Autonomy and the Self
Foreword

The initial idea for this volume grew out of a conference entitled “Norms and Persons – Freedom, Commitment and the Self,” which we organized in Konstanz, Germany, in 2008. Based on the illuminating and inspiring discussions there, it quickly became clear to us that, in future work, we wanted to focus more on the complex relationship between personal autonomy and the notion of the self. This finally led to the idea of editing a volume on the topic, bringing together internationally renowned scholars and a number of aspiring young researchers.

First and foremost, we would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all the contributors to this volume for their unwavering willingness to participate in this project—putting together a volume such as this indeed always takes longer than initially expected—and for providing us with such insightful and thought-provoking papers.

We would also especially like to thank Gottfried Seebaß, research project leader of the project “Normativity and Freedom” within the Konstanz Collaborative Research Centre “Norm and Symbol,” which was funded by the “Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft,” for his encouragement to edit the volume in the first place and for his continuous support during the entire editing process.

Furthermore, we would like to thank Nancy Kühler for meticulously taking care of the language editing of all the papers by non-native speakers and also the Konstanz Collaborative Research Centre “Norm and Symbol” for kindly funding this language editing.

During the final stages of the publication process, we also had the good fortune to benefit from the great support that the Centre for Advanced Study in Bioethics at Münster, Germany, provided us. Aside from voicing gratitude for the helpful remarks and suggestions given to us by numerous members of the Centre, we would especially like to thank Konstantin Schnieder for his invaluable help in creating the index for the volume.
Last but not least, we would like to express our gratitude to Ingrid van Laarhoven and all the other people at Springer Science + Business Media who were involved in this project for their keen interest, right from the start, in publicizing this volume and for their kind and enduring support during the whole publication process.

Münster and Konstanz
Michael Kühler and Nadja Jelinek
2012
Contents

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... ix

Part I  Autonomy and Free Will

1 Freedom Without Choice? .......................................................................................... 3
   Gottfried Seebaß

2 Freedom and Normativity – Varieties of Free Will ................................................. 23
   Barbara Merker

Part II  Autonomy, the Self, and the Role of Personal Traits

3 Norm-Guided Formation of Cares Without Volitional Necessity – A Response to Frankfurt ................................................................. 47
   John J. Davenport

4 Dynamics in Autonomy – Articulating One’s Commitments ............................ 77
   Nadja Jelinek

5 The Normative Significance of Personal Projects ............................................. 101
   Monika Betzler

6 Normative Self-Constitution and Individual Autonomy ............................... 127
   John Christman

7 Psychocorporeal Selfhood, Practical Intelligence, and Adaptive Autonomy ................................................................. 147
   Diana Tietjens Meyers

8 Emotion, Autonomy, and Weakness of Will ...................................................... 173
   Sabine A. Döring

9 Who Am I to Uphold Unrealizable Normative Claims? ................................... 191
   Michael Kühler
Part III  Autonomy and the Self Within Society’s Grip

10  Paternalistic Love and Reasons for Caring .......................................... 213
    Bennett W. Helm

11  Self-identity and Moral Agency ............................................................. 231
    Marina Oshana

12  Being Identical by Being (Treated as) Responsible .............................. 253
    Michael Quante

13  Integrity Endangered by Hypocrisy ...................................................... 273
    Nora Hangel

14  Who Can I Blame? .................................................................................. 295
    Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen

About the Authors ........................................................................................... 317

Index ................................................................................................................. 321
Introduction

Michael Kühler and Nadja Jelinek

Autonomy is generally held in high esteem. It serves as one of the central concepts in many philosophical debates, e.g. on understanding ourselves as persons, on how to conceptualize morality, on the legitimization of political norms and practices as well as on questions in biomedical ethics. In all such debates, the concept of autonomy is invoked either to formulate a certain constitutive moment of the subject in question or to function at least as an essential justificatory criterion, i.e. as a value to be respected when it comes to assessing a position’s plausibility and validity.\footnote{For a general overview of the various strands of the discussion on (personal) autonomy, see Christman (1989), Taylor (2005), Christman and Anderson (2005), Buss (2008), and Christman (2009).}

Derived from the Greek \textit{autós} (“self”) and \textit{nomos} (“law” or “rule”), the term “autonomy” was first used to describe Greek city states exerting their own laws. The general idea, which has not changed since then, is that the subject in question, in one way or another, “governs itself.” Accordingly, the idea of \textit{personal autonomy} is that a person “governs herself,” i.e. that, independent of unwanted internal and external influences, she decides and acts according to her own convictions, values, desires, and such. Of course, this all too short explanation gives rise to more questions rather than providing an answer. For what exactly is meant by the idea of convictions, values, or desires being a person’s \textit{own} and which influences endanger autonomy and why?\footnote{Frankfurt (1971).}

After the discussion following Harry G. Frankfurt’s seminal paper “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,”\footnote{Frankfurt (1988, 1999) as well as Betzler and Guckes (2000) and Buss and Overton (2002).} autonomy is nowadays explained mainly by pointing to a person’s capacity to reflect and endorse or disapprove of her (first order) desires on a higher (second order) level and to form a volition in line with an approved desire which moves her to act accordingly. It is, of course, highly disputed whether Frankfurt’s hierarchical model of desires and volitions and his later specification of “volitional necessities” are the most plausible way to spell out this capacity in detail.\footnote{For an overview of the discussion on Frankfurt’s approach, see Frankfurt (1988, 1999) as well as Betzler and Guckes (2000) and Buss and Overton (2002).} In this respect, Frankfurt’s line of thought is one of the main
focal points of the contributions in this volume as well, and we will come back to this in a minute.

For the moment, however, as rough and preliminary as this short explanation of autonomy as “self-government” may be, it provides one with a basic idea while also pointing to the central topic addressed in this volume, namely the relationship between autonomy and the self. For, especially in the explanation of personal autonomy as “self-government,” the notion of “self” usually implies more than a simple statement that the person being governed is the same as the one doing the governing: the notion of the self also takes up the aforementioned idea of convictions, values, desires, and the like as being a person’s own. In order to be autonomous, one therefore has to decide and act, or, more broadly, to live in general, according to motives that can count as expressions of one’s self, i.e. of who one is (or wants to be). The notion of autonomy thus leads to the notion of authenticity. Accordingly, a person can be judged autonomous if her decisions, actions, or life in general can be interpreted as the authentic expression of who this person (basically) is. That, however, leads to even more trouble because of the highly controversial question of how to spell out in detail the notion of the self and the idea of who a person (really) is.

Moreover, a special problem seems to arise with regard to the widespread idea that a major part of one’s self is formed through the acquirement of social norms and values. For, how exactly should the idea be analyzed that the norms and values a person identifies herself with or commits herself to are (truly) hers if the norms or values in question ultimately have to be traced back to some sort of social setting or social relation, i.e. if they have to be understood as being a genuine part of the social sphere and thus external to the person?

In order to shed some preliminary light on the notions of autonomy and the self, as well as their possible relationships, and in order to map the conceptual terrain of the subsequent discussion in this volume, we will, in the following, begin with a brief sketch of approaches to the self relevant for the topic at hand. In this respect, we distinguish roughly between subjectivist, social-relational, and narrative accounts of the self (section “The self” of this introduction). Secondly, we will address the question of possible relationships between autonomy and the self by highlighting two respective theses which not only mark the two most vividly opposing viewpoints but also, in a way, mirror the two main aspects of approaching the notion of the self. We have dubbed the one thesis existential cum libertarian thesis and the other authenticity via essential nature thesis (section “Autonomy and the Self” of this introduction). Although these designations may sound a bit exaggerated, they prove to be helpful in outlining the extreme positions of the conceptual terrain in which intermediary propositions are brought forward and in which the various aspects mentioned in the contributions of this volume can be pinpointed and assessed.

---

4 The best way of stating the problem at hand, i.e. whether in terms of “who one is” or in terms of “who one wants to be” is, of course, a matter of controversy, for each of the formulations already seems to endorse a different view implicitly. This will become clearer in the course of the introduction. See also Christman (2009).
Moreover (and still in section “Autonomy and the Self”), we will take a closer look at internal and external aspects of autonomy and the self and examine the relevance that limitations of a person’s freedom may have on her self and autonomy. Finally, in section “Overview of Contributions” of this introduction, we will provide an overview of the three parts of this volume along with brief summaries of each contribution.

The Self

For the topic at hand, approaches to explaining the notion of the self, when the term is used to answer the question who a person is, can be roughly divided into (1) subjectivist accounts, pointing to subjective or individual traits of the person in question; (2) social-relational accounts, pointing to a person’s social involvement and social interdependencies; and (3) narrative accounts, highlighting a constructivist approach by way of viewing the self as nothing other than what is created anew each time a story is told about who a person is.

Subjectivist Accounts of the Self

Existential Account

When starting from scratch to explain subjectivist approaches to the self, it seems fitting to begin with an existential account. In Being and Nothingness, Jean-Paul Sartre explains the notion of authenticity, which is mentioned above as a central component in describing autonomy, in terms of existential freedom. Put briefly, the basic idea is that, in Sartre’s view, being authentic means acknowledging existential freedom as the primary mode of existence as a human being and taking responsibility for being unavoidably forced to choose one’s attitude toward how to live one’s life in every single action. Ultimately, this implies that one is always able to define and redefine one’s self anew through one’s actions; hence Sartre’s slogan “existence precedes essence,” i.e. existential freedom precedes the self.

However, it would be a misunderstanding to assume that existential freedom with regard to the constitution of one’s self amounts to the idea of “anything goes” or that there are no boundaries at all in willfully defining one’s self. Sartre explicitly acknowledges the twofold constitution of one’s self. He distinguishes between

See Sartre (1943), esp. part 4, ch. 1. For a first overview of Sartre’s work and existentialism in general, see Crowell (2010) and Flynn (2011). In this volume, see especially Gottfried Seebaß’s contribution for a line of thought sympathizing with the general idea of existential or libertarian freedom. For an opposing position regarding the question of how to understand the main concepts involved on a basic level, see Barbara Merker’s contribution.
facticity and transcendence. The term facticity designates the factors of a person’s self that can be attributed from a third person point of view, e.g. one’s bodily properties, social integration, psychological traits, or individual history. Moreover, these factors are given from the beginning and, for the most part, cannot simply be altered at will.6

The term transcendence, on the other hand, highlights the role of the first person point of view. For it is one’s (existential) practical capacity to adopt not only a third person perspective toward oneself, i.e. recognizing something about one’s self, but rather also to adopt an engaged first person stance toward these traits of facticity. The question is thus a practical one of whether I choose to endorse or disapprove of these traits, thereby making them my own or disavowing them. Accordingly, one’s authentic self comprises only those traits of facticity that one has made one’s own from the practical first person point of view of transcendence.

Because we are constantly able to pose ourselves this practical question and, in answering it, to take a different stance toward the traits of facticity in question, we are constantly able to define and redefine our authentic self. This is then what existential freedom basically amounts to: our ongoing capacity, in the above sense, to choose who we want to be.

Moreover, the choice incorporated in taking a stance toward traits of facticity functions as the foundation of one’s values and normative bindings as well. Nothing is of value or of normative binding for a person if she has not constituted that value or normative binding by way of choosing it to be hers first.7 Hence, the idea of identifying with, or committing oneself to, certain norms or values has to be understood in terms of existential freedom as well, which means that there are no given criteria to guide any choice except that they themselves be chosen and thereby be made one’s own. The choice incorporated in existential freedom is thus (always) a radical choice. Hence, one’s authentic self is ultimately constituted—shaped and reshaped—by one’s ongoing radical choices.

Essential Nature Account

In contrast to the existential account, the second line of subjectivist accounts of the self denies the famous Sartrean dictum according to which “existence precedes essence.” Instead, it presupposes that, not only from the third but also from the first person point of view, there are factors which essentially determine a person’s self and which are not freely chosen and cannot simply be altered at will. The theory in question, which we call an essential nature account, therefore claims that the essential nature of a person is not chosen by the person herself but given. In this connection,

---

6 Especially bodily properties have rarely been given much thought in recent philosophical discussions of the self and of personal autonomy. In this volume, however, see especially Diana Tietjens Meyers’ contribution for addressing the topic.

7 For a generally sympathetic line of thought regarding the role of choosing one’s personal projects, see Monika Betzler’s contribution in this volume.
though, it is of great importance that the person in question *identifies* herself with the relevant characteristics. Otherwise, there would be no difference between the essential nature of the self and overwhelming external forces.

The most prominent proponent of an essential nature account nowadays is Harry G. Frankfurt. The key concepts of his theory are “caring,” “volitional necessities,” and “unthinkability.” A person’s *caring* about something is defined by Frankfurt as her taking the object in question to be *important*. “Caring” is thereby defined as an essentially volitional attitude which can, but does not have to, be accompanied by feelings, emotions, and value judgments. For Frankfurt, a person’s self is thus essentially defined in volitional terms.

Following the line of thought of an essential nature account, what a person cares about is *not* a matter of decision. This claim is underpinned by the fact that we do indeed sometimes decide to care about something or to stop caring about something respectively, but then become aware that our decision does not have any influence on the matter—it remains perfectly ineffective. So what we care about has to be regarded as given, not as chosen—at least in many and important cases. This is why Frankfurt talks about “volitional necessities” in this context. For a person who is subject to a volitional necessity, some options of decision and action become unthinkable, i.e. she cannot consider them as real options for herself.

The term “volitional necessities” refers to the will of a person in two respects. Firstly, volitional necessities bind the will, i.e. the relevant will cannot be any different. Secondly, however, volitional necessities are themselves wanted, i.e. the person in question does not want to want anything else. This endorsement is of crucial importance, for it guarantees that volitional necessities really represent the essential nature of the person in question. Without this additional criterion, volitional necessities would become inseparable from overwhelming external forces, like addiction, for example, which the person in question regards as alien. This also explains in which respect some decisions and actions become unthinkable for the person in question. She neither can nor wants to want to decide and act accordingly.

Based on this rough sketch of Frankfurt’s theory, the main *systematical difference* between the two subjectivist accounts of the self presented here can be identified as follows. Although both accounts have *in common* that they assume at least some factors of the self which are given and both require that a person has to *make them*...

---

8 For an overview of the relevant discussion, see Betzler and Guckes (2000), Buss and Overton (2002), Korsgaard (2006), Bratman (2006), and Dan-Cohen (2006). In this volume, see especially the contributions of John Davenport, Nadja Jelinek, and John Christman.


10 Cf. Frankfurt (1982), 80ff. More exactly, he claims that “caring” and “taking important” have the same *extension* although they differ in their *intensions*. For this point, cf. Frankfurt (1999a), 155f.


her own by endorsing it, they differ profoundly with regard to the kind and the degree of the factors referred to as given as well as to the role decisions play in the process of defining oneself. The existential account presupposes givenness or “facticity” only from the third person point of view and assumes freedom of choice from the first person point of view in order to constitute one’s authentic self by radical choice. The essential nature account, on the other hand, claims that a person is confronted with the fact that she cannot help but care about certain things, which means that she can merely discover her already given essential nature—but cannot alter it at will. Thus, givenness or “facticity” can also be found with regard to the first person point of view. The accompanying idea that a person also has to endorse her caring so that it really becomes her own does not contradict this claim. For volitional necessities cannot simply be changed by refusing to endorse them. On the contrary, trying to refuse one’s caring about something is either unthinkable for the person as a real option in the first place, or it leads to ambivalence within the person’s self, at the very least, which may even shatter the person’s self on the whole.

Social-Relational Accounts of the Self

In contrast to subjectivist accounts of the self, a group of accounts which can be subsumed under the label of social-relational accounts of the self emphasizes the dependence of the self’s genesis and continued existence upon social and cultural context. Theories of this kind usually go back to the seminal works of the American social behaviorist George Herbert Mead, who developed his theory of social interaction during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Before we roughly sketch Mead’s account, however, we will first take a quick look at Charles Taylor’s theory of articulation of the self. This theory suggests itself as a starting point because Taylor explicitly follows Frankfurt’s earlier, hierarchical account of the will. Yet he supplements it with his distinction between weak and strong evaluations concerning one’s first order desires, on the one hand, and his concept of articulation, on the other hand. Both supplements are tied to social-relational aspects.

Taylor regards a person’s self as a product of articulation. This term of art indeed presupposes certain given psychological states and attitudes, like desires, motivations, inclinations, feelings, and emotions. These are, however, not yet identical with a

---

15 In this volume, see especially Sabine A. Döring’s contribution, which focuses on the role played by our emotions and the phenomenon of weakness of will in this regard.
16 See Mead (1910a, b, 1912, 1913, 1925, 1934).
18 See Frankfurt (1971).
person’s self, and this is so for at least two reasons. Firstly, all these psychological attitudes and states mentioned do not yet provide a person with a fully fleshed out identity, but are often still vague and inchoate. Therefore, they have to be articulated, i.e. the person in question has to interpret and thereby finally constitute them in a certain way. If she has, for example, a vague feeling of being attracted to another person, she has to find out and concretize what kind of feeling she is experiencing: Has she fallen in love with the other person, does she simply like her as a trusted friend, or does she perhaps experience a kind of admiration for the other person’s moral superiority? In answering these questions and interpreting her feeling in some way or another, society and culture begin to come into play. For, interpretation requires language, and often not only ordinary everyday language, but terms and concepts which are highly specific to certain societies and cultures. Therefore, we rely on socially conveyed concepts in order to be able to define ourselves.

Secondly, the question of who we want to be matters for Taylor, too. We do not have to take all mental attitudes simply as given, but we can take an evaluative stance toward them. This characteristically takes the shape of strong evaluations, which can be roughly defined as value judgments. At this point, social and cultural factors become relevant once more. For, in order to evaluate our various desires and emotions, we are again in need of appropriate vocabulary, which now means that we are in need of value conceptions. These, however, like linguistic tools for articulation, can once again be acquired only through social and cultural interaction.

Yet, up until now, the claim that the self’s genesis as well as its continued existence depend on social and cultural relations is still rather weak. What has been claimed so far is only that culture and society have to provide certain tools, i.e. the necessary concepts. This, however, leaves still undetermined which concept a person applies to which characteristics of herself. It could still be entirely up to her exactly how to articulate her self, at least partially, in terms of strong evaluations within the conceptual framework provided by culture and society. Of course, this is not all that proponents of the social-relational account want to claim. According to them, the forming of the self requires not only certain conceptual tools, but, above all, the praxis of social interaction. This claim holds both for the self’s genesis as well as for its continued existence.

With regard to this last claim, the authors in question basically rely on Mead’s model of social interaction. Its main thesis is that we acquire and maintain our self by social interaction, i.e. more exactly, by internalizing the way other persons react to us, including their expectations as to how we should be and behave. According to Mead, these reactions are bundled in the attitude of the “generalized other,” which, dubbed as “Me,” becomes an integral part of a person’s self. The other central part is referred to by Mead as “I,” which is characterized as the individualistic and spontaneous instance of the self. More exactly, the “I” is an instance of individual

---

19 Cf. Taylor (1977b).
reaction to the “generalized other,” which is, in turn, present in the “Me,” and it is spontaneous in terms of its being entirely open and uncertain, even to the person herself, until it has taken place.  

Following this line of thought, the process of forming and maintaining one’s self can be seen as a continued dialogue between “I” and “Me,” i.e. between the spontaneous parts of one’s self and society’s expectations toward one. Accordingly, proponents of the social-relational account who are inspired by Mead’s theory hold that the self is essentially dialogical. They see the relation between “Me” and “I” as a process of negotiating or even as some kind of struggle. With regard to the latter, a person has to struggle between the demands and expectations society places on her—the “Me”—and her own stance toward these expectations based on her spontaneous and creative potential—the “I.” Seen this way, social relations provide not only the substratum from which individual selves are built, but they also determine, at least partially, how far a person can go in dissociating herself from social claims and expectations. The reason for this is that, according to the social-relational account, selves break down if they are not acknowledged, at least to some degree, by others within their social environment. Accordingly, successful or “healthy” individual departures from actual social demands and expectations can only happen by appealing to alternative social structures and values, either ones stemming from other cultures or ones anticipated in possible future social orders.

**Narrative Accounts of the Self**

In contrast to the approaches to the self mentioned so far, a narrative account holds that it is misleading to assume we could have direct access to features of the self, be they subjective (regardless whether from a third or even first person point of view) or be they social-relational. Instead, the features attributed to the self have to be regarded as conceptualizations and thus as construed. Hence, in approaching the notion of the self, we have to acknowledge, firstly, that the self is necessarily a linguistic construction. Secondly, narrative accounts hold that this construction be done in form of narratives. Put simply, a person’s self is nothing but the story which is told about who she is.

---

22 Cf. Mead (1934), 175ff.
23 Notice, however, that this is only a rough sketch of Mead’s account, which is actually much more complicated.
25 Especially Honneth highlights a “struggle for recognition” in this context.
Paul Ricoeur is one of the main proponents of such a narrative account, and his outline of what the notion of narrative identity amounts to proves to be especially helpful for the task at hand in this introduction. In distinguishing between *sameness* (*idem*) and *self* (*ipse*) and addressing the fundamental dialectic relationship between the two, Ricoeur indeed aims at illuminating the problem of personal identity as a whole with the help of a narrative account. However, for all intents and purposes here, it is sufficient to concentrate on Ricoeur’s narrative approach to the self or “ipseity,” which is precisely intended to answer the question of who a person is.

The starting point for Ricoeur is that, in order to get to know who a person is, we intuitively tend to tell a story of her life. This even holds for the person herself. It is thus the identity of the story that serves as the first cornerstone on the way to the person’s self. The crucial point in this step is that single aspects of a story gain their meaning only in relation to each other and to the story as a whole. Hence, in order to make sense of individual aspects in one’s life, we need to tell a story in which these aspects are put in some form of meaningful order, i.e. in which different aspects are construed as relevant for one another and for the story as a whole.

At this point, it is helpful to distinguish between stronger and weaker versions of narrativity. As especially Galen Strawson has pointed out, putting aspects of one’s life in a meaningful order does not necessarily mean telling a canonized form of story. Accordingly, weaker versions of narrative accounts only hold that single aspects of a person’s life have to be put in some form of meaningful order and inter-relation, whereas the question of whether this needs to be done in form of canonized storytelling is left open. Stronger versions of narrative accounts, like Ricoeur’s, however, emphasize the need for canonized forms of storytelling which, in turn, points to the need for including a social-relational framework in approaches to explaining the self. For, canonized forms of storytelling obviously depend upon a social framework.

Accordingly, Ricoeur goes on to argue that life stories have to be construed in terms of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. The identity of a story is then conveyed to the story’s main character, whose identity functions as the second cornerstone of Ricoeur’s

---


29 For the following, cf. Ricoeur (1987) in particular.

30 Cf. Strawson (2004), 439ff. Generally, Strawson dismisses narrative approaches to the notion of the self as either misleading or plain false. He distinguishes between a *psychological Narrativity thesis* and an *ethical Narrativity thesis*, whereas the former is to be understood as an empirical and descriptive thesis about how we actually understand ourselves as persons, and the latter as amounting to a normative thesis on how we should live our lives. Strawson then opposes both of these.

31 For some of the subsequent problems that might ensue from a narrative approach in conjunction with social and political frameworks, see especially the contributions of John Christman and Nora Hangel in this volume.
account. What has to be achieved in storytelling is concordance or coherence. This means that those aspects of the main character’s “life” which are interpreted as discordances or contingencies regarding the kind of story told have to be incorporated plausibly as well. For this, one needs a fitting configuration of the story which is able to provide concordance or coherence on the whole. This configuration then also constitutes a concordant, as well as dynamic, identity of the story’s main character.

The third and last cornerstone of Ricoeur’s approach consists in the identification of the (real) person with the main character in the story told. In this regard, the person engages in a game of imaginatively varying the specific storytelling and thereby also the main character’s identity to be identified with. Moreover, insofar as the person is always aware of varying the storytelling and of the question of identification, Ricoeur argues that the person can gain new knowledge or new awareness of herself. For, these different possible interpretations are thus also a kind of active self-interpretation. Following Ricoeur, this finally shows that a person’s self is essentially nothing but a specifically construed variation of a concordant story with a main character for the person to identify herself with.

**Autonomy and the Self**

**Existential cum Libertarian Thesis**

The first thesis to describe the relationship between autonomy and the self, which we dubbed the *existential cum libertarian thesis*, is a direct continuation of the existential account of the constitution of the self. Acting autonomously then basically means that one acts only on those motives that one has made one’s own from the practical first person point of view of transcendence, as sketched above, i.e. that one has radically chosen to incorporate in one’s authentic self.

At this point, it is helpful to sketch Sartre’s view on action or “doing” in more detail. Firstly, he notes the traditional idea of actions being intentional, i.e. that actions comprise and end that is intentionally realized by the agent. This distinguishes actions from mere behavior. The end to be pursued by an action has, in turn, to be understood as something which is not (yet) the case—hence Sartre’s emphasis on “nothingness” in this regard—and which springs solely from the agent’s practical first person point of view of transcendence. Therefore, no factual state in the world can give rise to action unless the agent has taken an evaluative stance toward it first, thereby actively evaluating it as something to be changed. Existential freedom thus serves, once again, as the crucial foundational component.

---

32 In this respect, see also Taylor (1977b).
33 For the following, see again Sartre (1943), esp. part IV, ch. 1.
Furthermore, Sartre notes that actions comprise “causes” and “motives,” whereas this English translation of Sartre’s terminology might cause some confusion. Unlike our usual understanding in a deterministic setting of cause and effect, Sartre uses the term “cause” to express the *reasons* for an action, i.e. what can justify it as well as explain it on a rational level. With the term “motives,” Sartre has the *subjective psychological facts* in mind, i.e. desires, emotions, or passions, which actually move one to act and which, ironically, we would now rather call psychological causes. Matters of translation notwithstanding, Sartre points to two well acknowledged aspects in current action theory: *reasons* and *motivational causes*. However, with regard to the existential framework, even reasons and motivational causes obtain their meaning for autonomy and the self only on the basis of existential freedom. In order for something to be a reason *for me* and a motivational cause to be *my own*, I must first have conferred value to different aspects of the situation through radical choice, thereby making these aspects significant as reasons for me, and I must have taken an *engaged* stance toward my motivational causes to make them my own.

The existential account of action sketched so far also has a bearing on the notion of the will. For Sartre, it is not the will that is the unique or primary manifestation of freedom, at least as long as one understands the will as a psychological trait which is also accessible from a third person point of view. It is rather that, in order to be able to constitute a person’s *own* ends to be pursued in action, the will has to be located within the notion of transcendence and thus has to be understood as a genuine practical stance implying the first person point of view. Hence, only as one’s exercise of existential freedom can the will and voluntary acts be regarded as authentic and autonomous.

At this point, at the latest, existential autonomy can be complemented with libertarian positions on free will, especially with ideas of agent-causation. For, it has to be the agent in the existential sense who has to choose radically and thereby constitute his ends, values, and ultimately his authentic self, i.e. who he is.

A libertarian position on freedom generally states that we must be able to choose between different options equally open, or at least more or less accessible, to us on an ontological level, i.e. in one and the same situation. Libertarian freedom is thus incompatible with determinism, which precisely denies the possibility of more than one continuation in one and the same situation. Consequently, when combining existential freedom and a libertarian approach, we must be able to choose radically between different stances open to us in one and the same situation and be able to adopt one of them based on our choice.

---

34 For a first overview of theories of free will, see O’Connor (2011), and for the idea of agent causation in this regard, see Clarke (2008), esp. section 3.

35 On this note, see especially the contributions of Gottfried Seebaß and John Davenport in this volume.

36 In this regard, Sartre sees the confrontation of determinism with freedom of the will or spontaneity as misleading, as long as the will is understood within a psychological framework of facticity, i.e. as being seen from a third person point of view. Cf. Sartre (1943), 563f. and 567–571.
In assuming a libertarian view on freedom of the will in combination with Sartre’s notion of existential freedom underlying every one of our actions, as described above, the general idea of the existential cum libertarian thesis is thus that, insofar as we are able to choose radically between different stances toward traits of facticity in every action, i.e. to choose radically which of them to make our own and incorporate them in our authentic self, we are able to constitute our self anew in every action. Hence, we are, in this sense, autonomous with regard to the constitution of our (authentic) self because we are the ones shaping and reshaping it based on our radical choices.

To be sure, as noted above, we are not able to rearrange our self completely at will. We cannot, for example, change the past and what we have done. What we can do, however, following the existential cum libertarian thesis, is to choose radically and continually anew with which of our previous traits and actions we still want to identify ourselves, i.e. which stance we want to take on them, thereby incorporating or disavowing them within our newly constituted authentic self. This holds for our identification with social norms, values, or roles, as well. For, we (in the sense of Mead’s “I”) are equally free to choose radically with which of them we want to identify or commit ourselves to, thereby either incorporating them in our authentic self or disavowing them. Analogously, with regard to a narrative approach to the self, we are not only the author of our “life story,” but we are also the ones who have to ask ourselves whether we want to identify ourselves with a story’s main character. For no one else can adopt our own respective first person point of view of transcendence as implied by the existential framework. In this respect, personal autonomy concerning the constitution of one’s self comprises one’s existential freedom to construe one’s authentic self narratively as well. In summary, the existential cum libertarian thesis holds that we are, in the sense described above, indeed, autonomous in choosing our (authentic) self, i.e. in choosing who we want to be.

Authenticity via Essential Nature Thesis

The second thesis, dubbed authenticity via essential nature thesis, rejects the ideas of existential freedom and radical choice and puts the relationship between autonomy and the self exactly the other way around. It is, therefore, not autonomy leading, through radical choice, to authenticity, but, on the contrary, autonomy presupposing authenticity in terms of a given authentic self. The most prominent proponent of the authenticity via essential nature thesis during the last few decades is again Harry G. Frankfurt.37 His theory of autonomy can be regarded as the consequence of his theory of volitional necessities. Another important author in this field is Charles Taylor.38 In the following, the argumentations of these two authors against the

---

38 See esp. Taylor (1977a).
existential cum libertarian thesis and in favor of the authenticity via essential nature thesis shall be presented a little more closely.39

Frankfurt’s argumentation against a libertarian conception of the self runs as follows. According to the existential cum libertarian thesis, we are able to choose (radically) what shapes our self, which, in Frankfurt’s terms, would amount to what we fundamentally care about. For Frankfurt, however, such radical choice is incompatible with personal autonomy.40 He argues that a state in which no limitation to the human will exists would lead to severe disorientation on the side of the person concerning the question of what to choose at all. Moreover, in cases where antecedent commitments and, therefore, a more or less clearly defined “self” already exist, the necessity of evaluating and ranking an overwhelming magnitude of alternative possibilities would inevitably lead to the dissolution of existent bonds. The agent is in danger of losing sight of his own interests, preferences, and priorities.41 That is one of the reasons why Frankfurt defends an essential nature account of the self as described above. We need criteria which make a choice authentic, i.e. really our own, by securing that our choices really correspond with our true nature. In a state of absolute freedom of the will, however, one would have to choose these criteria as well, i.e. one’s own essential nature would have to be created by free choice. Yet, for such a choice, we would need criteria, too, in order to secure that the chosen nature is really and essentially our own.42

According to this line of criticism, proponents of radical decisionist accounts, such as the defenders of the existential cum libertarian thesis, are thus faced with a dilemma. Either their account leads into an infinite regress, or persons are never able to decide and act authentically. Choosing the first horn would mean going back ad infinitum while looking for valid criteria, whereas choosing the second horn would mean giving up the claim that there can be something like real authenticity. For, (radical) choices which are made under existentialist conditions can have only a provisional and arbitrary character and can therefore never be a person’s own.43 In this case, one is then bound either to deny also the possibility that there actually are autonomous people or to revise the concept of personal autonomy so that authenticity is no longer a necessary condition. As none of these options is very attractive, the existential cum libertarian thesis is rejected, and the authenticity via essential nature thesis is put forward instead.

Taylor’s objections against the existential cum libertarian thesis run roughly along the same line. His critique, however, goes still further than Frankfurt’s. Where Frankfurt claims only that we cannot decide authentically within the existential cum libertarian account, Taylor denies that this account provides room for something

39 In this volume, see also Nadja Jelinek’s contribution for a more detailed discussion concerning the combination of Frankfurt’s and Taylor’s accounts.
like a choice at all. According to him, a choice always has to be based on reasons. Yet theories of radical choice do not allow for the relevant choice being based on reasons. For, then, the choice would not be a radical one anymore. Hence, according to Taylor, proponents of the existential cum libertarian thesis face a dilemma of an even more fundamental kind than that identified by Frankfurt. Either something can be radical, or it can be a choice, but never both. Taylor’s conclusion is, therefore, that the theory of radical choice, which lies at the heart of the existential cum libertarian thesis, is deeply inconsistent in itself.

What, then, does the alternative look like? According to Frankfurt, a person is autonomous if and only if she can decide and act in accordance with her true essential nature, i.e. in accordance with the volitional necessities which define her self. Only then are her decisions authentic. Taylor’s proposal is quite similar. According to him, autonomy is identical with actual self-realization. However, the two authors seem to differ with regard to the question of the metaphysical conditions of their theories and the role the person herself plays concerning the definition of her fundamental commitments.

According to Frankfurt, defining one’s commitments is merely a matter of discovery. We find them by getting to know what we care most deeply about. In contrast to this, Taylor assumes that the mental attitudes we can discover within ourselves are still inchoate and therefore have to be articulated. Only then is it possible to accomplish a definite fundamental commitment. Yet articulation entails an evaluative dimension which, in turn, relies on language. In order to articulate one’s own inchoate attitudes, one is thus in need of appropriate concepts. At this point, however, a certain degree of openness comes into play. For it is always possible to ask whether one has really articulated one’s fundamental attitudes in the most appropriate way. In this regard, we can gain new insight, for example, by reflecting our articulations and becoming aware of the fact that, until now, we have not really understood our fundamental attitudes and have therefore interpreted them in a distorting way. Dialogue with others may lead us to new insight as well, and sometimes also to new concepts for our articulations. Hence, it is, at least in principle, always possible to revise one’s articulations—Taylor even recommends a “stance of openness” toward them. Moreover, in comparison to Frankfurt’s account, Taylor clearly ascribes the person in question a more active role. For, a person does not only simply have to discover what she cares about, but actually takes an active part in the process of generating her fundamental commitments, albeit within a certain social and cultural framework which might even include objective moral evaluations. Even so, the fact that there are cases in which one has to choose, during a process of re-evaluation,
between two or more possibilities of fundamental articulations suggests that Taylor might presuppose a certain degree of ontological openness or even libertarian freedom, whereas Frankfurt’s purely subjectivist account of a given self clearly gets along fine without these assumptions. In fact, Frankfurt famously denies that the principle of alternative possibilities, and therefore ontological openness, matters at all.  

50 See Frankfurt (1969).

51 In this volume, see, on this note, especially Michael Quante’s contribution.

Internal vs. External Aspects of Autonomy and the Self

Up to this point, the aspects taken to be essential for the constitution of a person’s self and of her autonomy when formulating either the existential cum libertarian thesis or the authenticity via essential nature thesis have primarily been internal to the person. However, as already noted, the objection has been raised that both the self and personal autonomy hinge, at least partially, on social, i.e. external, factors, like one’s social and cultural upbringing, social attributions of (moral) responsibility, interpersonal reactive attitudes, shared narrative constructions of an agent’s self, or normative practices of social and political self-justification.

The strongest proposition with regard to the role of external factors defends the view that even a person’s identity and stable self over time depend on external factors, and especially on attributions of responsibility. Given the wide range of complexities concerning the relationship between external and internal factors of an agent’s autonomy and self, we can, in the following, give only a short glimpse on some of the most prominent tensions between social attributions and individually preferred self-conceptions.

Theories concerning the relation between the self and personal autonomy which emphasize the relevance of external aspects are often immediate continuations of social-relational and, in some cases, also narrative accounts of the self. Firstly, it is relatively easy to show the importance of both internal and external factors concerning the authenticity via essential nature thesis. External factors, like social attributions in general, are seen here as contributing essentially to the formation and maintenance of a person’s essential nature. In contrast to this, external factors seem to play a marginal role at most with regard to the existential cum libertarian thesis, as corresponding accounts presuppose that we are able to choose our self freely and individually. Consequently, these accounts reject the idea that any claims or ascriptions coming from society play an important systematic role for the constitution of either the self or personal autonomy. Even proponents of the existential cum libertarian thesis, however, have to admit that persons who shape their self by radical choice are socialized beings equipped with the social norms and values they have internalized during childhood. To be sure, once they have acquired the ability to reflect critically on these norms and values, they can immediately reject them. Yet, even then, it remains
dubitable if a person will ever be able to dissociate herself entirely from each and every social—that is external—influence.

As has been said with regard to social-relational accounts of the self, the forming and sustaining of the self as a basis for personal autonomy depends, in various ways, on social and cultural conditions, and especially on the practice of social interaction. That a self can be formed and maintained this way is, however, not sufficient for the actual existence of personal autonomy. In fact, autonomy has to be exercised. Yet exercising one’s capability of autonomy is also taken to presuppose both external and internal factors.

In regard to the forming of a self capable of autonomy, especially the question of education is of great importance. Very young children still lack a self, which is necessary for autonomy. They do not yet have the required inherent qualities such as rationality, the capability of critical reflection, and the ability to perceive themselves as subjects existing over time. Accordingly, education can be seen as a project with the aim of cultivating these internal features by external means, that is, for example, by telling the child about right and wrong, by encouraging strivings which are beneficial for becoming an autonomous subject, and by preventing developments which would endanger this aim. So, whether the process of developing a stable self can take place successfully depends not only on internal factors, i.e. on the child’s dispositions, but also, to a great extent, on an appropriate education. At this point, however, we step into an area of tension. For, on the one hand, education is necessary for the development of the child’s internal characteristics and also her ability to decide and to act in accordance with them. On the other hand, however, education also means paternalism and heteronomy. Therefore, education is a delicate matter in the context of personal autonomy. The question is then how far paternalism in education may go. There seems to be a clash between the means of education and its aims. The question is thus how these (seemingly) opposing tendencies of education can be reconciled.

Furthermore, it is not only during childhood that we depend on external social factors. Where the maintenance of one’s self is concerned, even as adults, we at least partially rely on the attitudes other people take toward us. A stable self does not only hinge on internal characteristics, but also on external factors as well. Socialization is an open-ended process. According to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, primary socialization—the forming of the self during childhood—is followed by a secondary socialization. A person’s self relies on social contexts throughout the entire span of the person’s existence. Just as in the case of the forming of one’s self, we are immediately confronted with tensions in this realm. There are,

---

52 For this point cf. especially Taylor (1979b).
53 In this volume, especially Bennett Helm deals with this delicate relation between education and autonomy.
however, some differences. *Firstly*, a “self” already *exists* when secondary socialization takes place, whereas, during childhood, this self *has yet to be formed*. Secondly, and resulting from this fact, the process of socialization takes place differently. During childhood, the attitudes of the “generalized other” are simply *internalized*, at least by small children who still lack the competency for critical reflection. As adults, however, we *are* normally able to call social claims and expectations into question. Therefore, secondary socialization does not simply mean the internalization of external attitudes, but comes closer to *bargaining*. The adult individual has to steer a middle course between two possible situations which would endanger the stability and integrity of her self. On the one hand, she must not submit to each and every social pressure, for this would mean the end of her integrity. On the other hand, the stability of her self relies on social recognition. Yet societies typically grant this recognition only to those members who, at least to a certain degree, share their values and submit to their norms. This problem typically extends into the political realm as well, for possible clashes can arise between identity ascriptions made by different social groups. Individuals who are exposed to conflicting social ascriptions, i.e. to conflicts that may even stem only from competing external factors, thus run the risk of losing their integrity. Especially a conflict between primary and secondary socialization can have devastating consequences. In the worst case, an individual will be unable to maintain a stable and integral self at all. Secondary socialization can thus be seen as a lifelong process of bargaining for one’s identity.

In this bargaining process, external and internal factors of the self have to be reconciled in a way which is able to solve the manifold problems deriving from the tensions brought forth by the dependency on both factors in order to maintain not only a stable and integral self but also one’s personal autonomy. Accordingly, in regard to the question of how to maintain one’s personal autonomy, one generally has to face the same tensions as noted above. The challenge of avoiding arbitrariness has to be faced especially by ascriptivist accounts of personal autonomy, according to which being a self capable of autonomy is essentially a matter of being treated as a responsible subject by one’s fellows. For, obviously, there are also internal factors, like rationality, the ability to reflect critically, the capability of postponing less important short-term desires in favor of long-term aims one really cares about, and so on, that play an important role in ensuring that ascriptions of personal autonomy are adequate or justified. Denying the ascription of responsibility and personal autonomy to a person who has these characteristics would thus be an act of sheer arbitrariness. Hence, in addition to the second person’s point of view, the first person’s point of view also matters crucially.

Still, in order *actually to exercise* one’s autonomy, persons firstly have to rely on social recognition in order to be able to form and sustain a self *capable* of being autonomous. As in the case of the process of maintaining a stable self, one has to

---

57 In this volume, especially Nora Hangel’s contribution is dedicated to this problem.
58 On this note, see especially Michael Quante’s contribution in this volume.
undertake a continual balancing act when it comes to actualizing one’s self authentically in order to preserve one’s autonomy. Accordingly, exercising one’s autonomy depends on a social infrastructure which provides one with the possibility to live authentically. Yet access to this possibility also has its costs. Societies set limits to their members’ possibilities to act and live authentically, and, in many cases, subjects break down under social pressure. Therefore, an individual person has to negotiate her way between exaggerated conformity to social norms and values, on the one hand, and possible exclusion from society because of overly individualistic ambitions, on the other hand.

Following this line of thought, the main question is then what the relation between internal and external components should look like concerning the maintenance of an autonomous self within secondary socialization. From what has been said above, it becomes evident that we need an appropriate social “infrastructure” in order to develop and maintain a stable and integral authentic self as well as in order to actualize our personal autonomy. Unsurprisingly, what exactly may count as an “appropriate” social infrastructure is highly contentious—the debate between liberals and communitarians being just one example in this respect. At least on a general level, however, it can be said that a certain amount of openness and tolerance is required within society, even though the degree of this remains controversial.

**Autonomy, the Self, and Limited Freedom**

Finally, in discussing the relationship between autonomy and the self and mapping the terrain confined by the existential cum libertarian thesis, on the one hand, and the authenticity via essential nature thesis, on the other hand, a further aspect should be taken into account, namely the bearing which possible limitations or hindrances of freely “realizing” one’s authentic self have on one’s autonomy and, in turn, on one’s self. It is usually assumed that a person can act according to what she authentically and autonomously wishes to do. As noted at the beginning, being autonomous is basically understood as the capacity to act, or, more generally, to live, without unwanted hindrances.

However, a person might sometimes lack the kind of freedom necessary to realize what she has (autonomously) decided to do. Especially in cases when one identifies with certain norms or values, situations can arise in which one is simply not able to live up to them. Given the familiar principle that “ought implies can,” the question arises of what bearing norms or values have on a person’s autonomy and self if these norms or values prove to be unrealizable, at least in the situation in question.

---

59 In this volume, see especially Marina Oshana’s contribution for a broad discussion of this question.
61 In this volume, Michael Kühler’s contribution is dedicated to a discussion of this topic.
Moreover, the complementary case has to be taken into account if one’s (stable) self proves itself to be a hindrance for achieving certain autonomously chosen goals. For, not only the familiar subjectivist question mentioned previously arises of whether one can (autonomously) change or transform one’s self in order to be able to pursue certain goals thus far incompatible or at least in conflict with one’s present self, but also a social-relational question comes up of whether others, due to their view of the person’s self, acknowledge or recognize a person’s action (or even intention) as valid and thereby prevent the action from succeeding in the first place in cases where recognition by others is a necessary condition for success.  

Overview of Contributions

Part I: Autonomy and Free Will

The three sections in this volume reflect the main themes of contention outlined above. In order to assess the plausibility of the different propositions put forward within the range of the existential cum libertarian thesis, on the one hand, and the opposing authenticity via essential nature thesis, on the other hand, it is first necessary to analyze the concepts and their foundations in more detail, thereby providing a clear view on their most critical implications. In what way do the concepts of freedom, choice, necessity, commitment, and autonomy relate to each other? The contributions in Part I present crucial clarifications on a general, conceptual level, focusing especially on the relation between the concepts of autonomy and free will.

In the volume’s first paper, “Freedom Without Choice?” Gottfried Seebaß addresses a fundamental issue in clarifying the concept of autonomy, namely its relation to the concept of freedom. In this respect, he argues for an analysis within a libertarian framework. Starting with a brief clarification of the concept of freedom in general, based mainly on the idea of being unhindered, he goes on to explore this general idea further by discussing two main dimensions: (1) freedom as openness to alternatives (possibility criterion) and (2) freedom in the sense of an available option being “natural” or “essential” to the agent in question (criterion of naturalness). In subsequently discussing the title-giving question directly, he asks whether invoking only the second dimension while disregarding the first—generally done by compatibilists—can provide us with plausible cases of freedom without choice. In analyzing various relevant cases of personal freedom, covering freedom of action as well as freedom of will, his answer is then mostly negative. Apart from cases like theoretical rationality or language, all cases of personal freedom mattering most for personal

---

62 In this volume, Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen discusses this topic in detail based on the familiar “Look who’s talking!” reply when being blamed.

63 We would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for Springer for helpful suggestions on how to improve the volume’s structure.
autonomy rely on the first criterion as well, i.e. the agent has to be able to choose between different alternatives. Only then can we understand ourselves as free and autonomous persons.

Barbara Merker takes up the general conceptual discussion and, favoring a compatibilist framework, asks in her paper “Freedom and Normativity – Varieties of Free Will” whether the manifold conceptions of free will may lead to the question of which of the enduring disputes are substantial ones about the same issue and which are perhaps only terminological ones due, for instance, to equivocal use of concepts. Firstly, she discusses five competing views on how to approach the problem of free will: presupposition of a fixed reference of freedom of the will which has to be explained adequately; formulation of a list of necessary and sufficient conditions for free will; conceptual analysis of our intuitions on free will; analysis of our social practice of attributing responsibility from a pragmatic point of view; and, finally, criticism of other approaches in order to pinpoint the most plausible aspects to be used in any attempt to conceptualize the notion of free will. She then argues for an evaluative and substantive approach regarding those aspects of freedom of the will which matter in our practical disputes and discusses a number of these aspects in detail, thereby presenting a complex account of what is, in her view, (really) at stake in discussions on freedom of the will and autonomy.

Part II: Autonomy, the Self, and the Role of Personal Traits

By helping to clarify general conceptual issues and thus sketching the main field of contention, the contributions so far have prepared the ground for a better understanding of the subsequent discussion in which influential aspects of the relationship between a person’s autonomy and her self are addressed on a more substantial or content-oriented level. At this point, especially the critical discussion of the latest development in Frankfurt’s own account marks the intersection of Parts II and III in which the understanding and role of personal traits and commitments comes into play. Do these refer mainly to internal or external factors of a person’s self and autonomy, and in what way can it be said that they play a constitutive role for any or both of them?

Part II addresses, firstly, aspects of an agent’s self and autonomy that have to be regarded as subjective or internal. For, what defines one’s self, i.e. “what one cares about” or “what one loves,” Frankfurt argues, is a purely subjective matter of given volitional necessities.” However, the contributions in Part II not only question the adequacy of Frankfurt’s concept of caring, but also raise the objection that, even if given subjective commitments were necessary to enable an agent making free and autonomous choices at first, it would remain questionable why these commitments should not be subject to rational deliberation and revision afterwards, thereby invoking libertarian or existential ideas once again. Put more broadly, the general question is how transformations of, or changes within, one’s self can be made plausible within each of the two opposing theses. Moreover, it is fairly arguable that a number of
personal traits traditionally accounted for as rather “arational,” e.g. one’s physical features and abilities or one’s feelings, have to be taken more seriously when developing accounts of the self and personal autonomy. For, it is apparent that they are quite capable of making either a fostering or an endangering contribution to a person’s self and autonomy. Finally, limitations or hindrances regarding the free or autonomous pursuit of the goals to which one finds oneself committed to can play a crucial role. What consequences then arise for a person and the notion of her (autonomous) self if she finds herself in such a predicament?

John Davenport’s paper, “Norm-Guided Formation of Cares without Volitional Necessity – A Response to Frankfurt,” is the first to address Frankfurt’s position on autonomy in particular. Davenport begins by stating that, despite distancing his views from Hume’s, Frankfurt has argued in several essays that our decisions would be arbitrary unless we already cared about some ideals, persons, or personal projects (as well as caring about our wholeheartedness). While this is related to the general question facing leeway-libertarians of how to connect control with indeterminism (sometimes called the “luck problem”), Frankfurt’s arguments involve more specific psychological claims that some kinds of leeway are autonomy-undermining. These arguments are thus more closely related to critiques of “unencumbered selves” (Sandel) and of motivational externalism in general (R.J. Wallace). Davenport responds that liberty concerning one’s most basic cares or identity-defining commitments appears problematic to Frankfurt because he lacks an adequate conception of how cares are formed; by his subjectivism concerning values worth caring about, he is driven to the conclusion that autonomy depends on discovering volitionally necessary limits on what we can and cannot care about. This conclusion, like related Humean conclusions in internalism in general, can be avoided if (a) values and norms can rationally guide the setting of new final ends or the formation of new cares, (b) without already motivating the agent by connection to natural desires or standing commitments. This view, which Davenport traces to Kant and Kierkegaard, is described as the idea that human beings form “selves” or practical identities by way of “projective motivation”—a volitional process (distinct from decision as intention-formation) in which we generate new motivation in response to putative justifying grounds. Davenport ends his paper by indicating how this conception of projective motivation provides a new way of reinterpreting higher-order volitions that solves the familiar “authority-or-regress” dilemma in hierarchical theories of autonomy without invoking prior or given volitional necessities.

Nadja Jelinek takes up several criteria which are considered necessary by various accounts of personal autonomy. These criteria are authenticity, synchronous consistency, and diachronic continuity. In her paper “Dynamics in Autonomy – Articulating One’s Commitments,” she examines the theory of “volitional necessities” put forward by Harry Frankfurt and shows that this account, despite its intentions to meet these criteria, fails to do so in several respects. She then considers two alternative suggestions. The first of these, which still refers closely to Frankfurt’s account, also seems to fail because it ascribes to the involved person a too passive role in the process of defining her fundamental commitments. The second proposal, however, which is based on Charles Taylor’s theory of persons as “self-interpreting animals,” turns out
to be more promising, for it seems to be able to avoid the flaws of both radical existentialist accounts, on the one hand, and Frankfurt’s too restrictive theory of “volitional necessities,” on the other hand. According to this proposal, the definition of our most fundamental commitments, which are at the same time the essential features of our selves, comes about through a process of both discovering and constituting. This account can therefore be considered as an attempt to show a third way between radical existentialism and equally radical essential nature accounts.

Monika Betzler addresses the role personal projects play in defining who we are and in generating specific personal reasons. In her paper “The Normative Significance of Personal Projects,” she argues that committing oneself to personal projects generates a distinct normative framework for oneself, irreducible to other reason-providing sources. According to her view, personal projects comprise three core elements: (i) they are norm-governed; (ii) they engender project-dependent reasons to pursue the project and its components non-instrumentally; and (iii) they shape one’s identity once one commits oneself to a project. Based on this explanation, Betzler distinguishes the notion of personal projects from competing sources of personal reasons and argues for the independence and irreducibility of personal projects. Unlike desires, committing oneself to personal projects involves valuing the project’s content and also emotional engagement which, in turn, confers authority—and not merely weight—to the reasons generated. In contrast to (life) plans, pursuing a personal project is not exhausted in realizing, step by step, a kind of blueprint for leading one’s life. Finally, personal projects differ from personal ideals in that they comprise more numerous and more concrete action-guiding reasons than “just” idealized social roles or virtues to live up to. Therefore, Betzler concludes that personal projects present an independent and irreducible source of personal reasons.

John Christman, in his paper “Normative Self-Constitution and Individual Autonomy,” starts his discussion by stating that many trenchant moral and political issues turn on the question of whether values, commitments, and desires are considered essential to the identity of persons—that is, whether they must be seen as internal to the self. The central thesis of his paper is that normative commitments are, in fact, central to agency and to the self. He attempts to defend this position by sketching a model of the self that is meant to function in a theory of individual autonomy. His contention is that the understanding of the self as separable from such commitments stems, in part, from a failure to differentiate the Me-self from the I-Self (using terminology developed by William James). The former contains aspects of the self that can be considered as the object of introspective appraisal. Such factors form our self-image, but they are elements of the self that we can bring to mind and contemplate. The I-self, however, refers to agentic consciousness itself, the functioning processes of judgment which operate according to norms and values which orient that judgment in a variety of ways. Seen in this way, norms structure the self in a way that guides reflective introspection itself. The difficulty that arises, and which plagues discussions of autonomy in many political contexts, is that agents interact in social settings where they are asked to justify their normative commitments to each other (often as part of social, democratic forms of deliberation), including justification of those commitments that partly constitute their (I-self) identities.
Christman then suggests an account of reflective self-justification that can serve the purposes of interpersonal reason-giving while remaining consistent with the thesis that (autonomous) selves are partly constituted by normative commitments.

Diana Tietjens Meyers addresses a further and often neglected important aspect of an agent’s self and autonomy: corporeality. In her paper “Psychocorporeal Selfhood, Practical Intelligence, and Adaptive Autonomy,” her main questions are: How must selfhood and autonomy be construed given that people are vulnerable to identity crises? How must autonomy be construed given that some people skirt potential identity crises? After explaining what an identity crisis is, she examines Charles Taylor’s and David Velleman’s accounts of identity, autonomy, and identity crises. In the spirit of Merleau-Ponty’s account of habit and J.J. Gibson’s account of the relation between corporeity and affordances, she then sketches an account of autonomous agency that includes four psychocorporeal components: psychocorporeal virtue, psychocorporeal cognition, psychocorporeal versatility, and psychocorporeal memory. In her conclusion, she connects her position to Aristotle’s views about practical understanding and argues that both Taylor and Velleman have reason to embrace her position.

In her paper “Emotion, Autonomy, and Weakness of Will,” Sabine Döring argues against the claim that (emotional) weakness of will can be rational. She argues that weak-willed actions caused by an emotion cannot be rationalized because they are not guided via reasons. Hence, they also cannot count as autonomous actions. In discussing the well-known example of Huckleberry Finn, who refrains from turning Jim over to the slave hunters due to (emotional) weakness of will, Döring states that Finn indeed does not act rationally—at least from his subjective point of view—but gains valuable insight into what it means to be rational. For the conflict between “better” judgment and emotions is itself a rational one and can thus be regarded as “productive.” Accordingly, Döring argues that it is sometimes our emotions, rather than our judgments, which inform us about the reasons which we really have. Emotions can, therefore, expand and improve our practical knowledge. However, to claim that weakness of will can be rational is to confuse this epistemic role of the emotions with practical rationality as autonomy, understood as the rational guidance and control which agents exceed over their actions. Agency thus amounts to more than autonomy so understood.

In his paper “Who Am I to Uphold Unrealizable Normative Claims?” Michael Kühter addresses the problem of persons’ encountering hindrances and limitations when wanting to act in accordance to their self-defining commitments. Taking the seemingly rhetorical title-giving question literally, whatever else one might say about a person’s self, short answers would be that she is either an idealist or a silly person who is conceptually mistaken. Such an assessment obviously hinges on the assumption that “ought” conceptually implies “can” and, correspondingly, depends on a strong conceptual distinction between ideals and action-guiding norms. Whereas ideals would not imply “can,” action-guiding norms, on the other hand, would. Hence, one could be an idealist without being conceptually silly. However, this provokes the question of how to explain the possibility of one’s unrealizable ideals functioning as a basis for one’s action-guiding decisions. In order to explain this
possibility and to make room for the idea of requiring oneself to do at least the best one can in light of one’s unrealizable ideals, Kühler argues that the assumption of “ought” conceptually implying “can” has to be rejected and replaced by a more complex and genuinely normative assessment of the relationship between “ought” and “can.”

**Part III: Autonomy and the Self Within Society’s Grip**

Against an unduly focus on internal aspects of an agent’s self and autonomy, it has been argued that both hinge, at least partially, on social, i.e. external, factors, like one’s social and cultural upbringing. Complementing the discussion of more internal aspects of an agent’s self and autonomy in Part II, the contributions in Part III, therefore, go on to address explicitly such influential external aspects of the self and personal autonomy, i.e. social attributions of (moral) responsibility, interpersonal reactive attitudes, narrative constructions of a person’s self attributed to her by others, and shared normative practices in general. These aspects have to be discussed plausibly as well when arguing for any position akin either to the existential cum libertarian thesis or to a socially complemented authenticity via essential nature thesis.

In his paper “Paternalistic Love and Reasons for Caring,” Bennett Helm invokes the notion of paternalistic love to address the question of how children are able to acquire new concepts and values which change their selves without compromising, but rather fostering their development of personal autonomy. He starts by referring to Tamar Schapiro, who identifies what she calls the “problem of childhood.” In growing up into a full-fledged, autonomous person, a child must gradually come to adopt a critical perspective—a set of values—in terms of which she can make autonomous decisions about how to live her life. Yet how can a creature that starts off lacking such a critical perspective and thus lacking autonomy ever come to acquire it? For it seems that her acquiring such a critical perspective cannot just happen to her, the result of forces external to her will, for then, the resulting values would not be authoritatively hers and could not ground her autonomy. What is needed is that she be responsible for her values; yet how can she be responsible for them if, lacking them, she has no basis on which to choose one critical perspective rather than another? Helm’s thesis is that a loving adult’s paternalistic understanding of the child’s well-being can provide a kind of scaffold for the child, providing her with access to reasons she could not have on her own. Helm then tries to show how the child and the adult can thereby share responsibility for the child’s acquiring or failing to acquire the relevant values, without undermining the child’s autonomy. This has two important consequences. First, the reasons the child thereby acquires are neither clearly “internal” nor “external” in Bernard Williams’ sense, given the way they are essentially interpersonal. Second, the sort of shared responsibility at issue here requires that we reject individualist conceptions of autonomy that are predominant in contemporary philosophy.

In her paper “Self-Identity and Moral Agency,” Marina Oshana aims at investigating the contribution self-identity makes to our standing as morally accountable
agents. Some of our interest in self-identity, i.e. a sense of self, arises out of concerns of particular importance from the perspective of the person herself. Such matters include the sustained interest we have in our future and in the fact that we anticipate our own behavior in a different way than we anticipate the behavior of others. Yet second-personal concerns are apparent here as well. It is a matter of both first-personal and second-personal concern that we be able to present ourselves as partners in social exchange with others and in the interpersonal enterprise that constitutes moral accountability. Self-identity is foundational for interacting in ways that give expression to our values and concerns. A sense of self enables us to be aware of what we do and to appreciate the motives that lie behind what we do. A sense of self is thus crucial to our status as agents; without a sense of self, we have no reason to place faith in our own agency—in our ability to affect the world through our choices and actions and our position to do so.

Michael Quante, in his paper “Being Identical by Being (Treated as) Responsible,” explicitly addresses external aspects of personal autonomy and the self by discussing the role attributions of responsibility play. He argues for the thesis that the concepts of responsibility and personal autonomy are, in a Hegelian expression, concepts of reflection, i.e. concepts that can only be explicated in terms of their mutual connection and whose respective content refers to each other. Central to this thesis is the idea of understanding both responsibility and personal autonomy in an ascriptivist sense. Human agents are held responsible for their actions by others. According to Quante, this social practice of being held responsible plays a constitutive role for the development of the evaluative self-relationship that is characteristic of persons and thus for our understanding ourselves as responsible and as autonomous agents. Following that line of thought, a second aim of Quante’s paper is then to show that the difficulty an ascriptivist position usually has with our ability to criticize our practice of ascribing responsibility as well as personal autonomy does not necessarily have to appear. For, there are properties and capacities necessary for personal autonomy that have a descriptive content and which can be put to critical use. Moreover, because our concept of personality (or the self) is also relevant in other contexts than that of ascribing responsibility, conditions within such other contexts can be imported as well, thus allowing ourselves to place our practice of ascribing responsibility in a wider and materially richer evaluative context.

Nora Hangel’s paper, “Integrity Endangered by Hypocrisy,” comprises two aims. The first aim is to shed some light on the relationship between personal integrity and the narrative conception of integrity in terms of moral reliability, thereby following a line of thought put forward by a number of contemporary feminist philosophers. In what way does personal integrity indicate intactness or completeness of the person? Or do we rather have to visualize the person within certain shared narratives that constitute and maintain the self as integrated within a socially recognized context, a self which is fundamentally socially recognized? Based on these questions, the second aim of Hangel’s paper is to inquire in how far and under which (personal, social, and political) circumstances a person is in danger of becoming hypocritical. As social contexts are heterogeneous and thus constituted by a plurality of narratives, some persons may find that their preferred self-constituting narratives are opposed
by some other and perhaps even more powerful yet discriminating narratives. These master-narratives, despite their often asserted socially integrating function, then prove to be harmful to these persons, diminishing their chances of equal social and political recognition and threatening their possibilities to become, and be recognized as, morally reliable community members.

In the final paper of the volume, “Who Can I Blame?” Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen addresses the case when one’s self proves itself to be a hindrance in performing certain actions successfully if their validity hinges on the acknowledgement of others, thus seemingly limiting the scope of one’s autonomy. Picking out our practice of blaming, Lippert-Rasmussen argues that it is shaped by the view that, metaphorically speaking, a person with a beam in her own eye is in no position to complain about the mote in the eye of another. Such a complaint would involve a distinctive kind of incoherence (one that can also be found in relation to praise). This incoherence has received little attention from moral philosophers, but incoherent blame and praise may be inappropriate for two rather different reasons. First, they might involve the non-moral inappropriateness of incoherent applications of the standards appealed to. This form of inappropriateness can occur outside morality and is not distinctively moral in nature. Second, incoherent blame and praise are often morally inappropriate because they demean others in that the incoherent appraiser elevates herself above her blamee (praisee) by presenting the latter in an unwarrantedly negative light, comparatively speaking. The first kind of inappropriateness does not explain the second, as Lippert-Rasmussen argues.

References


