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Commentaries on

Catriona Mackenzie and Jacqui Poltera, 2010. "Narrative Integration, Fragmented Selves and Autonomy." *Hypatia* 25(1): 31-54.

and

Andrea C. Westlund, 2009. "Rethinking Relational Autonomy." *Hypatia* 24(4): 26-49.

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Narrative Self-Understanding and Relational Autonomy

Comments on Catriona Mackenzie and Jacqui Poltera, "Narrative Integration, Fragmented Selves, and Autonomy" and Andrea C. Westlund, "Rethinking Relational Autonomy"

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i. Narrative Identity

Catriona Mackenzie and Jacqui Poltera's discussion of narrative integration and identity takes up a wide range of issues. It advances objections against Galen Strawson's critique of narrative identity and defends both the claim that some narrative conception of identity can capture descriptively the ways in which human agents experience and make sense of their lives and also the claim that some form of narrative self-interpretation is required for a fulfilling, well-lived life. In defending these claims, Mackenzie and Poltera appeal, in part, to Elyn Saks's autobiographical

account of her long, on-going struggle with schizophrenia and the significance of this struggle for her self-understanding (Saks 2007). According to the authors,

Saks's self-authored case study of the Episodic self-experience caused by schizophrenic delusions is highly instructive in showing first, why self-experience, if it is to be coherent, necessarily involves having a sense of diachronic connection between one's past, present, and future, and second, why the capacity to integrate one's experience into a self-narrative is necessary for a flourishing life (38-9).

In turn, Mackenzie and Poltera draw upon the fragmented character of Saks's experience of her agency to criticize Marya Schechtman's account (Schechtman 1996; 2007) of the sorts of narrative that can constitute a personal self. In particular, they argue that the illness narrative that Saks must employ to make sense of her periodically dissociated experience contravenes the coherence requirements that Schechtman regards as essential for narrative self-constitution. By Mackenzie and Poltera's lights, such an illness narrative serves an indispensable sense-making function, notwithstanding its disintegrative implications, if agents such as Saks are to achieve and sustain a temporally-extended sense of their identity as persons. Mackenzie and Poltera draw upon relational theories of autonomy to attempt to explain how a schizophrenic like Saks can achieve sufficient narrative identity to be capable of episodic autonomy while continuing to suffer diminished global autonomy in virtue of her psychological malady. They see this conclusion as underscoring the importance of forging a clear distinction between identity achieved through narrative self-understanding and various sorts of personal autonomy.

While there is much with which to agree in Mackenzie and Poltera's discussion – namely, that Strawson's account of the

Episodic self is ultimately incoherent, and that personal identity must be disentangled carefully from personal autonomy – I have a number of concerns, as well, about their position. For reasons of space, I limit my comments to three issues.

First, like many narrative theorists of personal identity, Mackenzie and Poltera emphasize that “on the narrative view, the continuity of a person’s life over time is constituted by the person herself, through the exercise of her agency and via an ongoing process of narrative self-interpretation . . .” (33-4). They regard selfhood as “an achievement of agency” (38). Yet, if the agency to which they refer is the agency of some personal entity, then who or what is the entity that constructs a narrative self-interpretation and, in so doing, brings into being diachronically extended, rationally intelligible selfhood? Notwithstanding the authors’ description of narrative self-constitution as the activity of the person herself, there are good reasons to think that the agent whose activity constitutes the self cannot be the very self who is constituted through narrative interpretation. It would seem that the agent must exist and be capable of self-reflective activity prior to the emergence of a personal self. If that is so, what can serve the role of agent in the achievement of narrative self-constitution? Mackenzie and Poltera do not say. Moreover, their tendency to describe a person’s constitution as a self with an identity over time as the product of that very person’s own action does more to highlight the difficulty than to resolve it. One way to seek to avoid this conundrum would be to reduce the agential source of narrative identity to some sub-agential motive(s), perhaps on analogy to David Velleman’s proposal that the desire to act in accordance with reasons can itself play the functional role of the agent when a person acts (2000). Nothing in Mackenzie and Poltera’s position suggests, however, that they would have any inclination to move down such a reductionist path.

A second concern involves Mackenzie and Poltera’s account of the role that illness narratives (cf. Kleinman 1988; Phillips 2003) can play in making self-understanding possible for persons, like Saks, who wrestle with psychological conditions that periodically debilitate or disorganize their capacities for lucid practical reasoning and rational conduct. Mackenzie and Poltera highlight Saks’s contention that she had to come to treat her psychotic delusions as part of her identity in order to be able to regard her medical treatment as an authentic choice, as an intelligible step toward establishing and protecting her sense of self (40, 48). The authors then infer from the self-constituting value of Saks’s illness narrative that Schechtman’s theory must be overly restrictive, for that theory would seem to preclude the incorporation of Saks’s dissociative states into a coherent narrative interpretation of her identity.

This move is perplexing on multiple grounds. It is not clear what exactly is meant by saying that Saks “accepted that her illness is part of who she is” (45), or that she had, in some sense, to regard her illness in this manner in order to embrace her treatment as a step toward composing or sustaining her self. It would seem to be enough for Saks to concede that she was afflicted with a serious condition and that treating that condition, while psychologically destabilizing and physically consuming in the short run, would give her the best chance of regaining and securing her powers of rational agency and sense of selfhood in the long run. Moreover, if Saks were to acknowledge her illness in this way, then her subsequent narrative self-understanding would seem to conform to Schechtman’s reality constraint. The reality constraint holds that a self-constituting narrative cannot, among other things, involve grossly delusional beliefs. Thus, I am perplexed both by Mackenzie and Poltera’s understanding of illness narratives and by their claim that Saks’s self-understanding serves as a clear counterexample to Schechtman’s reality constraint.

More fundamentally, I am not persuaded by the authors' efforts to eschew the "story-telling" elements of many narrative accounts of identity in order to escape Strawson's objections (34-5), or by their attempt to weaken the coherence requirements on self-narratives in order to accommodate the fragmentary, conflictual, or alienating qualities of Saks's experience of her self (47). Without some such elements of coherent story or tale, diachronic modes of self-understanding or sense-making simply cannot be expected to comprise narratives in any meaningful sense. I worry that Mackenzie and Poltera's attempts to rescue narrative conceptions of identity can succeed, if at all, only by abandoning their distinctively narrative character. This is a problem, I should add, only for those who are committed, as I am not, to a narrative framework for analyzing the character of selfhood and personal identity over time.

ii. Relational Autonomy

I turn now to Andrea Westlund's important discussion of the relational character of personal autonomy. Westlund addresses a central cluster of issues in the literature on relational autonomy. She attempts to show that a sound account of some necessary conditions of autonomy can constitutively incorporate a relational dimension that addresses many feminist interests in autonomy without entailing any substantive normative commitments. In so doing, she aims to rebut John Christman's claim that constitutively relational theories of autonomy necessarily entail an unpalatable perfectionism about the good (Christman 2004). Westlund argues that one necessary condition of autonomy in choice and action is both formal, or content-neutral, and also genuinely relational. This condition consists in a person's having "the disposition to hold [herself] answerable to external critical perspectives on [her] action-guiding commitments" (28). That is, a person's ability to be self-governing in the practical reasoning that leads her to act depends, at least in part, on her having "a disposition for

dialogical answerability," an openness "to engagement with the critical perspectives of others" (35).

In the main, I support the general approach that Westlund uses to elucidate the relational, or dialogical, character of autonomous agency. Like Westlund, I believe that an agent's autonomy turns, in part, on her attitude toward aspects of her answerability in the face of potential criticisms of her motives or actions; and I concur with Westlund and Christman that perfectionism about the good presents a serious pitfall in a serviceable conception of personal autonomy. My thinking departs from Westlund's, however, on the matter of whether avoiding perfectionism requires espousing a purely formal account that is free of substantive normative commitments.

Note, first, that Westlund's proposed condition of autonomy appears itself to entail some substantive normative commitment in its actual realization. To hold oneself answerable, in any concrete situation, is to hold oneself to an expectation that one answer for one's choices or actions; it is to apply to oneself a standard that calls for one to answer potential criticisms (under certain conditions). Hence, to act autonomously in any actual circumstance is, by Westlund's own account, to be disposed to apply in that situation some normative expectation to oneself. And this is not a purely formal expectation; such expectations are often matters for substantive evaluative disagreement.

Even if Westlund's account could manage to elude this particular substantive commitment, I would argue that other normative commitments also lie submerged in attitudes that are preconditions for agents' holding themselves answerable to others' criticism. As I have argued elsewhere (for instance, in the papers of mine that Westlund cites), agents may have diminished autonomy because they fail to regard themselves as sufficiently competent to answer for their conduct or as worthy of taking the position of potential answerers. These

ways of treating our own agential status are precursors to answerability; we can treat ourselves as competent and worthy to take the position of answerers without being disposed to hold ourselves fully answerable. Westlund is correct when she observes that the states of self-regard I have described do not appear to be content-neutral (37). This is why I consider my view to offer a substantive conception, albeit a weakly substantive one.

However, it is unclear to me why the substantive commitments implicit in persons' attitudes toward their own competence and worthiness to speak for their actions bring in tow an objectionable perfectionism, as Westlund alleges (36-7). It is not the case that my weakly substantive conception entails that autonomous agents must embrace a liberal, egalitarian conception of their self-worth. The conception I propose leaves plenty of room for non-liberal views of self-worth. Nor does it preclude autonomous engagement in non-ideal personal relations, as strongly substantive accounts do (cf. Oshana 1998; 2003).

My proposed conception also does not commit us to specific practices of justification, a commitment that Westlund rightly thinks a good theory of autonomy should avoid (38-9). Westlund's discussion of the reasons why autonomous agents need not face an obligation to cite reasons for all of their actions, in all circumstances, on demand, is valuable in this regard (39-40). Yet notice that Westlund's treatment of some of the conditions for the legitimacy of critical challenges to persons' actions brings to light the fact that the disposition to hold ourselves answerable carries with it an implicit, substantive commitment to norms of legitimate challenge. In this respect, Westlund's theory cannot remain wholly neutral on the character of the applicable justificatory practices.

Notwithstanding these concerns about Westlund's position, her paper makes valuable advances in the literature on

relational autonomy and feminist social philosophy. It repays close study. Moreover, both Mackenzie and Poltera's treatment of narrative identity and Westlund's discussion of relational autonomy underscore, in very different ways, the value of distinguishing carefully between practical identity and sufficient conditions for personal autonomy. These authors appreciate well that the literature on relational autonomy has done much to show that agents' reflective endorsement of their effective motives may fall short of guaranteeing personal autonomy. These articles also suggest, again in different ways, that autonomous agency need not arise from coherently constituted or authentic selfhood.

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Comments on Westlund and Mackenzie and Poltera

Comments on Catriona Mackenzie and Jacqui Poltera, "Narrative Integration, Fragmented Selves, and Autonomy" and Andrea C. Westlund, "Rethinking Relational Autonomy"

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These two penetrating and insightful articles explore important issues concerning the nature of the self, the inter-subjective and social nature of persons, and the relation between autonomy and value commitment. Of particular interest to social theorists who focus on gender and race will be the way in which models of the self and autonomy sketched here attempt to capture the full variety of modes of social being and avoid the traditionally parochial conceptions of the self-governing "man" that marked much philosophy and political theory in the past. In general, I am largely in agreement with the main claims developed in the papers, but

want to raise some issues that might further the discussion about these important issues.

Catriona Mackenzie and Jacqui Poltera mount a powerful response to Galen Strawson's rejection of narrative conceptions of the self. The response is largely motivated by a discussion of a person - "Saks" - who exhibits a lack of just the kind of narrative coherence in her life and experiences that narrative theorists say is necessary for a unified self. The pathological nature of her existence, they argue, illustrates how this lack undercuts her ability to sustain a unified life as an agent. I find little to quibble with here, though I do want to raise some questions that might point to a promising further development of the authors' views.

First, is it really clear that the source of the pathology for Saks is a lack of specifically *diachronic* coherence? This person also suffers rather severely from synchronic fragmentation, especially evident when she describes the lack of a "filter" channeling her various thoughts and sensations into a unified, self-oriented, schema. Strawson might be able to reply here that while Saks lacks a coherent self and a flourishing life because of a lack of a unified self, it is not *temporal* continuity of the sort required by narrative views that she is clearly missing. She would be just as disoriented if her memories and attachments to her past self were fairly well ordered. To bolster such a response, Strawson could also point out the various ancillary symptoms she experiences as candidates for the source of her (self-oriented) problems.

Second, Mackenzie and Poltera interpret the narrative criterion of self-constitution as a flexible standard (more flexible than Schechtman interprets it, they claim). They say, rightly in my view, that the narrativity in question need not take on the structure of a traditional story to mark the coherence of a unified sense of self. Indeed, they insist that we should loosen the coherence requirements on self-constituting

narratives to take better account of (quoting Gallagher) the “equivocations, contradictions and struggles that find expression within an individual’s life” (47). This seems right, but then, what *does* make a sequence of experiences a narrative in the end, as opposed, say, to a simple and unconnected series? The authors claim that the sequence must be susceptible to “integration” by the self-reflecting agent; but what makes such a sequence capable of being integrated?

Consider a dream sequence: my own dreams make a kind of emotional sense, even if the scenes they involve shift incomprehensibly (“...then the field I was in turned into a cemetery and I was attending my grandmother’s funeral but was inappropriately dressed...”). Such sequences, especially when heard by a person other than the dreamer, make no sense as a narrative at all, but the dreamer, especially during the dream, sees them as strangely intelligible (sometimes, at least). If our lives were like dreams, would they count as integrated? If not, what would make them so?

I raise these questions as a person who has relied on a loose understanding of narrativity in my own work on models of the self and who has admittedly also not specified what level or kind of coherence must attach to narratives to have them count as such (Christman 2009). David Velleman has utilized the notion of “intelligibility” in describing this kind of coherence (Velleman 2005), but again, we need a non-circular conception of intelligibility that will do the proper work in distinguishing the minimally unified life of a self from the disoriented and dissociated experiences of, for example, a schizophrenic.

What is also valuable about Mackenzie and Poltera’s analysis, however, is their claim that narrativity functions differently in conceptions of the *self* than it might in conceptions of autonomy. This allows the former idea to maintain a kind of flexibility that makes room for idiosyncratic life paths as well

as subject positions that may themselves be structured by pathologies and discontinuities. Autonomy, on the other hand, requires a temporally extended self-narrative but also involves socio-relational components that reflect the ways that selves “are shaped by complex, intersecting social determinants and [which] are constituted in the context of interpersonal relationships” (48). They are careful, however, not to claim overly specific social relations as required for autonomy since, in keeping with their openness to the varieties of selves and life paths just mentioned, they avoid cementing particular (and contentious) personal relations as the only ones that autonomous persons can engage in. This is a theme that leads us to consideration of Andrea Westlund’s work.

The central aim of Westlund’s paper is to argue that autonomy can be understood as constitutively relational in ways that capture feminist suspicions of the alleged acceptance of subservience by some women but which not problematically perfectionist in ways that most liberal (and other) political outlooks strive to avoid. Specifically, she adds the condition of “answerability” that marks the autonomous person’s ability to respond to others adequately in defense of her commitments. This, Westlund claims, establishes an interpersonal (relational) element to autonomy that at once explains why subservient choices often indicate a lack of self-government but which does not do so merely by imposing a perfectionist ideal onto the requirements of autonomy.

Westlund’s approach exhibits an attempt to walk the thin line between purely procedural or content-neutral accounts of autonomy, where no mention is made in the conditions of self-government of any particular desire, value, or characteristic the agent might have, and accounts that rule out, as *per se* heteronomous, self-subordinating and subservient lifestyles. Indeed, this is an issue that theorists of autonomy have been tossing about for a while now. But this

is more than merely an internecine debate, for it strikes at the heart of moral philosophy in the Enlightenment tradition; it points to the question of whether our conception of the person (in particular the self-governing, reasonable person) precedes our conception of the good life, indeed of moral values in general. The challenge is to distinguish the capacity for moral *choice* (for example, to form and judge conceptions of the good) from what some claim as moral *knowledge*, namely the ability to understand the truth about moral values. The Kantian tradition of moral philosophy, and the attendant liberalism in political theory that grows out of it, insists that moral truth cannot be specified independently of practical reason. Hence, we cannot specify the truth about morality and the good life before fully grasping how a reasonable, self-governing agent is structured and functions in the first place. (Of course, those that resist these Kantian impulses may well reject any such separation between the right and the good.)

Also in the background of these debates is the now generally shared distrust (if not outright rejection) of the individualist commitments of this Enlightenment tradition, where the conception of the person and practical reason attaches fundamentally to individual persons without necessary reference to the social constituents of their identities. This distrust has emerged from many quarters, not the least important of which is feminism, where focus on the inter-relatedness of many lives (or some parts of all our lives) served to illuminate and emphasize relations of care, affective connection, and inter-dependence that marked women's traditional social roles (and, as such, tended to be ignored or denigrated).

I mention these broader themes in order to contextualize Westlund's project, as well as to underscore its importance. As we noted, Westlund claims that the best way to capture the relational character of autonomy, and so achieve these

broader aims, is to add a condition of "answerability", according to which one has the "disposition to hold oneself answerable to external critical perspectives on one's action-guiding commitments" (28).¹ This captures what she calls a condition of "self-responsibility" (35).

One question we might ask about such a condition concerns how best to understand what truly motivates including it. For I can imagine two different sets of considerations that might justify adding such a requirement, but one of these sets of considerations does not, in the end, amount to an inter-personal condition, and the other is not clearly justified in ways Westlund would find congenial. In the first case, one could require that one be disposed to answer for one's value commitments for quasi-*epistemic* reasons, namely that being responsive to reasons and objections we might consider further solidifies the basis or foundation of our values. That is, insofar as we are disposed to defend ourselves and our values in the face of criticism, to that extent we have good reason to hold them (and are not simply in their grip). But notice, establishing such a foundational basis for our commitments could be accomplished by answering to a *machine* if it were cleverly programmed to ask the right questions of us, so as to ensure that we have thought through our commitments properly. If the purpose of answerability is quasi-epistemic in this way, nothing necessarily follows about inter-*personal* relations; what matters is that we engage in inner dialogue in order to ward off skepticism and further anchor our commitments for good reasons.

In most of her discussion of this condition, however, Westlund appears to reject this understanding of her position, especially since she discusses the conditions of "appropriateness" of others' asking questions of us (presumably other real persons). She also claims that self-governance in her sense "requires more than one perspective to be in play" (36). But she notes also that this dialogue can be

“imagined” and hence wholly internal: “the critics for whom the agent answers may sometimes inhabit her own moral imagination rather than her real social environment” (36). But this suggests that it is serving this more purely instrumental role, and hence not requiring (necessarily) anything in particular about the way we relate to each other as people.

On the other hand, Westlund may reject this quasi-epistemic reading of her claim. She might do this by insisting that social relations matter for autonomy, not for the role they play in better supporting our convictions, but in order to understand when we are truly self-governing, specifically making sure we are not merely “in the grip of a desire” in devoting ourselves to particular (especially subservient) values. But if this is the approach that is intended, it is more difficult to see how the model maintains its content neutrality, since the grounds for requiring this disposition relate to an ideal of social relations, an ideal about which reasonable, reflective people disagree.

But Westlund would surely object here that it is her whole point to show that certain types of relations effectively disable a person from distinguishing those values that she sincerely holds and those that are merely driving her by way of fear, closed-mindedness, or unquestioning obedience. Here I would say that I am happy to agree to this claim, except that I would say that the responsiveness she adds as a relational condition of autonomy concerns a person’s *competence* regarding self-government and not conditions of *authenticity*. The latter category of conditions involves what it means for a person’s values to be her own in the proper sense. But it is not authenticity that is disrupted when a person lacks the disposition to answer for her commitments. For after the kind of questioning and responsiveness Westlund demands, the person may well come back to the same values she began with – they were “hers” all along. The capacity she lacks is the

ability to sift properly through the reasons available to her for having any values at all, not which ones are really her own.

Why does this issue of classification matter? It is because liberal anti-perfectionism (or, actually, any political approach for which respect for radical *difference* is central) is concerned to keep separate accounts of what it means to have the capacity to accept, follow and perhaps revise a set of values from accounts of what such values should be. Confusing the latter aim with the conditions of the former is (or can be) dangerously inimical to the acceptance of deep pluralism of world views as a permanent fact of modern social life. Understanding the answerability condition as an element of competence allows Westlund to maintain her anti-perfectionist credentials by arguing that it is not (what many observers would label) “subservience” *itself* which is ruled out here, since the question of what counts as (unacceptable) subservience is something about which, in principle, autonomous people can differ. Rather, it is any set of relations that prevents a person from developing a sense of herself, her values, and her place in the social matrix in which she exists.

Such a classification of the self-responsibility condition would also further bolster Westlund’s response to the charge that her view overly valorizes interpersonal responsiveness (illustrated by the case of “Betty”). For Westlund is rightly sensitive to the fact that some individuals are not overly disposed to defend their commitments to others in every situation, and she defends a context-sensitive understanding of what kinds of questioning might be appropriate for (autonomous) agents to be ready to face. This stance on her part could then be defended as a view about what adequate reflective choice amounts to – a basic competence – not what holding authentic values means.

However, this move re-raises my earlier concern, for then it is clear that the *relational* nature of the account is derivative:

interpersonal relatedness of a particular sort is a constitutive element of autonomy only insofar as such relations are required for adequate reflective acceptance of one's values. I then am less sure that Westlund can claim, as she does, that her account of autonomy as self-responsibility "demands ...attention to caring relations in which the capacity for autonomy is developed and sustained" (42). That may be true of many or most people, but it depends, for it will not be true of those who can answer for their values perfectly well without attending to any particular social relations with other actual individuals.

Be this as it may, the context-sensitivity that Westlund insists upon is very much in keeping with the attention to pluralism and difference that anti-perfectionism underscores, a perspective that she and I share. It is also a general perspective that fits very well with Mackenzie and Poltera's insistence that narrative coherence for autonomous selves requires different things for different (sorts of) people. This attention to the radical and multi-dimensional *differences* in identities, self-understandings and social connectedness that marks the modern world is very much welcomed in a politics that is devoted to resisting all forms of oppression, but in a way that accepts the broad variability and contestability of values.

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¹ We might note the similarity between this condition and one offered by one of our other authors, Catriona Mackenzie (Mackenzie 2008). In that work, Mackenzie adds a condition of recognition for one's normative authority as a requirement of autonomy.

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Overly Wide Scope: Including Internalized Sexism and Racism in Identity and Autonomy

Comments on Catriona Mackenzie and Jacqui Poltera, "Narrative Integration, Fragmented Selves, and Autonomy" and Andrea C. Westlund, "Rethinking Relational Autonomy"

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i.

In different ways, issues of scope lie at the center of both Catriona Mackenzie and Jacqui Poltera's "Narrative Integration, Fragmented Selves, and Autonomy" and Andrea C. Westlund's "Rethinking Relational Autonomy." Mackenzie and Poltera find themselves embroiled in a debate with Galen Strawson over whom exactly a narrative theory of identity excludes. While Mackenzie and Poltera attempt to provide an identity theory that is inclusive of almost all agents, they allow that an autonomy theory would be more restrictive (49-

50). Westlund's position on scope derives from her attempt to build a relational account of autonomy that can respond to John Christman's charge that relational accounts necessarily contain substantive conditions. In developing a purely formal relational account, Westlund sets a very wide scope for autonomy, counting individuals as autonomous even when their relations with others are of a deeply subservient nature.

Feminist theorists have devoted energy to exploring the concept of autonomy with the thought that autonomy could be used for locating and separating out individuals who fell into patterns of behavior dictated by sexism (or any other form of bigotry). That includes both men who fail to question their own sexism and women who internalize sexism. By developing substantive accounts of autonomy, feminists could place conditions on autonomous action that exclude such agents from the scope of autonomy, since society's sexism externally dictates much of their behavior. Substantive accounts give the term a much narrower scope than more traditional formal accounts. Westlund, however, favors the more formal approach and argues for the autonomy of many of those powerfully affected by sexism, but not all of them. And so, Westlund, while responding to Christman's claim that all relational accounts are substantive, also tries to respond to these original feminist worries.

Both the Mackenzie and Poltera account of identity and the Westlund account of autonomy are permissive on the question of scope. While I believe both papers do excellent jobs of responding to the critics they are directly confronting, I wonder whether we want to expand the scope of autonomy, in particular, as widely as Westlund does when she follows the trend set by most non-feminist autonomy theorists. The feminist criticisms to which Westlund is responding may be stronger than is usually thought within the autonomy literature. Before tackling that issue, I'll look at Mackenzie and Poltera's discussion of identity.

ii.

In “Narrative Integration, Fragmented Selves, and Autonomy,” Catriona Mackenzie and Jacqui Poltera do not set out to discuss autonomy directly, and in fact worry about accounts that conflate autonomy with identity (33, 46). They instead lay out how an agent forms her identity by utilizing a narrative that pulls together her interpretation of who she is in the present, based on who she was in the past, and where she hopes to go in the future (34). This narrative is both constitutive of the agent’s self-understanding and necessary for her future flourishing. Not being able to put together such a narrative is likely to leave the agent with a disorganized view of her self, with no ability to view her life in a coherent, unified way (41-2).

Against this account, Galen Strawson critiques narrative theories for excluding certain types of agents, whom he refers to as “Episodics,” who see themselves in terms of relatively isolated time slices in the present. Mackenzie and Poltera argue quite convincingly that Episodics are not ordinary (37-44). To exhibit what it would be like to lack a narrative-based identity, Mackenzie and Poltera draw from the autobiography of a remarkable woman, Elyn Saks, who tells of her struggles to overcome schizophrenia. Saks has episodes where she is unable to connect various aspects of her self because she is being deluded by artificial images of selfhood that derive from her pathology (31-2, 39-40). Thus, Saks, at least during the times when she is within the grips of schizophrenia, would lack an identity in the narrative sense. Having schizophrenia does not preclude the possibility that she could have an identity – the incorporation of her pathology as a part of her life tale is key to the development of her self-narrative (47-8). But life *within* schizophrenic episodes provides an accurate description of what it would take to be unable to form one’s own identity. Thankfully, few of us live entirely within such episodes, and so the application of “identity” has an incredibly wide scope.

While this account allows a very wide scope for being able to form an identity, it allows a smaller scope for autonomy. Their thought is that autonomy ought to have higher conditions for its attainment than identity formation. Autonomy should at least have competency conditions and authenticity conditions, and Mackenzie and Poltera are open to further conditions that derive from their endorsement of a relational account of autonomy (48-9). These additional conditions would surely narrow down the scope of autonomy, as we can see by asking whether agents who have internalized sexism should count as autonomous.

Clearly, agents who have internalized sexism could develop their own identity on the Mackenzie and Poltera view. The question of autonomy requires a bit more work. Within their competency conditions, Mackenzie and Poltera include that agents not be deluded (48). Further, within the conditions that they consider as possible additions for a relational theory, they mention the requirement of “having certain affective attitudes toward oneself, for example of self-respect, self-esteem, and self-trust” (49). Since they do not explicitly endorse these latter conditions, we can only conclude that Mackenzie and Poltera would at least be open to labeling agents who have internalized sexism as “non-autonomous.” Such agents are deluded in ways that often undermine their self-respect and self-esteem. Since Mackenzie and Poltera did not concentrate on autonomy, we cannot pin down their answer to the scope question much beyond concluding that it would surely be narrower than it is for identity. For another view on autonomy’s scope, it will be useful to turn to Westlund.

iii.

Non-feminist theorists of autonomy have long worried about setting the conditions for autonomy too high since doing so would make autonomy overly rare (perhaps limiting it to the provenance of philosophers who rationalize their everyday

actions) (Young 1980, 567; Dworkin 1988, 17). These mainstream accounts have opted, instead, to determine who is autonomous based on whether individuals set their own life goals (to put it simply); these accounts disallow external judgments on whether the individuals have chosen those goals well.

Feminists have criticized these accounts as representing the autonomous life as too isolated: such accounts seem to see autonomous agents as setting life goals all on their own, as if it were preferable to avoid influences that might judge your goals and urge you to pursue different trajectories. Such accounts would appear to miss the various ways in which our lives, and goal-setting abilities, are interconnected with other agents (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000). Autonomy, these feminists convincingly argue, need not be about individuals avoiding the influence of others – autonomy can be about the ways in which we take control over our lives through the aid of others while setting out to live alongside, and sometimes for, these others.

Andrea Westlund, in her “Rethinking Relational Autonomy,” attempts to put together a relational account of autonomy that is also responsive to the more mainstream rejection of substantial conditions. And, for the most part, she succeeds. Westlund’s account is relational insofar as its central condition revolves around the agent’s dispositional ability to defend her various desires, values, and commitments against the imagined or actual criticisms of other agents (28, 33). Thus, Westlund’s account maintains the view of the agent as interconnected with others. At the same time, her condition for autonomy is formal since it does not matter which desires, values, or commitments the agent sets – what matters is the ability to defend them against potential external critiques (36-41). Finally, Westlund’s account remains rooted in the self insofar as the determination of autonomy lies in the agent’s ability to defend herself, and not in the possible reactions of

these external critics (34-5). Westlund’s account is fitting as an autonomy account, is formal, and at least meets the feminist concern of being sufficiently relational so as to not put the patriarchally prized super-individualist up on a pedestal.

On the issue of scope, substantive accounts are likely narrower: substantive conditions exclude more individuals than merely formal conditions would. The basis for choosing between these account-types could thus be recast in terms of whether we think certain types of individuals ought to count as autonomous. I will concentrate on individuals who have deeply internalized a form of bigotry aimed at them, such as women who have deeply internalized sexist values or members of underprivileged races who have deeply internalized racist values. Individuals who deeply internalize such values not only act according to a set of values that represent a disrespect for their selves; they may also find it hard to value themselves at all. Therefore, it is worth asking whether they ought to be included within autonomy’s scope.

Westlund would include many of these individuals as autonomous, which she makes clear in her discussion of Marina Oshana’s Taliban woman case (28-9). Westlund would not say all women under the Taliban count as autonomous while acting as culturally expected. If a woman were forced to act according to Taliban demands, no one would count her actions as autonomous. Actions also would not count as autonomous for Westlund if the women performing them internalized sexist Taliban values but were unable to defend them against criticism. Such agents act from those values in a robotic fashion – without any ownership over the values – and would not count as autonomous for Westlund (29).

Taliban women who deeply internalize sexist Taliban values to the extent that they not only fervently believe them but also can defend them against all comers are autonomous on

Westlund's account. This result is an accepted byproduct of establishing a formal account that makes no exceptions for people who have completely internalized values that actually undermine their own self-respect (37).

We would also have to include Clayton Bigsby, the character from Dave Chappelle's infamous skit featuring a blind white supremacist who doesn't know he is African American, as autonomous even after he learns his race. Bigsby has internalized white supremacy to the point of being able to write scores of books defending it. Upon learning he is not white, he cannot simply drop his internalization, which runs deep. Surely he will lose all of his self-respect, but still will be able to act in ways that fit with his internalized values, which he would remain fully able to defend.

Westlund follows the established line of thought of mainstream theorists that it is preferable to widen the scope of autonomy because a narrower conception may lead to less respectful interactions with greater numbers of non-autonomous agents (42). The idea is that autonomy is connected with deserving respect: if someone is not autonomous, they do not have a full claim to the kind of respectful treatment we owe autonomous agents. For example, there is no need to treat a person in a non-responsive comatose state who requires immediate surgery as autonomous. The surgery decision necessarily must be made without the kind of rational exchange that would be owed to an autonomous agent. We should still respect this person, but we need not treat him or her as we would treat an autonomous agent.

We should expand the scope as wide as possible if we thought doing so would strengthen requirements for respectful treatment. Yet, that is only one way to think about the relation between autonomy and respect. Substantive accounts of autonomy need not reserve respect only for the

autonomous, for whom they set a high bar. A simple fix is available: assign respect to the capability for autonomy and don't count as autonomous those agents whose core values are turned against them from without.

For example, unlike the comatose patient, there is nothing substantially preventing Clayton Bigsby from realizing his autonomy; Clayton Bigsby is capable of autonomy. Thus, we ought to respectfully attempt to show him the errors of his ways by appealing to his autonomous capabilities. We ought to do that since surely we want him to *autonomously* choose an autonomous lifestyle - a new lifestyle couldn't be autonomous if he didn't autonomously choose it. Were we to treat him in ways that didn't respect his autonomy (coercing him, brainwashing him, etc.), we would not be helping him become autonomous. It is only those that cannot achieve autonomy on their own, such as the comatose, that we can acceptably treat differently. Making respectful treatment conditional on the capability shows why we must treat the non-autonomous, who remain capable of change, in respectful ways: that is the only way to help them change autonomously.

Thus, a substantive account does not re-victimize the victims, as Westlund seems to think (43). Instead, it could allow us to properly pinpoint the victimization at stake. The severity of the harm done to these agents lies precisely in the fact that their deeply internalized values *prevent* the full achievement of their autonomy. Otherwise it is incredibly difficult to properly describe this harm. After all, the Taliban woman and Clayton Bigsby do not see themselves as harmed by their values, which they have internalized. The harm nonetheless lies in their values: there is some obscure - but external - process that is warping these agents' values such that the very basis for them respecting themselves is being undermined *by their own values*, which indicate that they are worth less as individuals due merely to their identities. It seems strange to

consider such agents as sufficiently in control over their lives to count as autonomous.

I am, of course, making substantial claims – but surely it is central to feminism and anti-racism that we can accept the wrongs of sexism and racism as objective facts. In particular, it makes sense to think there is something wrong with a putatively autonomous agent whose actions derive from values that undermine her very self-worth.

I have not here made an argument that we must accept a substantive autonomy account. I believe, though, that as feminists and anti-racism theorists, we need more convincing that we should be happy with a formal account, such as Westlund's. Of course, it was not Westlund's primary goal to convince us to accept a formal account, but only to show the compatibility of formal conditions with a relational account. Though I believe she succeeded on that end, I wonder whether some of our reasons for preferring relational accounts may have been lost in the process. While Mackenzie and Poltera succeeded in establishing that narrative theories of identity provide a wide enough scope to include almost all ordinary agents, I remain worried that we should not view autonomy's scope quite as widely.

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Autonomy or Authenticity?

Commentary on Andrea Westlund's 'Rethinking Relational Autonomy' and Catriona Mackenzie and Jacqui Poltera's 'Narrative Integration, Fragmented Selves and Autonomy.'

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Andrea Westlund's 'Rethinking Relational Autonomy' and Catriona Mackenzie and Jacqui Poltera's 'Narrative Integration, Fragmented Selves and Autonomy' have many overlapping themes. In what follows, I draw out one of the overlapping themes: both articles distinguish between the necessary conditions for 'identity' or cross-temporal agency and the necessary conditions for autonomy. I suggest that the distinction between identity and autonomy potentially challenges one of the orthodoxies in the autonomy literature, namely, that an autonomous agent is in effect an agent who exhibits authenticity.¹ Neither article endorses a distinction between authenticity and autonomy. On the contrary, both

assume that the orthodoxy is correct and hence that autonomy requires authenticity. I am suggesting that the distinction between autonomy and identity implicitly puts pressure on the orthodoxy even if it is not intended to do so.

Westlund's 'Rethinking Relational Autonomy' is a meticulous defense of what she calls a 'dialogical conception' of autonomy. This is a new position in the logical space of theories of autonomy. Westlund nicely summarizes the starting point in many discussions of autonomy: 'to act autonomously is to act on a desire (or value) that passes a test of reflective endorsement and thereby counts as truly one's own... [S]uch endorsement constitutes the agent's authorization of the desires by which she is moved. In the absence of such authorization, many philosophers speak of agents' being "gripped by" or "alienated from" their desires.' (2009, 30). She takes up Michael Bratman's account of reflective endorsement in which agents are self-governing with respect to their choices and actions when there is a higher-order 'self-governing policy' about that choice or action. According to Bratman, the reason that the self-governing policy itself is authorized in the right way, and not simply a higher-order attitude that the agent may also be gripped by or alienated from, is that these self-governing policies 'contribute to the organization of our cross-temporal agency,' and hence 'these policies have a claim to speak for the agent because they are among the psychological ties that constitute a person as one and the same agent over time' (Westlund 2009, 31-32). Suppose an agent adopts a policy about an exercise regime as a result of depression about her weight. For Bratman, despite the fact that the agent's depression is what ultimately drives her actions, she is nevertheless autonomous because the self-governing policy is a necessary component of a self across time and hence 'speaks for the self.'

Westlund responds that a distinction should be drawn between an agent's having a self-governing policy and an agent's autonomy. She suggests that intuitively our reaction to the depressed agent is: "That's the depression speaking, not you!" and hence that we are likely to characterize such agents as in 'in the grip of a reasoning-governing policy that is not one's own, regardless of the role played by that policy in organizing one's agency over time' (Westlund 2009, 33). Westlund also considers the case of 'deeply deferential agents,' who have a self-governing policy of deference to another but 'have no basis of for doing so that is not itself deferential' (Westlund 2009, 32). She argues that although the self-governing policy may play a role in constituting cross-temporal agency, it may still be autonomy undermining. The response to such agents parallels the response to the depressed agent described above: "That's so-and-so speaking, not you!" (Westlund 2009, 33).

Thus, for Westlund, having a higher-order policy (in Bratman's sense) that agents employ to critically reflect on their lower-order choices is not sufficient for autonomy. On her view, however, critical reflection does play a role. Westlund's position steers a course between the position that 'a choice or action may be regarded as autonomous just when it is motivated by a desire or value that has survived a suitably rigorous process of critical scrutiny' and the position that requires a 'merely hypothetical standard of critical reflection - for example, one that requires that a desire or value could or would withstand some idealized process of reflection' (Westlund 2009, 35-6). The former approach is too stringent in that it would require that every preference or desire pass a test of critical reflection to be autonomous, whereas the latter is too weak because it doesn't require agents to *actually* exercise critical reflection at all. Westlund herself offers a carefully worked-out a 'dialogical' account. She argues that autonomy is a disposition of an agent to 'hold herself answerable, for her action-guiding commitments, to

external critical perspectives' (Westlund 2009, 35). It is a disposition to respond to the normative challenges of real or imagined others. Neither the depressed person nor the deeply deferential person will have this disposition. The deeply deferential agent's response to justificatory challenges will not be dialogical because it will not be the case that 'more than one perspective is in play' (Westlund 2009, 36). Rather, in response to challenges, the agent will rehearse the perspective of the person to whom she defers without critical engagement of her own. Similarly, citing depression is also not 'holding herself answerable to external critical perspectives.' Both the depressed agent and the deeply deferential agent are, as Westlund puts it, 'impervious to critical challenge' (2009, 34).

There are two features of Westlund's dialogical account that make it a significantly original one. First, it is *constitutively* relational. For Westlund, a necessary condition of being autonomous is having a disposition that requires 'positioning oneself as always a potential member of a reflective or deliberative dyad' so that the psychological perspective of the autonomous agent '[points] beyond itself, to the position the agent occupies as one reflective, responsible self among many' (Westlund 2009, 35). Secondly, it is 'formal' (content-neutral) not substantive or value-laden; it does not require an agent to endorse or reject any particular justification of their reasons for choice and action. Hence, Westlund's article provides a counterargument to John Christman's critique of constitutively relational accounts, namely that they imply an unacceptable perfectionism, or a requirement that the agent endorse (or the external conditions correspond to) some substantive moral position (Christman 2004; Christman 2010).

The article by Catriona Mackenzie and Jacqui Poltera is a rich and very rewarding exploration of the conditions of agency and the consequences of this for autonomy. The distinction mentioned by Westlund between the conditions of cross-

temporal agency and the conditions of autonomy has an important place in their argument. The first part of the article critiques Galen Strawson's proposal that an 'Episodic self' is a candidate for agency. Employing an analysis of Elyn Saks' memoir of living with schizophrenia, Mackenzie and Poltera propose that Saks' description of periods in which she was severely ill with psychotic delusions, in which she experienced a disorganized and fragmented sense of self, shows that Episodic identity is not sufficient for genuine agency. Rather, they argue that having a temporally extended *narrative* identity is necessary and sufficient for agency. The second part of their article critiques Marya Schechtman's account of narrative agency. Mackenzie and Poltera claim that Schechtman 'blurs the distinction between identity and autonomy' and that the constraints she imposes on narrative identity are too strong (2010, 45 ff.). They propose a conception of narrative identity with modified constraints. First, they adopt a 'reality' constraint that is weaker than Schechtman's. Schechtman's reality constraint is violated, for example, when the contents of an agent's thoughts do not correspond to reality. Psychotic agents therefore do not have narrative identity because their thoughts violate the reality constraint. Mackenzie and Poltera respond by making a useful distinction between the contents of psychotic thoughts and the 'illness narrative' of psychotic agents. They argue that it is possible for an illness narrative that corresponds to reality to be incorporated into an agent's self-conception; indeed, 'the illness narratives of persons such as Saks who suffer from psychopathology can be self-constituting despite their fragmentation if they enable the person to make sense of her history, rather than being caught in a terrifying "stagnant present"' (2010, 50). Mackenzie and Poltera also reject Schechtman's account of narrative agency as 'it places overly restrictive requirements of coherence, affective identification, and self-knowledge on self-constituting narratives' (2010, 48). They propose that an agent's sense of self may contain overlapping, even conflicting, fragments, yet may still

comprise a self-narrative that forms the basis of a flourishing life.

This 'looser conception of narrative self-constitution' allows Mackenzie and Poltera to distinguish between identity or agency - the synchronic and diachronic conditions of selfhood - and autonomy (Mackenzie and Poltera 2010, 47). They argue that Saks suffers from diminished autonomy whereas her narrative identity is intact. They outline two broad sets of conditions required for autonomy: competency and authenticity conditions. The former include capacities for 'rationality, capacities for self-control, and motivational effectiveness' and the latter 'specify that, to be autonomous, an agent's desires, beliefs, commitments, and values must be her own, which requires that she has critically evaluated them in some way' (Mackenzie and Poltera 2010, 48). (Mackenzie and Poltera endorse a relational account of these two conditions, though they do not specify precisely the way in which the relational conditions are to be understood.) Mackenzie and Poltera argue that both Saks' autonomy competency - especially her capacity for 'programmatically autonomy,' that is, the capacity to make life-choices such as whether and whom to marry - and her authenticity are diminished as a result of her experience of psychotic illness.

Each article makes a persuasive case that the conditions of cross-temporal agency are different - perhaps less stringent - from the conditions of autonomy. Mackenzie and Poltera point out that 'illness narratives' play an important role in agents' self-conceptions over time while at the same time the illness experienced by the agent may be precisely the feature of her psychology that undermines her autonomy. This observation makes me wonder whether different kinds of narratives of identity have the same role in cross-temporal agency and also the same consequences for agents' autonomy. For example, gender and race narratives play a similar role in constituting cross-temporal agency. Does the

way in which agents experience gender and race have the potential to undermine their autonomy in the same way that the experience of psychotic illness has this potential? Theorists of oppression have pointed out that the ideologies of gender and race can have a debilitating effect on the psychologies of agents who are oppressed and hence on their competencies.

A second question for Mackenzie and Poltera's account arises for their claim that narrative identity is necessary for autonomy (although it is not sufficient). How does this claim intersect with their reality constraint? Recall that they draw a distinction for the purposes of modifying Schechtman's reality constraint between the illness narrative and content of the illness narrative. In certain cases, however, it may be difficult for agents to draw a sharp distinction between incorporating the narrative into their self-conception and incorporating the contents of the narrative. Again I am thinking of gender and race narratives such as 'I am a black woman.' It may be impossible to distinguish the race narrative from its contents because race narratives seem to *imply* beliefs with certain contents such as 'I am inferior to white people' or 'White people think of me as inferior,' or 'I am naturally suited to certain inferior positions or roles in society.' Since the contents of these beliefs are false, does the narrative violate the reality constraint? If it does, since for Mackenzie and Poltera narrative identity is a necessary condition of autonomy, agents have neither narrative identity nor autonomy. Does the reality constraint on narrative identity therefore potentially import a substantive constraint into Mackenzie and Poltera's conception of autonomy?²

Thirdly, although Mackenzie and Poltera's claim that authenticity is one of the conditions of autonomy, their discussion suggests that authenticity may in fact come apart from autonomy (cf. Oshana 2005; Oshana 2007). On their account, the illness narrative - 'I am a person with

schizophrenia' - contributes to how Saks constitutes her sense of self, even during periods in which she is relatively well. So, for instance, having intrusive thoughts is part of who she is as a person with schizophrenia; these thoughts are central and ineliminable features of Saks' self, and therefore authentically her *own*, in some sense (cf. Oshana 2005, 88-90). However, for Mackenzie and Poltera, these aspects of the self are *inauthentic* in agents like Saks, because 'there will always be significant aspects of the [schizophrenic] person's self... from which she may always feel alienated,' and as a result of which she has diminished autonomy. How do Mackenzie and Poltera reconcile the apparently incompatible claims that illness narratives contribute to the constitution of a self that is an agent's 'own' and the claim that at the same time these aspects of the authentic self are inauthentic and hence undermine autonomy?

The question of the relationship between authenticity and autonomy also arises for Westlund's article. She wants to allow that agents who adopt practices that significantly inhibit their equality may do so autonomously. She comments that if a 'fundamentalist woman does freely and authentically accept a condition of social and personal subordination, it seems...problematic to assume that her condition as subordinate, in and of itself, undermines her status as a self-governing agent' (Westlund 2009, 29). She distinguishes between two (hypothetical) fundamentalist women, both of whom accept their condition of subordination but only one of whom 'is prepared to take up and respond to the critical perspectives of others, even if she is unconvinced by their arguments' (Westlund 2009, 29). The latter exhibits dialogical autonomy whereas the former does not. It is clear that, for Westlund, authenticity and autonomy go together. However, in my view, it is implausible that the difference between the two women can be located in a difference in their authentic selves: both treat being a fundamentalist Muslim woman as constitutive of their sense of self and essential to 'who they

are.' Both (*ex hypothesi*) endorse their commitments to fundamentalism and the condition of subordination that goes along with it. The only difference between the two is that one can (or does) justify her commitments to others whereas the other can (or does) not. It seems therefore that Westlund's account implicitly also puts pressure on the authenticity criterion of autonomy.

Two final considerations stem from Westlund's use of the notion of a disposition. The autonomy disposition will be manifested only if the agent is subject to the normative challenges of others and has the opportunity to respond to them. However, in many situations in which agents are subject to oppressive ideologies, there will be little if any opportunity to respond to justificatory challenges. A disposition that is never manifested suffers from the same objection that Westlund addressed to hypothetical accounts, namely that, in the absence of normative challenges from other agents, critical reflection will not be engaged at all. Suppose an agent is never in a position to respond to justificatory challenges. Is Westlund's view that she is autonomous because her disposition *would* be manifested *were* she subjected to challenges? Or is the view rather that only agents who have the opportunity to respond to normative challenges, and in fact do so, are autonomous? A related question is how the disposition required for autonomy would develop for agents who are subject to oppressive circumstances. Dispositions to respond to others' requests for justification of one's own reasons are honed through education, open debate, and being subjected to a wide variety of real and imagined perspectives that challenge one's own. It is plausible that agents living in social conditions of significant inequality, for instance those in which girls are not entitled to education, will not encounter the circumstances necessary for the disposition to develop. Thus, although Westlund characterizes her position as adopting a weaker criterion of autonomy than those requiring

that preferences be subjected to reflective endorsement, for many agents, dialogical autonomy may actually be more stringent and difficult to achieve.

To sum up: both articles make important advances in our thinking about the notion of autonomy. By carefully distinguishing between the conditions of identity or cross-temporal agency and the conditions of autonomy, they point towards the possibility of a richer exploration of the ways in which conditions that contribute to the construction of agents' identities might at the same time undermine agents' capacities for autonomy. I suggested that the self yielded by a process of identity-construction is equivalent to an authentic self. Thus, the idea that the former may not be autonomous implicitly challenges the orthodoxy of the autonomy literature that authenticity and autonomy go together.

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¹ Marina Oshana's work challenges this orthodoxy (e.g. Oshana 2005; Oshana 2007).

²As Sally Haslanger pointed out to me, the identity narratives that people construct for themselves may be more or less true. What degree of truth is required to satisfy the reality constraint?

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Narrative Identity and Autonomy

Reply to Commentaries

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Thanks to our four commentators for their thoughtful and challenging commentaries. Before responding to the issues raised by the commentators we begin by briefly recapping our argument.

Our paper was motivated by two main concerns. The first was to question the coherence of Galen Strawson's (1999,

2004, 2007) conception of the episodic self and to defend a broadly narrative approach to identity against his critique of narrativity. Drawing on Elyn Saks' (2007) autobiographical narrative of schizophrenia, we drew attention to the suffering caused by the breakdown in acute (and chronic) mental illness of a person's sense of herself as a diachronic agent. We also argued that Saks's reflections on her experience attest to the importance of capacities for narrative self-understanding for leading a flourishing life.

The second concern was to argue for the importance of distinguishing the conditions for selfhood or practical identity from the conditions for autonomy.ⁱ We claimed that this distinction is blurred in Marya Schechtman's (1996) otherwise illuminating narrative self-constitution approach to identity. We argued that in order to explain how illness narratives, such as that of Saks, can enable a person to manage her illness sufficiently to constitute a relatively coherent practical identity, the coherence requirements on what can count as a self-constituting narrative need to be looser than those proposed by Schechtman. As John Christman points out in his commentary, this gives our approach to selfhood "a kind of flexibility that makes room for idiosyncratic life paths as well as subject positions that may themselves be structured by pathologies and discontinuities" (2). At the same time, we wanted to maintain that the conditions for autonomy are more stringent than the conditions for selfhood. This enables us to explain, as Natalie Stoljar points out, how an illness narrative might play an important role in an agent's self-conception and in enabling her to constitute a sufficiently coherent sense of self, even if illness may be precisely what diminishes her capacity for autonomy.

None of the commentators appear to take issue with our critique of Strawson, and all four commentators agree on the importance of distinguishing the conditions for identity from the conditions for autonomy. The commentators' concerns

seem to focus on four clusters of issues: the notion of narrative coherence; the notion of an illness narrative; the implications of our argument for gendered and racialized narratives; and the relationship between autonomy and authenticity. We address each of these issues in turn.

i. Agency and Narrative Coherence

The first set of issues, raised in the commentaries by John Christman and Paul Benson, concerns the notion of narrative coherence. Christman asks first whether Saks's experience of self-fragmentation results from disruption to her sense of diachronic continuity or from synchronic fragmentation. Our answer is both, because, as we make clear in our critique of Strawson's episodic self, we think that a sense of diachronic continuity is necessary for having a sense of synchronic coherence. In the paper, we support this claim with reference to Shaun Gallagher's (2003) argument that the capacity to organize our experience into a basic temporal structure is a necessary condition for the pre-reflective sense of self that grounds capacities for self-reference, metacognition and autobiographical memory. In recounting and reflecting on her experiences of psychotic disorganization, Saks also suggests that synchronic and diachronic fragmentation are interconnected.

While sympathetic to our argument that the coherence requirements on self-constituting narratives should be loosened, Christman also wonders what level and kind of coherence, intelligibility and integration are required for a self-constituting narrative, as distinct from say a dream sequence. As he points out, a dream sequence may make some kind of narrative sense to the dreamer but presumably would not count as self-constituting and does not make much narrative sense to others. We want to respond to this question in two stages.

First, there are a number of characteristics of coherent and intelligible narratives that distinguish them from other sequences, such as chronicles or dream sequences, which also depict a series of events or experiences. A minimal set of requirements for a coherent narrative is that it must explain the causal connections between the events/experiences and actions it recounts; it must structure event/experience sequences into temporal orderings that need not be chronological but must be intelligible; it must provide a context within which individual events /experiences and their significance can be understood; and it must be meaningful in the sense that it enables the reader or audience to make sense of the inner lives and perspectives of the characters – their motives, and emotional responses to other characters and to the events and actions described in the narrative. Ricoeur's notion of "emplotment" sums up this requirement in characterizing narrative as an organizing and interpretive structure that links character, motive, object and circumstance in such a way as to enable us to ask and answer questions of "who?", "why?", "how?", "when?", "where?" (Ricoeur 1992). Note that because narrative structures are forms of communication, as well as of understanding, the criteria for coherence are subject to intersubjective norms.

Second, extending this conception of narrative coherence to self-narratives, we would argue that, to be self-constituting, a self-narrative must also meet requirements of causal and temporal intelligibility; it must enable the person to make sense of significant events and experiences in her life, her memories, traits of character, emotional responses, values, and relations with others; and it must provide a self-interpretive context within which she can project herself into the future via intentions and plans. We are thus in agreement with Schechtman on the need for constraints on self-constituting narratives. We also agree with her that these constraints are intersubjective because personhood is social. As Schechtman argues, in order to constitute herself as a

person, an individual needs to be able to “grasp her culture’s concept of a person and apply it to herself” (Schechtman 1996, 95). Her self-narrative must also be capable of being made intelligible to others and must conform, to at least some degree, with others’ narratives of her. Schechtman proposes two main constraints on self-constituting self-narratives: a reality constraint and an articulation constraint. Our disagreement with Schechtman focuses on her interpretation of these constraints, which we argue are too stringent and consequently blur the distinction between narrative self-constitution and autonomy. We expand on this claim in sections two and three below.

Benson says that he is not persuaded by our response to “story-telling” critiques of narrative, arguing that “without some such elements of coherent story or tale, diachronic modes of understanding or sense-making simply cannot be expected to comprise narratives in any meaningful sense” (3). What we have said above about the notion of narrative coherence should make it clear that we don’t disagree that self-narratives must meet coherence constraints. What we reject is the conception of narrative self-constitution that underpins “story-telling” critiques, such as that of Strawson or Samantha Vice (2003): that self-interpretation involves thinking of oneself as if one were a character in a novel, or “thinking of oneself and one’s life as fitting the form of some recognized genre” (Strawson 2004, 442).

A more substantial objection raised by Benson concerns the relationship between agency and selfhood. If, on a narrative self-constitution view, selfhood is an achievement of agency, then, he asks, “who or what is the entity that constructs a narrative self-interpretation and, in so doing, brings into being diachronically extended, rationally intelligible selfhood?” Benson’s reference to an entity and his claim that “the agent must exist and be capable of self-reflective activity prior to the emergence of a personal self” suggests that he

thinks our account (and perhaps narrative approaches to identity more generally) is metaphysically confused and conflates the agent and the self. We are not entirely clear if Benson’s objection is metaphysical; if it is, we wish to make it clear that in our view narrative identity is practical, not metaphysical. Alternatively, Benson’s objection may be that narrative approaches to the self problematically fail to distinguish different dimensions of selfhood.

Within the recent literature, there are (at least) two important ways of carving out distinctions among different dimensions of selfhood. In phenomenologically-informed cognitive science, theorists distinguish between the minimal, embodied self of primordial self-awareness – what Antonio Damasio (1999) refers to as the “core self” of “core consciousness” and Gallagher (2000) and Dan Zahavi (2005) refer to as the “minimal self” – and the narrative or extended, autobiographical self. On Zahavi’s interpretation, the minimal self is the pre-reflective self of first-personal experiential givenness. Zahavi criticizes narrative theorists for failing to recognize that the narrative self is phenomenologically and ontologically dependent on this experiential self. He suggests reserving the term “self” for the minimal, experiential self and referring to the narrative self as narrative personhood. We agree that it is important to distinguish between the minimal, embodied self and the narrative self, although we did not draw this distinction in the paper under discussion. We also accept that the minimal, embodied self is developmentally prior to the emergence of the narrative self. However, we would caution against making the distinction between these different dimensions of selfhood too sharp. As Gallagher points out, because of the reconstructive nature of memory, although “the registration of episodic memory as ‘my’ memory of ‘myself’ clearly depends on a minimal but constantly reiterated sense of that self that I recognize, without error, as myself...the core features of the self are constantly being reinterpreted by the narrative process”

(2000, 20). Zahavi also acknowledges that the subjectivity of the minimal experiential self is a bare subjectivity, rather than a personalized subjectivity, and that we are only concretely individuated as narrative persons. It is only when narrative personhood disintegrates, for example in chronic schizophrenia or in advanced dementia, that, arguably, we glimpse a residual core self.

J. David Velleman (2006) makes a different kind of distinction among different reflexive “guises” of the self: the self of what he variously refers to as the person’s “self-image,” sense of self or narrative self-conception; the self of personal identity or self-sameness over time; and the self as autonomous agent. The self as autonomous agent is motivated by the higher-order aim of making sense of oneself, and it is clear that for Velleman this self is the locus of agential control. He often describes it as the unrepresented, thinking “I” of the person’s mental standpoint that is the mental analogue of the geometric point of origin of the person’s visual perspective (2000, 30-31; 2006, 358). Velleman thinks that the self as autonomous agent makes sense of oneself via two distinct forms of understanding: causal explanation and narrative understanding. Thus he also refers to the autonomous agent as the “inner narrator” that makes up the narrative self it then enacts. Given Benson’s reference to Velleman in his commentary, we suspect that Benson is pressing us to make, or to clarify our position with respect to, this kind of distinction between the agent that constructs the narrative self and the self it constructs. We cannot address this question in detail here, but we hope the following brief comments will suffice to outline our general position. First, we agree with Velleman’s resistance to understanding the self in any of its guises as a metaphysical entity or motivational essence. Second, we are sympathetic to Velleman’s idea that as persons we are motivated by the higher-order aim of making sense of ourselves and that a central way in which we do so is via narrative self-understanding. Third, we think Velleman is

right to distinguish among different senses or reflexive guises of the self. However, as Mackenzie has argued in detail elsewhere (Mackenzie 2007), we think these dimensions of selfhood are more integrated and interrelated than Velleman suggests.

ii. Illness Narratives

Benson says he is perplexed on multiple grounds by our discussion of illness narratives. Specifically, Benson suggests that it is not clear what we mean in claiming that Saks had to accept that her illness is part of who she is in order to develop a coherent sense of self. Nor is he clear why we think that Saks’s complex stance towards her psychotic delusions raises questions for Schechtman’s interpretation of the reality constraint.

In response to the first issue, it is important to reiterate that we are not making a metaphysical claim about Saks’s deep or essential self. What we are claiming is that Saks’s illness is a central feature of her life and her practical identity, and has to be taken into account in much of her practical reasoning and deliberation. Benson’s commentary implies that a mentally ill person’s sense of self and capacities for rational agency are quite distinct from her illness and that the illness is an affliction that “periodically debilitates or disorganizes [her] capacities for lucid practical reasoning and rational conduct.” Saks did think of her illness in this way, especially in the early stages of its onset. This is in part why she felt estranged from her psychotic delusions and also resisted medication – because she regarded her illness as other than herself and wanted, as she says, “to exist in the world as my *authentic self*” (Saks 2007, 226). However, her autobiography attests to her growing realization that to manage her illness she could not think of it as other than herself but had to accept it as a central aspect of her practical identity. We suggested that James Phillips’ (2003) notion of an illness narrative helps explain this process of acceptance.ⁱⁱ Illness narratives are narratives that

revolve around the person's illness and its meaning within her life. Following Phillips, we argued that an illness narrative can enable the construction of a sufficiently integrated narrative identity *if* it restores the agent's sense of her self and her agency and if it enables her to make sense of her experiences, including her experience of her illness (Mackenzie and Poltera 2010, 48).

On this same issue, Stoljar questions how we reconcile the "apparently incompatible claim that illness narratives contribute to the constitution of a self that is an agent's 'own' and the claim that at the same time these aspects of the authentic self are inauthentic and hence undermine autonomy" (4). We take up the issue of autonomy in the next section. At this point, however, it is helpful to make two clarifications in response to this question. First, we would argue that one reason for distinguishing between practical or narrative identity, on the one hand, and autonomy on the other, is that it makes it easier to disambiguate two different senses of "one's own." An agent can acknowledge that an aspect of her identity, for example a character trait, or a psychological disorder, is "her own," in the sense of being a "circumstantially necessary" (Oshana 2005) part of who she is, without it being "her own" in the sense that she affectively identifies with it, endorses it, or is autonomous with respect to it. Thus we see no inconsistency between accepting an aspect of one's practical identity as "one's own" in the first sense while feeling alienated from it. This is why we do not accept Schechtman's claim that "aspects and experiences from which I feel alienated...are not part of my narrative" (2007, 171), and it is why we think she blurs the distinction between identity and autonomy. Second, we do not agree that aspects of the self from which we may feel alienated are necessarily inauthentic. To be authentic is to be true to oneself, and being true to oneself may sometimes require acknowledging that aspects of oneself from which one feels affectively alienated are nevertheless central to one's practical identity.

This leads us back to Benson's second concern with our discussion of illness narratives. Benson says he is perplexed about why we think illness narratives challenge Schechtman's interpretation of the reality constraint and why we suggest the need to loosen the coherence constraints on self-constituting narratives. To clarify, on Schechtman's view, elements of an agent's self-narrative that conflict with the reality constraint, such as psychotic delusions, cannot be self-constituting. Our argument is that this interpretation of the reality constraint is too stringent because it cannot account for the role of illness narratives in self-constitution. Moreover, the requirement that only those aspects of a person's life and experience with which she strongly affectively identifies can count as part of her narrative imposes overly stringent conditions on diachronic (and synchronic) integration. Saks's recurring delusion that she was a mass murderer, for example, clearly violates the reality constraint. Since this delusion results in feelings of self-alienation, it also violates Schechtman's requirement of strong affective identification. We see this as a problem for Schechtman's account because this delusion plays a pivotal role in Saks's life experience and in her practical identity. To understand herself and also to regain a sense of her own agency, Saks therefore had to come to terms with this delusion and its role in her life; that is, to integrate it into her self-narrative. This process of integration, we suggest, involves the construction of an illness narrative that enables her to distinguish the false *content* of the psychotic delusion from an acceptance of the *fact* that she suffers delusions.

iii. Race, Gender and Autonomy

Stoljar is clear about our purpose in distinguishing between the content of psychotic thoughts and the role of illness narratives in enabling a person to gain self-understanding with respect to her psychosis. She wonders, however,

whether it will always be possible for agents to make this distinction clearly, suggesting that in the case of internalized oppressive race narratives, for example, “it may be impossible to distinguish the race narrative from its contents because race narratives seem to *imply* beliefs with certain contents” (4). Since the content of these beliefs is false, this raises the question of whether such narratives violate the reality constraint and hence whether such agents have a narrative identity. A further question is whether gendered and racialized narratives have the potential to undermine agents’ autonomy in the same way as the experience of psychotic illness.

The question of how our analysis of illness narratives might bear on racialized and gendered narratives raises interesting and complex issues that we can only address in outline here. Before addressing Stoljar’s specific questions, it is important to highlight a significant difference between illness narratives and race or gender narratives. Illness narratives, we have suggested, can play an important therapeutic role in giving meaning to an illness and its impact on the person’s life, even if these narratives may sometimes involve confabulation or delusion. Their function is therefore quite different from race or gender narratives, which function to enforce oppressive social norms, political structures and relationships.

Stoljar’s questions about race and gender are nevertheless valuable in drawing attention to the fact that an adequate account of the coherence constraints on self-narratives must take account of the ways in which social norms of personhood are bound up with norms and narratives not only of gender and race, but also of class, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and (dis)ability. Constructing a coherent self-narrative in social contexts marked by oppression, or in contexts where others do not recognize and treat one as a person, may therefore be extremely fraught. This is why “consciousness raising” plays an important role in countering

the effects of social oppression, by bringing to awareness the implicit beliefs bound up with oppressive narratives.ⁱⁱⁱ

In response to Stoljar’s questions, we would argue firstly, that in extreme situations, for example in contexts characterized by significant physical violence and brutalization, sexual abuse, severe psychological trauma, or brainwashing, the internalization of oppressive narratives of race and gender may threaten an agent’s capacity to constitute a coherent narrative identity.^{iv} We would also suggest that Benson’s (2000) analysis of the gaslighted woman is an example of an agent subject to a form of psychological oppression that has not only impaired her autonomy competences but also undermined her sense of identity. In less extreme situations, an agent’s capacity to constitute an identity need not be threatened by oppression, although her narrative identity – the agent’s character, beliefs, values, emotional responses – will certainly have been shaped by the oppressive cultural narratives that she has internalized, which will include false beliefs about herself. As a result, her self-narrative may contribute to the ways in which oppression impairs her autonomy.

Secondly, then, as Rocha suggests, we allow for the possibility that if an agent’s autonomy competences are sufficiently compromised by the oppressive norms she has internalized, or by false or delusory beliefs, then her autonomy is threatened. We stress, however, that autonomy is a matter of degrees and domains. Living with a serious mental illness may impair some of an agent’s autonomy competences more than others, at some times more than others, and in some situations more than others. Further, different agents with similar illnesses may be impaired to different degrees, depending on their individual circumstances, including the level of social support available to them. The same applies to agents who have internalized oppressive norms and narratives.

Stoljar raises two further questions about autonomy that require more detailed answers than we can provide here. The first is whether the reality constraint imports a substantive constraint into our conception of autonomy. Although Rocha does not pose this question explicitly, his commentary also raises the question of whether a relational approach to autonomy ought to embrace substantive constraints. The second concerns whether we do, or ought to, endorse a distinction between authenticity and autonomy.

In response to the first question, in the paper we gave three reasons for thinking that a person with chronic mental illness, such as Saks, could only be partially autonomous: that her autonomy competences are partially impaired by the illness; that there are aspects of her identity from which she will always feel alienated; and that psychological disorders can undermine the affective attitudes of self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem that we claim are necessary for autonomy. These reasons thus refer to three conditions for autonomy: competence conditions; authenticity conditions; and weakly substantive self-affective conditions, which we did not discuss in any detail in the paper.^v We had not considered before whether our commitment to a loose reality constraint on self-constituting narratives does import a substantive constraint into our conception of autonomy, but Stoljar may be correct in suggesting that it does.

The second issue raised by Stoljar pushes us to clarify the extent to which we are in fact committed to authenticity conditions for autonomy. In our discussion above, in disambiguating two different senses of “one’s own,” we claimed first, that one can accept an aspect of one’s practical identity as “one’s own” – in the sense of being a circumstantially necessary part of one’s identity – while feeling alienated from it; and second, that aspects of the self from which we may feel alienated are not necessarily inauthentic. The question we now need to address is whether

one can be autonomous with respect to an aspect of one’s identity from which one feels alienated. In the paper we endorse Christman’s non-alienation interpretation of the authenticity condition, suggesting that we think autonomy *is* inconsistent with alienation (Christman 2001; 2009). In many cases, such as that of Saks, we think this is the case. However we are persuaded by arguments, such as those proposed by Oshana (2005) and Benson (2005) that ambivalence and sometimes alienation need not be inconsistent with autonomy.^{vi} We suspect, therefore, that we may need to rethink our general commitment to authenticity conditions for autonomy.

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ⁱ We use the terms “selfhood” and “practical identity” interchangeably here. An implication of our argument in Mackenzie and Poltera (2010) is that a narrative self-constitution view provides the best framework for understanding the process of practical identity formation.

ⁱⁱ We discussed Philips' notion of an illness narrative because he applies this concept to psychiatric illnesses such as schizophrenia. However, the notion of illness narrative was originally developed by other theorists, notably Arthur Frank (1995).

ⁱⁱⁱ For an orthogonal discussion of how racist and sexist norms can shape an agent's beliefs and threaten her sense of self, see the collected papers in Sullivan and Tuana (2007).

^{iv} This kind of theoretical claim requires empirical support. We suggest that relevant empirical support can be found in the psychological and psychiatric literature on "traumatic dissociation," arising from memories of physical or sexual abuse, cultural dislocation, war trauma, and other traumatic experiences. Spiegel (2006) characterizes traumatic dissociation as a "failure to integrate aspects of identity, memory and consciousness" (567), resulting in fragmentation of the self.

^v For a more detailed discussion of this constraint, see Mackenzie (2008). There is a slight difference between us with respect to this issue. Mackenzie is committed to a weakly substantive conception of relational autonomy. She is also sympathetic to Westlund's (2009) dialogical approach, but agrees with Benson and Stoljar that this may commit Westlund to a more substantive view than she acknowledges. Poltera is committed to a weaker substantive conception of relational autonomy than Mackenzie and is less sympathetic to Christman's non-alienation interpretation of the authenticity condition. Poltera wants to allow for the possibility that, in some circumstances, an agent can be autonomous despite being alienated, ambivalent or subject to oppressive social norms.

^{vi} See Poltera (2010) for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

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Reply to Benson, Christman, Rocha, and Stoljar

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I'd like to begin by thanking Sally Haslanger and the editorial board of SGRP for organizing this symposium, and Professors Benson, Christman, Rocha and Stoljar for their very insightful and stimulating comments. I have learned a lot from this discussion and, in particular, from the juxtaposition of my paper with Catriona MacKenzie and Jacqui Poltera's fine article on narrative integration. Some illuminating connections have been drawn between the two, and my reply begins from the ground we share. I proceed thematically, since certain ideas arose in more than one set of comments.

i.

Natalie Stoljar points out that both MacKenzie and Poltera's paper and my own draw a distinction between the necessary conditions for cross-temporal agency and the necessary

conditions for autonomy. Stoljar argues, further, that both papers put pressure on what she calls the "authenticity" criterion of autonomy. Paul Benson makes the same claim in his closing paragraph and, while John Christman seems to retain a stronger connection between authenticity and autonomy than either Benson or Stoljar, he also argues that my view is not best understood as offering an authenticity condition. This emergent theme has prompted me to rethink the way in which I have sometimes framed my argument.

Authenticity conditions, as both Stoljar and Christman note, are usually paired with competence conditions as two distinct components of an account of autonomy. Competence conditions concern capacities one needs in order to be self-governing (rationality, self-control, and the like), while authenticity conditions pertain to the question of what makes a belief or desire truly "one's own." On certain hierarchical views of autonomy, for example, reflective endorsement satisfies the authenticity condition, while the competence condition would be satisfied at least in part by possession of whatever capacities one needs to engage in motivationally effective reflective endorsement. I have been critical of such accounts. Nonetheless, I have sometimes framed my own position as an alternative account of authenticity, or, in other words, as an alternative answer to the question of what's required for a belief or desire to count as one's own. (I do this implicitly in the paper under discussion, and more explicitly in Westlund 2003.) Stoljar suggests that, because of the distinction I draw between autonomy and cross-temporal agency, perhaps I should not frame it in this way at all.

I am amenable to this suggestion. As useful as the language of ownership can be, it also has its limitations. I have never been strongly tempted by the idea that self-governance depends on determination by something we might call one's "true" self. I have found the notion of ownership pertinent to autonomy primarily because it is suggestive of a normative

relationship of responsibility or answerability for the motives on which one acts. Whether those motives involve desires or values that form a part of one's self-identity (or, indeed, one's narratively integrated identity) is a conceptually distinct issue. Such belonging is not, at the very least, sufficient for autonomy. The discussion in this symposium has, I think, convinced me that the notion of authenticity is more naturally and more clearly associated with the question of integrated identity than it is with autonomy. If this is so, then one upshot of my argument (like MacKenzie and Poltera's) would be that autonomy and authenticity can come apart.

ii.

But if responsibility for self is not an authenticity condition, then what is it? Christman suggests that it is best understood as a competence condition. As Christman sees it, what a person lacks, when she lacks the disposition to answer for her commitments, is "the ability to sift properly through the reasons available to her for having any values at all" (Christman 4). Going this route, according to Christman, would preserve the anti-perfectionism of my view – since self-subordination is not directly ruled out – but only at the cost of rendering its relationality derivative. That is, autonomy would turn out to be (constitutively) relational only to the extent that an agent's ability to sift through reasons was itself dependent on her engagement in certain kinds of social relationship. This, Christman argues, may be true of many of us, but not all.

I would argue, however, that answerability must involve something more than the ability properly to sift through reasons. A deeply deferential individual may be quite *capable*, in a perfectly ordinary sense of the word, of examining objections, constructing arguments, and, indeed, answering for herself. What she does not do is hold herself to any expectation that she do so. The self-responsible agent, by contrast, holds herself to the *expectation* or *demand* that she

respond appropriately to legitimate requests for justification, experiencing herself as *owing* a suitable response, at least under certain conditions. One who relates to herself in this way feels the demand for answers not just as a pressure from without, but also as a requirement to which she is held from within. If answerability for oneself is a competence, then, it is a normative one, resembling in certain respects what Stephen Darwall calls "second-personal" competence.¹ The non-answerable agent fails to stand in a distinctive normative relationship to herself, which is just the flip side of her insensitivity to the legitimate justificatory demands placed on her by others.

The normativity of the competence puts a more than merely derivative relationality back in the picture. Stoljar highlights a key passage in my paper, which I'll cite again here: autonomy requires "positioning oneself as always a potential member of a reflective or deliberative dyad," such that "the internal psychological condition of the autonomous agent ... point[s] beyond itself, to the position the agent occupies as one reflective, responsible self among many" (Westlund 35). Answerability, in sum, is normative in the sense that the autonomous agent holds herself to an *expectation* or *demand*, and relational in the sense that an expectation or demand is something that one party is subjected to by another, or by one party to herself when she manifests sensitivity to what others can legitimately ask of her.

iii.

But does this send me from the frying pan into the fire? In embracing a normative conception of competence, have I lost what Christman calls my anti-perfectionist credentials? Christman, I think, would argue that the normative competence I've just described implies a commitment to an ideal of social relations about which reasonable persons could disagree. While Benson does not seem to think I'm committed to that kind of ideal, he does argue that a view of

this sort cannot be purely formal. To hold oneself answerable is, he notes, “to apply to oneself a standard that calls for one to answer to potential criticisms (under certain conditions)” (Benson 3). This, Benson argues, is not a purely formal standard, since such expectations are matters of substantive disagreement.

These are important objections, with which I am still grappling. I would argue, however, that my view falls short of building in a commitment to ideal social relations – or, at least, of doing so in a way that falls afoul of liberal anti-perfectionism. Indeed, my argument is meant to proceed in what Christman identifies as a broadly Kantian way, falling within the tradition on which “moral truth cannot be specified independently of practical reason,” and according to which “we cannot specify the truth about morality and the good life before fully grasping how a reasonable, self-governing agent is structured and functions in the first place” (3). I think (and hope) I have avoided relying on any *prior* commitment to a particular vision of the good life. If our form of practical reasoning and self-governance turns out to have a normative and relational structure, this is, at the least, not something imported from outside.

I would argue, moreover, that there is room for a significant amount of disagreement (even radical disagreement) between autonomous individuals about what forms of social engagement they should embrace. To be self-governing, we don’t need to have a clear understanding of what *makes* us self-governing, nor are we required to endorse the idea that every individual *should* in fact function in whatever way self-governance turns out to require. We just need to function that way in fact. To put it somewhat paradoxically, we don’t need to embrace our own answerability, we just need actually to be self-answerable. A shared moral or political commitment to relationships in which all are treated as answerable will likely provide a more hospitable

environment for the development and sustenance of the relevant competence – but this does not mean that one cannot have the competence without the commitment. (I will return to this point two paragraphs hence and, from another angle, in my final section.)

My response to Benson’s objection, regarding justificatory practice, is similar. In short, I suggest that my account’s commitments on this score are not such as to violate the spirit of a formal approach to autonomy. While my account does seem to imply a commitment to *some* standard governing legitimate challenge, the shape of that norm is as much up for grabs (and as much the subject of justificatory discourse) as anything else. Some people might bristle at the thought that they *ever* owe a response – and yet, whether they hold themselves answerable for that commitment is crucial to the question of their autonomy. I submit that, in this respect, the requirement I defend is no more substantive than the conditions given by other defenders of “formal” views. Reflective endorsement theorists, for example, do not require that the autonomous agent actually endorse the criterion of reflective endorsement itself; reflective endorsement is held to be constitutive of autonomy, regardless of whether the agent would, at some level, fail to reflectively endorse that very requirement.²

I realize that the highly deferential but purportedly still answerable agent is bound to strike many readers as a paradoxical creature. Yet it seems to me that we can function as answerable even while being highly uncertain, and indeed confused, about our own status as such, and about the implications of our own reflectively endorsed commitments. Setting aside those cases of deference I describe as “deep,” even someone who is highly committed to deferring to particular others might hold herself answerable for that commitment. I do not mean that she might be able, ultimately, to successfully defend her commitment against all

criticism. But responsibility for self is not in that sense a *success* condition for autonomy. Rather, it is a relational stance on which one holds oneself answerable for one's commitments. Indeed, I take this stance to involve a certain humility about the ultimate defensibility of our commitments, by which I mean openness to the possibility that we may turn out to be *unable* to defend some of them in the end. Without that kind of humility, it is hard to see how one would be genuinely engaged by and responsive to external critical perspectives.

iv.

This reference to humility might seem surprising, particularly given the emphasis placed on self-respect and self-worth by many defenders of relational autonomy, and (within this symposium) by Benson and James Rocha. Humility is surely compatible with self-respect or self-worth, but it suggests a different emphasis. So, I now turn to the important question of the relationship between autonomy and these self-regarding attitudes.

Benson argues that, even apart from the justificatory standards discussed above, other normative conditions "lie submerged in attitudes that are preconditions for agents' holding themselves answerable to others' criticism" (3). In particular, he suggests, the self-answerable agent must regard herself as sufficiently competent and worthy of answering for herself. While these attitudes do not, on his view, commit one to perfectionism – there is plenty of room, he suggests, for non-liberal understandings of self-worth – he does think they render a view like mine at least "weakly" substantive.

I'm inclined to agree that autonomy could be undermined by a severe lack of confidence in one's ability to answer for oneself. (Incidentally, however, I think it could also be undermined by an *excess* of confidence, since this might leave one short on the sort of epistemic humility that I take to be

crucial to genuine answerability.) But a lack of self-regard would, in this way, pose a threat to autonomy on just about *any* formal account, since these seem, quite generally, to rely on competences that could be disabled by severe enough self-doubt. This line of thought leads me to doubt whether there is a strong distinction to be drawn between formal and weakly substantive views of autonomy. The formal views might *all* involve more of substance than we have thought, and there might be nothing at all worrisome about that. What we do need, however, is a distinction between both "formal" and "weakly substantive" views, on one side, and, on the other, the more strongly substantive views that seem to have perfectionist implications. I am convinced, like Benson, that this distinction can be drawn, though I need to think more about whether or to what extent we ultimately differ on the details.

It's possible that we differ in our understandings of the role played by self-worth. Self-worth, of course, is a peculiar and multifaceted thing. As Thomas Hill Jr. and others have noticed, some deferential agents might be quite proud to be self-subordinating. (The Deferential Wife he describes in "Servility and Self-Respect" seems to be one of them.) In one intuitive sense, the proud self-subordinator lacks a sense of self-worth, since she takes her interests to be of secondary importance at best. But in another sense, she does not. She regards herself as having a proper role to play and takes pride in playing it well. There is thus an equally intuitive sense in which her self-worth *depends* on her deference.

I argue that whether deference compromises autonomy depends on how deep it goes. If it goes so deep that the agent does not experience herself as even potentially engageable in justificatory dialogue (because she hears all challenges to her action-guiding commitments as addressed through her to someone else), then her autonomy is undermined. She does not have the normative, relational competence I describe in

Section III above. But, if it does not go that deep, and she is engageable in justificatory dialogue, then her apparently self-denigrating views do not render her non-autonomous. Does this mean that she must have an independently identifiable attitude of self-worth or self-respect that serves as a precursor to the self-relation manifested in her answerability? As my treatment of “paradoxical” agents already suggests, I’m reluctant to take this route: human psychology strikes me as too complex to tie self-answerability to any specific, substantively defined attitude or belief about oneself. I’m more inclined to say that her self-answerability is (as I say in the paper) a *sui generis* form of self-respect: a form of self-respect that is constituted *by* the normative self-relation I describe.

Rocha raises an important worry about the scope of this account, arguing that its lack of substance precludes proper characterization of the harm oppression does to agents in undermining their self-respect. He writes: “The severity of the harm done to these agents lies precisely in the fact that their deeply internalized values *prevent* the full achievement of their autonomy” (Rocha 4). There is something strange, he says, about considering an agent to be autonomous when her values have been warped by “some obscure – but external – process” (Rocha 4). The strangeness to which Rocha refers is what initially got me interested in this topic, and I do agree with Rocha that oppression can incur distinctive, autonomy-related harms. But there is a way in which I can partially accommodate his point. On my view, oppression can undermine both autonomy and (a distinctive form of) self-respect precisely because it can undermine answerability. I describe deference, for example, as deep when it does so. Perhaps, in the paper under discussion, it looks as though I regard this kind of damage as relatively rare, but that is not necessarily the case. It might be more common than we would like to think. Combined with oppression-related damage to self-confidence, which could have the effects noted

above, my net might be cast more widely than Rocha suggests.

There will, however, be cases on which we disagree. On my view, the obscure but external processes at which Rocha gestures are “domesticated” when the agent holds herself answerable for the commitments they help to shape. Even if the agent is harmed by these processes in some other way, she is, at least, not gripped by the commitments they generate: these commitments, and the processes from which they flow, are subject to her review and assessment. Stoljar rightly points out that, in some contexts, occasions to review and assess will be limited. I believe that cultures and traditions are generally complex and interconnected enough to offer at least some footholds for critical challenge. Nonetheless, I am willing to bite the bullet and argue that, even where there is no such foothold, there is an important difference between the agent who is answerable but unchallenged, and the one who is not answerable at all. Both lead lives that are deeply affected by their internalization of oppressive values. But the former has an attitude (which I’ve described as a form of humility) toward those values that renders her open to rethinking them.

I would submit that for most of us, at least some of our deeply held values fall in the “unchallenged” category, and we should not consider those values to be heteronomously held simply because they have never been questioned. How we would respond under counter-factual conditions matters to our autonomy. The Bigsby character described by Rocha, in fact, strikes me as someone who is gripped by his values, rather than self-governing, because he is so extremely (indeed, comically) unable to entertain the possibility that they may be mistaken. He is not self-answerable, ironically, because he is too confident in the arguments that “support” what turn out to be self-denigrating values.

v.

I have not done justice to the four excellent commentaries I have been fortunate to receive on this paper: each raised a wealth of important questions, some of which I have addressed only partially and provisionally, and others, I fear, not at all. All of the comments will continue to inform and challenge my thinking on these matters, and for that I am grateful. So, in closing, I would once again like to thank all for their contributions to this discussion.

¹ See Darwall (2006). I have more to say about the relationship between self-answerability and second-personal competence in Westlund, forthcoming.

² I thank Nate Jezzi for making this point some years ago in his comments on an early draft.