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Assessing "non-alienation" in John Christman's conception of personal autonomy

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Abstract: The condition "identification-with" plays a prominent role in contemporary hierarchical analyses of personal autonomy. Objections to these accounts have prompted refinements of the hierarchical analysis and the notion of identification within them. John Christman, having developed such a more fine-grained hierarchical analysis over the last twenty years, has argued recently that the condition of identification-with should be replaced by a condition of non-alienation in such accounts. In this paper, this theoretical move is criticized and the thesis is defended that we should base accounts of personal autonomy on a default-and-challenge structure in general instead of replacing "identification-with" by "non-alienation".

> What ensures that we accept our love without equivocation, and what thereby secures the stability of our final ends, is that we have confidence in the controlling tendencies and responses of our own volitional character.
>
> Harry G. Frankfurt

Over the last twenty years, John Christman has developed a comprehensive conception of personal autonomy that starts from Harry G. Frankfurt's and Gerald Dworkin's higher-order-theories. In doing so he has oriented his work towards the problems that arise for Frankfurt's account. A crucial advancement of Christman's conception consists in integrating a historical component that takes the process of acquiring beliefs and desires within a person's biography into account for the assessment of the person's autonomy (see Christman 1991 and 1993). Beyond this, Christman's conception reacts to further developments within the debate about

personal autonomy: Even though he still groups himself with the individualist camp, his newest conception is meant to capture also the social dimension of human persons, which is treated under the heading of relational autonomy. Thereby he incorporates central insights of the communitarian critique of individualist conceptions of autonomy, although he seeks to stay within the framework of liberalism. Finally, it is worth noting that Christman tries to guard his conception against the objection of being too intellectualist or rationalist, by including the affective and the bodily dimension of human persons. It is particularly this last aspect by which Christman seeks to dismantle the charge that a higher-order-theory is too demanding, that it asks too much of the finite subjects human beings simply are, and that it leads to the ethically inacceptable result that many decisions and indications of wishes by human beings, which we intuitively recognize as expressions of their autonomy and respect prima facie, do not count as autonomous. In other words, a conception of personal autonomy that is too demanding in the end yields an encroaching paternalistic practice and at the same time provides a philosophical justificatory basis for it (cf. Beauchamp 2005, 317–321 or Taylor 2009, chaps. 3 and 4).

Against this general background of the debate about personal autonomy and the developments of John Christman's conception that are to be located within that debate, I here want to deal with an aspect that comes up especially in the newest statement of his view: The replacement of the condition of "identification-with" that is central to Frankfurt's account by the condition of "non-alienation."[1] To do so, I will first briefly reconstruct Christman's conception of personal autonomy as it is presented in his *The Politics of Persons* (1). Then I will trace his critique of the condition of "identification-with" and his alternative condition of "non-alienation" (2). Finally, I will critically examine Christman's proposal and suggest why it is more promising to model personal autonomy in general on a conception of default-and-challenge (3).

1 Christman's conception of personal autonomy in *The Politics of Persons*

The emphasis of his account is, as Christman puts it, "more on the conditions of authenticity rather than competence" (2009, 155). My contribution is focused on the conditions of authenticity only insofar as it is within them that the replacement of "identification-with" by "non-alienation" takes place. Since many other aspects relevant to or problematic about a conception of personal autonomy are blinded out in the following, it is irrelevant for the purposes of this contribution that the "account of competence" Christman presents here is, according to his own assessment, "clearly incomplete" (2009, 155).

As a summary of conditions of personal autonomy, which he up to that point develops in much detail by dealing with criticism of higher-order-theories of personal autonomy, Christman offers the following conception:

> „[A]utonomy can be specified as obtaining if the following conditions hold (as elaborated in the previous discussion): Relative to some characteristic C, where C refers to basic organizing values and commitments, autonomy obtains if:

1 By the "newest statement" of Christman's conception of personal autonomy I mean the one he develops in The Politics of Persons. For reasons that will become clear in the course of my analysis I include Christman's discussion of the relation between "identification-with" and "alienation," as it is presented in an earlier essay (Christman 2001).

(Basic Requirements — Competence):

1. The person is competent to effectively form intentions to act on the basis of C. That is, she enjoys the array of competence that are required for her to negotiate socially, bodily, affectively, and cognitively in ways necessary to form effective intentions on the basis of C;

2. The person has the general capacity to critically reflect on C and other basic motivating elements of her psychic and bodily make-up; and

(Hypothetical Reflection Condition — Authenticity):

3. Were the person to engage in sustained critical reflection on C over a variety of conditions in light of the historical processes (adequately described) that gave rise to C; and

4. She would not be alienated from C in the sense of feeling and judging that C cannot be sustained as part of an acceptable autobiographical narrative organized by her diachronic practical identity; and

5. The reflection being imagined is not constrained by reflection-distorting factors." (2009, 155)

It is important to note that this is an account of personal autonomy since the historical (or biographical) dimension is integrated therein (via conditions 3 and 4) and that not being alienated is a necessary condition for a person being personally autonomous relative to some characteristic C. Furthermore, one minor clarification is in order: Although presented as necessary conditions only this set of conditions is, as Christman himself states, "meant generally as sufficient conditions for autonomy" (2009, 156).

In the non-technical "prose" following this definition of personal autonomy Christman describes his conception this way:

> "Autonomy involves competence and authenticity; authenticity involves non-alienation upon (historically sensitive, adequate) self-reflection, given one's diachronic practical identity and one's position in the world." (2009, 155)

It is evident that Christman's recent conception relies heavily on this condition of non-alienation and, thereby, on the conception of "alienation" which is in the background. Therefore in the next section of this paper I will go into the details of this part of Christman's conception of personal autonomy.

2 From questions of identity to questions of alienation

In a footnote, Christman himself characterises the strategy he follows in developing his account of personal autonomy further this way:

> "What I have done is urge that we shift our focus, from what identity *is* to conditions in which it is importantly constricted; that is from questions of identity to questions of alienation". (Christman 2009, 214 fn. 11)

Therefore it is helpful to have a look at his objections against the condition of "identification-with" at first, before going into the details of his condition of "non-alienation".

2.1 Christman's critique of the condition of "identification-with"

Christman's critique of conceptions of personal autonomy that refer to a condition of identification can be summarised in the following two points: first, he holds that the condition of identification is ambiguous, for it oscillates between the mere recognition that a certain trait applies to me, and the positive valuation of the fact that the trait in question applies to me (see Christman 2009, 143 and Christman 2001, 203).[2] Second, he takes this condition, when it is understood in the former sense, to be too weak to guarantee personal autonomy, for in that case an evaluative self-relationship would be lacking (Christman 2001, 203). On the other construal the condition would be too strong, since it would require a "wholehearted endorsement" (ibid., 202 fn. 44) that would make for "full[.] identification-with" (ibid., 2003; see Christman 2009, 143 f.). In contrast, Christman takes the condition of non-alienation he proposes to be both stronger, for mere recognition without an evaluative component is insufficient (Christman 2001, 203), and weaker, because it allows not only for cases of wholehearted endorsement in which I fully identify with one of my traits as guaranteeing autonomy (Christman 2009, 143 f. and Christman 2001, 202).

Christman's reflections are not directed primarily against attempts at explicating the condition of identification in the sense of a purely theoretical self-ascription (= identification-as) of a trait; this is why we shall disregard this line in the demarcation of his account. The point he deems central is that the evaluative reading some conceptions of personal autonomy give of the condition of identification makes for too strong requirement. This he takes to lead to a situation in which human beings are in principle confronted with an excessive demand due to such a conception of autonomy, and in which some cases are ruled out as cases of autonomy, even though we would normally recognise them as instances of personal autonomy and respect them accordingly.

If this critique is to be successful as a justification of Christman's alternative proposal to replace the condition of identification-with by the condition of non-alienation, then it must be possible to show, first, that his conception does not suffer from such an ambiguity of its central criterion, and second, that it can sidestep the effect of excessive demand the criticised conceptions are reproached for.

2.2 Christman's condition of "non-alienation"

We should note first that Christman's critique of conceptions of personal autonomy that work with a condition of identification in the sense of endorsement (= identification-with) is given to misunderstanding. In some places it seems as though he wants to introduce his condition of non-alienation as an alternative to endorsement. But in some more explicit places it becomes clear that he wants it to be understood as an alternative to the demand of wholehearted endorsement:

> "Alienation is a stronger reaction; it involves feeling constrained by the trait and wanting decidedly to repudiate it." (Christman 2009, 143 f.; see Christman 2001, 203).

2 In the following I will refer to mere recognition without an evaluative dimension by identification-as and to a form of recognition that expresses an evaluative self-relationship by identification-with. For a discussion of the distinction between "identification-as" and "identification-with" in the context of personal autonomy see Quante 2002, chap. 5 and Quante 2007a, chaps. 7–9.

Thereby he commits to a very strong reading of Frankfurt's conception, which can be evidenced in Frankfurt's texts, but that does not adequately represent Frankfurt's position.[3] Now I do not want to deal with the question whether Christman's critique is based on the best possible interpretation of Frankfurt's work. But this ambiguity in Christman's stage-setting is also systematically relevant, for it entails three ambiguities of his own conception.

(i) In analogy to the oscillation between "endorsement" and "wholehearted endorsement" we have identified in Christman's characterisation of the conception he criticises, his own conception implies an oscillation between "alienation" and "deep alienation." This leads to an ambiguity in his condition of "non-alienation," for it is unclear whether this is to exclude only cases of deep alienation or also weaker forms of alienation. Alienation consists in a person's not wholeheartedly confirming a trait, deep alienation requires, by contrast, a vehement negative evaluation that destroys the functional unity of a person. Thus both "mere" and "deep" alienation can function as the opposite concepts of "wholehearted" or "full" identification-with. But only deep alienation is supposed to be incompatible with autonomy.

This ambiguity makes it difficult to comprehend exactly how Christman's replacement strategy is meant to work. If "non-alienation" only excludes cases of deep alienation but still admits for less serious cases of alienation, then the condition in question is actually one of non-(deep alienation). This condition is not coextensive with the condition of wholehearted identification, for the latter also excludes weaker cases of alienation. If we instead interpret the condition of non-alienation as excluding all cases of alienation, we get a very strong requirement. But such a strong requirement could not evade the charge of excessive demand Christman puts forth against the condition of wholehearted identification. A systematically charitable reading would therefore have to interpret Christman's condition of non-alienation in the sense of non-(deep alienation).

(ii) Another ambiguity lies in Christman's characterisation of non-alienation as "reflective." Characterising a situation of non-alienation as "non-reflective" can either mean that the subject in question has in fact not engaged in critical reflection. But Christman intends "reflective" to cover two different sorts of case. On the one hand this condition is fulfilled by an actual reflection on the part of the subject which is qualified further in other parts of the conception. On the other hand, this condition can also be regarded as fulfilled, according to Christman, if this reflection is undertaken hypothetically and ascribed counterfactually to the subject by an interpreter who wants to assess the subject's personal autonomy.

At first we could understand Christman's proposal as saying that a positive achievement that is actively attained by the subject was replaced by the absence of a factor that blocks autonomy. But now this explication of "reflective" makes clear that a situation of not being alienated is only compatible with personal autonomy if the subject has undergone a process of reflection or if an onlooker has assumed such a process of reflection counterfactually.[4] This eliminates the advantages of Christman's strategy concerning the charge of excessive demand with respect to the conception that works with a condition of identification-with.

3 This impression arises in particular if one neglects the contextual thrust of Frankfurt's reflections. The strong formulations regarding a decided identification-with and wholeheartedness (especially in Frankfurt 1988, chaps. 5, 7, 8, and 12) serve to answer the problem of regress. They are not meant as an analysis of the everyday standard conditions under which human persons normally exercise their autonomy.

4 This ambiguity is grounded in Christman's uncommented move from the requirement of an *absence* of alienation (= not to be alienated), as it is formulated in the fourth element of his definition, to the requirement of a – factual or counterfactual – *exclusion* of alienation (= reflective non-alienation).

(iii) Finally we should point to another source of ambiguity ensuing from the fact that Christman does not, at least not at the surface of his conception, require a positive condition to be fulfilled, but only the absence of a certain state. This mode of talking, according to which a subject does not identify with a trait that applies to itself, can either mean that no evaluative judgement is made (= identification-as). Or it can mean that the subject – factually or counterfactually – reaches a negative evaluative judgement and thus identifies negatively with the trait in question. In the latter case we are lead to the question, already granted, whether this negative attitude needs only to fulfil the condition of alienation or even the condition of deep alienation so that the personal autonomy of the subject is not given with respect to this trait.

Summarising our discussion so far, we can first note that Christman's condition of reflective non-alienation carries some ambiguities, too. Particularly the oscillation between "alienation" and "deep alienation" creates problems analogous to those he makes out in the condition of identification-with, which he takes to oscillate between "endorsement" and "wholehearted endorsement." Even if we grant that the latter ambiguity can be traced back to Frankfurt's conception, we will have to note at this point that Christman inherits this problem in virtue of his own strategy.

In view of our other question we have to grant, secondly, that Christman's condition of the absence of "deep alienation" is in fact not open to the charge of excessive demand. To the contrary, it rather attracts the charge of formulating to weak a condition of personal autonomy. Were we to require the absence of all forms of "alienation," it would not be possible to see why Christman is less open to the charge of excessive demand and to the empirical inadequacy of his conception of personal autonomy than are proponents of a conception which implies the positive requirement that a subject must "fully" (Christman 2001, 202) identify with the trait in question in order to count as autonomous.[5]

Frankfurt and Christman agree about the requirement of an evaluative identification-with that manifests itself in the factually or counterfactually ascribed exercise of the capacity of critical self-evaluation. This is why in both conceptions this critical self-evaluation equally functions as a conceptual test for deciding whether or not a subject is personally autonomous with regard to a certain trait. There is further agreement among them about the absence of deep ambivalence (Frankfurt) or deep alienation (Christman) being a necessary condition of this personal autonomy. But it is controversial how the two conceptions treat all the cases in between the extremes of deep alienation on the one hand and wholehearted endorsement on the other. Christman is aware of the fact that "non-alienation" and "identification-with" are no complete opposites. But the way he introduces his condition on the basis of criticising the condition of identification-with covers the grey area of the cases in between wholehearted endorsement and deep alienation, for he continuously infers from the negation of the strong reading of identification-with to the absence of a strong form of alienation, i. e. to non-(deep alienation). But this skips cases in which the complexity and finitude of human persons shows up in everyday contexts.[6]

5 By "empirical inadequacy" I here mean that the required condition is principally impossible to fulfil by finite subject such as human persons.

6 This dialectical situation is similar to the quarrel between compatibilists and incompatibilists in the free will debate in which complex cases are blinded out in favour of extreme positions; see Quante 2007b.

3 "Non-alienation" versus "identification-with": a useful opposition?

Our analysis of Christman's proposal shows that his strategy does not yield any immediate advantages for determining personal autonomy, which could be understood as reactions to his two critical points (ambiguity of the condition, overly demanding effects of the conception). It remains to be inquired whether Christman's proposal of replacing the condition of identification-with by a condition of non-alienation in conceptions of personal autonomy does make sense from other perspectives. To answer this question we have to get rid of the ambiguities we pointed out above in Christman's condition of non-alienation. We shall thus assume in what follows, firstly, that only the case of "deep alienation" is incompatible with personal autonomy; secondly, I assume that the absence of alienation is to be grounded in a critical reflection that is either carried out by the person in question or undertaken hypothetically by an onlooker, thus I assume that it is to be understood as non-alienation. If I am not mistaken, this is best in line with Christman's answer to the question whether the person in question is autonomous with respect to a certain characteristic where he takes the condition that "the person does not feel deeply *alienated* from it upon critical reflection" to be the "proper test for the acceptability of the characteristic in question" (Christman 2009, 143; see also 153).[7]

Departing from these two assumptions we will now, in a first step, identify a number of critical points against Christman's proposal. In a second step, we will assess Christman's overall strategy.

3.1 Critique of Christman's proposal of replacement

Firstly, one can object to Christman's condition of non-alienation that it provides too weak a requirement, as "non-alienation" is defined only as the absence of "deep alienation."[8] This excludes only those cases in which a person

> "is unable to present a minimally settled sense of herself to others in practical discourse." (Christman 2001, 203)

He is surely right to say that

> "we all contain some measures of internal conflict and complexity, and an attitude of ironic acceptance of the tensions of our own psyches is inevitable and perhaps healthy in a multidimensional and perplexing world" (ebd., 203).

Even if this repudiates the excessive and unrealistic requirement of wholehearted identification-with, which not only Christman imputes to his opponents, it does not entail that only a massive psychic defect, in the sense of the incapacity meant above, excludes the possibility of personal autonomy. This would only be the case if personal autonomy were conceived of as the capacity of rational decision and action, which again does not match the comprehensive conception of personal autonomy. The distinction will lie within the range of psychic constel-

7 The formulation of the third and fourth conditions in Christman's conception entails that the case of counterfactually ascribed reflection is also to be included.

8 As in this paper I exclusively deal with this proposal of replacement, I will leave aside the other aspect of Christman's condition of authenticity, which he intends to solve problems that arise for Frankfurt's conception. But it is to be recognized particularly that Christman urges with the fifth condition of his conception that the critical self-reflection, which is a part of the condition of non-alienation, has to meet further conditions (see Christman 2009, 146 and 162).

lation that can be characterised as non-deeply alienated. And Christman's construction does not provide criteria for determining this distinction more precisely.

Secondly, the concept of "critical self-reflection" is problematic." In the case of reflection that is factually carried out, the personality of the individual in question is involved and the factual absence of deep alienation, which from the perspective of the interpreter of the situation as a whole must count as inadequate, can be traced back to disturbing factors that are excluded as inadmissible in view of the condition Christman includes in his overall conception. In this case his overall conception would not turn out to be too weak, even though the decisive work is not done by the condition of non-alienation.

In the case of hypothetical critical reflection we have to distinguish between two cases, since the evaluative standard of this counterfactual deliberation will either be the psychic structure of the individual in question or it must consist in general assumptions that are presumed to be plausible.[9] On the first variation, we have the same situation we had in the case of a critical reflection that is factually carried out and that, from the perspective of the interpreter, leads to a false negative result (non-alienation appears where alienation would be adequate). On the second variation, the standard is detached from the psychic structure of the individual so that the reference to the personality and thereby the biographical aspect of autonomy impends to get lost. It is hard to reconcile this result with the overall design of Christman's conception of personal autonomy (for this condition of adequacy of his conception of personal autonomy see Christman 2001, 201f.).

Thirdly, and especially in view of the history of the concept of alienation, it is to be criticised that Christman reduced "alienation" to a category of individual psychology.[10] Even if we agree with his goal to integrate an affective or emotional component into the conception of personal autonomy in this way, we have to see why this could not also be integrated in the condition of identification-with. Nor is it understandable why Christman dismisses the social psychological dimension of alienation. In Christman's account, too, the absence of alienation in the sense of an individual psychic experiential state does not determine by itself whether a person can count as autonomous with regard to one particular aspect of their personality. Rather, an intersubjective comprehensibility (see Christman 2009, 239) of this psychic reaction is required and this yields the possibility of intersubjective critique, even if the ambiguity of hypothetical self-reflection pointed out in the second objection makes it impossible to determine more precisely the standards of such an external critique within Christman's own conception.

Christman explicitly justifies his proposal to replace the condition of identification-with by the condition of non-alienation by saying that this way ambiguities and weaknesses of conceptions that seek to explicate personal autonomy in terms of the condition of identification-with are avoided. Thus it is not inappropriate, *fourthly*, to voice the objection that no such progress is detectable. For, on the one hand, the centrepiece of the condition of identification-with, i. e. critical self-reflection, is obviously also implied in Christman's condition of non-alienation, as non-alienation is understood as the result of factual (or a hypothetically ascribed) critical self-evaluation that needs to be stable across certain contexts and occasions.

On the other hand, the semblance of theoretical progress can be rendered as an effect of the ambiguity of Christman's critique of the conception of identification-with. As we saw in the second section of this contribution, Christman equates "identification-with" with "wholeheart-

9 Besides indispensable standards of rationality this will presumably also include assumption about the structure of needs and about desires that are grounded in the human form of life and are thus normally given.

10 For a good account of the complexity of the concept of alienation see Jaeggi 2005.

ed endorsement" (Christman 2001, 202 fn. 44). Even if some of Frankfurt's formulation do not at any rate exclude this interpretation, it is obvious that this requirement would be much too strong and would in fact have effects that are gravely excluding and legitimise paternalistic infringements. It has been pointed out and criticised above that the inversion of this argument targeted on the condition of non-(deep alienation) would equally go too far and would formulate too weak a requirement. At this point I want to take my critique one step further and show by means of a conceptual distinction that the condition of identification-with can be formulated in a more differentiated and adequate way than Christman assumes and than it has been done in some of the received conceptions of personal autonomy. But when we do this, the apparent theoretical advantage of Christman's proposal dissolves.

It is uncontroversial that it must be about identification-with, since a "mere acknowledgement" (Christman 2001, 203; see also Christman 2009, 143) is insufficient as a condition of personal autonomy.[11] This is an evaluative judgement that, according to Christman, encompasses cognitive and affective aspects. Three results of such critical self-evaluation are conceivable: (1) an affirmative evaluation, (2) an adverse evaluation, and (3) an explicit suspension of judgement or the evaluation that the content is neutral.[12] Despite the worries discussed above we here accept Christman's assumption that it is irrelevant whether such a judgement is in fact rendered by the individual in question in the context of critical reflection or whether it is ascribed counterfactually in the context of hypothetical reflection; thus we do not in the following need to distinguish between these two variants. However, we have to introduce a distinction of cases with respect to each of the three possible results of a critical self-evaluation. Regarding the affirmative judgement we have to distinguish between a mere or prima facie endorsement (1.1) and wholehearted endorsement (1.2) that excludes tensions or ambivalences. Accordingly, with respect to the adverse judgment we have to distinguish between mere rejection (2.1) that corresponds to Christman's concept of alienation, and a deep rejection (2.2) where the judgement destroys the person's integrity and capacity to act (Christman's "deep alienation"). In view of the third case we have to differentiate the neutral judgement (3.1) that a trait is deemed evaluatively irrelevant and the neutrality of the suspension of judgement (3.2) where a person leaves it (yet) open how they evaluate the trait in question.[13]

11 Presumably, one will also have to rely on such "mere acknowledgement," which is here termed "identification-as," in an analysis of personal autonomy. This is the case if (and insofar as) this theoretical stance of first-personal self-reference is a necessary element of propositionally constituted self-consciousness. At least if the matter is propositionally constituted identification-with, Christman speaks about judgements throughout, this practical self-relationship is connected with a theoretical self-reference.

12 This third case is not without further qualifications to be equated with "identification-as" as a purely theoretical attitude, as this is a practical attitude that either suspends the evaluative judgement for the moment or arrives at the result of evaluative neutrality. So in both cases the evaluative, i. e. the practical dimension is at issue, whereas it is completely lacking in the case of a purely theoretical identification-as in the sense of a merely cognitive self-ascription of a trait. The question that is crucial in the philosophy of self-consciousness, whether personal self-relationships always includes a practical dimension or whether there exist also forms of purely theoretical personal self-consciousness, cannot be dealt with at this stage. If one denies the possibility of a purely theoretical personal self-relationship, then identification-as is only conceivable as a variation of the third case. Furthermore it is important not to equate the two variants of the third case with the pathological state in which a person is incapable of taking an evaluative stance about themselves and their states or traits.

13 It is important not to identify case (3.2) with the ambivalence of a person both Christman and Frankfurt address. Ambivalence means that a person arrives at differing judgements concerning a trait so that they do not exhibit a stable psychic structure in that respect. If this instability entails functional disorder, ambivalence can endanger the autonomy of a person. The indecision often referred to in this context can also mean the suspension of a judgement illustrated in case (3.2), which can also lead to functional disorder.

Christman imputes on the Frankfurtian position to posit case (1.2) as a necessary condition for personal autonomy and he then rightly rejects this as an excessive demand. But his counter-proposal to treat the absence of deep alienation (case 2.2) as sufficient for personal autonomy, suffers from the reverse error of positing too low a threshold. As seen above, Christman and Frankfurt agree that case (1.2) is sufficient for personal autonomy and case (2.2) is sufficient for personal heteronomy. What is less clear, as Christman's own critique of the ambivalences of those conceptions that work with a condition of identification-with attests already, is whether such conceptions would treat case (1.1) as sufficient and case (2.1) as compatible with personal autonomy.

To my mind this result suggests the following conclusion: The capacity to form an evaluative self-relationship and to render an evaluative judgement is crucial for personal autonomy (see Quante 2007a, chaps. 8 and 9).[14] Whether this occurs in the affirmative, the adverse or in a form that attests neutrality, is irrelevant for the question of personal autonomy. This capacity for critical self-evaluation is a necessary condition that is exercised factually under appropriate circumstances or that has to be ascribed counterfactually and in a controlled way, i. e. with reference to the biography of the person in question.[15] The result of deep alienation is surely incompatible with personal autonomy, here we can agree with Christman *and* Frankfurt, but this is not because of the content of the judgement but because of the disturbing effects it elicits as a psychic state in the subject in question.

If one takes this, in contrast to Frankfurt's and Christman's, more fine-grained conception of critical self-evaluation as a basis, it becomes apparent that Christman's proposal to improve on Frankfurt's conception by replacing the condition of identification-with by the condition of non-alienation does not work. This is because, first, he takes the false opposition between "wholehearted identification" and "deep alienation" as his starting point and does thus not take the crucial middle ground between these two extremes into account.[16] On the other hand, the remedial proposal is set on the wrong level, since the relevant measure for personal autonomy is the capacity for critical self-evaluation which Christman's condition of non-alienation also implicitly makes use of. At this stage of theorising, this much we can note, no progress has been obtained. Therefore I disagree with Christman when he stresses the advantages of his strategy as follows:

14 In "Freedom of the will and the concept of a person," his first essay in this field, Frankfurt already speaks of a "capacity for reflective self-evaluation" (Frankfurt 1988, 12). There, in the context of discussing the case of the unwilling addict, he touches upon the possibility of "identification and withdrawal" (ibid., 18) as modes of evaluation. But it remains unclear in Frankfurt whether the act of evaluation, independent of its result, is sufficient for a person to count as autonomous with respect to their (her?) first order desires (given the absence of other factors that inhibit autonomy). In this regard, my proposal at this point goes beyond Frankfurt's conception.

15 As will become clear instantly, this ascription should be conceptualised as default-position and not as a result of critical examination.

16 A paradigm example of this is Christman's statement: "Even if our identities are in flux and our value commitments conflicting, and even though we are full of ambivalences and unresolved tensions, we are autonomous only if we can say that our decisions flow from us as the author of that ongoing struggle to negotiate those conflicts and tensions. Decisions and desires that fail to bear the proper relation to that ongoing personal project of character development that reflective agents are all engaged in, count as external and alienated and do not manifest autonomy in a crucial way" (2008, 156). Obviously Christman does not demand the total absence of "ambivalences and unresolved tensions" but neither does he offer criteria which might help to determine where the crucial border lies beyond which personal autonomy is destroyed by alienation.

> "In this way, I avoid the question of whether I wholeheartedly endorse the factor as a personal ideal, but I also do not simply accept my addictions or constraints with equanimity" (2008, 158).

It is simply not sufficient for a conception of personal autonomy to shy away from the extremes of mere acceptance (= identification-as) and wholehearted identification-with; if we really want to make philosophical progress we will have to enter the middle ground between these extremes and try to give a philosophically illuminating description of the overall structure we can find here. As I will point out now very briefly this should be done by following the general scheme of default-and-challenge.

3.2 Autonomous by default: a radical alternative

Christman's basic strategy is to replace a positively phrased condition for personal autonomy ("identification-with") with a negative condition ("non-alienation"). Basically, this seems to be the right track, as we can thus replace a positively characterised catalogue of necessary and sufficient conditions with a criterion that points to factors that endanger autonomy, without having to come up with a comprehensive list of these factors. Thereby we can accommodate the fact that "personal autonomy" is a negative concept in the sense that we do not dispose of a list of necessary and sufficient conditions that could function as criteria, but we are in a position to identify concrete challenges that either prevent or render inadequate an ascription of personal autonomy. Even though with this statement I approve of Christman's general strategy, I think the implementation of this strategy by integrating the condition of non-alienation as a "conceptual test" (Christman 2009, 153) for the ascription of personal autonomy is not expedient. Beyond the objections I have raised in detail against the elaboration of the condition of non-alienation, I want to close with two general deliberations I can here only sketch programmatically.

1. What speaks against the use of the concept of alienation as an ersatz for the condition of identification-with is that alienation is thus reduced to a factor of individual psychology. It is, however, implausible to claim that a person who reaches a negative evaluation of a trait that constitutes them thereby forfeits their personal autonomy with respect to this trait. This intuition may become plausible if one assumes the person in question not to have the chance to get rid of this trait. Put this way, the source of the incompatibility does not lie in the negative judgement, but in the assumption – which indeed needs to be examined in itself – that autonomy and determinism are incompatible.[17] Or the intuition is grounded in the negative judgement's having effects which undermine the person's capacity to act. But then it is the effect and not the negative judgement in itself, which constitutes the incompatibility with personal autonomy. Taken by itself, critical self-evaluation is an expression of personal autonomy even if it yields a negative result with respect to a particular trait, but it is not a sign of a lack of personal autonomy.[18]

17 Christman himself refers to this intuition: "If, while feeling alienation and self-repudiation of this sort, a person is unable to rid herself of the characteristic in question, she is heteronomous in relation to it" (2009, 144). For a detailed analysis of this intuition and the condition "unable to rid of" within the framework of an analysis of personal autonomy see Mele's discussion of sheddable and unsheddable attitudes (Mele 1995, 153–173).

18 The way of speaking Christman also adopts, according to which a person is personally autonomous with respect to a trait, can be misleading at this point. As long as the phrase "with respect to" is understood in the

Consequently, nothing is gained by limiting the concept of alienation to a factor of individual psychology for determining personal autonomy. But one looses grip of a conception that could be suitable as a social philosophical category for critically capturing societal framework conditions in which it is systematically made hard or even impossible for human beings to develop and exercise the capacities necessary for personal autonomy, especially the capacity for critical self-evaluation.[19] If it is clear that the distinction between personal autonomy and heteronomy does not coincide with that between alienation and non-alienation (in the sense of individual psychology), then by adopting Christman's strategy we loose a powerful category of critical social philosophy without drawing profit in the analysis of personal autonomy.[20] As Kim Atkins (2008, 124 f.) states, that a

> "relational approach to autonomy aims at distinguishing between reasons that one really wants to have and those that are the result of uncritically internalized social norms. Oppressive socialization can interfere with autonomy at three different levels: the formation of one's beliefs, desires, values, emotions, and attitudes, including attitudes to oneself; the development of the competencies necessary for autonomy; and the ability to make autonomous decisions or to act on them. A relational theory of autonomy responds to all three levels of interference by aiming at unifying the first-, second-, and third-personal perspectives of selfhood".

As I see it a non-reduced complex concept of alienation which takes into account both the level of individual psychological states and the level of social institutions and arrangements can help to spell out such a 'unifying' conception of personal autonomy. Therefore, as far as Christman intends to integrate the insights of the relation-autonomy-accounts into his conception of personal autonomy he should not give away such a thick concept of alienation.

2. The general lesson to learn from Christman's proposal is the insight that one should not only take account of the character of the concept of autonomy as a negative concept on the level of particular conditions, but that one should abandon the formulation of positive conditions from the outset. This is why the formulation of the fourth condition in Christman's conception is more to the point than the substantial explication that follows it is.

The analysis of Christman's proposal does not reveal the negative finding that the negatively formulated condition of non-alienation does point to a positive list of conditions that are demanded in this test, because it entails the requirement of being the result of critical reflection. It also suggests the suspicion that we have to do without this kind of explication of an authenticity condition and confine ourselves to naming the general preconditions human beings fulfil as a general rule and under normal circumstances.[21] The default-condition, set as the normal case, forms a solid basis for the counterfactual elements an explication of personal autonomy cannot renounce without succumbing to the danger of excessive demand or over-intellectualisation

sense of "being the object of critical self-evaluation," a negative evaluation and personal autonomy are compatible with one another.

19 A complex conception of alienation, one that equally encompasses the individual psychological and the social philosophical dimensions, is to be found, for instance, in Karl Marx; see Quante 2011b.

20 A promising attempt to preserve the critical function of the concept of alienation in the debate about personal autonomy is offered by Oshana 2005.

21 This structure is taken into account by all those conditions posited by Christman that require minimal standards or the "absence of neuroses and other debilitating pathologies" (2001, 201) and "normal" functioning (ibid.).

of personal life. The task of philosophy, and also the task of empirical sciences, has to consist in identifying the circumstances under which human persons do not exercise this capacity for personal autonomy in particular cases, in particular contexts or even permanently; this includes the circumstances under which human beings cannot even develop this capacity for personal autonomy, we need only think of the field socialisation and education. Not only the bestowing of the sort respect we owe to autonomous persons, but also the ascription of personal autonomy as a complex set of capacities has to be conceived in terms of the model of default-and-challenge. The fulfilment of the required conditions has to be presupposed as the normal default-position that can be challenged and examined in each individual case, if doubts or critique can be established with sufficient reasons. From these challenges there emerges a part of the complex nexus that makes up the personal autonomy of human persons. The philosophical inclination is to leave this structure of default-and-challenge and to give in to the temptation of developing a positive conception of personal autonomy that promises to indicate necessary and sufficient conditions of personal autonomy. But if we cannot be certain ever to have identified all conceivable challenges, we cannot presume that we have completely come to terms with the complex nexus underlying human personal autonomy. It is decisive not to view this as a general threat in the sense of a philosophical scepticism that must be dismantled in general before our practice of ascribing personal autonomy can be recognized as justified.

The general lesson to draw from Christman's proposal is that we should not build individual negatively formulated criteria into a positive conception of personal autonomy, but that we should arrange the conception of personal autonomy as a whole along the lines of the model of default-and-challenge. The autonomy of our practice of ascribing personal autonomy and of the respect for personal autonomy consists in our reliance on this practice, even though we are not capable of explicating the complex structure of its foundation comprehensively. Viewed thus, the exercise, ascription, and recognition of personal autonomy are ultimately based on trust.

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