Educating for Autonomy: Identity and Intersectional Selves
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1. Introduction

An autonomous self is able to establish guidelines (norms) for directing itself into the future. This ability is rooted in a reflexive, self-mediating capacity. Thus, autonomy is not only a capacity for critical self-reflection, but the capacity for producing norms and directing oneself by them.

In a previous article I used Royce's notion of interpretation and Buchler's notion of reflexive communication to develop the idea of reflexive self-mediation. I will briefly summarize that idea (Sections 3) and then introduce the notion of norm-generation as the productive aspect by which that process can become autonomous.

A word on pragmatism is perhaps in order. Buchler eschewed any characterization of his work as a "pragmatism" although he readily admitted that it was informed by the classical pragmatists. Royce's characterization of his work as an absolute pragmatism might be thought to be an oxymoron. But, as Mahowald points out, there is reason to think of Royce's work as having a "pragmatic element." "The guiding question of the pragmatic method -- what practical difference would this idea make? -- illustrates a common and essential accent on future experience as the criterion for human judgments. Such an emphasis marks the properly pragmatic attitude for both James and Peirce. While other philosophies may also stress future experience, none claims this as its defining characteristic....[this emphasis] will likewise define the pragmatic element in our study of Royce."

The account of autonomy in this paper could be similarly characterized as having a "pragmatic element." The account suggests that autonomy involves not simply a reflecting, back through critical reflection on beliefs, desires, and aspirations that one already has. Rather, it involves a constructive or "inventive" process of norm generation by the self; a norm in turn guides self-projection into the future.

2. Autonomy: Contemporary Discussions

There are a variety of contemporary approaches to the concept of autonomy: for example, as a right to noninterference in defining and leading one's own life; or, as the possession of certain "procedural" capabilities, such as (1) critical reflection on desires, capacity for reflection and identification with "first order" desires, and/or a capacity for legislation or (2) the development of a repertory of "autonomy skills" or equal capabilities among persons; or, more substantively, as the aiming for or realization of certain kinds of goals, such as self-fulfillment, self-realization, personal integration. Some accounts of personal autonomy argue that it depends
on developmental, historical, and social factors that are external to the agent. Other accounts argue that genuine autonomy is not ultimately explained by anything external to the agent [e.g., education, peer pressure, the state of the world prior to the agent's birth or development as an adult agent] but depends on the possession by the agent of particular mental abilities, values, beliefs, and dispositions, regardless of how they were acquired. In this paper, I will frame the discussion in terms of a contrast between "proceduralist" and "substantivist" approaches.

According to a "proceduralist" approach (e.g., Frankfurt, Meyers), personal autonomy consists in the possession or exercise of certain abilities, irrespective of the substantive content of the choices. A "substantivist" theorist worries that an apparently autonomous choice might merely express inculcated values or beliefs over which one has exercised no control or ones which, even though endorsed, are repressive or stultifying. One example would be that of a wife who unreflectively endorses submissiveness to her husband's wishes; another would be that of a husband who unreflectively insists on his wife's submission. A "substantivist" approach argues that only certain kinds of choices constitute autonomy or that choices ought to conform to objectively autonomy-conducng standards. A "proceduralist" worries that self-determination has been compromised because standards are being imposed on, rather than shaped by, the self.

If autonomy means the capacity for "self-governance," then the substantivist is right that autonomy involves norms. But, a "substantivist" approach is limited if it doesn't account for norms themselves as being self-produced. "Norms" are not simply universal standards of rationality or consensus (even if there may be some contexts in which universal norms are appropriate). Norms must also be seen as produced by selves; and they may be diverse, revisable and generated by human selves in specific contexts or for specific purposes.

The limitations in proceduralist and substantivte approaches to personal autonomy parallel some accounts of democratic delibeilation. Noelle McAfee identifies three models of democratic deliberation, a preference-based model, a rational proceduralist model and an integrative model. The first she identifies as originating in economic choice or preference maximizing theory, the second as inspired by Rawls and Habermas and the third as Deweyan in character. Preference-based models of deliberation, like proceduralist accounts of autonomy, do not evaluate the merits of preferences; they simply seek (1) to determine that they are freely held, and (2) to determine how to satisfy conflicting ones.

Rational proceduralist models of deliberation, like substantivte accounts of autonomy, claim that only some preferences or reasons count as "rational" or legitimate and worthy of pursuit. What counts as rational or legitimate is determined by universalist presuppositions about what counts as "objectively" liberating or what could be universally agreed to.

The "pragmatic" and naturalistic approach to autonomy that I propose here suggests that norms and ideals may be generated "from the bottom up." Norms are generated in and through human reflexive and inventive processes. They are revisable and plural. This is like the Deweyan model of deliberative democracy discussed by McAfee, in which communicative problem-solving by communities in context determines the norms and directions for public life.
On the approach I develop, educating for autonomy in a democratic society would mean cultivating the skilled practice of reflexive norm generation.

What I mean by reflexive norm generation is a capacity of, borrowing a term from Meyers, an "intersectional self." By this I mean, that a self is a community of interrelated traits. Each trait is a position in a perspective or network of relations. For example: someone as mother (spouse, aunt, daughter, sister, niece, etc.) is located in a familial perspective, as feminist is located in a perspective of feminists and social progressives, as novelist is located in a perspective of writers, as someone fluent in English is located in the perspective of English language speakers, as a possessor of a driver's license is located in the perspective of licensed drivers, as a lover of music is located in a perspective of music lovers and so on. The unique combination and interrelation of traits constitutes the person as a community of traits or locations. This unity is the overall unified determinateness of the person.

On this view, a self is a community or communities of [sub-]selves or traits. (Among the classical American philosophers Mead, too, developed a relational or social model of the self, but for the purposes of this paper and the focus on autonomy, I have omitted a discussion of Mead.) Royce's view of interpretation presupposes the idea of a self as a community of temporal selves -- the past, the present and the future selves. Buchler's theory of reflexive communication, which was in part inspired by Royce's theory of interpretation and upon which I shall rely to develop the idea of reflexive norm generation, grows out of a theory of self as a unified community of selves.

3. Reflexive Self-mediation

The Roycean theory of interpretation conceptualizes the processes by which an "I" is capable of temporally thick self-direction. Interpretation is logically or formally triadic; psychologically it is social. An interpreter interprets an object to a third, an interpreter. The third is both another self (interpreter) and a sign that mediates, or "gives the mental realm definiteness and self-control." This process shows us ourselves as we are and thus is a process of self-revelation as well as one of self-control. The will to interpret is "the will to be self-possessed," the will to "pass from blind leadings to coherent insight and resolute self-guidance." Royce also suggests that interpretation is a cognitive process that a self undergoes distinct from perception and conception.

Interpretation is triadic and social whether it occurs between individuals or within an individual. For Royce, a self is internally differentiated because it is temporal, in the sense that a self interprets itself into its future. Interpretation as it occurs within an individual can be schematized as (i) the Present Self (Interpreter) interpreting an idea of (ii) the Past Self (Interpretant) for (iii) the Future Self (Interpretation). In so doing the (Present) Self interprets itself, lends itself control and self-direction as it moves into its future, a self-positing of its own self-interpretation that defines its progression into the future.

Interpretation is an ongoing process; every interpretation becomes the basis for another interpretive process, allowing for revision and redefinition. If autonomous activity is thought of
as something like interpretation, autonomy would consist in a capacity for self-mediation and redefinition as the self projects itself into the future.

Buchler's notion of "reflexive communication," abstracts from and builds on the Roycean idea of interpretation. (Buchler is also indebted to the Peircean theory of signs, which debt I will not pursue here.) Think of interpretation as a process that occurs within an internally differentiated self -- a self that is a community of its locations -- so that we have a process of self-interpretation: a self interprets an aspect of itself to another aspect of itself. The self moves into a future to which it has itself lent definition and direction.

Communication is defined by Buchler as the process:

1) by which an object is a dominant (meaning, salient) object for each of the selves involved in the communicative process;
2) that generates signs (interpretation) for each self; and
3) in which each self is an object (sign) for the other self.

Buchler’s self is plurally constituted not only in virtue of being temporal, as with Royce, but because in any present cross-section a self occupies many perspectives (is many traits or integrities). For example, a self is a daughter, a professor, a hiker, a citizen, a feminist, a spouse, and so on. Each of those constitutes a perspective of the self. Communication has, like Royce’s notion of interpretation, a triadic structure. In reflexive communication, one self-location or perspective is an object for another self-location (and vice versa) with respect to a common dominant (or salient) object. From each perspective the self generates signs that assimilate and can transform the communicative meanings and forge a third self-perspective. This process becomes norm-generating in so far as the third self-perspective produces a policy which guides the self in its future judgments. (For Buchler, the concept of judgment is meant to encompass decisions, actions, choices, that is, any instance of a human self taking a position that articulates or actualizes a relation between the self and some aspect of its world.)

Suppose a self aims to articulate for itself how to be both a feminist and a spouse. A communicative relation is established between the self as feminist and the self as spouse. Each self-perspective communicates to itself and to the other, and generates signs about a dominant object, namely, marriage-in-light-of-feminist-concerns. In the process of reflexive communication these aspects of the self articulate a third self-perspective, e.g., self as "feminist/spouse."

In Buchler’s theory, the communicative relation can be schematized as doubly triadic, for it involves both the relation between self -perspectives and the sign-generating relation between self -perspectives and the dominant object. Using the feminist and spouse example:

(1) Each self-perspective is related to (is an object for) the other self-perspectives. (Abstracting from the process as temporal, these relations are formally symmetrical.) Thus,

(i) self-as-feminist is an object for self-as-spouse
(ii) self-as-feminist is an object for self-as-feminist/spouse (the projected self-perspective);
(iii) self-as-spouse is an object for self-as-feminist/spouse (the projected self-perspective)

(2) In addition, each self-perspective is related to each other in virtue of its sign-generating relation to the dominant object, marriage-in-light-of-feminist-concerns. I will use the symbol “<-->” to represent the sign-generating relation. (Abstracting from the process as temporal, these relations are formally symmetrical.) Thus,


That a self-perspective can be an object for another self-perspective means that a self can partially detach itself from any of its perspectives. This capacity is crucial for the ability to articulate for itself a new self-perspective, one that is partially constituted by what’s “given” and partially constituted by the self’s own communicative and articulative processes.

Reflexive communication may take place in a very general way or in a specific respect of marriage-in-light-of-feminist-concerns. It could take place in an action or active judgment (e.g., filing a joint tax return under the woman's name) or in an arrangement of jewelry (e.g., wearing or not wearing a wedding ring), an exhibitive judgment, and not only as a mental or linguistic assertion about how one is going to behave. Feminism and marriage as dimensions of the self have wider social and historical determinants; the process may thus have a dimension of collaborating with others, e.g., other feminists, other spouses, one's own spouse. The policy might also lead the self to initiate another process of self-definition, e.g., with respect to oneself as daughter or with respect to one's participation in social and political activity.

I want to suggest that autonomy, as a process of norm-generation, is rooted in this process of reflexive communication. Autonomous agency is possible because through reflexive communication a self can generate norms that guide its self-projection into the future; its future is not because it is unrelated to or undetermined by its social and other locations, but because it has the capacity to partially detach itself from a role or perspective(s) in some respect and articulate another perspective for itself. On this approach, autonomy requires partial independence from social locations, while at the same time social locations may enable reflexive norm generation. This approach avoids a false dichotomy often found in accounts of autonomy as "independence from others and from social conditions", so that socially related or involved selves are not "really" or "fully" autonomous.
4. Norm Generation

I have represented reflexive communication in the preceding section as productive and positively transformative of the self. But, by itself reflexive communication does not guarantee autonomy; it is the natural root of it. Reflexive communication could result in self-deception, or reproduction (reinforcement) of oppressive, addictive, limiting or destructive patterns. For example, suppose a self aims to articulate how to be a professional colleague, but the process of reflexive communication involves internalization, imitation and reproduction of "the old boys club" patterns of behavior. The self in such a case may have engaged in reflexive communication but it may not have generated norms of its own. Such an example would be parallel to the housewife example discussed in some feminist literature, where the self internalizes and endorses socialized gender patterns and roles without generating norms of its own; instead the self simply reproduces given social roles or patterns. (The same is true for the politically or socially challenging positions. For example, someone could be a feminist in so far as one simply assimilated and reproduced the position, viz., the person who becomes a "knee-jerk" or merely "puppet" feminist, similar to the process wherein a traditional role is simply reproduced, instead of the person contributing to the {171} articulation of such a position as one's own norm.) I am not claiming that a "good-old-boy" or a housewife could not be autonomous. I am saying that whether either is or not depends on whether the reflexive communicative process is one that involves norm generation. Both the “good old boy” and the housewife could take on social roles that have been articulated as their own norms.

Assimilation of social norms undeniably takes place; autonomy, let alone any reflexive activity with regard to social roles, would be incomprehensible without such assimilation. Assimilated social norms and roles may be a phase in the process of becoming autonomous, for example, as a starting point or framing of a context for reflexive communication. Thus, a dancer's training in classical ballet may be a condition for inventive reflexive communication and the generation of norms for self-determination as a dancer. Autonomy consists in generating a norm for self-direction in at least some respect(s) into the future.

On a standard procedural account autonomy consists in the endorsement and/or integration of desires, interests; for example, I endorse or integrate feminist desires or interests with spousal ones. The process is one of selecting and integrating what is already there, but it is not thought of as constructing or inventing a policy (norm) for self-guidance. On a standard account, the self appears to be static and the integration is not clearly transformative of the self.

On the account I am proposing, norm-generation means that the self has not only assimilated social norms and made them one's own (an internalization process), but has inventively manipulated them in some respect such that the norm is the product of the self's own reflexive activity. Reaffirmation (as opposed to knee-jerk reproduction) of oneself as "a good-old-boy" or as a housewife could be an instance of norm-generation and hence, of autonomy. Norm-generation or autonomy does not require abandoning assimilated social norms, but it does require inventive manipulation of them in reflexive communication.
There are two senses of norms.\textsuperscript{19}

a) Norms as procedures in the service of goals or results beyond judgment itself (e.g., the invention of methods and procedures for the production of food, for the sake of biological sustenance of the species).

b) Norms for the sake of judgment itself or for self-transformation through critique and extension of human judgment. Norms in this sense would be "unconditional" \textit{in the sense} that they are not only instrumental, not only for the sake of results per se, but for the furtherance of judgment itself.

The two senses of norm generation are not necessarily mutually \textsuperscript{172} exclusive. In the spouse/feminist example, a self might articulate a norm for being a spouse/feminist as an extension of feminist judgment and of self-transformation for their own sake (norm for the sake of judgment or self-transformation), or it might articulate a policy with respect to good daughterly conduct for the sake of sustaining or transforming some constellation of family relations (norm in the service of a goal or result). In the good-old-boy example, a self might articulate that as a norm of self-identity for its own sake, or as a useful norm for corporate advancement.

Norm generation need not be intellectual or only the product of (rational) deliberation. A well-trained athlete develops in physical action norms by which she is able to self-direct her movements: assessment of the distance between herself and a hurdle, the adjustment of pace so as to clear the hurdle are all actions. Her physical movement capabilities constitute autonomy (self-direction/governance) with regard to physical activity. Similarly, a carpenter may articulate methods in the process of crafting woodwork which serve as norms for her self-direction as carpenter. Each, the athlete and the carpenter, generates norms which are [self-]directing; each is engaged in a process of reflexive communication in the mode of active judgment. Neither may be able to state or tell someone else exactly what the norm is, although each is able to enact or exhibit it.

Consider now another kind of human judgment (one that is not typically thought to have anything to do with autonomy), a parent interacting with his infant.\textsuperscript{20} He experiments with different ways of holding the infant. In his actions, he communicates with himself and with the infant, and in so doing develops norms by which he recurrently directs himself in the ongoing care of the infant. Of course, such an interaction could also be purely reactive or impulsive (just as a carpenter's activity could be largely mechanical). But, it need not be; it can be attentive and reflexively communicative and when it is, judgment is able to generate norms and thus be self-directing or autonomous. There are unfortunately plenty of examples of reactive or impulsive care-giving, some of which are violent and destructive. But, there are also plenty of examples of norm-governed, self-directing care-giving. The parent's reflexive communication is intertwined with interpersonal or social communication with the infant. (It could also be intertwined with communication with other caregivers.) He invents norms in his capacity to comfort, communicate with, and succor the infant. Presumably such norms evolve over time as the infant grows and the parent's relationship to his child develops, but the point is, that this too is
autonomous and no less so for being parental and social than more typical, paradigm examples of autonomous action, such as a person making a career choice.

5. Educating for Autonomy

Educating for autonomy would not involve just learning critical reasoning skills. Autonomy doesn't require becoming a philosopher or someone with high levels of abstract reasoning skills. Nor does it require becoming independent of social relations and involvement. Rather, this approach recognizes that autonomy is variously expressed. This suggests that educating for autonomy can be cultivated in many different ways in educational processes.

Autonomy might require collaborating with others or being responsive to others (e.g., the parent example). Therefore, educating might involve cultivating capacities for collaboration as collective (reflexive) communication and norm generation.

Self assertion is often thought as necessary for autonomy… and it may well be; but listening to, assimilating the views and experiences of others might also be necessary for autonomy, especially when autonomy involves social collaboration and the development of norms for a community. (This ties in with McAfee's discussion of the Deweyan model of deliberative democracy mentioned earlier.) But it may be desirable for personal autonomy as well -- e.g., the capacity to engage in reflexive communication as a feminist may involve identification with and assimilation of a social perspective and communication with others about what feminism means and could mean in one's own personal life. It might also involve learning from the experience of others.

The following chart summarizes some of the additional "autonomy skills" that education for democracy might seek to instill:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional autonomy skills</th>
<th>Intersectional-self autonomy -- additional skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>critical reasoning</td>
<td>critical reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultivate independence</td>
<td>+ cultivate interdependence in social relations and involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self assertion</td>
<td>+ cultivate capacity for listening to &amp; assimilating the views and experiences of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultivate integration of desires</td>
<td>+ cultivate diversification -- &gt; development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ increase the richness of experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ cultivate different perspectives -- &gt; enhance the capacity for norm generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cultivate capacities for collaboration as collective (reflexive) communication and norm generation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If the self is intersectional, or plurally constituted, then integration of desires and interests may not be the goal of autonomy. It may be a goal, but there may be other normative goals, such as cultivation of diversification, or the development of different perspectives in the self so as to increase the richness of experience or to enhance the capacity for norm generation. This may be important for social practices as well. If selves are plurally constituted then, social norms, too, may include recognition of and enhancement of diversity, and not simply integration, harmony, assimilation or consensus, particularly if the last means agreement on a single mode of acceptable social life. Obviously, neither fragmentation nor perpetuation of irresolvable conflicts is desirable either. However, rational proceduralist models of public deliberation (analogous to substantivist models of personal autonomy) that claim that only some preferences or reasons count as "rational" or legitimate and worthy of pursuit may have too restrictive and prescriptive a view of what is desirable and achievable in a democratic society. As noted earlier, this is a problem that MacAfee attributes to a Habermasian approach to public deliberation, namely, that what counts as rational or legitimate is determined by "universalist" presuppositions about what counts as "objectively" liberating or what could be universally agreed to. Moreover, diversification, conflict or a problem encountered may be essential for norm-generation. These may not always or only be social: a self may experience "internal" conflict or diversification (e.g., in experiencing a sexual orientation which is not recognized in the self's social world) or may experience a biological source of a problem (e.g., in experiencing physical limitations in one's own body).

Autonomy might be expressed and achieved in different ways and to different degrees depending on the context. Perhaps autonomy is best thought of, not as attributable to a whole individual (or community), but rather as about the ways in which the individual (or community) articulates itself and generates its own norms. That a self is autonomous in some respects, does not entail that it is in others and conversely, that a self is not autonomous in some respect does not entail that it is not in others. So, to say that a quadriplegic is not autonomous with respect to [most] physical movement or activity would not entail that she is not autonomous with respect to verbal expression. Mele makes this kind of distinction, such that the quadriplegic lacks executive autonomy or autonomy with respect to action, but has psychological autonomy with respect to mental/verbal possibilities, i.e., beliefs, values, decisions (even though they cannot be enacted).21

6. Conclusion

A robust theory of autonomy would not reduce it to a mere endorsement of desires and interests or to adherence to pre-existing [social or other] norms, but rather, conceptualizes autonomy in terms of the [norm] inventive powers of the self. The approach I am taking allows for a broadening of what autonomy is and hence, for recognizing as autonomous behavior that has often been dismissed as "merely emotional, intuitive, natural, manual"... and so on. For example, if "emotion" is no less a contributor to autonomy than "reason" and if social and communicative processes can count as autonomous, then autonomy would not have to be defined as either an exclusively "male" (rational, individualistic) province or value and autonomy as a value would not necessarily be inconsistent with many feminist values (e.g., the value of
relationships, of community, of collaboration). These are all a propos some of the challenges facing societies aiming to promote democratic processes among participants who may have been or would be excluded (for example, caregivers of dependent persons) from public deliberation on more traditional models of a rational deliberator or a self-concerned preference maximizer. These ideas are still quite preliminary. But, my thought is that this approach offers a much improved basis on which to understand and evaluate autonomy.

NOTES


11. This section, III and section IV are condensed versions of the account I developed in Wallace, Ibid.


