in the meaning of autonomy compared with the Lockean/neoliberal approach, but for other reasons too. When I visited Alcatraz in San Francisco I learned of the Indian occupation of the island in 1969 in response to the history of forced assimilation, dispersal of communities and families, and the appropriation of Indian land. The occupation was characterised by the Indian activists who came together from dispersed tribes and families as a fight for self-determination and justice. The editors of the book documenting the occupation, *We Hold the Rock*, 'encourage you to seek out this history of your own. To use this work as a starting point. To hear the voices and to feel the stories' (Johnson, 1997: vii). On the island I did just that, watching the commemorative documentaries, listening to testimonies, and reflecting on the significance of the spray-painted banners of resistance on government property. The voices and stories have stayed with me, and they struck a chord with respect to thinking about the value of political, collective autonomy and how it intersects with journeys of personal autonomy.

[10] Collins acknowledges that hegemonic 'controlling images' (such as matriarchs, mammies and welfare dependents) and institutional racism can undercut Black women's autonomy but she seeks to challenge 'the notion that Black women's objectification as the Other is so complete that we become willing participants in our own oppression'; the effects of controlling images 'are much less cohesive or uniform than imagined' (1990: 93). Therefore she argues, 'Black women's lives are a *series of negotiations* that aim to reconcile the *contradictions* separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as Other' and the 'peculiar *tension* to extract the definition of one's true self from the treatment afforded the denigrated categories in which all Black women are placed' (1990: 94; my emphasis). For Collins, these contradictions and tensions enable Black women to develop a sense of self that is 'true' or authentic from their own standpoint.

[11] In the work I drew the notions of intrapsychic and interpersonal autonomy from, this point about rigidity is also emphasised. Sawitri Saharso draws from psychological literature which suggests 'it is not only *possible* that a low degree of interpersonal autonomy goes together with a high degree of intrapsychic autonomy, but that the latter is even *necessary* to survive

without psychological damage in these situations. It is through the firmly consolidated inner world of self and object representations that the experience of merger of self and social role is never total, and that that the individual is less dependent on his or her environment' (Saharso, 2000: 236; original emphasis).

[12] I'm thinking here of Carmen De la Pica Morales, a character on *The L Word* who plays a Chicana lesbian living between different worlds in Los Angeles.

[13] This might to seem to fly in the face of intuition, but the idea that dominance effects the oppressed more than the oppressors does have a strange logic. Reflecting on the historical consequences of commercial slavery in the US, African-American legal theorist Judy Scales-Trent understands this logic to imply 'that in America it is easier for white people to be autonomous than it is for black people, because many white Americans oppress black Americans; and in Nazi Germany, it was more likely that Nazis would be autonomous than Jews, because Nazis oppressed Jewish people' (1998: 858). Scales-Trent rejects this reasoning:

> I maintain that white Americas, perhaps even more than black Americans, are constrained by their need for dependence and dominance [which] desperately limits the ability of white Americans "to achieve moral independence." Black Americans maintain a fierce and daily struggle with the American system of lies and distortion that shape our daily existence: failure to do so would mean psychological death. White America, on the other hand, needs to maintain a complicated system of lies in order to maintain its dominance: every system of oppression needs an ideology to justify its cruelty…And it does not make any sense at all…to suggest that it is our lives, the lives of black Americans, which are distorted by these lies and this cruelty, while the lives of those who create the lies and perpetuate the cruelty, are left untouched. (Scales-Trent, 1998: 864)

[14] Okin's bafflement is evident in her 1999 reply to her critics as well as her 2005 reflections on the furore sparked by *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* She recognises she 'stepped into something of a political minefield' and may have been 'the one who threw a verbal "grenade" into a simmering discussion' on feminism and multiculturalism (Okin, 2005: 69). Her confusion in relation to her critics is evident as she works through the 'oddly incomplete and inaccurate readings' of her work, and attempts to redirect critics to the 'considerable textual evidence' in her work that her answer to the multiculturalism question is not a simple "no" (Okin, 2005: 69, 71).

Perhaps getting to the heart of this confusion, Alison Jaggar's (2009) reviews Okin's work and points out that Okin did not pay enough attention to matters of methodology in her later work, meaning she did not deconstruct and deal with 'difference' in the way postcolonial feminists see as necessary.

[15] Vikki Bell's (1999, 2002) work shows that the totalitarian interloper is present in many current feminist debates, and articulates what I've been asking myself for some time now: 'Why does the use of these highly inflammatory terms – evil, fascistic, collaborator – suggest about the imagined political context within which these feminist theorists place their arguments? Why does the strongest possible manoeuvre one can make in forming an argument against another feminist currently seem to be to place her thought in proximity with fascism either explicitly or else by casting her thinking as dangerous in such a way that it is positioned as implicitly leaving the door open to extreme anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian politics, in other words, to totalitarianism? (Bell, 2002: 576, 578).

[16] This is not an issue of cultural relativism either, although it does suggest feminist judgement about women's autonomy with respect to certain practices or contexts can only be pursued by cultural 'insiders'. But postcolonial feminists claim to eschew cultural relativism as an ethical position from which to make value judgments, and tend to steer clear of making claims about the cultural 'authenticity' of insiders. They are aware cultural relativism forms one of two responses (the other being ethnocentrism) 'from *within* Western discourse to the process of colonizing non-Western cultures' (Charusheela, 2001: 205; original emphasis).

[17] MacKinnon (2006: 52, 62) makes similar observations, and puts this down to the emergence of a 'theory class' in feminism. Curthoys (1997) says much of the same.

Chapter 5
Autonomy and Poststructuralist Feminism

The rush to judgment forecloses the anxiety over the unknown.
(Butler, 1998: 230)

Introduction

Poststructuralist thinkers tend to approach the idea of autonomy with suspicion due to its association with a liberal, Enlightenment conception of the autonomous subject, especially the conception of subjectivity in Kant's approach to moral autonomy. With respect to my task of making sense of the poststructuralist feminist engagement with the notion of autonomy, the consequence of this association has been a mixed blessing. Because poststructuralist feminists follow the more general poststructuralist 'critique of the subject', their critics have tended to assume they do not value autonomy, and in some cases, that they do not believe in the subject or self at all. As I hope to show, this type of argument against poststructuralist feminism from within feminism itself has been rather rushed. On the other hand, and despite such criticism, following the 'critique of the subject' has enabled poststructuralist feminists to rethink not only the subject but also the notion of autonomy, often in profound and controversial ways. In my mind, Butler's warning about the 'rush to judgment' also neatly captures the way poststructuralist feminists approach the idea of autonomy.

To make sense of the poststructuralist feminist engagement with the idea of autonomy, in the first section of the chapter I explain how two founding fathers of poststructuralism undermine the confidence of the autonomous subject of Enlightenment thought. Since poststructuralist feminists share this 'critique of the subject' and also appropriate their insights on rethinking the subject, this section helps comprehend how poststructuralist feminist approach autonomy. In the second section, I set out two poststructuralist feminist perspectives on autonomy,

demonstrating that the concept is valued and theorized in different ways. The final section submits these perspectives to critical analysis.

5.1. Poststructuralist Critiques of Autonomy

The poststructuralist critique of autonomy is, more precisely, a critique of a particular conception of the autonomous subject. Poststructuralist theorists point to the '*illusory* character of the rationalist, self-authorizing, transcendental subject presupposed by Enlightenment thought in general, and the liberal tradition in particular' (Mahmood, 2005: 13; original emphasis). To make sense of this, and the backdrop to the poststructuralist feminist approach to autonomy, I turn to two predominant poststructuralist critiques of autonomy (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000: 11). One critique takes root in psychoanalysis, particularly in the work of Jacques Lacan, and the other stems from the work of Michel Foucault.

5.1.i. Illusions of the Self: the Psychoanalytic Critique and Jacques Lacan

Lacan undermines the confidence of the modern autonomous subject by arguing that its presumption of self-grounding and stability are phantasmic (or idealized). Specifically, this approach shows that the modern autonomous subject represents a masculine subject whose illusion of autonomy is secured within the structure of language and through repression of the feminine Other. Lacan therefore follows and develops the more general insight from psychoanalysis that the self is divided (Meyers, 2005: 30). Though the terms 'illusion' and 'phantasmic' may suggest Lacan is mocking the modern subject, on the contrary, he argues that such imaginings are necessary for the achievement of (masculine) subjectivity. It is for this reason that the kind of theorizing Lacan pursues takes poststructuralists into the subject's 'deepest dramas' for what is at stake is the very achievement of selfhood (Zerilli, 2005).

In order to understand the basis of this critique of autonomy, Lacan's theoretical approach needs to be spelled out. By fusing psychoanalysis with structuralism,[1]

Lacan makes a connection between the psychical aspects of subjectivity and the structure of language itself (Hekman, 1990: 84; Minsky, 2002: 51). It is important to consider that this account of subjective formation is not ontological is the sense of explaining what Being *is,* but instead aims to explain how we relate to Being (Colebrook, 2004: 198, 199). Lacan theorizes this relation with the concepts of the Imaginary, the Real, and the Symbolic. The Symbolic order refers to the structure of language that constitutes culture or the public realm (Minsky, 2002: 52; Butler, 1999: 58). The Symbolic gives meaning to experiences and a sense of substance to identity. Because we must submit to the Symbolic in order to become subjects, language constitutes our subjectivity. The Real, by contrast, is the 'remainder' of the Symbolic, it is an 'element in the Symbolic order that resists absolute symbolization…[it is] the gap, the unnamable, and the limit of discourse that points to that which is beyond meaning' (Leeb, 2008: 355; Cornell, 1999: 88). The Symbolic is said to confirm and depend on the presence of the Real because 'without the *assumption of a presence* that exceeds the structure of signifiers, no signification or meaning would be possible' (Colebrook, 2004: 156; my emphasis). In other words, Lacan argues we must assume that which is immediately absent to be present in order to for us make sense of Being. We must assume an 'otherness to life' (Colebrook, 2004: 156).[2]

For Lacan, the Imaginary structures the initial stages of subject formation and in this sense prefigures our subjection within the Symbolic order. Lacan argues that the Imaginary aids the development of the bodily ego when an infant experiences the mirror stage. In concrete terms, the mirror stage gives the infant an initial sense of being a distinct, coherent self, when it first sees a reflection of itself (as a distinct embodied being) in the mirror (meaning a literal mirror, the primary other's mirroring gaze, and the mother as a mirror in the sense that she too appears a distinct self). However, this *appearance* of a stable, coherent self is just that, since the infant's identity remains merged with the mother's (Minsky, 2002: 52). More broadly, the Imaginary also refers to the state of the 'ego as narcissist' that is present even when we become subjects within the Symbolic order (Leeb, 2008: 357). The Imaginary is therefore the domain 'in which we constitute ourselves narcissistically

through our identifications with self-reflecting images' and where we inevitably reduce such images - in the form of other people or objects - to the self (Minsky, 2002: 52). The ego turns the other into itself 'in a quest to shore up her fragile unity…and wholeness' (Leeb, 2008: 362).

The Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real are interrelated domains. The central unifying principle of these domains is sexual difference. According to Lacan, the unconscious itself is structured by sexual difference, which enables infants and subjects to fantasise about their relation to Being. Of course, following Lacan, this means that in comparison to each other, masculine and feminine subjects have an asymmetrical relationship to Being. Of importance for understanding the critique of the modern autonomous subject is the way in which sexual difference relates to the constitution of subjectivity within the Symbolic order. Judith Butler (1999: 61) summarises Lacan's view well:

> The masculine subject only *appears* to originate meanings and thereby to signify. His seemingly self-grounded autonomy attempts to conceal the repression which is both its ground and the perpetual possibility of its own ungrounding. But that process of meaning-constitution requires that women reflect that masculine power and everywhere reassure that power of the reality of its illusory autonomy. This task is confounded, to say the least, when the demand that women reflect the autonomous power of masculine subject/signifier becomes essential to the construction of that autonomy and thus, becomes the basis of a radical dependency that effectively undercuts the function it serves.

The repression that is both the 'grounding' and 'ungrounding' of the subject captures the way Lacan criticises the idea of the stable subject and also how he conceptualises the process of individuation and the formation of the self. In one sense, repression constitutes the 'grounding' of the subject because, when in infanthood, 'the mother

must be abjected for the subject to be' (Cornell, 1999: xvii). In other words, in order for a separate, distinct self to emerge successfully, infants must repress the love for and dependency on the mother. According to Freud's account of the Oedipal complex, this is partly because the mother ultimately desires the father instead of the child, and the child struggles but learns to cope with this. Lacan develops this insight further, arguing that 'the law of the father' structures the Symbolic domain where the phallus is the primary signifier (Minsky, 2002: 53).

According to Lacan, our subjectivities are defined in relation to the phallus because it is the signifier or 'value that inaugurates the…symbolic order' (Colebrook, 2004: 198; Minsky, 2002: 53). Masculine subjects 'have' the phallus, allowing them to identify with and have access to rational language which signifies their autonomy. Being constituted by the Symbolic, Lacan argues subjects experience, more generally, a 'repression of the signifiers of the desire of the primary Other' (Cornell, 1999: xix). Such repression therefore enables 'the 'illusion' of stable subjectivity…only through derogation or denial of the potentially troubling alterity of the other' (McNay, 2008: 4). Since the subject's autonomy is meant to rest on his own self-grounding, the 'troubling alterity' residing within his unconscious and other signs represents his possible 'ungrounding'. In other words, although the masculine subject thinks of himself as autonomous, as Butler makes clear his identity and his autonomy are in fact in a state of 'radical dependency' on the feminine Other (Butler, 1999: 61).

5. 1. ii. Illusions of Enlightenment: Debating Subjects with Michel Foucault

In what marks a key tension within poststructuralism, Foucault famously dismissed psychoanalysis as another discourse which attempts to trade on the notion that there is such a thing as one's 'inner' self (Foucault, 1984a: 362). For Foucault, the notions of the 'unconscious' and 'repression' are part of a discourse that *create rather than reveal* the self. Utilizing his genealogical method, Foucault argues that the Enlightenment subject ultimately amounts to one discourse on the subject among many.

The epistemological break with the Enlightenment is perhaps best captured by the Foucaultian argument that ‘discourses create subjects as well as objects…there are no essential subjects, only individuals caught in a network of historical power relationships’ (Hekman, 1990: 68). Unlike liberal and Marxist view that claim power is possessed, centralized, and repressive, Foucault suggests we should understand power as exercised, local and productive (Sawicki, 1991). Unlike liberal theorists who attempt to find spaces for the subject to escape power or control whether or not they consent to power, Foucault suggests that ‘the relations of force’ that make up power constitute subjects (Mills, 2003). As he puts it,

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it “excludes,” it “represses,” it “censors,” it “abstracts,” it “masks,” it “conceals.” In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (Foucault, 1984b: 205)

Stepping away from any particular regime of knowledge/power, Foucault gives an abstract account of how we are constituted as subjects with the concept of subjectivication. He puts it, ‘there are two meanings of the word subject, subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to’ (Foucault in Rabinow, 1984: 21). In other words, subjectivication suggests ‘power’s productive and repressive aspects are intertwined with respect to the subject; power both enables the constitution of subjects and constrains the options of those subjects at the same time’ (Allen, 1999: 36). In more abstract terms, Foucault is seen to highlight the ‘dialectic between freedom and constraint’ in the very process of subject formation (McNay, 2000: 2). There cannot be, therefore, autonomy ‘outside’ of power.

It has been suggested that Foucault can be approached according to which side of subjectivication he emphasises throughout his work (Bevir, 1999; Mahmood, 2005). The early, 'excitable' or 'bad' Foucault is associated with the emphasis laid on the constraining aspects of power, the emergence of bio-power and the production of docile bodies. *Discipline and Punishment* and volume one of *History of Sexuality* are considered to be illustrative of the 'excitable' Foucault, where the individual is read as a 'mere effect of power' (Bevir, 1999: 68). The final, 'composed' or 'good' Foucault tends to be read in light of his work on ethics and the 'techniques of the self', which provide more emphasis on the possibilities of agency. Taking these two sides into account, the general consensus seems to be that, in his critique of autonomy, Foucault advocates the possibilities of 'agency' alongside resistance, where constituted subjects can be 'creative beings; it is just that their creativity occurs in a given social context' (Bevir, 1999: 67). When Foucault put it that, 'power is exercised over free subjects, and only insofar are they are free', Bevir interprets this to mean we are 'individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realised' (Bevir, 1999: 73).

Against this framework, Foucault directly responds to Kant's notion of autonomy and its illusion of transcendence. Given that we are constituted by power and specific regimes of power/knowledge, the idea of a 'founding sovereign subject' that is able to 'have experiences, to reason, to adopt beliefs, and to act, outside all social contexts…avoid the influence of any norms and techniques prescribed by a regime of power/knowledge' is illusory (Bevir, 1999: 67). The specific link between autonomy and transcendence which is integral to the modern subject is, for Foucault, not only implausible, but constitutes an aspect of the particular Enlightenment discourse on the subject.

5. 1. iii. The Subject of Freedom and Progress

The poststructuralist deconstruction of the modern autonomous subject also extends to a deconstruction of the freedom it presumes. In Chapter One, I discussed how

liberal notions of freedom are underpinned by a specific conception of subjectivity, and are not open to anyone. The free subject is 'predicated on a particularly modern and constraining distinction between rational and irrational. Those who are not, or cannot become, rational, are then excluded as candidates for freedom' (Coole, 1993a: 87; my emphasis). For example, in Chapter One, it was clear that in Locke's approach to autonomy, only those who could follow natural law could be candidates for freedom. Kant endorsed the same logic, and excluded women from the domain of reasoning subjects. Poststructuralist theorists further argue the Enlightenment notion of freedom is inseparable from the idea of historical progress. On this view, historical events 'are connected by and through an underlying, meaningful, and rational structure comprehensible by reason. The pregiven purpose of history is the progressive perfection of humans and the ever more complete realization of their capabilities and projects' (Flax, 1990: 31).

Particularly for Foucault, the will to predetermine who drives history forward and by what means is unwise. Foucault argues if we 'listen to history' we find there are no 'timeless and essential secret[s]' but rather a 'profusion of entangled events' (Foucault, 1984c: 78, 89). His genealogies unsettle the idea of 'origins' and that history embodies a teleological drive. Relatedly, Foucault denies the status of the 'universal intellectual' since there 'is no global transformation to formulate, no revolutionary subject whose interest the intellectual or theoretician can represent' (Sawicki, 1991: 225). Revolutionary theory bent on 'controlling history' rests on binary models of struggle and consequently, 'the notion of a subject of history, a single locus of resistance' (Sawicki, 1991: 223). According to Foucault, power is not only held by one group over another so the logic that freedom and liberation will be achieved once power is opposed is faulty.

Another reason for resisting the lure of the universal intellectual is that we cannot foresee the consequences of change. Reason does not permit access to a priori knowledge of the means and ways of transformation, or the truth of change. Reason does not permit us to access truth, which then enables us to control the direction of history to better realise that truth. Foucault's critique of transcendence goes some

way to undermining the idea that the subject can gain access to some unmediated truth that directly represents reality and allows him to foresee history. As Foucault puts it:

> …truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power…Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics of truth": that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned…the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1984c: 73)

For example, the material effects of Enlightenment thought and its 'politics of truth' provided justification for excluding certain irrational subjects as candidates of freedom within certain political communities.

More than this however, these assumptions about freedom are seen not only to be theoretically erroneous but politically dangerous; they permit judgement as regards who is and is not free, justifying corrective political action on this basis and in the name of progress. Foucault was profoundly disturbed by totalitarian and fascist regimes which were justified on the basis of binding freedom, based on a particular subject, to progress and the control of history. Consequently, he suggests:

> the historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions…I prefer even these *partial transformations* that have been made in the correlation of historical analysis and *the practical attitude*, to the programs for a new man that the worst

> political systems have repeated throughout the twentieth century. (Foucault, 1984d: 47; my emphasis)

What Foucault draws attention to is the way any theoretical or political framework that theorizes freedom and social transformation together has always constructed 'the subject it prescribes as quintessentially free' (Coole, 1993a: 90). Rather than grounding politics and movements for freedom in a conception of the subject, Foucault argues that the questions of 'partial transformations' must challenge truth instead; 'the problem is not changing people's consciousness - or what's in their heads - but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth…The political question…is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness, or ideology; it is truth itself' (Foucault, 1984c: 75).

5. 1. iv. Approaching Autonomy via the 'Critique of the Subject'

The way poststructuralist feminists engage with the concept of autonomy has been overwhelmingly shaped by the poststructuralist critiques set out by Lacan and Foucault. It is not irrelevant to underscore the point that by approaching autonomy primarily from this angle, poststructuralists have been concerned with refuting a particular approach to autonomy, namely early liberal conceptions of moral autonomy. For theorists of self-determination who wish to hold onto the notion of autonomy, it is clear that the poststructuralist critique succeeds in 'conflat[ing] the notion of autonomy with certain conceptions of autonomous *agents*' (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000: 11; original emphasis).

Approaching autonomy via Kant's idea of moral autonomy ultimately leads to the misunderstanding that autonomy need be 'characterised as a condition dependent, exclusively, on the faculty of reason… a condition that is measured by the extent to which a person succeeds in directing his or her life according to universal, impersonal principles of reason' (Oshana, 2001: 212). Nonetheless, by rethinking the subject, poststructuralist perspectives can be seen as productive for theorizing autonomy; poststructuralist feminist appropriations of Lacan and Foucault 'may be viewed as

salutary, for they alert us to the need to develop notions of autonomy based on richer, more psychically complex, and more diverse conceptions of agents' (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000: 11).

Highlighting this distinction is significant because it appears to have led poststructuralist feminists in two directions. First, in rejecting the connotations of Kant's autonomous subject, initially at least, they consequently rejected the very term 'autonomy' which prevented theorists from considering the notion of autonomy in an entirely separate light from that of moral autonomy. By moving beyond this conflation of in notions of autonomy, it is possible to dismantle some of the myths which crop up in feminist theory on autonomy. Second, by staying clear of 'autonomy' and drawing on the 'critique of the subject' poststructuralist feminists have developed their own conceptual repertoires to theorize the phenomena of autonomy. The next section turns to make sense of the poststructuralist feminist approach to autonomy.

5. 2. Rethinking Autonomy within Poststructuralist feminism

Critics of poststructuralist feminism have suggested that its onslaught of the modern autonomous subject has brought an end to the possibility of autonomy and in some cases even the idea of selfhood. Marilyn Friedman writes that 'feminists influenced by postmodernism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis and other movements with contemporary philosophy…will have little interest in the concept of autonomy' (Friedman, 2000: 220). The task of showing that personal autonomy does survive within poststructuralist feminism is set against this perception. In what follows I turn to the work of two poststructuralist feminists to explore how the idea of autonomy figures in their work. I turn first to the work of Judith Butler, and then to the work of Drucilla Cornell.

5. 2. i. From Agency to Autonomy? Deciphering Butler

The work of Judith Butler is perhaps the most criticised poststructuralist feminist perspective with respect to her position on the subject and repudiating the idea of autonomy. However, Butler does provide a theory of agency in relation to her understanding of gender, and presents this as a challenge to normative heterosexuality. In her later work, Butler shifts to a discussion of the limits of 'sexual autonomy' with the complexities of gender in mind, specifically focusing on transexuality and intersexuality. With respect to autonomy, I want to show that it is in Butler's later work *Undoing Gender* (2004) where feminists can gain a more precise understanding of what she was trying to articulate in *Gender Trouble* (1999). At the same time, these two texts can be read as offering different understandings of autonomy. Her account of agency can be read as valuing 'acting otherwise' or 'non-conformity' which is problematic insofar as it is a very limited account of autonomy, whereas her later work on sexual autonomy provides a more robust account of the necessity and limits of autonomy for gender minorities.

5. 2. i. a. Agency and Gender Trouble

Butler's (1999, 1993) account of agency rests on the general poststructuralist insight that there is no subject prior to signification or language, and the Foucaultian account of subjectivication. As she puts it,

> the claim that the subject is itself produced in and as a gendered matrix of relations is not to do away with the subject, *but only to ask after the conditions of its emergence and operation*…[this] is the matrix through which all willing first becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition. In this sense, the matrix of gender relations is prior to the emergence of the "human". (Butler, 1993: 7; my emphasis)

In roughly the same vein, Butler goes on to argue that there is no 'internal' gendered essence within the subject; 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender…identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (Bulter, 1990: 34). In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler adds to this understanding of performativity the notion of citationality, and fuses it with Lacan's account of the Symbolic. With this she more clearly explains how gender is constituted and reproduced through the repetition (the compelled citation) of gender and sexual norms within the heterosexual matrix. In other words, 'gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 1999: 45).

The 'high rigid regulatory frame' of which Butler speaks constitutes a regime of power/knowledge that is structured by normative heterosexuality or the 'heterosexual imperative' (Butler, 1993: 4). Regulatory power functions by creating 'certain cultural configurations of gender [as] "real" [which] consolidate and augment their hegemony through that felicitous self-naturalization' (Butler, 1999: 45). In other words, Butler argues we become gendered subjects within the heterosexual matrix, which aims to squeeze us into identifications that follow from what are commonly understood as sex (either male or female), gender (either masculine or feminine, respectively) and the proper objects of heterosexual desire. This imperative is also exclusionary in the sense of enabling and sustaining abjection. In relation to subject formation, this 'requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not subjects, but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject' (Butler, 1993: 3). For example, to identify as heterosexual requires that one is not homosexual but at the same time, homosexuality defines the limits of heterosexuality and constitutes that which is abject and excluded '"inside" the [heterosexual] subject as its own founding repudiation' (Butler, 1993: 3).

Emphasising the rigidity of this framework should dispel any notion that Butler approaches gender as a voluntary perform*ance.* Indeed, echoing Lacan, Butler argues,

> Insofar as heterosexual gender norms produce inapproximable ideals, heterosexuality can be said to operate through the regulated production of hyperbolic versions of "man" and "woman." These are for the most part compulsory performances, ones which none of us choose, but which each one of us is forced to *negotiate*…the compulsory character of these norms *does not always make them efficacious* (producing the intended result). Such norms are continually haunted by their own inefficacy; hence the anxiously repeated effort to install and augment their jurisdiction. (Butler, 1993: 237; my emphasis)

Therefore although subjects are constituted they are not determined by their subjectivication. She clarifies that 'when the subject is said to be constituted, that means simply that the subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity' (Butler, 1999: 198). Identity has a substantive effect because of repetition. Gender is repeated in relation to ideals which cannot be perfectly copied and embodied precisely because they are phantasmic constructions. As subjects we negotiate with the ideals and our present circumstances, within the divergence between the ideals and what is immediately before us.

It is in light of this divergence of what gender is normatively supposed to be (its hegemonic forms) and how gender is negotiated that Butler locates the possibilities of agency; 'it is in this space of ambivalence which opens up the possibility of a reworking of the very terms by which subjectivication proceeds - and fails to proceed' (Bulter, 1993: 124). More precisely, Butler conceives of agency as a 'resignification of norms', as 'subversion, of working the weakness in the norm' (Butler, 1993: 237). Because there is no 'before' or 'outside' of power, resignification and subversion have to occur 'within the matrix of power' without 'replicat[ing] uncritically relations of domination' (Butler, 1990: 42).[3] A critical repetition of the norms that govern intelligibility which varies from the hegemonic

ideals of gender and sexuality, for Butler, would not only destablize but also denaturalize the heterosexual imperative. In an passage often quoted by feminist theorists, Butler suggests 'the critical task is…to locate subversive repetition enabled by those [hegemonic] constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them' (Butler, 1999: 201).

In opposition to feminist critics of Butler who argue she does not think autonomy is possible, I would argue that her approach to agency is inclusive of a value associated with autonomy, that of non-conformity (Friedman, 2003: 60). Indeed, it is possible to argue that her account of agency amounts to an account of non-conformity to hegemonic gender and sexual norms. Though Butler herself does not use this term, it was momentarily alluded to by Foucault, her guiding light, in *Discipline and Punishment.* In relation to the normalizing power of disciplinary practices, Foucault notes that normalization produces a 'whole infinite domain' in which 'nonconforming is punishable' (Foucault, 1984b: 194). Butler aims to use the domain and untapped subversive power of gender and sexual non-conformism to destablise the heterosexual imperative and contest its status as truth.

Linda Williams's (1995) analysis of Annie Sprinkle's performance art and pornography confirms this interpretation of Butler's concept of agency. Williams suggests that 'by performing sex *differently*, though still within the conventional rhetoric and form of the genre, Annie Sprinkle's pornography demonstrated a provocative feminist agency…' (Williams, 1995: 305; my emphasis). Generally, Williams argues, 'In taking on the persona and address of the whore hailed by misogynist culture, Sprinkle opens us a field of *acting otherwise* through subversive repetition…she disrupts the active male, passive female paradigm of conventional pornography' (Williams, 1995: 310; my emphasis). For example, Williams notes that Sprinkle does not oppose the category 'whore' in her sex work, but takes it seriously - indeed professionally - and in this way subverts what is usually associated with this category. Sprinkle articulates 'something that is not named in

"whore": her own desire, surprisingly new pleasures' (Williams, 1995: 307, 308). Analysing her screen performances Williams notes for each show 'what is different in this number…' (Williams, 1995: 311). Especially of note is the act which generated Annie's second name, because, according to Williams, this 'parody of the male money shots' is paradigmatic of sexual agency (1995: 313). Williams's co-researchers disagreed but nevertheless 'located even *greater affirmation of agency* in the *greater taboo* of golden showers' or '*even greater* agency in the exhibition of a self-sufficient female sexuality in female ejaculation' (Williams, 1995: 313). All these instances of subversion - 'acting otherwise,' acting 'differently' and acting in ways that deliberately grate against the usual, 'normal' tropes within pornography, amount to non-conformity.

Exercising autonomy in such a way that causes social disruption, to whatever extent, in relation to patriarchal norms is one reason why autonomy is an important feminist value (Friedman, 2003). Nonetheless, non-conformity cannot constitute the only meaning of autonomy. Interpreted as 'acting otherwise', Butler's notion of agency rests on suspect distinctions between that which is deemed to be ordinary or mainstream and unusual or non-mainstream. Practices like cosmetic surgery are often theorized in relation to 'non-mainstream body modification' practices, which because of their non-conformist status, automatically confirms the agency of those who participate in them. In such terms it seems 'the notion of the mainstream might be a fiction about the uniformity of the dominant…it upholds the fiction of the mainstream *in order to* designate non-mainstream body modification as a radical political practice' (Walker, 1998: 127, 128; my emphasis). Such distinctions therefore beg questions about the interpretation (who is interpreting, in what context?) of the ordinary/usual and their relation to social transformation. Butler's model of resignification is embodied within the drag queen, but as Linda Zerilli points out, 'It is just as likely that I will see drag when I see drag and see gender when I see gender…To see drag, after all, is to know gender is being performed – otherwise, we would simply see gender' (Zerilli, 2005: 53)

In more abstract terms, then, understanding the sign (drag queen) cannot be determined by interpretation alone (Butler vs. Zerilli) and cannot be determined by context (dressing up for charity vs. the queer bar). It would seem that since Butler herself states gender norms are inapproximable, 'any performative harbours other possible interpretations' (Zerilli, 2005: 52). The question left for feminist theorists is: how will we be able to know whether subversion reinforces or undermines relations of domination, relations which Butler argues must not be 'uncritically replicated' in the course of subversion? Butler acknowledges that the conception of agency does not have the inbuilt or *a priori* distinguishing criteria necessary for this task. Illustrating this, she ponders over forms of body modification,

> Does [transgender] support the most idealized and recalcitrant forms of gender norms, or does it expose the way in which everybody 'becomes' its gender? Does it submit to a medicalization and normalization of the engendered body, or is it an active appropriation of medical and surgical resources in the service of making a life more livable? Can we say for sure whether cosmetic surgery that seeks to enhance the ideal of femininity of a body is radically different from transsexual surgery, or that either are radically distinct in their cultural meanings from piercing? These questions have no easy answer, for once we accept that gender norms constitute our desire and fantasy, and seek to enter into the rearticulation of those norms, do we occupy a place outside of that circle by which we can judge: this is subversive, this is not; this is radical, this is reactionary? (Butler, 1998: 229)

Indeed, Butler later explicitly states that she is not concerned with making normative judgments vis-à-vis gender and identity: 'the positive normative vision of the text…does not and cannot take the form of prescription: "subvert gender in the way I say and life will be good."…I am not interested in delivering judgements on what distinguishes the subversive from the unsubversive' (Butler, 1999: xxiii).

It is possible to interpret 'agency' as a rather empty addition to theory on autonomy. However, I would argue what it sets up and points to becomes evident in Butler's later work. Returning to Foucault's insight that normalization produces a 'whole infinite domain' in which 'nonconforming is punishable' (Foucault 1984c: 194) paves the way to an understanding what Butler wants to say with her concept of agency. I would argue that Butler's concept of agency attempts to draw attention to the domain of abject subjects - those who do not appear to live by hegemonic gender and sexual identities - who are *punished by their non-conformism*. Butler aims to relieve these subjects of their punishment, and if this is not immediately obvious in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, it is clear in her later work where she explicitly discusses the self-determination and sexual autonomy of such abject subjects of the New Gender Politics.

5. 2. i. b. Autonomy and Undoing Gender

Butler does not understand gender only as an arm of the heterosexual imperative. She poses a key challenge to feminist theorists by tentatively uncoupling gender from its presumed heterosexual origins: 'although heterosexuality operates in part through the stabilisation of gender norms, gender designates a dense site of significations that contain and exceed the heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1993: 237). Therefore, she argues for 'a non-causal and non-reductive connection between sexuality and gender is…crucial to maintain' (Butler, 1993: 238). It is a mistake, Butler argues, to think that the lesbian femme wants to 'pass' or that she is 'mirroring' her heterosexual original. It is a mistake to think that the stone butch wants to 'be' a man. The butch and the femme do not copy originals; the point is to show that the so-called originals are 'as performative as the copy…Through performativity, dominant and nondominant gender norms are *equalized*' (Butler, 2004: 209; my emphasis). It is with this conception of gender as well as her account of agency that Butler attempts to draw attention to those abject subjects whose lives are unintelligible from within the heterosexual matrix.

Pointing to the unintelligibility of gender out with this matrix and to the forms of gender which exceed it, Butler disrupts how feminists conventionally approach gender. Crucially, this helps to us to see the forest from the trees in deciphering the normative drive of her work. Her perspective has often been interpreted as being unable to provide a normative vision in relation to gender because that would force her to make 'an appeal to the truth *about the unnaturalness* of' gender (Allen, 1999: 77; my emphasis). Yet, Butler is not concerned with the *unnaturalness* of gender only with the status of truth given to the logic of gender within the heterosexual matrix. Again, this echoes Foucault when he writes, 'the problem is not changing people's consciousness - or what's in their heads - but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth…The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness, or ideology; it is truth itself' (1984: 75). Given that the politics of truth about gender currently work in an exclusionary way, Butler seeks to change this, 'to extend the norms that sustain viable life to previously disenfranchised communities' (Butler, 2004: 225).

Specifically, the normative task underpinning her emphasis on 'gender trouble' is to advocate that gender minorities become intelligible within the discourses of the 'human'. Butler wants to 'expose the tenuousness of gender "reality" in order to counter the violence performed by gender norms' (1999: xxv). In *Undoing Gender*, Butler more clearly binds gender to 'the question of survival, of how to create a world in which those who understand their gender and their desire to be nonnormative can live and thrive not only without the threat of violence from the outside but without the pervasive sense of their own unreality, which can lead to a suicide or a suicidal life' (Butler, 2004: 219). Thus, she approaches gender as a question of life and death; as she puts it, she is concerned with 'what makes a life livable.'

Butler considers autonomy as one value that helps make life livable for those who embody nonnormative gender identities. Indeed, in a move that the early Butler and her critics might not have foreseen (given that autonomy was synonymous with the modern autonomous subject), *Undoing Gender* explicitly calls for 'greater claims of

autonomy' and 'self-determination' for such subjects; they 'might need to consider autonomy as one dimension of their normative aspirations' (Butler, 2005: 25). Autonomy, both individual and collective, may be enhanced or its achievement made more possible for gender minorities with an end to 'phobic violence against bodies' as well as the 'unwanted legislation of identity' (Butler, 2004: 7, 9). Again, in a move that might confound critics' expectations, Butler states 'in this sense, individual agency is bound up with social critique and social transformation' (Butler, 2004: 7).

In contrast to her theory of agency, Butler provides an account of some conditions that make autonomy a possibility for gender minorities, still relying on her Foucaultian framework. First, she puts it that, 'choosing one's own body invariably means navigating among norms that are laid out in advance and prior to one's choice or are being articulated in concert by other minority agencies' (Butler, 2004: 7). Butler sets out other conditions necessary for self-determination,

> individuals rely on institutions of social support in order to exercise self-determination with respect to what body and what gender to have and maintain, so that self-determination becomes a plausible concept only in the context of a social world that supports and enables the exercise of agency…it turns out that changing the institutions by which humanly viable choice is established and maintained is a prerequisite for the exercise of self-determination'. (Butler, 2004: 7)

It is quite clear from this that Butler thinks self-determination is possible, but cannot be taken for granted. In particular, Butler makes a connection between the vulnerability each human being experiences from birth in relation to other people – the primary tie, which we are largely unaware of and often deny - and the ever-present vulnerability and interpersonal proximity each person experiences in every day life within political communities (think of the tube or bus at rush hour). Although bodily autonomy for oneself is necessary, she asks: 'If I am struggling *for*

autonomy, do I not need to be struggling for something else as well, a conception of myself as invariably in community…' (2004: 21). With respect to gender violence, she states it is 'always *an exploitation of that primary tie*, that primary way in which we are, as bodies, *outside ourselves, for one another*' (Butler, 2004: 22; my emphasis). Samuel Chambers and Terrell Carver elaborate on this aspect of Butler's work, suggesting the discussion of primary ties and human vulnerability point toward an ontological account of Being which explains our 'primary relationality' (Chambers and Carver, 2008: 107). They argue this notion of relationality is distinct from the idea of the relational autonomous self, discussed in Chapter Two and associated with care feminism. Whereas care feminism's concern is with our *conscious* relational ties and care obligations to 'a concrete, knowable and intelligible other', Butler's concern is to emphasise that 'relationality precedes the subject' in ways that render the human condition always already vulnerable due to its relational primacy (Chambers and Carver, 2008: 108).

Read in light of this, Butler's understanding of 'sexual autonomy' is underpinned by an awareness that achieving some degree of autonomy is no easy matter, especially if one's life is currently unintelligible within the terms that govern reality. Similar arguments about the fragility of achieving autonomy are also made in the work of Drucilla Cornell, to which I now turn.

5. 2. ii. Autonomy as an Ethical Ideal: Cornell's Imaginary Domain

Cornell's work, especially *At The Heart of Freedom,* fuses a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective with the Kantian *idea* of the state. Fusing of liberal political and psychoanalytic frames, Cornell seeks to give an account of freedom which privileges the idea 'that a person's freedom to pursue her own happiness in her own way is crucial for any person's ability to share in life's glories' (Cornell, 1998: 18). The notion of freedom in this context echoes the idea of personal autonomy. However, this understanding of freedom is also centrally related to what Cornell calls 'the imaginary domain'. Cornell's aim is to provide an ethical argument about the value and necessity of freedom, and to provide the theoretical justification stating

why each person should be entitled, as a moral, political and legal right, to their own 'imaginary domain…the space of the 'as if' in which we imagine who we might be if we made ourselves our own end and claimed ourselves as our own person' (Cornell, 1998: 8). To further elaborate on what the imaginary domain is, in relation to the metaphor of 'space' Cornell states, 'the imaginary domain gives to the individual person, and only to her, *the right to claim who she is through her own representation of her sexuate being*. Such a right necessarily makes her the morally and legally recognised *source of narration and resymbolisation* of what the meaning of her sexual difference is for her' (Cornell, 1998: 10; my emphasis). The power of this right, she argues, must be set against the patriarchal backdrop in which women, 'for too long have been judged capable only of passive imagination and the ability to mimic the persona deemed proper for women' (Cornell, 1998: 11).

5. 2. ii. a. Stability and Individuation As Achievements

Cornell asks us to suspend the idea that the subject already exists as a mature, moral agent who embodies freedom. Maintaining that this subject is however a necessary ideal, she works backwards, as it were, to ask what is necessary for the subject to *Be* at all. Cornell argues feminist theorists must be attentive 'to the form of the free person because such persons, given the *fragility of the human creature*, are only made possible if certain conditions are provided for them. Even something that we call psychic "life" is no longer conceived as a given, but *appreciated as an accomplishment*, realized only through the emotional as well as physical support from others' (Cornell, 1999: xvi; my emphasis). With this, she challenges the bulk of political theory which treats such fragility as easily overcome and the foundations of autonomy - a psychic life of one's 'own' - as already formed and stable.

Such an accomplishment is inseparable from our embodiment. Cornell follows the work of Lacan, outlined above, and views human beings as sexed creatures and sexuality as an integral aspect of how we become selves and orient ourselves; we are 'sexuate beings' (Cornell, 1998: 7). Making use of Freud's insights on the development of the bodily ego and Lacan's mirror stage, Cornell agrees that the

formation of a self is necessarily tied up in our embodiment or corporeality. For her, sex indicates ‘our unconscious identifications as beings who have been sexed, who have been formed, and who can see themselves only through a sexual imago’ (Cornell, 1998: 7). Fragility, embodiment and the importance of coherence with respect to the formation of the self are bound together. Coherence implies the need for continuity, for a ‘projected future in which this process “of pulling oneself together” is experienced as a sense of self-identity over time’ (Cornell, 1998: 36).

To illustrate her point, Cornell draws on her work with Ona Zee Wiggers, who worked as a prostitute and union organizer. Wiggers’s testimony about women like herself who sell sex and who have experienced childhood sexual abuse acknowledges that such experiences may have, ‘at an early age [disrupted] the development of an integrated sense of self, leading them to experience a kind of splitting off from the body’ (Cornell, 1998: 54). Taking this psychological state seriously, Cornell takes Wiggers at her word when she says that prostitution temporarily helped her deal with her incestuous past; ‘her life as a prostitute was a representation of her sexuate being, a persona that she had to live out’ (Cornell, 1998: 55). Cornell argues rather than viewing sex workers as suffering from false consciousness, which merely simplifies the complexities of psychic life, feminists must attend to the processes that act as barriers and facilitators to the development of a stable, coherent self.

What experiences like this illustrate is the fragility and vulnerability of the task of becoming our own person. ‘Given that we are creatures thrown into a world not of our own making and yet which inevitably shapes us, we can be crushed in our efforts to become our own persons. We need to explicitly articulate and recognize that *individuation is a project*, and one that needs legal, political, ethical and moral recognition if it is to be effectively maintained’ (Cornell, 1998: 64; my emphasis). Drawing on liberal political theorists, Cornell advocates an ethical individualism that is attentive to our constitutive identities, relational ties and yet upholds the ‘dignity [that] points us to the potentiality of human beings to lead a life that is their own’ (1998: 63; 1999: xxi).[4]

5. 2. ii. b. Keeping Autonomy Ethical

Her reasoning behind making an ethical argument about the imaginary domain and the representation of sexuate being, rather than making an argument about how to evaluate or judge women's autonomy is laudable. First, drawing on the liberal 'discontinuity thesis' she states, 'in our morally complex world we sometimes need to insist on discontinuity between what we think is good for ourselves and the people close to us and what we would allow the state to impose as the general evaluation of the good' (Cornell, 1998: 59). Cornell is firmly against 'state-enforced moralism', privileging Right over the good in the domain of sexuality. The state should not, for example, enforce heterosexuality or the nuclear family as the ideal way to structure family life; this denies sexual minorities the right of representation of their family life. Furthermore, Cornell argues that feminist theorists should also privilege Right over the good in areas of sexuality, and move away from the kind of theorising of male domination 'used to morally and legally judge our sexual relationships' (Cornell, 1998: 46). In other words, feminists should not define what the good life is, or what freedom means, for women.

Cornell's argument harks back to the idea that allowing people to live as they see fit necessarily means accepting, accommodating and tolerating different forms of life, 'from stamp collecting to taking care of one's invalid parents. There is no particular way of giving shape and meaning to a life' (Dworkin, 1988: 31). Cornell advocates tolerance and interpersonal respect based on each person's right to their own imaginary domain. As autonomy theorist Gerald Dworkin wisely put it, 'And, if I am to recognize others as persons, as independent centers of consciousness, as *them*, then there is a requirement that I give weight to the way they define and value the world in deciding how I should act' (Dworkin, 1988: 32). Controversially, Cornell extends this interpersonal respect and anti-state moralism to practices of prostitution.

Combined with her insights about the fragility of a coherent, embodied self, Cornell argues prostitutes and porn workers should be recognised as legitimate sources of

self-representation; if they are represented as anything other than persons feminists are basically saying sex workers are not subjects, that 'there is nothing left except a thing to be filled in by the desires of others' (Cornell, 1998: 53). If the state prohibits prostitution on the grounds of 'saving women from themselves', 'the state is protecting prostitutes' chances *to become persons they now are not*, since they have reduced themselves to pieces of property' (Cornell, 1998: 53; my emphasis). For Cornell this approach is illegitimate and illogical; sex workers are persons in the here and now, working to achieve a stable sense of self; they are not sexual slaves for 'they sell only *part* of themselves for a *period* of time…[being] paid for *specific* acts' and sex work is 'one of the most lucrative ways for a woman to make a living' (Cornell, 1998: 53-54). Providing a short genealogy of the useless and harmful legal and legislative attempts to deal with prostitution, Cornell makes the case that sex workers should be given the legal right to self-representation and unionization to combat the hierarchies within prostitution and the porn industry; 'it is not for the state but for them [sex workers] to find out what the meaning of prostitution is for themselves' (Cornell, 1998: 54).

The argument against state and feminist-enforced moralism and for the free reign of the imaginary domain is also underpinned by Cornell's psychoanalytic approach to gender. For Cornell, Lacan's account of culture and the phantasmic construction of gender do not tell us what men and women are actually like, or how they actually live out their gendered and sexual lives. Although Cornell is persuaded by his view of culture structured by the Symbolic, the latter does not capture the entirety of lived experience. Indeed, it *cannot* capture the entirety of experience because the Real - the 'remainder' of the Symbolic - points to that which is beyond signification (Leeb, 2008). Much like Butler, for Cornell, that fact that normative (in the sense of dominant) constructions of gender are phantasmic suggests people cannot actually embody gender as such. Therefore there is always divergence between what gender 'is' and how women and men live out gender (Cornell, 1998: 198). Using gender as a measure to then judge the extent of women's autonomy is misguided: 'our right to our person should not turn on the resolution of theoretical disputes about the nature of the female body and its relationship to culturally imposed norms of femininity'

(Cornell, 1998: 21). A deconstructive reading of gender necessarily implies that feminists steer clear of any attempts to define the nature or origins of gender. This in turn makes 'the challenge to the reality of gender hierarchy…ethical, rather than based on disputes about the inaccuracies in accounts in all the disciplines about what real life men and women are actually like' (Cornel, 1999: xx).

Partly in reference to Cornell's privileging of Right over the good as well as her psychoanalytic understanding of gender identification, she argues against 'feminist projects of transformation that try to give content to what sex can mean by legal definitions of either masculinity or femininity, so as to end male domination' (1998: 181). This, she argues, would contravene the ideal of the imaginary domain and each persons right to live as they see fit. 'The complexity of sex and gender identifications…[means] that people cannot and should be legally forced to confront, let alone revalue, identifications that have made them who they are' (1998: 183). Feminist theorists and the state should not 'morally condemn' the value of gender identification or any form of family' (Cornell, 1998: 182).

At the same time, the imaginary domain allows feminists to 'doubt the *value* of rigid gender identification' that everyone is routinely subjected to, so as to enable women and men to 'reimagine themselves through reidentification,' to imagine 'new ways of being "sexed" that are less costly to both men and women' (Cornell, 1998: 184, 185). As I read her, Cornell wants to challenge what she calls gender hierarchy and the limitations on women's psychic space, to imagine who they are and what they might become. But, because Cornell is armed with psychoanalytic understandings of gender and of the formation of the subject, she rejects any easy judgement about the extent of women's autonomy in relation to gender. In other words, enhancing women's autonomy does not come with increased intervention by the state, rather change comes by giving women 'the psychic and moral space for the exploration of new possibilities and for the chance to rework the fabric of the web of meanings out of which the self is spun' (Cornell, 1998: 183).

In this section, I have tried to show how poststructuralist feminist approach the idea of autonomy. Following poststructuralist theory more generally, these feminists rethink what autonomy means in light of their queries into the constitution of subjectivity. Butler's notion of sexual autonomy mirrors Cornell's notion of the imaginary domain and the right of sexual self-representation in some ways. Both highlight the difficulties of achieving psychic stability and security in relation to one's sense of embodiment, and both make the claim that the legislation, or judgements, of embodied identity is wrong-headed. In the next section I assess some aspects of the poststructuralist feminist approach to autonomy.

5. 3. Assessing the Poststructuralist Feminist Approach to Autonomy

Having made the argument that personal autonomy does survive within poststructuralist feminism, it is now possible to evaluate the extent to which autonomy is adequately theorized from this approach. My evaluation is bound by what I think are the most relevant critiques of this approach to autonomy as well as the continuing significance feminist theory places on the relationship between gender and autonomy. The evaluation is divided into two parts. The first focuses on the issue of subjectivity, and the second looks to the relationship between gender and autonomy.

5. 3. i. The Subject and the Possibilities of Autonomy

It is undisputed that any theory of personal autonomy requires some account of the subject or self that is, or could be, a determining agent. Given that poststructuralists enter the debate about autonomy through their questioning of the modern autonomous subject and its epistemological underpinnings, it seems only logical to ask if poststructuralist feminists offer accounts of the subject or self that improve upon this modern conception. Further, it must be asked if these theorists theorize the subject in a way that actually allows for autonomy. The criticisms launched against poststructuralist feminism on this matter are substantial.

There are two key poststructuralist breaks with modern epistemology of relevance here. Regarding the first, poststructuralists argue against the notion that a constituted subject is a wholly determined subject. The constituted subject is only perceived and criticised as a determined (and hence non-autonomous) subject according to the constituting/constituted binary of modern epistemology (Hekman, 1995). This binary presents us with two options: either we are self-grounding, with an inherent knack for autonomy, or we are the opposite, wholly determined by forces out with. As I have shown above, though in different ways, Butler and Cornell both argue for a constituted subject that can be autonomous; autonomy is not a given however, but a difficult achievement riddled with contingencies and determined by discourses, options and values determined prior to the subject's arrival. Since it has long been accepted that the constitutively social self is compatible with personal autonomy (e.g. Barclay, 2000), I will not linger on criticisms which dwell on this in principle.

Nevertheless, such compatibility points to substantive criticisms to do with the nature of such constitution. Lois McNay has highlighted the dominance of Foucault's and Lacan's influence on feminist theory which has led to a theorization of the subject based on a 'negative paradigm' wherein 'priority is accorded to the moment of constraint' within impersonal structures of language (McNay, 2000: 35). Ultimately, this suggests 'a form of determinism because of the frequent assumption, albeit implicit, of the essential passivity of the subject' formed via a 'uni-directional and repressive dynamic' (McNay, 2000: 3). McNay argues on this account 'agency is conceived primarily as a property of linguistic structures rather than of individuals engaged in the world' (McNay, 2008: 167). Of course, one main poststructuralist objective in positing agency as *not* a property of individuals is to challenge the modern reasoning subject who naturally always has it. However, in making this critique without considering the expansive range and complex forms of forces and intentions that constitute the middle ground, poststructuralist feminists provide a rather abstract account both of the subject and of agency (McNay, 2008: 168).

At least one consequence of such abstraction relates to the second break with epistemology, which refers to the argument that there is no prediscursive 'I' prior to

our entry into language or discourse. There is, in other words, no 'true' 'essential' or 'inner' self waiting to be found. As I pointed out this has been taken by some critics to suggest poststructuralists endorse the view that there are no such thing as selves, and as I argued in the section second, I do not think poststructuralist feminists endorse this idea. However, because of her notably abstract approach to the subject, Butler does tend to conflate the argument that there can be no prior 'essential' or 'unified' self with the argument that *any* notion of a coherent, stable self is 'essentialist' and therefore unsatisfactory. This conflation is problematic insofar as a coherent, stable self is thought to be desirable, if not absolutely necessary, for exercising and enhancing autonomy. This conflation is illustrated in Susan Hekman's (1995) discussion of the advantages of the 'discursive subject' for feminist theory, which Butler's work is seen to represent.

Hekman places theorists of the discursive subject in opposition to thinkers who want to 'retain elements of the modernist, constituting subjects' by advocating the 'dialectical subject' (Hekman, 1995: 197). Along with Hekman I agree that the discursive subject helps to end the problematic assumptions that gender is an 'essence' contained within and emanating forth from each sex in a predestined, natural way. It helps feminist theorists to show that there is no unitary conception of 'woman' because what women 'are' is historically, culturally and racially variable and dependent on various discourses; 'woman' has no ontological substance. Hekman then argues, in what I regard as more postmodern than poststructuralist fashion, that 'the subject that emerges from this perspective is…a product of fluctuating, changing and often conflictual historical and social influences that *impinge on it*' (Hekman, 1995: 201; my emphasis). Identity still exists, but is 'no longer conceived *in even quasi*-essentialist terms. Rather, it is an identity that is fluid, heterogeneous and changing…plural and nonhierarchical' (1995: 201: my emphasis). By contrast Hekman contends the 'dialectical subject' operates by assuming 'a relationship between "inner" and "outer" worlds,' with reference to the "inner" always implying an 'essentialist, constituting' subject which harks back to 'the masculinist Cartesian subject' (Hekman, 1995: 197). Hekman name drops Diana

Meyers as a key thinker of the dialectical subject, and so I take her to mean that Meyers posits a quasi-essentialist subject with an 'inner world'.

Meyers's conception of the self is not exactly as Hekman contends, and more importantly, draws attention to the desirability of developing a stable sense of self-identity with respect to autonomy that does not rests on an 'essence' gendered or otherwise. Meyers does discuss the autonomous self with a metaphor similar to a dialectic:

> Autonomous people are not vouch-safed a glimpse of their inner selves that other people are denied. Rather, they possess and exercise skills that maintain *a fluid interaction* between their traits, their feelings, their beliefs, their values, their extended plans, their current possibilities for realizing these plans and their conduct. (Meyers, 1989: 55; my emphasis)

However, the fluid interaction Meyers advocates is not between an 'inner' world that is prior to culture or sociality and an 'outer world' that is ready to embed such skills within a person. Rather, the skills Meyers discusses that are, on her account, helpful in terms of developing personal autonomy may be possessed but they are not *innate*. Indeed, these skills may be the ''tools' that can be 'taken up,' where the very 'taking up' is enabled by the tools themselves' (Hekman, 1995: 204). In other words, nothing in the so-called dialectical account of the autonomous subject rejects the constituted nature of the self.

The task Meyers sets herself is to account for the skills that people employ when they develop and enhance their own autonomy. In the analytical philosophy literature, Meyer's concept of 'autonomy competency' is prominent (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000; Friedman, 2003). Autonomy competency is found to be a useful way of describing the use of numerous and varied skills which help us imagine three interrelated processes of self-discovery, self-definition and self-direction. These processes are fundamental to securing autonomy because, according to Meyers, they

help secure an integrated personality which points to one's authentic self (Meyers, 1989: 59). Meyer's 'authentic self' is similar to Jane Flax's notion of the 'core self' in that it highlights the importance of achieving a sense of stability and coherence in relation to self-identity (Flax, 1990). Crucially, these thinkers also emphasise that this sense need not remain static; this stable or core self is 'evolving and dynamic', 'a subject who is in charge of her life within the limits of imperfect, introspective decipherability ...who fashions her self-portrait and shapes her self-narrative through processes of self-discovery, self-definition, and self-direction' (Meyers, 2002: 22).

Pointing to cases like post-traumatic stress disorder and borderline syndrome, it is possible to highlight the tragedy of lives lived without a core self. Flax, a psychotherapist explains:

> Borderline patients lack a core self without which the registering of pleasure in a variety of experiences of ourselves, others, and the outer world are simply not possible. Those who celebrate or call for a "decentered" self seem self-deceptively naive and unaware of the basic cohesion within themselves that makes the fragmentation of experiences something other than a terrifying slide into psychosis. These writers seem to confirm the very claims of those they have contempt for, *that a sense of continuity or "going on being" is so much a part of the core self that it becomes a taken-for-granted background.* Persons who have a core self find the experiences of those who lack or have lacked it almost unimaginable. Borderline patients' experiences vividly demonstrate the need for a core self and the damage done by its absence. Only when a core self begins to cohere can one enter into or use the transitional space in which the differences and boundaries between self and other, inner and outer, and reality and illusion are bracketed or elided. (Flax, 1990: 218, 219; my emphasis)

Similarly, some feminist philosophers have given much thought to how (their own) experiences of rape and violence, resulting in trauma, can lead to the 'undoing of the self' which then shatters the ability to be autonomous (Brison, 1997). The sense of a core, stable self helps ground personal autonomy and direct autonomous action; it contributes to autonomy competency. It is simply not enough to say, as Hekman does, that the discursive subject 'is more successful *because* it involves a more radical critique of the modernist subject' (Hekman, 1995: 197; my emphasis).

Hekman's clear opposition between the dialectical and discursive subject is itself an unhelpful dichotomy: 'The neglect to think the coherence of the self has *reinforced* a broader impasse in theory on identity which seems to be stranded in an opposition between so-called essentialist conceptions, on the one hand, and post-Nietzschean constructivism on the other' (McNay, 2000: 27; my emphasis; Flax, 1990: 218). In light of the shifts within poststructuralist feminism, the need for this reinforcement also appears out-of-date. Contrary to the dichotomies that Hekman seeks to install regards modern and postmodern subjects, Drucilla Cornell's psychoanalytic approach also demonstrates the importance of something similar to Flax's notion of a core self. As I discussed above, Cornell explicitly seeks to understand how feminist theorists can better theorize the links between embodiment, fragility and coherence, drawing on her discussions with Ona Wiggers. On her own account, Wiggers's experiences of childhood sexual abuse enabled her to 'split herself off' while being a sex worker. Cornell then takes this seriously in theorizing the achievement of a core self, of individuation and in justifying imaginary domain as an ethical ideal.

Paradoxically, even though Butler's subject is seen to be synonymous with the discursive subject, her thinking on the New Gender Politics alludes to the desirability and necessity of a core self, which again, undermines stark dichotomies between modern and postmodern subjects. In her essay *Doing Justice to Someone,* Butler documents the case of David Reimer, who as an infant had part of his penis 'burned and severed' during an operation which was meant to remedy a problem with the foreskin (Butler, 2004: 59). This happened because the person working the operating machine did not know how to use it properly. After the incident, medical

practitioners and so-called gender specialists advised his parents he could be raised as a girl to avoid possible problems - locker room anxiety, trouble meeting a heterosexual partner, etc - caused by the divergence between his disfigured body and his gender identity. Still a child, David then had his testicles removed and was raised as a girl. When he was 14 David wanted to become a boy, 'had his breasts removed' and 'a phallus constructed for him' (Butler, 2004: 60). Although these specialists published research stating that the case of David's change was 'successful' and that he was content in his own skin, Butler provides evidence to the contrary.

Much like the lives the of many intersex individuals, David was subjected to endless medical examinations to determine his "true" gender identity, as well as horrendous experiences of bodily intrusion at the hands of surgeons and medical students. Drawing on his self-narrative, Butler shows that David tried but did not succeed in developing a stable, coherent sense of self that is necessary for 'making a life livable.' In his view:

> He is a man born a man, castrated by the medical establishment, feminized by psychiatric world, and then enabled to return to who he is. But in order to return to who he is, he requires, and wants, and gets, a subjection to hormones and surgery. He allegorizes transsexuality in order to achieve a sense of naturalness. And this transformation is applauded by endoctrinologists on the case since they understand his appearance now to be in accord with an inner truth. (Butler, 2004: 65)

Butler goes on to suggest that, though he tried, David did not know who he was in a world structured around two types of body, and was in a sense not allowed to discover who he could have been because medical practitioners and others could not conceive of leaving him alone. At the end of her essay, Butler regrettably informs the reader that when he was 38, David committed suicide. Butler does not quite establish the argument about the importance of a core self for fear of being associated with the argument that there is some gendered 'essence' to the subject. However, she clearly

wants to do justice to *someone,* whoever David was and could have been, when she states 'the norms governing what it is to be a worthy, recognizable, and sustainable human life clearly did not support his life in any continuous or solid way. Life for him was always a wager and a risk, a courageous and fragile accomplishment' (Butler, 2004: 74). To clarify, it should be possible to argue for a coherent, stable self without conflating this with the notion that this is somehow 'essentialist' in relation to the subject or gender, or that is constitutes harking back to modernist pretensions.

Of course, what my argument shows is that poststructuralist feminists, along with other feminist thinkers, do not assume individuals are born with the capacity to be autonomous. Autonomy is a possibility not a given. Logically, this implies that some people will fail to become autonomous during the course of their life, or more precisely, that autonomy will be exercised in a patchy manner in relation to different aspects of one's life and subject to the inevitable difficulties that each person faces. Indeed, Cornell writes about 'the potentiality…we all have to design our own life. But it is just that, a chance' (Cornell, 1998: 63). For this very reason, Cornell argues feminist theorists and the politically liberal state must recognise individual women in terms of the abstract ideal person. As she puts it,

> Although we cannot be the fully authenticating sources of our own values, in reality we should nonetheless be politically recognized as if we were. The abstract ideal person is normatively recognized as the node of choice and source of value. *Abstraction - defining the person only through a normative outline - is the only way we can preserve freedom of personality*…That is to say, freedom of personality as a political ideal need not be rooted in a truth about the human condition. (Cornell, 1998: 38, 39)

I would argue that the seemingly odd jump from a quite complex and profound rethinking of the subject and its vulnerability to an abstract ideal, demonstrates how poststructuralist feminists refuse the 'rush to judgment' about autonomy. They refuse to ignore what often remains unknown in feminist theory, such as the link

Wiggers herself makes between her childhood and sex work, and use it to rethink how feminists should approach personal autonomy. Making a moral judgment about sex work does nothing, they would argue, to promote the understanding that is needed to comprehend women's psychically complex lives. Of course, this refusal to make judgments about women's autonomy coupled with Cornell's sort of abstraction has been criticised by feminist theorists who believe it is necessary to make some sort of judgment in relation to inequalities. In part, they believe this is so in order to uphold the normative commitments that keep feminist theory and politics afloat in a world where gender inequality remains central feature of women's lives.

5. 3. ii. Autonomy, Equality and Gender: Clarifying Some Feminist Confusions

Feminist theorists who approach women's autonomy with the question of gender inequality firmly at the forefront of their analyses provide another set of criticisms aimed at challenging the way poststructuralist feminist engage with the idea of autonomy. Specifically, feminist perspectives which cluster around the ideal of gender equality argue that the role of equality in determining which practices and contexts are more or less conducive to women's autonomy has dropped from poststructuralist feminist analysis. Feminists who can be characterized as egalitarian feminists, of the sort discussed in Chapter Three, argue the poststructuralist focus on subjectivity and sexuality, though important, begs too many questions about social and economic inequalities which impact upon women's autonomy. As a result, poststructuralist feminists fail to provide a complete account of what undermines women's autonomy. In the following two parts, I try to unpack some of the ways the poststructuralist feminist approach has been interpreted with a view to making sense of it and its broader relationship to other feminist perspectives.

5. 3. ii. a. Confusion # 1

To begin, I want to dwell on the rejoiner Nancy Hirschmann provides to Cornell's argument about prostitution for two reasons. First, it highlights that egalitarian feminists are correct with respect to their argument that socio-economic inequalities

are notably absent in poststructuralist feminist approaches to autonomy. For example, Nancy Hirschmann quite rightly points out:

> Cornell never critically engages the social conditions, such as the structure of patriarchal power in the family through which such child abuse takes place, that forced [Ona Wiggers] to make such a choice, any more than she explores the economic conditions that much more frequently lead women into prostitution because it is the best paying employment they can find. The failure to locate individual experience within broader contexts of social construction cannot bring about the "radical" political change she claims to seek. (Hirschmann, 2003: 229)

Further, as most feminist theorists are aware, there is a wealth of evidence associating prostitution with coercion, violence, trafficking, financial necessity, substance abuse and homelessness (e.g., H. Eisenstein, 2009; MacKinnon, 2006). In light of these conditions, which often point to outright social domination, Cornell's strategy of including prostitution within the broader terrain of 'sexuality' which the state has no business meddling in seems inadequate. Arguing that 'it is not for the state but for [prostitutes] to find out what the meaning of prostitution is for themselves' (Cornell, 1998: 54) seems to leave many women with, say, addiction problems, out in the cold. The anti-state position also ignores the ways in which local government level intervention can work to help women with such problems, presenting them with opportunities *to develop routes out* of prostitution. It is important to point out that Cornell does not seek to justify or excuse, as she puts it, 'the harsh economic and psychic history' that sex workers might have faced (1998: 46). Nor does she deny that in an 'ideal world…women would not be driven into prostitution by poverty and drug addiction' (1998: 58). Nevertheless, socio-economic inequalities do remain in the background of her analysis.

I would argue it is partly because egalitarian and poststructuralist feminist positions employ different conceptions of (in)equality that they cannot see eye to eye in cases

like sex work. Egalitarian feminists employ a conception of gender that primarily highlights socio-economic structures, institutions and relations, and their implications for the freedom and well-being of persons (Young, 2000). Gender signifies a set of hierarchical relationships between women and men, or 'the deeply entrenched institutionalisation of sexual difference' (Okin, 1989: 6). Though egalitarian feminists are aware that it is not only women who are sex workers, they would nevertheless ask why the majority of those working in prostitution are women, and would then point to gender inequalities. Those familiar with the 'equality-difference' debate within feminism know that poststructuralist feminists tend to avoid this conception of inequality but also its associated ideal of equality (Scott, 1990). Specifically, they reject the ideal of gender equality based on comparison between men and women (which women are we comparing to which men?), and on the idea of substantive equality which they argue flattens out differences or value pluralism. As a result of this, however, poststructuralist feminists are left with few tools to systematically account for socio-economic inequalities which egalitarian feminists convincingly show impact upon women's freedom and well-being.

Using the recently developed idea of 'clustered disadvantages' (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007) to move beyond the confusion caused by different conceptions of '(in)equality', may provide a way to show not only that egalitarian and poststructuralist positions converge to some extent, but may also point to a more nuanced approach to women's autonomy in relation to prostitution. Wolff and De-Shalit argue that using the concept of disadvantage rather than inequality is more useful theoretically. Given that socio-economic and cultural inequalities are interdependent and reinforcing, showing how these 'cluster' into disadvantage makes it is easier to identify which groups or individuals are the worst off in any given context. For example, street level prostitution would be one case where particular strands of inequality cluster to create severe disadvantage. Wolff and De-Shalit also point to 'corrosive disadvantages' (2007: 11) which puts emphasis on risk; they argue 'people are disadvantaged because they are exposed to risks which they would not have taken had they had the option, or are forced to take risks that in one way or

another are bigger than others are being exposed to or take' (2007: 66). Women who work in prostitution are often exposed to risks – such as rape, violence, other forms of coercion – that they should not have to face, and that are considerably more severe than those found in other forms of work.

I would argue that foregrounding 'disadvantage' allows us to get around the confusion caused by tensions over 'inequality' and shows where egalitarian and poststructuralist positions converge in some cases. It also suggests that evaluating women's autonomy in relation to prostitution should be more nuanced. For example, it is possible to argue that sex workers may be among the most disadvantaged relative to others in society, but that they can nevertheless achieve a degree of autonomy, as Ona Wiggers clearly shows. Sex workers may not experience the same degree of freedom relative to those who are more advantaged, but they can still achieve autonomy.

Although I agree with egalitarian feminists in this first criticism, the second reason I focus on Hirschmann's rejoiner to Cornell is that it points to an error in egalitarian criticisms of the poststructuralist psychoanalytic approach to autonomy. Egalitarian feminists argue that poststructuralists deny the power of gender inequalities, secured by the rigidity of socio-economic structures, which adversely affect women's autonomy. Consequently, they argue poststructuralists 'overestimate changes that can be brought about by an individualist identity politics' (McNay, 2008: 172). Again, Cornell's 'imaginary domain' falls within this type of critique; Hirschmann rejects this concept as a 'individualist freedom of abstract imagining…as if simply thinking my way around oppressive practices is all that stands between me and an infinite number of possibilities and futures' (Hirschmann, 2003: 229). Certainly, the way Cornell explains the 'imaginary domain' in *At the Heart of Freedom* gives this impression. However, in *Beyond Accommodation* she states:

> It is a mistake to read the imaginary domain as a libertarian ideal that either relies on an individualist anthropology or denies the importance of equality. To read the imaginary

> domain in this way is to miss the psychoanalytic underpinnings in which it is justified and specifically to fail to see that it is an explicit attempt to give form to the free person as a matter of "law," an undertaking completely inconsistent with at least the Anglo-American libertarian version of the free person. (Cornell, 1999: xxxxvi, 26fn.)

This is not unimportant because it allows for a correction in Hirschmann's misinterpretation of Cornell. For example, in an oddly descriptive tone, Hirschmann states, 'Cornell defends prostitution as a way for women to express their sexuate being because a prostitute she interviews says that her work has helped her recover from the trauma of childhood sexual abuse' (2003: 229). Cornell doesn't *defend* prostitution on this basis but instead tries to understand the complex and difficult experiences that make sex work a viable option for some women, in order to challenge the view that such women are not 'dupes' or suffering from false consciousness. She then tries to theorize freedom with this understanding of the case in mind. In a sense, Hirschmann trivializes Cornell's point.

In my mind, this a clear example of how some feminists deploy 'the rush to judgment' and allow what is 'unknown' about sex workers like Wiggers to remain so. Making such things known serves to increase feminist anxiety insofar as it disrupts easy equations between practices like sex work and the extent of women's autonomy. It has been argued before that psychoanalytic feminist approaches heighten feminist anxiety in this way. It would appear that the main reason for this is that they reject 'the notion of an uncontaminated psychic space that becomes, or is, the mere repository of oppressive social relations' (Elliot, 1995: 46). In turn, these approaches do not shy away from the idea that women themselves are partly responsible for reproducing problematic gendered relations and practices, like sex work. Cornell's approach opposes perspectives that 'cast women as pure victims of an unmediated process of social determinism, a process that renders invisible subjective agency, conflict and fantasy' (Elliot, 1995: 46). Precisely because Cornell draws attention to such agency, conflict and fantasy in relation to sex work, it

appears to produce a feeling of anxiety in feminist theory concerned with evaluating women's autonomy. If feminist theorists approached prostitution through the 'disadvantage' lens, they could quash such anxiety by holding on to the insight that sex workers are comparatively less free but that they may still achieve some degree of autonomy. At the same time, there is nothing in this type of argument that renders redundant the egalitarian feminist analysis of gender as social structure and inequality. What is does suggest, however, is that such an analysis cannot by itself provide an adequate approach to women's autonomy.

5. 3. ii. b Confusion # 2

A second tension between egalitarian and poststructuralist feminist approaches again has its roots in feminist confusion over the concept of gender. This tension is produced by the egalitarian critique of Butler's early formulation of agency as subversion and the ideas about gender it is thought to have entailed. As I will point out, criticisms of this sort have fundamentally misinterpreted the normative purpose of Butler's work, and appear to have failed to realise that Butler theorizes with a different conception of gender in mind. Nonetheless, egalitarian feminist theorists continue to point out crucial gaps in Butler's work in relation to the broader terrain of theorizing autonomy and identity.

As explained above, egalitarian feminists use gender to signify inequality. Stevi Jackson conceptualises gender as 'a hierarchical social division' which connects social structures, institutions, norms as well as everyday social interaction and our embodied practices (Jackson, 2001: 290, 291). Butler's 'cultural' approach to gender is argued to completely neglect these aspects of gender. With this in mind, feminist theorists like Jackson are frankly irritated by Butler's early formulation of agency as subverting the norms of gender:

> Because of the preoccupation with deconstructing binaries, the subversion of gender is widely thought of as a multiplication process: making the boundaries between genders more fluid,

> creating more genders by moving between and combining elements *of the existing two*. This does not challenge gender itself: you do not subvert a hierarchy by introducing more ranks between the dominant and subordinate. (Jackson, 2001: 291; my emphasis)

On this account it also seems gender identity is viewed as either masculine or feminine in a way that implies the sex/gender distinction of second wave feminist theory; there are 'two' genders to speak of. Jackson argues that Butler's suggestion that 'all we can achieve is remix of identities and subjectivities constructed through gender division' is woefully inadequate for feminist theory (Jackson, 2001: 291). To demonstrate the inadequacy of Butler's vision of making gender 'more fluid' rather than doing away with it altogether, she states, in a footnote, that Butler's 'reflections on a lesbian femme's claim that she likes her "boys to be girls" are illustrative of this' (Jackson, 2001: 292).

Similarly dismissive interpretations of Butler's view on gender have been voiced elsewhere. In a way that indicates, 'a baffling, cavalier triumphalism [stemming from her] poststructuralist feminism, [a]ccording to Butler, gender identity is a pesky phantasm that we can dispatch without too much trouble - say, by delighting in the "deviant" gender performances of drag queens. Emphasizing the *superficiality* of gender identity, as Butler does, seems to make light of women's subordination' (Meyers, 2002: 4; my emphasis). Pointing these criticisms out, I am not restating flaws in Butler's conception of agency, as I have done above, but aim to highlight how some theorists have either missed or disregarded her approach to theorizing gender where gender identity is uncoupled from heterosexuality. Though Butler does think through gender within the heterosexual matrix, as I pointed out above, she also argues that feminist theory should not comprehend gender as being reducible to heterosexuality or sexuality. One of Butler's increasingly forgotten contributions to feminist theory is the challenge to its pervasive heterosexism. Jackson's dismissal of femme/butch attraction as merely 'playing' with gender illustrates how gender is wrongly reduced to the significance it has with respect to heterosexual relations.

In her more recent work, Butler acknowledges she is often asked what good can come from multiplying gender. She puts it that, 'it is not a question merely of producing a new future for genders that do not yet exist. *The genders I have in mind have been in existence for a long time, but they have not been admitted into the terms that govern reality*' (Butler, 2004: 31; my emphasis). She goes on, 'Because the norms governing reality have not admitted these forms to be real, we will, of necessity call them new. But I hope we will laugh knowingly when and if we do' (Butler, 2004: 31). I would argue if we read Butler in light of her shift from agency to autonomy, as discussed above, the egalitarian feminist critique of her conception of gender no longer holds. Butler's notion of 'gender trouble' is not about 'indulgence' 'exercising bourgeois freedom in excessive dimensions', or about 'prescribing new gender norms' (Butler, 2004: 30, 31). Rather, it draws attention to the politics of truth that makes life 'unliveable' for gender minorities, many of whom are 'still looking to become possible' within the terms that govern reality. Again, the criminalization of, and violence directed towards gender minorities is what drives Butler's work. In this sense, she is very much concerned with both the socially constitutive nature of the self as well as social relations and institutions which perpetuate these forms of violence. I would argue the egalitarian feminist criticism of Butler's approach to gender is misconstrued. Reading Butler in light of her shift from agency to sexual autonomy clearly demonstrates this.

Of course, given this specific focus on the self-determination of gender minorities, egalitarian critics might argue that 'dominant identities are left under-problematized' (McNay, 2008: 169). On one hand, Butler would reply by stating that 'Through performativity, dominant and nondominant gender norms are *equalized*' (2004: 209; my emphasis). In other words, just because some genders are dominant and others are marginal does not mean that only gender minorities appreciate the 'the unwanted legislation of identity', as she puts it. This ideal should be extended to all genders regardless of their relation to dominant gender norms. This move seriously challenges a mass of feminist literature that argues feminine identity and in particular, feminine appearance norms, are oppressive and should be opposed (e.g.

Bordo, 1993; Chambers, 2008). In short, many feminist theorists would not be content with leaving all identities, especially dominant ones, left to flourish as they are. Going against the feminist grain, in a move echoing Foucault, Butler steers clear of judging dominant gender identities because she does not locate freedom or truth in subjectivity. What needs challenged is truth itself.

On the other hand, because of the status or truth of dominant gender norms within the heterosexual matrix, this produces an oppressive relation between such dominant and marginal subjects. Egalitarian feminists would rightly add, however, that this does not adequately *explain how* gender as it is currently attached to heterosexuality, functions as a key organizing principle in terms of social structures, institutions, social relations and embodied practices (Ingraham, 1994). In other words, whilst Butler foregrounds gender as non-reducible but linked to heterosexuality and sexuality in its cultural production, egalitarian feminists would tend to highlight gender as 'heterogender' which 'foregrounds the relation between heterosexuality and gender…and institutionalized heterosexuality with…gender division (Ingraham, 1994: 80). As a result, Butler insufficiently explains how heterosexuality as an organizing principle might be tackled in its material and social manifestations. Egalitarians feminists rightly argue that more social and political change is needed in addition to challenging the discursive norms which uphold it (Jackson, 2001; Young, 2001). Further, repeating a point stated earlier, neglecting to look at the ways in which heterosexuality produces gender in its dominant manifestations leaves untheorized the divergences within the realm of dominant norms; dominant gendered, heterosexual identities are not monolithic but are, like all other identities, subject to variance (Jackson, 2006).

Conclusion

Butler's warning about 'the rush to judgement' and how this works to 'foreclose anxiety over the unknown' illustrates two themes that capture the poststructuralist feminist engagement with autonomy. First, because poststructuralist feminists follow the 'critique of the subject' some feminist theorists have too quickly disregarded

their work and have not kept track of how it has developed over time, most notably demonstrated in Butler's shift from agency to autonomy. I have shown at length how the critique and common assumption that autonomy is not valued within poststructuralist feminism is untrue. Cornell's imaginary domain, for example, is almost synonymous with the legal, moral and political protection of autonomy as an ethical ideal. Certainly, one blessing of approaching autonomy via the 'critique of the subject' is that poststructuralist feminists attend to the discursively and socially constituted self. Contrary to critique, this is not antithetical to autonomy. Further, they attend to the psychic complexity and vulnerability of achieving not only a core self but also a good degree of personal autonomy. Autonomy is understood as an achievement, rather than a fixed, given state. Tied to this argument however, is the dismissal of some key poststructuralist feminist insights *because* the conclusions they necessitate about subjectivity and autonomy sit (understandably) uncomfortably in relation to feminist sensibilities. I illustrated this with reference to Cornell's research with Ona Wiggers and Hirschmann's rejoiner.

At the same time, refusing the rush to judgment also captures the way poststructuralist feminists theorize the notion of autonomy. Both Butler and Cornell explicitly refuse to attach the idea of autonomy to a specific conception of subjectivity and identity. Following Foucault, they find the idea of judging someone's autonomy or how free they are, based on their gender identity, to be theoretically unhelpful and politically dangerous. Butler captures this approach nicely with the notion that the 'unwanted legislation of identity' and the 'phobic violence against bodies' should be applicable to all genders/sexes regardless of their relation to dominant norms. Only Cornell offers a minimal condition in this respect, with the idea of a stable and coherent - core - self. Within the personal autonomy literature in other disciplines, particularly analytical philosophy, this is an uncontroversial though invaluable position. Butler and Cornell only embrace judgement with respect to the heterosexual imperative and its pervasive politics of truth.

For other feminists, notably egalitarians, foregrounding the ethical ideal of autonomy does little to explain or change the socio-economic structures, institutions, relations and practices that sustain gender as an organizing principle which limits the possibilities of autonomy. Rather than relying on cultural change, these feminists imply concrete and sweeping changes in gender relations must be made at all levels within society, something the poststructuralist feminist framework cannot accommodate. Further, making judgements in relation to subjectivity and identity, and so regarding the extent of women's autonomy, may be necessary in order to keep the normative hope of ending gender inequality alive. In other words, egalitarian feminists demonstrate that poststructuralist feminist accounts of autonomy are incomplete and have inadequate explanatory power in some respects. Despite this, poststructuralist feminism nonetheless presents a challenging contribution to feminist theory concerned with the idea and experience of personal autonomy.

Notes

[1] Although Lacan views language as having a definite structure, 'it is the movement from the rigorous elaboration of structures to emphasizing the power of signifiers that turns structuralism into poststructuralism' (Benton and Craib, 2001: 164). As I will explain, Lacan's position is poststructuralist in that he emphasizes the power of the primary signifier - the Phallus - in language and in relation to subjectivity.

[2] To make sense of this, Colebrook gives the example of a hungry child who calls on his mother for food. To do this, he 'must address an other, must articulate his demands through some sign; he must therefore mediate his address to an other through some system of signs.' Because this system transcends the child's desire and the mother (or any other), Lacan surmises that 'in language we are subjected to an impersonal or systematic Other, the law or signification' (2004: 156).

[3] To reinforce the point, Butler makes it clear, 'the agency denoted by the performativity of "sex" will be directly counter to any notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart from the regulatory norms which he/she opposes. The paradox of subjectivication is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulartory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power (1993: 15).

[4] Cornell explicitly works to detach an ethical individualist position from both the 'connotations of the possessive or solitary individual' and 'a metaphysical conception of autonomy' (Cornell, 1998: 63). Regards the latter she states, 'Not only do we not need such a concept; it is actually out of touch with the material and cultural reality in and through which

a human being is shaped and which then provides her with the possibility of designing a life' (1998: 63). In light of this note, it is possible to reiterate that poststructuralist feminists do reject *specific conceptions* of autonomy and the subject but that they do not reject the idea of personal autonomy, an idea concerned with individual self-determination. In other words, the connotations of autonomy, in some minds inseparable from Kantian moral autonomy and the modern subject, have pushed theorists away from the idea of autonomy as otherwise conceived. This has led theorists like Cornell to develop alternative conceptual repertoires – the imaginary domain - to theorize the idea of personal autonomy.

Conclusion

I began this study by highlighting the scepticism and uncertainty the idea of autonomy invoked in some quarters of feminist theory. This apparently stemmed from different perceptions of what autonomy meant, where it came from, and what it was intended to do. As a result, I observed that some feminists distanced themselves from the idea whilst others attempted to reclaim and rethink autonomy for feminism. Throughout this study I aimed, first and foremost, to *make sense* of feminist engagement with autonomy in order to bring about more clarity and certainty with respect to its meanings and value.

In Chapter One I sought to give the thesis a historical grounding with respect to the idea of autonomy. In doing so the aim was to show why feminist theorists have been opposed to the way in which autonomy has been constructed within the liberal tradition. I also aimed to show the divergent characterisations of autonomy within this tradition. The chapter looked to the three of most influential liberal approaches to autonomy in modern political thought, namely those of John Locke, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill. Locke's approach to autonomy was formulated in light of his opposition to monarchical power. His natural rights liberalism produced the argument that individual autonomy, or 'freedom of will', was a natural right, and, in the context of a political community, ought to be protected by private rights. Locke's approach to autonomy was formulated primarily for the citizen-property owner, and in step with this his is equated with possessive individualism. It is Locke's approach to autonomy that feminists find to be masculine and capitalist. In Kant's approach to autonomy, he solidified the critique of the morality of obedience by arguing that all rational beings were capable of following self-imposed moral law. Autonomy in this approach signifies 'autonomy of the will'. For Kant, the state has to respect the autonomy and the dignity of rational beings with the principle of freedom, or Right. Unlike Locke, Kant introduced a strict, gendered moral division of labour, excluding women from the status of moral, rational beings and hence citizenship. The chapter located fruitful feminist engagement with the idea of autonomy in the work of Mill. Mill's approach to autonomy is embodied in his idea of freedom as non-domination

and individuality. Importantly, Mill also makes the case for autonomy as collective self-government through his valuation of participation in public life and social change. Although all three approaches are situated within the liberal tradition and all three are problematic from a feminist point of view, I argued that Mill's approach challenged the sexism as well as the individualism seemingly inherent to the idea in Locke's and Kant's approaches, by equating autonomy with non-domination, individuality, and democracy. In light this, Mill offers a liberal approach to autonomy that should be seen as valuable for feminism.

The remaining chapters turned to examine contemporary feminist thought. Each chapter followed a three-part structure with a view to make sense of each feminist approach to autonomy. First, I looked to critiques of autonomy within a particular feminist approach, second, I showed how each approach reclaimed and rethought autonomy, and third, I assessed each feminist approach.

In Chapter Two I examined care feminism's engagement with the idea of autonomy. The care critique of autonomy revolves around its challenge to the construction of the autonomous self at the centre of the ethic of justice which informs the liberal tradition, specifically the social contract tradition with roots in Locke and Kant. Care feminists argue that this autonomous self is masculinist in its reasoning as well as its disavowal of dependency. Despite this forceful critique of autonomy, the second part of the chapter showed that care feminism does value autonomy. Its reclamation is attached to a host of values associated with the ethic of care. The beginning of this reclamation stems from care feminists' reconstruction of the autonomous self as relational. I zoned in on the implications of this idea with respect to women's freedom, and found that care feminists emphasise the importance of challenging the norms of self-sacrifice and encouraging women's individuality. I tried to shed light on these themes using Mill's view of marriage as friendship, thereby forging links with classic and contemporary feminist approaches to autonomy. Having shown care feminism does value autonomy, the chapter also assessed the approach by considering two responses to it. The first was that care feminism is inattentive to inequality as it structures care practices and care labour, and I argued that while this

is a worry for care feminists, they are in fact aware of the ties between inequality and autonomy. The second response to care feminism was that it harbours perfectionist and thus paternalist tendencies by emphasising the relational conditions of autonomy. While this criticism is designed to slight the idea of relational autonomy, I argued that it does the opposite and reinforces the value of this notion of autonomy. It does so because of the way it points toward the complexities of respecting and enhancing women's autonomy when conditions of inequality and oppression are explicitly analysed.

Chapter Three picked up on this analysis, looking to the meanings and value of autonomy in egalitarian feminism. The egalitarian critique of autonomy revolves around a broader challenge to contemporary liberal approaches, namely libertarianism and Rawlsian liberalism, which have their roots in Locke and Kant. According to egalitarian feminists, the methods of individualism and abstraction informing these approaches fail to account for certain structural inequalities and relations of dominance, which are in some cases *justified* using the idea of autonomy. In this sense, egalitarian feminists argue autonomy functions ideologically in these approaches. Further, libertarianism and Rawlsian liberalism fail to devote enough attention to the value of political autonomy and participatory norms. Egalitarian feminists therefore seek to rethink autonomy in the context of democracy and social justice. I explained why egalitarian feminists foreground the political ideal of autonomy and seek to emphasise its value in relation to the participatory norms that democracy requires. In this sense, this approach has affinities with that of Mill. Egalitarian feminists also share the view that the kinds of activities that occur within civil society contribute to citizens' autonomy in a political and personal sense, specifically in the context of workplace democracy and consciousness-raising. Furthermore, I discussed how egalitarian feminists see family life as central to their understanding of a participatory society and how this shapes their approach to autonomy. Ultimately, their hope is that with 'the end of gender' political and personal autonomy will be more meaningful for all. In my assessment of this approach, I argued that egalitarian feminists are utopians, but that their approach should be seen in terms of a process model of utopia, rather than an end state model.

In this light, egalitarian feminism recuperates the transformative project that the autonomy requires.

In Chapter Four I examined the postcolonial feminist approach to the idea of autonomy. Their critique of the idea is bound up in their opposition to liberalism in its past and present forms. In the first place postcolonial feminists recognise the autonomous subject of Lockean and neoliberal approaches to be a colonizing subject, constructed to justify the domination of peoples and places in the name of economic gain and cultural and racial superiority. They further object to the way liberalism has reserved the right to collective autonomy for more 'civilized' peoples, a position most explicitly defended in Mill's approach. For postcolonial feminists, liberal approaches to autonomy are infused with the judgemental, imperialist gaze inherent to classic liberal discourse. Because postcolonial feminists find this discourse to structure elements of historical and contemporary feminist thought, I showed how their critique of autonomy extends to this field and is well illuminated by the feminism-multiculturalism debate. Despite the firm opposition to the idea of autonomy as it is embedded within liberalism and western feminism, I explored how postcolonial feminists are staunch defenders of both individual and collective forms of autonomy. Some postcolonial feminists value autonomy in the context of critical pedagogical theory, which presupposes a strong tie between process of decolonization and self-determination. Other postcolonial feminists affirm the importance of collective autonomy by drawing attention to intergroup power relations with the concept of intersectionality, and theorizing the complexities of subjectivity and identity formation in community contexts. In my assessment of the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy, I considered three responses to it. I considered but rejected the critique that postcolonial feminists romanticise visions of autonomy 'from the margins'. Contrary to this response, postcolonial feminists seek to emphasise the risk, anxiety and struggle integral to processes of autonomy. Second, I assessed the view that the postcolonial feminist approach to autonomy endorses, to some extent, an 'emergent humanism', a position affiliated with libratory factions of postcolonial thought more generally. Finally, I discussed the

competing frames of references of postcolonial and egalitarian feminism, as limiting the way they judge one another's vision of autonomy.

The final chapter of the thesis aimed to make sense of the way poststructuralist feminists approach the idea of autonomy. My task of showing that these feminists do value autonomy was made all the more significant in light of the entrenched perception in some feminist quarters that poststructuralist feminists eschew autonomy altogether. To begin, I showed how the poststructuralist feminist critique of autonomy is situated within the more general poststructuralist 'critique of the subject', which deconstructs the illusions of self-constitution and self-transparency which are viewed as integral to liberal, Enlightenment constructions of autonomy. But rather than doing away with the subject and with it the possibility of autonomy, as critics suggest, poststructuralist feminists follow Foucault and Lacan by *rethinking* subjectivity and therefore the possibilities of autonomy. To demonstrate this, and to make sense of the poststructuralist feminist approach to autonomy, I focused on the work of Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell. I interpreted Butler's view of the discursive subject and her valuation of sexual autonomy in light of her critique of heterosexism and the material and symbolic violence done to gender minorities. I then made sense of Cornell's approach to autonomy in light of her concepts of the 'imaginary domain' and 'sexuate being', which are explicitly tied to a concept of freedom and a liberal political framework. In my assessment of the poststructuralist feminist approach to autonomy, I first evaluated the usefulness of Butler's notion of discursive subjectivity for theorizing autonomy. I argued that it underestimates the extent to which a good degree of autonomy is only possible through the establishment of a 'stable self', and that Cornell's perspective is better equipped to make clear why this is so. Despite my critique here, I then defended Butler's notion of sexual autonomy from theorists who seek to trivialize it. In my final point, I assessed Cornell's notion of freedom rooted in the imaginary domain. Although it illuminates the complexities of selfhood, her conception of freedom and the liberal framework in which it is embedded fails to address relations of dominance and structural inequalities and how they can severely undermine autonomy. I concluded by reiterating my claim that feminists have been too quick to think poststructuralist

feminists have little interest in the idea of autonomy – clearly, they do. Moreover, the limits of this approach are balanced by the contributions it makes to understanding how autonomy, relative to context and person, can be a difficult but worthy achievement.

This journey through feminist approaches to autonomy was undertaken in response to the following question: should autonomy be considered a valuable concept for feminist theory?

I have shown that feminists clearly battle with the ways autonomy is constructed in the liberal tradition. In particular feminists resist the liberal capitalist norms which inform the construction of autonomous selfhood and freedom in Locke's approach and the contemporary libertarian and neoliberal versions of it. In the context of these approaches, 'property in the person' and possessive individualism are indeed the antithesis of what feminists seek in the name of autonomy. Feminists also reject the view of autonomous selfhood and moral reasoning which inform Kant's approach to autonomy. It is now possible to clarify and emphasise that it is these particular liberal approaches that embody what Marina Oshana (2001) calls the 'Autonomy Bogeymen'. When feminists attack the idea of autonomy it is usually the way in which it is constructed in one of these two liberal traditions that is their focus. If autonomy is only understood through the lenses offered by Locke and Kant in these ways, then the answer to the question driving the thesis is no.

I contend, nonetheless, that autonomy is a valuable concept for feminist theory, and that my analysis in each chapter verifies this. The idea of autonomy can also be understood through the lens offered by Mill, and I have shown that this is of value to feminism in many respects. Notwithstanding the elitist and colonial discourses his work reproduces, this thesis has shown that Mill's way of thinking about autonomy is mirrored in some contemporary feminist approaches, whether or not this is explicitly acknowledged. More specifically, Mill transforms the idea of autonomy from being an attribute of privatized individuals, whether grounded in property in the person or the development of Kantian moral personality, to a capacity that derives its meaning

from personal development and individuality. Arguably what feminist approaches to autonomy share is a valuation of individuality and non-domination, alongside forms of public and political autonomy. They stress the significance of the educative conditions of autonomy as well as the importance of more democratic social relationships for enabling autonomy. Mill's approach cannot be said to characterise all contemporary feminist approaches however, given that postcolonial and poststructuralist feminists draw on different philosophical and political traditions to theorize autonomy.

For each feminist approach, the value of autonomy is centrally linked to opposition to domination. Thus, for care feminists, the concept of autonomy conceived in relational terms is valuable in the sense that it is viewed as an essential aspect of a self that is socially embedded but should not be determined by relations of domination. For egalitarian feminists, the role of autonomy in contesting relations of domination is also essential, and they share this view of the relational self. But for them I would suggest autonomy is a political value, in the sense that it is a core ideal in their vision of a participatory, democratic and just society. For postcolonial feminists, autonomy is valued as it contributes to the project of contesting colonial, racist discourses and social practices through critical pedagogy. In particular, the notion of 'intrapsychic' autonomy is, for them, key in enabling individuals to develop a sense of self-worth despite processes of marginalisation and domination. Finally, poststructuralist feminists value autonomy for the role it can play in destabilising gender and allowing the sexual self-determination of gender minorities, as well as in helping to achieve psychic stability.

In light of this, and because autonomy is a contested concept, capable of being interpreted in various ways, I would argue feminists need to exercise more patience in debates on the topic and be more attentive to similarities and differences in how the concept is used in a variety of feminist approaches. 'Autonomy' need not always signify a liberal, capitalist value. Moreover, the exercise of writing this thesis has convinced me that an adequate feminist theory of autonomy needs to take seriously all the different ways in which autonomy is valued in these diverse strands of feminist

thought. So, for example, the focus on personal autonomy and intrapsychic stability needs to be supplemented with attention to how collective and political forms of autonomy provide the necessary conditions in which individual autonomy can be exercised. Feminist theorising about subjectivity and selfhood is essential, and gives us an understanding of how autonomy, as part of lived experience, can be achieved. But this focus alone cannot provide feminist theory with adequate insights into the social and material conditions that the development and exercise of autonomy requires. Egalitarian feminists and postcolonial feminists in particular point toward the public struggles and processes of democratisation that are needed if women's autonomy is to be enhanced and relations of domination challenged. My argument falls in line with recent calls to re-orientate feminist theorizing, away from thinking primarily about 'the subject question' and the tendency to 'privatize' the question of freedom (Zerilli, 2005; Goodman, 2004).

Finally, it is worth reflecting on what my thesis means for political thought about the idea of autonomy more generally. W. B. Gallie warned some time ago that defenders of ideas tend to believe that their understanding of an idea 'is the only one that can command honest and informed approval, they are likely to persist in the hope that they will ultimately persuade and convert all their opponents by logical means' (Gallie, 1956: 193). Theorists and philosophers understand the idea of autonomy in very different ways, and some will, for example, remain adamant that Kant's idea of autonomy is the best and most plausible, and that contemporary thinkers who use autonomy in the way suggested by Mill have, to put it bluntly, got things very wrong (O'Neill, 2003). I do not see these kinds of dispute as cause for anxiety, and my aim in this thesis has not been to push for interpretative closure on the subject of autonomy. Autonomy is, and will remain, an essentially contested concept. My thesis about the relevance of autonomy in feminist theory should be seen as a contribution to the wider, on-going debate about autonomy and its ethical and political implications.

If conceptual contestation is inevitable, then, as Monique Wittig suggests, 'We must produce a political transformation of the key concepts, that is the concepts which are

strategic for us' (Wittig, 1992: 30). In this thesis I have shown feminists have taken the idea of autonomy and transformed it in various ways in light of their political critiques and visions of social change. In doing so I hope to have produced a work that clarifies the meanings and value of autonomy within feminist theory, and for feminist theory. Despite the questionable roots of the idea in modern political thought, the political transformation of autonomy within feminist theory shows it is an indispensible concept for feminism.

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