

Chapter 2

Analysing Freedom and Autonomy: Recognition, Responsibility and Threats to Agency

Abstract This chapter connects the Hegelian conception of free agency from chapter one with Pettit's republican writings on the nature of freedom. While chapter one offers a predominantly normative account of free agency, chapter two deals with the social and political conditions for freedom and autonomy. In so doing, this chapter also explains some of the differences between the role of recognition within our republican account of justice and Honneth's well-known theory of the struggle for recognition. Moreover, this chapter not only further discusses the exact role and scope of recognition for a social account of freedom, but it also critically examines the nature and value of equality for safeguarding every person's free and autonomous agency. In the course of this analysis, chapter two will uncover the crucial significance of non-domination and non-alienation for being a free and equal member of society, putting the focus on certain forms of inequality and their agency-hampering effects.

In the last chapter, I set out an account of rational agency which highlighted the crucial importance of relationships of mutual recognition for achieving freedom, expressed in the idea of freedom as recognition. My arguments in Chap. 1 also stressed the importance of being able to take responsibility for one's reasons and actions, expressed in the idea of autonomy as responsible endorsement. While the last chapter embedded both these ideas within a dialectical understanding of social normativity and discursive reason-giving, a range of questions still need to be answered.

First, the question is how the normative ideals of freedom as recognition and autonomy as responsible endorsement can be translated into socio-political ideals.

Second, I still owe the reader an account of the (supposedly close) connection between our Hegelian understanding of freedom and contemporary republican ideas about freedom.

Third, considering that my account of freedom is recognition-centred and taking into account that there already exist recognition-centred theories like Honneth's, one might wonder where the difference between Honneth and Schuppert lies. Therefore, I should carefully set out the details of my idea of recognition and explain how my understanding of recognition and its role is (at least to my mind) better suited for connecting rational agency through freedom with justice than the other theories of recognition.

Furthermore, I want to address in this chapter the issue of holding people responsible for their actions and I will highlight in which way the conception of agency and freedom presented here differs significantly from other responsibility-sensitive conceptions of social justice, such as luck-egalitarians. The discussion of responsibility will lead us directly to the issue of potential threats to people's agency and freedom. It is in this section that we will also see how the ideal of autonomy as responsible endorsement must be conceptualised within the realm of the political.

Having discussed potential threats to the exercise of our rational agency, I will move on to a discussion of the role equality plays within my conception, which will also lead me to considerations concerning the role of fairness, and the way political decision making processes should be structured. In short, this chapter is going to cover a lot of ground, aiming to connect my rather abstract normative considerations from Chap. 2 with existing debates in the literature on social justice.

2.1 Freedom as Recognition: Normative and Political

The idea of freedom as recognition as presented in the previous chapter provides a normative account of freedom, as it specifies the social-relational condition for exercising one's rational agency, to adopt a set of normative positions and to take responsibility for them. The crucial insight I highlighted and developed in the discussion is the fact that freedom is a shared social normative achievement, which depends on a set of relationships of intersubjective reciprocal recognition. Freedom as recognition is a sensitive and vulnerable state of immense importance, as only if we enjoy freedom through recognition can we exercise our rational agency as valuing and responsible subjects. This includes our capacity to form, revise and pursue a conception of the good.

However, while the examination in the last chapter managed to provide a convincing account of the nature of rational agency and of the importance freedom and autonomy have for actualizing our capacity for rational agency, it is yet unclear how the idea of freedom as recognition relates to the socio-political dimension of freedom, that is the kinds of freedom a person requires for being a free and autonomous rational agent within a society of free and equals. Phrased differently: how do we have to understand and conceptualise the ideal of freedom as recognition within a conception of social justice?

Within contemporary political theory the most common way to conceptualise freedom on the political level is to incorporate it into an account of basic rights each and every person has. Freedom is naturally taken to be of crucial importance as highlighted by John Rawls's (1971, §39 and §82) defence of the priority of liberties. The basic liberties include for Rawls (1999b, p. 53)

political liberty (the right to vote and to hold public office) and freedom of speech and assembly; liberty of conscience and freedom of thought; freedom of the person, which includes freedom from psychological oppression and physical assault and dismemberment (integrity of the person); the right to hold personal property and freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure as defined by the concept of the rule of law.

Rawls (1971, p. 244) famously remarks that these basic liberties can only be restricted 'for the sake of liberty itself', meaning that trade-offs between the basic liberties and other advantages for society are strictly forbidden. Rawls uses a rights-based account of freedom, typical for contemporary liberalism, suggesting that the first step towards protecting these liberties lies in constitutionally guaranteeing every citizen's right to these freedoms, protected by the impartial rule of law.

It goes without saying that if we want to see every person's capacity to exercise their rational agency (as expressed in the ideal of freedom as recognition and autonomy as responsible endorsement) similarly protected within a theory of social justice, it is crucial that we flesh out the socio-political dimension of freedom as recognition.

The best way of doing so is to highlight the close connection between freedom as recognition and the established republican principles of freedom as discursive control and its political other, freedom as non-domination.¹ Both concepts are familiar from Philip Pettit's work (Pettit 1997, 2001a, 2003a, 2006a). Let me thus start by analysing Pettit's idea of freedom as

¹I discuss these issues also in Schuppert (2013b).

discursive control and point out how my account relates to it and how freedom as recognition provides a convincing account of the interrelationship between discursive agency, recognition and freedom.

Pettit's starting point is to analyse the idea of freedom in terms of the conditions for being held responsible. According to Pettit (2001a, p. 65), agents are free and thus fit to be held responsible if they are free persons, which means free in their agency, 'the agency allowed to them by their standing relative to others'. It is thus not only Pettit's more well-known account of freedom as non-domination, which is very sensitive to the relationships we stand in with regard to other people but also his account of freedom as discursive control. As Pettit (2001a, p. 66) points out, '[w]e stand in a variety of relationships to others, each of them characterized by its own distinctive pattern of power and vulnerability, authority and liability'. Depending on the kind of relationship we stand in, we can be either considered more or less free, as some of the relationships we stand in might be 'discourse-friendly', and others not.

To be in discursive control and thus to be a free person means to 'have the ability to discourse and ... have access to discourse' (Pettit 2001a, p. 70). Discursive control itself then involves a dual aspect, namely, 'the ratiocinative capacity to take part in discourse, and the relational capacity that goes with enjoying relationships that are discourse-friendly' (Pettit 2001a, p. 70). According to Pettit, freedom as discursive control requires that the person in question is reason-responsive, that is generally 'disposed to act in accordance with reason' (Pettit 2001a, p. 99), able to reflect on reasons, socially recognised as a discursive authority and able to actually participate in discourse-friendly relationships.

For Pettit therefore, a person can only be held responsible if the person in question is recognised for being reason-responsive and if she is in discursive control, which implies the possibility that the person could have done otherwise. As Pettit points out, though, being in discursive control is a state we sometimes enjoy only virtually, which means that we do not always discursively reflect on our actions, as we act out of habit. However, what is important is that we could take discursive control if we chose to do so, which means that we can also be held responsible for actions we performed under virtual discursive control.

The key political aspect of Pettit's idea of freedom as discursive control is that in order for a person to enjoy discourse-friendly relationships the person must be free from domination. The idea of non-domination is obviously a core aspect of (neo-)republican thinking. The question though is what domination actually refers to.

Frank Lovett (2010) offers a fascinating account of different conceptions of domination. According to Lovett (2010, Chap. 3), significant imbalances

in power are no sufficient condition for domination. Instead, ‘domination should be understood as a condition suffered by persons or groups whenever they are dependent on a social relationship in which some other person or group wields arbitrary power over them’ (Lovett 2010, p. 20).

This conception of domination is marked by three important features: first, it sees domination as a problem in specific social relationships; second, domination is understood as being structure-based, meaning that it is not a particular outcome of domination which matters (e.g. that I dare not to speak my mind) but the structure of the social relationship itself²; third, domination is identified as the use of arbitrary interference or alien control.

The account of domination that Pettit offers in (most of) his writings shares these features. Thus, Pettit for instance argues that it is not – as many liberals seem to think – interference that theorists of freedom should be primarily concerned with but the ability to *arbitrarily* interfere with somebody’s freedom (i.e. dominate).³ Domination, then, refers to a state in which ‘the dominating party can interfere on an arbitrary basis with the choices of the dominated’ (Pettit 1997, p. 22). This does not mean, however, that the dominating party actually interferes. Already the potential for domination is problematic enough. Thus, domination is a social relation that persists in various places, not just in cases of master–slave relationships, but also in societies with major social inequalities, exploitative work conditions and sexist hierarchical structures. The republican idea of freedom as non-domination, therefore, tries to protect people’s freedom (for Pettit as discursive control) against potential threats to their agency.

From what I have said so far it should be clear how the conception of freedom as recognition can support and strengthen Pettit’s account of freedom as discursive control through highlighting the direct connection

²For the difference between structure-based and outcome-based conceptions of domination, see Lovett’s (2010, pp. 40–47) excellent overview.

³As most readers probably know, there exists significant disagreement over the differences between the republican ideal of freedom as non-domination (Pettit 2006a, 1996; Laborde and Maynor 2008) and the classic liberal mantra of freedom as non-interference (Carter 1999; Kramer 2003; Larmore 2003), or simply negative freedom (Berlin 1958). I do not want to go into this issue here, since I hope that from what I say in this chapter and Chap. 3 it will be sufficiently clear that republican non-domination is a valuable ideal in its own right. Moreover, let me note that the strict distinction between positive and negative freedom was always an unfortunate one, as any liberal theory seems to include at least some form of positive freedom, too. From the viewpoint of rational agency, though, it is simply important to stress that the conditions for free and autonomous agency can be easily hampered and distorted without direct interference, a fact Pettit’s republican ideal of non-domination seems strikingly more aware of than classic negative liberty views.

between rational agency, freedom, autonomy, recognition, responsibility and non-domination. Let's take a closer look at how this connection works in detail.

In the explication of his notion of freedom as discursive control Pettit (2001a, p. 72) explicitly refers to the need for discourse-friendly relationships which require the public recognition of one's status as a discursive authority. However, Pettit does not engage in-depth with the idea of recognition and the crucial role it plays in making the exercise of a person's free and autonomous agency possible. It is here that my account of rational agency with its ideal of freedom as recognition provides the necessary normative groundwork for understanding the intricate social-relational preconditions which must be fulfilled for a truly discursive practice of reason-giving and reason-taking to be possible.

As we saw in the analysis of freedom as recognition in the previous chapter, reciprocal intersubjective recognition is a fundamental condition for a person's ability to be a valuing and responsible subject. Together with the idea of autonomy as responsible endorsement freedom as recognition is the key condition for realizing a person's capacity to meaningfully adopt norms, give reasons and be a responsible free and equal member of society. A person who exercises her capacity for free and autonomous agency is precisely the kind of reason-responsive, discursively recognised person, which Pettit wants to define in his own account of the free person.

The ideas of freedom as recognition and autonomy as responsible endorsement flesh out the agency requirements Pettit tries to grasp in his account of the ratiocinative and relational capacities which a person's discursive control involves. Using the Hegelian conception of recognition, discussed in Chap. 1, my notion of freedom as recognition provides a detailed account of the conditions for free and autonomous rational agency which implicitly lie at the very core of Pettit's idea of freedom as discursive control. Our account of social practices of reason-giving and the social nature of normativity also help to get a better understanding against what kinds of threats to agency Pettit's political notion of freedom as non-domination is supposed to protect our freedom and autonomy (see the following discussion in Sect. 2.4).

Pettit's republican account of freedom as non-domination builds on a particular aspect of his theory of freedom as discursive control, namely, the aspect of discursive power.⁴ The idea of discursive power nicely shows how a normative status, namely the status of being a recognised reason-giver,

⁴It is important to note that non-domination alone might not suffice to protect a person's agency against all possible threats. This is a point I return to later in this chapter.

shifts within the realm of the socio-political into a status of power, that is a status dependent on a set of material and non-material relations. Understanding this shift and seeing how certain social relationships and their power structures present a direct threat to a person's ability to actually exercise her rational agency within a discursive social practice is the key for grasping the connection between the normative account of freedom as recognition and political ideas of freedom. Freedom as recognition is about giving a person voice and making her worthy of address, two normative and social achievements which must be protected so as to secure a person's free rational agency.

While Pettit offers a valuable account of how freedom and responsibility can be connected it is our account of the social-relational conditions for rational agency which highlights the discursive nature of adopting normative states and valuing. Moreover, it is our re-interpretation of Hegelian recognition theory which fleshes out the connection between normative and political theories of freedom. Freedom as recognition as a normative and non-domination as a political concept show, how recognition theory and republican political theory are intertwined and must be linked. The idea of freedom as non-domination shifts the focus of established debates on freedom to the nature and structure of social relationships; meanwhile it is the idea of freedom as recognition which explains the normative workings of mutual recognition and free agency.

On my republican account, once we move from the normative to the socio-political level, recognition must be understood as a form of social relationship, as a social state in which members of society value and acknowledge each other as legitimate reason-givers and bestowers of the status of being a fully free and equal member of society. Proper recognition requires thus institutions which allow people to see eye-to-eye and meet as equals. Mutual recognition, however, is not a state of perfect social harmony, but it merely is a state of acknowledgment between independent consciousnesses, which still allows for a set of agonistically conflicting ideas, values and reasons.

Recognition, that is the mutual intersubjective acknowledgment of each other's rational agency and freedom, is a good that is necessary for creating equal social relations and giving people the ability to realize their freedom in being fully participating members of society. This allows them to be discursively in control and to be held responsible.

Recognition, thus, plays an important role at different conceptual levels and it serves several purposes: firstly, reciprocal intersubjective recognition is a necessary condition for rational agency, both so that an agent can see herself as a legitimate source of claims and so that an agent counts within

society as a legitimate reason-giver; secondly, only under conditions of mutual recognition can an agent become fully free and autonomous so that she can identify with her own actions as her own and take responsibility for them, as specified in the ideas of freedom as recognition and autonomy as responsive endorsement; thirdly, build into the logic of reciprocal recognition is a demand for equal social relationships, as being a free and autonomous agent demands that one can enjoy discursive control; lastly, the principle of reciprocal intersubjective recognition specifies a necessary feature of the institutions of society, which are modelled according to the idea of non-domination and discursive control so as to protect every person's capacity for rational agency.

The idea of mutual intersubjective recognition is thus an underlying structuring principle which informs social relationships, the design of institutions and enables agents to actualize their freedom and autonomy. It is here that the connection between our idea of freedom as recognition and republican ideals of freedom as non-domination becomes the most apparent.

While I will return to the connection between rational agency, freedom as recognition and non-domination below (Sect. 2.4), first the question arises then how my application of recognition theory and its use in a theory of social justice differs from the way Axel Honneth tries to combine a Hegelian account of recognition with social justice. Moreover, as became already clear at the end of the previous chapter, I also have to explain how using a Hegelian concept of social recognition and rational agency is able to avoid the pitfalls of social determinism. After all, if our freedom is freedom as recognition, this could mean that our rights and our status as agents are dependent on social recognition, too.

2.2 Freedom, Recognition and Social Justice

The idea that some form of social recognition is important, not to say necessary, for achieving a universally valuable state, such as for instance self-realization or free and autonomous agency, features prominently in the works of a wide range of moral and political philosophers of the last 300 years.

Rousseau, for instance, offers an account of recognition as part of his notion of *amour-propre*, 'a form of self-love that drives human individuals to seek the esteem, approval, admiration, or love – in short, the recognition – of their fellow beings' (Neuhouser 2008, p. 1). For Rousseau, the recognition

people seek as part of *amour-propre* is a harmful drive for distinction, corrupting the positive form of self-love *amour de soi*, which is an instinct towards self-preservation that goes hand in hand with an acknowledgment of one's own social dependency.

The recognition of one's own dependency Rousseau connects to the Stoic idea of *oikeiosis* which can be interpreted 'as the basis of a natural sociability' (Brooke 2001, p. 98). The recognition of *amour-propre* meanwhile is the main currency in which unproblematic natural inequalities (such as differences in strength or eye-sight) are either translated into or superseded by harmful social inequalities. According to Rousseau (1997b), differences in social recognition create power imbalances and hierarchies which can ultimately lead to the domination of the majority by a powerful minority. Put differently, Rousseau not only provides in his second discourse an interesting account of the distorting effects of certain forms of recognition on social relationships, but he also raises republican concerns like freedom from domination and alien control.

However, Rousseau's account of recognition is in many ways only a prolegomena to his wider ethical theory, which famously tried to give an intersubjective account of the possibility of freedom under the general will. Moreover, Rousseau sees recognition predominately as (underserved) social recognition based on property and vanity. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that Rousseau's discussion of recognition and social (in)equality, especially in his second discourse, has a distinctly republican flavour.

The idea of recognition is also present in Kant, especially in his remarks on the dignity of the moral person and the respect a moral person deserves, an idea nowadays often summarised as treating others always as ends in themselves, not means. As Kant (1996b) remarks 'a person, that is as the subject of a morally practical reason ... possesses a dignity ... by which he exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings'. The Kantian idea of recognition as respect was then further developed by Fichte, who also starts to use the term *Anerkennung*, i.e. recognition. Fichte (2000, p. 39) observes that a human being 'becomes a human being only among human beings' which for Fichte (2000, p. 45) means that 'the concept of individuality is a reciprocal concept' so that one's subjective individuality 'is never mine, rather it is mine and his, his and mine'.

The by far most extensive theory of recognition, though, can be found in Hegel's work, as already discussed in Chap. 1. For Hegel, mutual intersubjective recognition is crucial for developing and exercising rational agency. While my own theory draws heavily on Hegelian insights, Hegel's theory has also been adopted and interpreted by a range of other philosophers, two

of which I briefly want to mention here, namely Thomas Hill Green and Charles Taylor, before focusing on Axel Honneth's account of recognition and social justice.

2.2.1 *Green and Taylor on Recognition*

Green (1890, 1986) offers a Hegel-inspired account of recognition paradigmatic for the interpretation of Hegelian recognition theory amongst the British Idealists (Nicholson 1990).⁵ For Green (1986, p. 112), the existence of an individual's right to X depends on two conditions, namely, (a) *the social recognition of the individual's specific right by society*; and (b) the connection of the right's existence and exercise to an acknowledged social good (Dimova-Cookson 2001, pp. 134–136). It is the first point which is of particular interest here as for Green, then, rights are powers and entitlements given to the individual by society, namely through the recognition of other members of society.

However, let me first briefly comment on the second aspect of Green's theory, his moral perfectionism. For Green (1986, pp. 26–27), the social recognition of rights is a process that should be mutual and directed towards a moral end, namely, the achievement of a common good. That is to say, through recognizing each other's rights the individuals in a society make a common good their own (Green 1986, p. 26) and thus advance their own moral self-perfection.

Green actually sees recognition as a necessary step for overcoming one's self-centred motivation for actions and he argues that a state of mutual recognition is a state in which every individual acts in the interest of the common good. According to Green, acting in the interest of the common good is ultimately also in each individual's own interest. Green thus subscribes to a quasi-metaphysical ideal of moral self-realization.

This conception of recognition as part of a common project of self-perfection appears skewed, though. Green paints a picture of perfect harmony in which human freedom and autonomy are subordinated values within a grand project of personal self-transformation. For Green,

⁵It is worth noting that Bradley (1927) offers a somewhat different take on Hegel's practical philosophy and recognition theory, as Bradley attributes Hegel a social role view, according to which each person has her station and duties in the greater workings of society. Bradley, thus, like Green sees Hegel's recognition theory as part of a moral theory in which the self is fully realized by serving the greater social organism. However, Bradley's emphasis differs from Green's.

recognition is part of a project of self-objectification and adopting a self-disinterested disposition, while for Hegel recognition is necessary for actualizing one's freedom and reasoning independently so that one can act as legitimate reason-giver within the social normative space of the ethical.

The main issue with Green's account, though, is his view of social recognition as a community privilege of rights-bestowal. Green claims that the existence of a right is wholly dependent on social recognition, which clearly seems to get recognition all wrong. According to Hegel's explications in the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Phenomenology* recognition is necessary for becoming an autonomous reason-giver. However, the right (if one even wants to call it a right) to be a reason-giver in the first place is not dependent on any form of social recognition. In fact, for Hegel, it would be a nonsensical idea to speak of a person's right to exercise her capacity for rational agency, as being a free and autonomous agent is the very condition of being a rights holder.⁶

It is by no means up to the community to decide whether I am a rational agent as exercising one's rational agency is the fundamental precondition for taking up normative statuses and valuing. Moreover, the fundamental rights I have, qua being a rational agent, which must be recognised in order for me to be a socially recognised reason-giver, are connected to my fundamental interest (see Chap. 3), which are not a contingent matter of social approval.

As Hegel remarks in the third part of the *Encyclopaedia* (1970b, p. 302) with respect to human freedom and the individual's rational will, 'the idea itself as such is the actuality of human beings, *not something that they have but something that they are*' (my emphasis). Humans are rational beings with a capacity for free and autonomous rational agency, and social relationships of mutual intersubjective recognition are a necessary condition for a person to fully actualize this capacity. Hence, Green's view of recognition, even if one decides to forget about his moral perfectionism, gets recognition theory wrong, which is one of the reasons why Hegelians have been for such a long time considered to be advocating a community-relative view of rights.

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Apart from Honneth, Charles Taylor is nowadays probably the most well-known advocate of recognition theory in contemporary political philosophy. Taylor actually re-introduced the notion of recognition into the wider political theory community in his seminal essay on *Multiculturalism and "the Politics of Recognition"* (1992). Taylor connects his account of recognition with issues concerning a person's identity formation and cultural difference.

⁶For a good discussion of this point see Honneth (2010a, 2011).

While Taylor's account is interesting and had significant influence in debates on multiculturalism, from my point of view, there are two major issues with his theory: first, Taylor's focus on psychological issues in terms of misrecognition and their effect on identity formation, and second, Taylor's essentialist conception of group identity and authenticity embedded in a *telos* of self-realization. Let me briefly examine why I hold both to be problematic.

The first problem of Taylor's account of recognition is that Taylor focuses too strongly on the psychological dimension of recognition. Taylor's claim that identity is 'partly shaped by recognition or its absence' which means that 'misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being' (Taylor 1994, p. 25) certainly rings true. However, while Taylor seems correct in claiming that our identity is – at least partially – formed intersubjectively (or in Taylor's words 'dialogically'), and that forms of recognition and misrecognition do influence this process, Taylor construes recognition almost exclusively as a psychological good, which means that his account lacks the distinct normative, agency-enabling and discursive power-enhancing dimensions of recognition. To reduce recognition to the level of a psychological good, though, means to ignore the normative force the concept of recognition possesses within our account of rational agency. Even though Taylor does stay true to Hegel by emphasizing the intersubjective nature of identity-formation, Taylor sheds Hegelian recognition of its normative and explanatory power within a discursive, social-relational account of agency and freedom.

The second problem with Taylor's use of recognition is even more difficult, as Taylor embeds his account of identity formation within a teleological narrative of authenticity that is both somewhat culturalist and agency limiting.

The problem is twofold. Taylor (1994, p. 28) claims on the one hand that particular cultural practices and values have to be recognized as authentic expressions of one's true self, as one's identity is ultimately culture-dependent; on the other hand Taylor construes that identity-formation is a quest for self-realization, as a form of self-discovery. Both aspects share obviously certain features as both cultural and personal identity are seen to be expressions of one's true authentic self. However, at the same time there is a tension between cultural demands for equal recognition and the personal quest for discovering and realizing one's true original self (Taylor 1994, p. 31).

The major issue this second problem of Taylor's account unveils is the fact that Taylor seems to fail to see the normative idea of Hegelian

recognition as a necessary condition for free and autonomous rational agency. Instead Taylor presents a teleological account of self-discovery and self-realization based on an almost essentialist picture of a person's true authentic self. Oddly enough, it seems that this authentic self is not truly dialogically shaped and intersubjectively constituted and expressed, but that it must only be discovered, recognized and realized.

Taylor, then, despite emphasizing the Hegelian roots of his own theory and arguing for an anti-naturalist hermeneutical understanding of human agency, seems to get recognition wrong, too. His account fails to adequately address the normative dimension of recognition and the role it plays for having the very possibility of exercising one's rational agency. Moreover, his account has culturalist tendencies and presents a story of authentic self-realization.

Both Green's and Taylor's accounts of Hegelian recognition seem to misconstrue the concept. Neither is recognition part of a community-relative rights view, nor part of a merely psychological account of authentic self-realization. The problem in particular with Taylor's work on recognition is that it has led to a state of affairs in which within academic and political discourse recognition seems to defend the particularist claims of marginalized social and cultural groups, suggesting that recognition theory, and the politics of recognition, is a politics of multiculturalist divides.⁷ That is not at all to say that all forms of the politics of recognition are sectarian and essentialist at heart (which would be unfair and absurd), but it flags up the problematic nature of the uneasy tensions within Taylor's account of recognition. Put crudely, the politics of recognition often confuses and blurs the boundaries between recognition, toleration and liberal impartiality.⁸

⁷The problem with a lot of writings on multiculturalism and the politics of recognition is precisely that recognition is interpreted as a value which gives legitimacy to rather essentialist claims of cultural, social, or ethnic distinctiveness, instead of arguing for a society in which every person, no matter to which group she belongs, can exercise her freedom and autonomy as a rational agent (Laden and Owen 2007, Chaps. 8 and 10; Phillips 2007; Young 1990; Kymlicka 1995). In fact, this struggle over cultural recognition has also triggered criticisms of Honneth's writings, arguing that it is redistribution and not recognition which helps the poor and needy (Fraser and Honneth 2003; Tully 2000).

⁸Recognizing others as competent judges and free rational agents is distinctly different from tolerating other people's behaviour because one feels compelled to respect other people's life-choices. Equating recognition with toleration is extremely problematic, just like equating impartiality with absolute neutrality. See Galeotti (2002), Castiglione and McKinnon (2003), as well as de Marneffe (1990) and Mendus (1999).

2.2.2 Honneth on Recognition

The currently most popular account of recognition is Honneth's which claims that proper recognition is necessary for actualizing social freedom and realizing one's personality.⁹ Honneth (1994) famously claims that social struggles over justice are quintessentially struggles for recognition. Honneth suggests that these conflicts of recognition either fall into the domain of love and the family, of respect and legal equality, or of esteem and justice to achievements. For Honneth (2004a, 2011), a just society is a society which fosters social integration through mutual recognition.

Concretely this means that 'all subjects must receive the same chance of individual self-realization through equal participation in recognition conditions' (Honneth 2004a, p. 360) which entails that in the three spheres of recognition people's needs are covered (i.e. in the realm of love and the family), they enjoy equal legal rights (i.e. respect recognition) and they receive the recognition they deserve for their achievements (i.e. esteem recognition). Moreover, every member of society should enjoy legal freedom (i.e. basic rights), moral freedom (i.e. personal autonomy) and social freedom (i.e. the status of an equal and free member of society), since only if these three forms of freedom are guaranteed to all a society can achieve what Honneth (2011, part C) calls a democratic morality (*demokratische Sittlichkeit*).

For Honneth this means that we must work towards eliminating clichés and cultural stereotypes that hinder the satisfaction of people's needs, that we should re-define gainful employment and dismantle social asymmetries, and that we should extend the realm of legal guarantees so as to safeguard people's fair and equal opportunities to self-realization. According to Honneth, we need a thorough re-assessment of our personal, economic and political relationships, fostering trust, esteem and political participation.¹⁰

With its focus on different dimensions of freedom, the importance of social relationships and the inner and outer conditions of proper (i.e. autonomous) relations-to-self, Honneth's account of recognition and justice seems to tie in perfectly with the project I present here. So why did I set out

⁹As with so many other great philosophers, Honneth's immense productivity means that he has published different accounts of recognition since his thinking on the interplay between recognition, personality formation and justice has obviously evolved. I will nonetheless try to deal with Honneth's work as whole, attempting to always use a friendly but critical reading of his works as basis for my own analysis.

¹⁰Honneth offers an in-depth discussion of these three forms of relationship and their necessary re-assessment in the third part of *Das Recht der Freiheit*.

my own account of recognition and freedom instead of using Honneth's? And what are the problems (if any) with Honneth's theory?

There are three problematic aspects to Honneth's theory. While not all three aspects are equally strong in each of Honneth's accounts (which as I said in footnote 24 differ from each other), they all stem from Honneth's reading of Hegel. Even though Honneth's and my reading of Hegel overlap in many instances, there are some very significant differences.

Honneth's theory of recognition has basically three sides, to wit, a psychological one in terms of relation to self and personal identity formation, a socio-economic one with respect to valuing people's labour and achievement, and a normative one in terms of people's freedom. All three of these sides are in some way problematic, which is precisely the reason why I argue that Honneth's account of recognition is unable to ground a full, that is, also normatively rich enough, theory of social justice that promotes the idea of freedom as recognition and autonomous rational agency.

Honneth's account, with its three dimensions, is a hybrid which portrays recognition in quite different ways: on the one hand recognition sometimes appears like an additional Rawlsian primary social good, namely when Honneth talks about esteem recognition and valuing people's contributions and achievements; on the other hand Honneth often presents recognition as a psychological good necessary for attaining one's proper relation to self and to others, which allows a person to participate in the public realm without a feeling of shame. This psychological use of recognition could also be expressed in the language of Rawlsian primary social goods, namely, as the social bases for self-respect. However, in his latest book Honneth at times describes recognition as a necessary feature for accepting one's own dependency on others, which acts as a social "glue". In this third reading, recognition is part of an idea of social complementation, since Honneth (2011, p. 86) claims that in a just society all (life) plans are complementary to each other.

The problems with Honneth's three readings of recognition are the following: (1) in his psychological account Honneth presents a quasi-Aristotelian self-realization view of recognition, as expressed in his concept of integrity; (2) in his socio-economic account Honneth construes recognition primarily in terms of esteem, almost turning recognition into mere social approval; (3) on Honneth's freedom-based account of recognition as social "glue", Honneth misconstrues the role of recognition for free social agency within a shared space of social normativity as a process of complementation and harmony.

On all three counts Honneth somewhat undervalues the normative dimension of recognition and its connection to Hegel's view of rational

agency as ethical life (Pippin 2008). Ultimately, while Honneth presents an extremely valuable account of the negative effects of misrecognition and the ‘social pathologies’ of modern life, his theory fails to grasp the central normative function of recognition within a full-fledged theory of social justice. Moreover, Honneth’s different uses of the idea of recognition seem at times mutually exclusive, making it thus unclear whether recognition should be seen as a meta primary good, or simply as a good which comes in different forms:

1. The first problem is connected to Honneth’s account of the psychological dimension of recognition, in which recognition is seen as a necessary good for securing a person’s integrity. In this dimension, Honneth’s theory of recognition is primarily concerned with the negative effects states of misrecognition and disrespect can have for a person’s relation to self (Honneth 1992), and hence for the person’s individual development. For Honneth, modern life and its social relationships robs people of a proper sense of self, curtailing their ability to realize their personality, as social relationships reflect a ‘climate of cold, calculating purposefulness’ (Honneth 2005, p. 91). Thus, Honneth argues we need a politics of recognition in order to rectify modern life’s social coldness and enable people’s individual self-realization.

Honneth uses Hegel for stressing the importance of intersubjectivity within an interesting account of social-relational autonomy that focuses on social relationships and an agent’s self-development as an intersubjective process. Many of the conditions Honneth mentions tie in with my own account of autonomy. As Honneth in an article jointly written with Joel Anderson (Anderson and Honneth 2005, p. 131) observes,

[o]ne’s relationship to oneself, then, is not a matter of a solitary ego reflecting on itself, but is the result of an ongoing *intersubjective* process, in which one’s attitude toward oneself emerges in one’s encounter with an other’s attitude toward oneself.

Honneth in fact offers a convincing account of both the crippling and the enabling effects another person’s attitude and a society’s institutional, or cultural, attitude towards myself can have on my sense of self, as well as on my ability to see myself as an autonomous social agent. However, at several points in his writings Honneth identifies achieving one’s personal integrity as the goal of proper recognitive relationships. This seems to suggest that Honneth wants that a person reaches a state of self-sufficiency in which she is with herself in herself (Pinkard 2012). Let me further explain this.

In his writings on identity formation and personal development Honneth (1994, 2004b, 2005) presents a picture of the person as a

needing being that requires various forms of recognition so as to form her identity, achieve integrity and realize herself. This account is problematic for two reasons: first, it presents a person's life-project not as an agency-centred endeavour of free and autonomous reasoning in a social space but as a teleological process of self-realization, and second, the idea of integrity suggests that an individual can reach a state of self-sufficiency in which the person is 'with herself'.¹¹

Both these ideas, however, seem to misconstrue Hegelian recognition which after all is an agency-centred concept that stresses the inevitable never-ending social dependency of us as free agents and persons. Hegel's theory of recognition actually suggests that we can never reach a state of self-sufficiency, or perfect integrity. However, Honneth seems to ultimately defend a view of autonomy which, though intersubjectively brought about and vulnerable to forms of misrecognition, collapses into a view of the self-sufficient private reasoner who needs certain social conditions to be truly able to exercise her autonomy, but it lacks the dimension of the normative relevance of recognition for being a free rational agent in the first place. As I will set out in my analysis of Honneth's freedom-based view of recognition, while Honneth's theory does include an agency-dimension this as well is grounded in the somewhat skewed and overly idealistic picture of social harmony and complementation.

Honneth certainly is right in claiming that autonomy requires recognition, but his view of integrity and self-realization seems to be at odds with Hegel's ideas about social self-actualization as an intersubjective *and open-ended* process. The idea of integrity simply turns the agency-enhancing function of recognition into a too teleological project of self-completion.

2. The second problem is part of Honneth's account of the socio-economic dimension of recognition. Just like in the case of autonomy, Honneth's initial observations concerning the nature of social-relationships under advanced capitalism and its alienating market-based social relationships is very astute and helpful for understanding the social pathologies of so-called Western societies. However, once again Honneth's positive conceptualization of recognition within this well set out framework is problematic.

Honneth (2004a, b) focuses on giving people in marginalised professions and work fields the recognition they deserve, interpreting esteem recognition as a kind of social approval that should be readily available

¹¹Terry Pinkard interprets the idea of self-sufficiency as proof for an underlying strong Aristotelianism in Honneth's work (Pinkard 2012).

to all those contributing to the well-being of society as a whole. Honneth's claim that within our economic system certain professions are systematically undervalued once again holds true, but the question is whether giving recognition to all those, to whom recognition is due, is indeed a viable solution to the problem.

First of all, the question is who gets to decide what counts as a contribution. Second, the question is how much each contribution is to be valued. For Honneth, the answer to both these questions seems to lie in democratic procedures, which ultimately lead to a fair distribution of esteem recognition.

However, Honneth's idea of giving people the recognition they deserve is a very controversial one. Esteem recognition seems to be a good that cannot be distributed equally as people achieve and succeed in life differently, even though Honneth at times seems to assume that a quasi-egalitarian distribution might be possible. Moreover, giving people the recognition they deserve can also lead to a situation in which people get too much recognition, thus jeopardizing a fragile social balance of influence and respect.¹² Both these points were already (although in slightly different language) discussed by Rousseau (1997b) in his second *Discourse*.

One of the main problems with Honneth's proposal is that even if it were possible to arrive at an objective list of contributions and their appropriate recognitive remuneration, we would arrive at a system where every member of society could tell her exact social worth based on the recognition she receives. While arriving at such a list already seems impossible, it also is doubtful if such a system would even inspire people to behave better in relation to each other. Why should people not just try to maximize their recognition income on the expense of others?

Here comes again Honneth's idea of social harmony and complementation into play, since only if indeed all plans and goals mutually depend on each other and form a common whole does it make sense to think that doling out esteem recognition on the basis of desert can lead to something other than recognition-rivalry. But it is far from clear why within pluralist societies all individual life plans should merge into societal harmony.

Moreover, there is another somewhat odd feature of Honneth's socio-economic account of recognition, which I briefly want to mention. In *Das Recht der Freiheit* Honneth (2011, p. 226) argues that we can improve our social relationships by being clearer about the rights, duties and

¹²For an insightful discussion see McBride (2009). However, the idea of distributing esteem recognition as a means of creating a more just society has also been advocated by Brennan and Pettit (2004).

expectations of certain social roles. That is to say, if a person P counts in circumstances C as a director D, then P should enjoy the rights of D, have the duties of D and be expected to behave and be treated like D. While this might sound to a degree sensible, again the question arises of who sets out the rights, duties and expectations of D. Moreover, Honneth's specific discussion of role obligations sounds awfully familiar from Bradley's (1927) infamous description of a person's station and duties in the greater workings of society.

Overall, Honneth's account again seems much stronger in terms of the negative analysis of current shortcomings than in the positive explication of recognition and its normative role. While at times recognition, in the sense of esteem recognition sounds like a distributable good which will cure certain ills, at other times recognition seems to be understood as a mutual acceptance of every person's contribution to a societal good. In some ways, then, Honneth seems to overburden the concept of recognition with too many functions.

3. The third problem stems from Honneth's reconstruction of Hegel's idea of freedom. As mentioned earlier, Honneth distinguishes three kinds of freedom, namely, legal freedom, moral freedom and social freedom.

The sphere of legal freedom, which refers to the most basic rights each and every agent must have, is the sphere of basic respect recognition. The sphere of moral freedom, which refers to a person's ability to reason independently and justify her beliefs, is the sphere of autonomy. The sphere of social freedom, which refers to a person's standing as a free and equal member of society, is the sphere of mutual recognition of one's own dependency. It is this third idea of freedom which – as pointed out above already – raises some problems.

Needless to say, the reading of Hegel and freedom presented in Chap. 1 and at the beginning of this chapter agrees with many of Honneth's observation. Just like Honneth, I would like to claim freedom needs to be understood as a social-relational idea which can only be realized in suitable relationships with others. This entails that every person's is in some sense dependent on others. However, in my reading, just like in Pippin's and Brandom's, too, this dependency is an inevitable mutual state of social normative vulnerability and not – like it is for Honneth (2011, p. 92 and p. 222) – an aspect of a society in which every person's good is taken to be complementary to each other.

This difference is not as minor as it seems, since Honneth's idea of complementation introduces once again a teleological notion of integration and unified resolution. In other words, Honneth's account of social freedom, despite its impressive sociological credentials, is less

process-oriented, pluralist, vulnerable and pragmatic than one would expect. In fact, Honneth's account at times seems procedural, accommodative and appeasing.

Honneth's theory of a grand synthesis of social unity might strike some readers as closer to Hegel as my own theory.¹³ However, as I explained in the beginning of the book, I am more interested in presenting a coherent and convincing account of republican global justice with a Hegelian twist, than in re-telling the story of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. If applied correctly Hegel's theory of recognition is a powerful tool for social and moral theory, but it seems that Honneth is in his application too optimistic about overcoming all social conflicts.¹⁴

Having set out my three major criticisms of Honneth's account of recognition, it hopefully has become clear why I argue for a different reading of recognition. However, in order to be as clear as possible about the exact role recognition should play – according to the theory defended here –, let me briefly rehearse what recognition can and cannot do.

If my argument is correct, recognition is about providing the conditions for free and autonomous agency and exercising this agency in the socio-political reality of one's society. Honneth's view, meanwhile, sees recognition either as a psychological good we need in order to achieve personal integrity, or as a form of distributive good which conveys approval for people's deeds. However, recognition cannot be everything, that is, normative and social (pre)condition for free agency, a necessary requirement for autonomous reasoning, a distributable social good as a currency of desert and contribution, the basis for equal basic rights, and a tool for achieving social unity.

Therefore, I argued that recognition should only be understood in the first two senses, namely as a normative and social condition for free agency and a necessary requirement for autonomous reasoning. Only when I am recognized by others will I have a proper relation to self, so as to be able to realize autonomy as responsible endorsement. I also can only be a free rational agent under conditions of mutual recognition, as expressed in the

¹³I am not sure whether Honneth's reading is indeed closer to Hegel than my own, since my own reading seems to focus more on the *Phenomenology* while Honneth also seems to draw heavily on the *Philosophy of Right*. Be that as it may, as I said earlier Honneth's theory is highly insightful and especially useful for analysing the social pathologies of contemporary capitalist societies.

¹⁴Another point worth making is that Honneth clearly sees his theory as directed at one society at a time, which might possibly explain his optimism about achieving social unity. However, my own theory is global in scope and certainly wants to avoid all idealistic visions of a world of perfect harmony.

idea of freedom as recognition. Recognition should not be overburdened as the basis for basic rights, or in the form of approval-recognition we have to hand out to the personally ‘deserving’. Other concepts and ideas will have to base and safeguard rights, such as fundamental interests and non-domination, since in my account recognition chiefly plays a normative role.

My account of recognition thus might also be able to show why within the debate over recognition and (re)distribution (Fraser and Honneth 2003; Owen and Tully 2007; Bohman 2007b) both sides get the problem of justice and the role recognition plays in achieving a state of social justice wrong. Honneth is correct in highlighting the importance of intersubjective recognition, but he misapplies the concept by focusing on self-realization and esteem recognition. Fraser is correct in stressing the importance of achieving a form of participatory parity, but her account of the obstacles to get there is too narrowly focused on material redistribution and underdeveloped with respect to the ideal of successful free agency and equal social relations.

Having explained where the differences between my own reading and Honneth’s theory of recognition lie, it hopefully has become clear which advantages my account might have. However, as most readers will remember, the chapter started with a whole range of pressing questions, which I promised to address, so the next section will deal with responsibility.

2.3 Freedom and Responsibility

After having shown that my account offers a convincing connection between normative and political questions of freedom and how it differs from existing theories of recognition, it is now time to turn our attention to the question of how to conceptualise responsibility and what is meant by saying that my republican idea of freedom allows us to hold people responsible for the reasons they have and the actions they take. Moreover, I will have to point out the differences between existing responsibility-sensitive theories such as luck-egalitarianism and my own take on responsibility and its relation to social justice.¹⁵

Luck egalitarians hold that justice requires us to compensate people for the disadvantage they incur through no fault of their own, and that for

¹⁵People who roughly fall into the luck-egalitarian camp include Dworkin (1981a, b), Cohen (1989) and Rakowski (1991). For critical discussions of luck-egalitarianism and some of its related problems, see Hinton (2001), Seligman (2007), Scheffler (2005), Vallentyne (2008), Arneson (1989, 2000b), Cohen (2008), Lippert-Rasmussen (2001), and Matravers (2007).

all other outcomes, namely those which can be attributed to an agent's free choice, we should hold people morally accountable.¹⁶ Thus luck-egalitarians distinguish between choice (option luck) and circumstance (brute luck). Luck-egalitarians aim to provide people with equal starting positions, giving every person a fair chance to succeed in life.¹⁷ In fact, as luck-egalitarians point out, once we have provided people with equal starting position it would be grossly unfair and unjust if people are not held accountable for their decisions, as people making good choices and living wisely would be unfairly disadvantaged.

Luck-egalitarians thus argue for massive redistribution so as to give people equal starting positions and they stress the value of every person's freedom and autonomy, which is exactly one of the reasons why they think people can and should be held responsible for their actions. While the terminology of luck-egalitarians might initially sound similar to my own, their theory of responsibility and freedom is actually almost the complete opposite of mine. Let me explain why.

Luck-egalitarians hold people responsible by effectively punishing agents for exercising their agency unwisely and making bad decisions, a strategy that ultimately leads to three distinct problems: first, through the way people are held responsible their very ability to exercise their agency might suffer; second, luck-egalitarians ignore the ideal of recognition and allow selfish behaviour which treats people as means, a policy that ultimately is bound to produce massive social inequalities; third, the luck-egalitarian distinction between lucky and unlucky members of society will create a culture of class-resentment and alienation.

The first problem is that most luck-egalitarians are very unforgiving when it comes to bad decisions a person knowingly makes, which means that luck egalitarians are willing to let this person suffer the full negative consequences of her actions (Rakowski 1991). Thus, if a person decides to invest a significant sum in a risky endeavour and the endeavour fails, meaning that the person ends up losing all her money, luck-egalitarians see

¹⁶This is not the only possible definition of luck-egalitarianism. Lippert-Rasmussen for instance seems to hold that any theory which cares on some level about responsibility is luck-egalitarian. I think such a definition of luck-egalitarianism is too wide.

¹⁷Luck-egalitarianism thus argues for a distinct form of equality of opportunity, though it is important that this form of equality of opportunity differs significantly from the one advocated by Rawls (1999b, §12 and §14) as part of his second principle of justice. There exist big differences between narrow and wide conceptions of equality of opportunity, both in terms of the opportunities provided and the scope and site of these opportunities (Cohen 1989; Chambers 2009; Phillips 2006; Mason 2001; Wallimann-Helmer 2013).

little (and often even no) reason to assist this person. Hence, our unlucky agent might have to live on the street, which obviously would severely limit her possibilities to participate in social life and pursue her conception of the good. The problem is simply this: many luck-egalitarians have a very moralistic outlook, holding people responsible for their bad decisions, no matter how harsh the consequences (Anderson 1999).¹⁸ It goes without saying that in some cases the consequences of our actions might be so horrendous that our very ability to exercise our agency is threatened as in the case of an uninsured hiker who falls and severely injures herself.

The second problem with luck-egalitarianism is that it implicitly advocates a dog-eat-dog view of society, as at the end of the day the way we fare in society and life is an exact mirror of how good we are as free and responsible agents. As luck-egalitarians allow people to enjoy the benefits from wise decisions just like they let people suffer the consequences of their bad decisions it is quite clear how a society of initial equal opportunity quickly turns into a society of 'haves' and 'have-nots'. As on the luck-egalitarian view these outcomes are 'morally deserved', though, there is nothing society can do to limit these inequalities (Rakowski 1991). In fact, the particular view of the free and responsible agent luck-egalitarianism presents invites us to treat other members of society as means to our success as freedom, autonomy and our fitness to be held responsible are not seen as intersubjectively constituted, socially dependent normative states.

The third problem is actually prior to the other two as it is implicitly connected to the very question of how we can know when somebody is morally responsible and when not. To give you an example: luck-egalitarians want to compensate the less-talented members of society for their lack of talent, a plan which initially merits some interest. However, it soon becomes clear that it is extremely difficult to determine who is talented, and who is not. To do so would probably require a whole set of standardised tests, which we probably would have to run several times, making sure that nobody pretended to be 'dumb'.

Moreover, once we have established who is talented, and who is not, we have another problem because as Jonathan Wolff (1998) observes such a policy might undermine people's self-respect, as they have to admit to themselves to be less talented (and thus worth less) than other members

¹⁸This is the so-called harshness objection to luck-egalitarianism. While one should not make the mistake of overstating the harshness objection, since some bad decisions can be traced back to bad brute luck, there is indeed good reason to believe that luck egalitarians struggle with keeping a lid on social inequalities due to their harsh policy of holding people responsible. For a less critical view of the harshness-objection, see Voigt (2007).

of society. In fact, if we take luck-egalitarian thinking seriously we have to distinguish between the handsome and the 'ugly', the sexy and the unwanted, and create a whole culture of social labeling (Van Parijs 1995). Living in such a culture would most definitely create antagonistic class structures with those being labeled as less attractive, not very talented and bad looking feeling alienated and misrecognised.

Overall, many luck-egalitarians seem to take an extremely harsh stance on responsibility, creating the picture that some just naturally have it all and others do not, and that people making good decisions and being successful should reap the full rewards while those which take unreasonable and bad decisions are left to pick up the tab. Hence, luck-egalitarians actually construe responsibility contrary to how our view of free agency understands it.

Within our account of rational agency and freedom as recognition and non-domination, responsibility is extremely important, as being free means both to be able to take responsibility and to be held responsible. That is to say that it is only the free and autonomous agent, the free and autonomous person, that can be held responsible. Responsibility, both in the sense of taking responsibility and in the sense of being taken to be responsible, is a mark of distinction, namely, the mark of distinction of the free and autonomous agent.

However, being a free and autonomous agent is difficult, as one has to take responsibility for one's reasons, one has to stand behind them. Moreover, as Pettit (2001a, p. 96) points out even as a free and autonomous agent I might still fail in being reasonable, be it due to understanding reasons incorrectly, or exhibiting a form of weakness of will. Thus, instead of harshly punishing people for their bad choices a theory of responsibility should try to strengthen and maintain people's ability to make free and autonomous choices. This is especially so as the practice of reason-giving and reason-taking as well as the practice of acting in a free and autonomous manner are capacities which need to be trained, exercised and repeated as they will develop over time.

In other words, we should sustain and encourage every person's freedom and autonomy so that they can exercise them, which entails that we hold people responsible by critically assessing their reasoning and their actions. Thus, we can praise and blame people for their behaviour and actions, we can question their judgment and force them to re-evaluate reasons and arguments, but we should not aim for a moralistic practice of "punishment or riches". Instead we should encourage people to be free and autonomous agents and 'responsibilize' them.

The underlying reason for this approach to responsibility is that our Hegelian reading of agency acknowledges the vulnerability and fragility of rationality and free and autonomous agency. This is precisely the reason why we have to sustain people's freedom and autonomy so that they can act as rational agents and foster their rationality. There exist many threats to our agency and rationality and it would be utterly counterproductive to install a draconian regime of responsibility which hampers our capacity for free and autonomous rational agency instead of promoting it.

So instead of engaging in a practice of social labelling, trying to separate the 'dumb' and the 'ugly' from the 'intelligent' and 'beautiful', republicans should try to define and analyse the various threats to agency and see what they can do to protect themselves against them.

2.4 Threats to Agency

As I mentioned at the end of the last section, being a free and autonomous person is not always easy as exercising one's rational agency is a demanding task which in itself does not guarantee that one will be happy or successful.

Being a free and autonomous person after all 'only' allows me to exercise certain unique capacities and my being a free person 'only' guarantees that I am a recognised reason-giver within a community of free and equals. Put differently, I enjoy a certain form of discursive control or discursive power, and I am able to devise and pursue a conception of the good; however, this fact alone, on its own, does not mean that I achieve my goals or that I actually exercise my rational agency always perfectly. What I make of my agency and where it leads me is a matter justice cannot predetermine.

However, when I talk about threats to agency I do not refer to the unpredictable perils of being a free agent but I refer to different forms of social relations and relations-to-self which can harm a person's ability to exercise her agency. In this section, then, I want to single out three distinct kinds of threats against which a person's freedom and autonomy need to be protected. The three threats are alienation, domination and ossification, all of which partially overlap with each other.

The first threat to agency is alienation. The idea of alienation is commonly taken to be quintessentially a Marxist category, one which is used by student protestors and socialist party leaders to denounce the workings of a capitalist economic system in which a select few realize themselves in their work, while the masses prostitute themselves on the wage labour market.

While the Marxist analysis is useful for describing the effects that modern and industrial working conditions can have on the worker's relationship to her own activity and to the product of her labour (Marx 2007, pp. 85–95; Blauner 1964), the meaning of alienation my account is most interested in is the idea of not being able to identify with one's reasons and actions as one's own. That is to say, alienation expresses itself as a feeling that one's reasons and actions are not accepted and do not matter, so that instead of acting freely one is simply re-acting.

The phenomenon of alienation as an experience of estrangement from one-self, powerlessness, lack of self-confidence and purposelessness is tightly connected to an agent's autonomy. As Rahel Jaeggi (2005) astutely observes, under conditions of alienation a person is unable to identify with her actions as her own, and she feels like the reasons she gives for performing certain actions are irrelevant, or undervalued. Both, however, to identify with one's actions as one's own and to see oneself as a legitimate reason-giver in the social space are essential conditions for autonomy, as we saw in the first chapter when we discussed autonomy as responsible endorsement. Alienation is thus an autonomy threatening problem as it keeps an agent from standing by her reasons for actions and her actions.

Moreover, as Jaeggi (2005, pp. 53–61) also points out, alienation imposes a feeling of powerlessness and purposelessness which makes autonomous agency in the Hegelian sense impossible as a person is kept from seeing and realizing her own capacity for freedom. Jaeggi offers two interesting phenomena of alienation: in some cases a feeling of dis-relatedness, that is the feeling of not standing as an equal – or at least an appropriate other – in relation to others; in other cases alienation can manifest itself in failed attempts to appropriate one's own reasons, meaning that one lives one's own life as a foreign life (Jaeggi 2005, pp. 63–65).

In fact, alienation often goes hand in hand with invisible power structures which work essentially as forms of agency-curtailling threats of potential domination. However, potential domination and perceived powerlessness, that is, alienation, can only be overcome through inclusive decision-making mechanism and institutions which are open to and encouraging of an agent's participation. Jaeggi therefore calls for social relationships in which one engages with the other, relationships which allow one's participation in the practices and institutions of society. Thus, an agent's capacity for autonomous agency needs to be protected from the potential danger of self-alienation, a state in which the agent no longer identifies with her actions, in which she feels powerless and irrelevant. This idea of necessary protection can be expressed in the idea of *autonomy as non-alienation*, which is the socio-political ideal of autonomy as responsible endorsement.

Autonomy as responsible endorsement and autonomy as non-alienation mirror the relationship between freedom as recognition and freedom as non-domination.

As a socio-political ideal geared towards protecting every person's free and autonomous agency autonomy as non-alienation requires that agents should have a certain form of political say, or *Mitbestimmung*. This implies that agents stand in relationships which do not marginalise, or structurally exclude them, and that they experience recognition not just in the form of necessary respect, but as genuine appreciation, or *Wertschätzung*.¹⁹ Moreover, non-alienation prohibits social structures which through 'routinization', certain forms of division of labour and social hierarchies lead to instances of self-subordination (Thompson 2013). Non-alienation demands that each member of society stands in proper relation to self and to others.

The second threat to agency is domination. Domination, as discussed earlier, refers to a state of affairs in which an agent, or a group of agents, can arbitrarily interfere with another subject. As I mentioned in Sect. 2.1, domination is a social phenomenon that can exist in a range of relationships, be it due to social inequality, exploitative working conditions, political power, psychological dependency, or institutionally-mediated economic hierarchies. All of these forms of domination threaten an agent's agency and the freedom she enjoys as freedom as recognition. Thus, as we earlier saw we have to safeguard the conditions for rational agency by implementing the republican idea of freedom as non-domination.

For republicans, non-domination is 'the condition under which you live in the presence of other people but at mercy of none' (Pettit 1997, p. 80) and as Pettit rightly points out, the ideal of non-domination is a useful yardstick for our social, political and economic institutions. If we use non-domination as a political ideal, though, – as Cécile Laborde (2008, p. 102 and p. 153) points out – we have to be careful to use it as an agency-enhancing idea that cares about our status as free and autonomous beings in relations to others (i.e. to avoid the danger of *dominium*) and to the institutions of

¹⁹The German term *Wertschätzung* also translates as esteem, a term well known from Honneth's work. Esteem, however, has been used in the literature to describe a slightly different form of recognition referring rather to a currency of praise and blame, something well expressed and discussed in Brennan and Pettit (2004). With respect to autonomy as non-alienation I think that the difference between *wertschätzen* (to appreciate) and *respektieren* (to respect) which Jaeggi also alludes to is much better suited to grasp the matter of the issue.

society (i.e. to avoid the danger of *imperium*), and not as an ideal that takes on an overly strong liberal perfectionism.²⁰

If it is sensibly, that is critically, conceptualised (Laborde 2008, Chap. 7) non-domination is autonomy-enhancing without subscribing to a form of autonomy-fetishist paternalism. That is to say that non-domination as it is understood here is first and foremost a condition for a person to sustain and exercise her free and autonomous agency within the shared space of the social. A critical view of non-domination, however, still allows for living freely according to one's own conception of the good, so that a person would be able to subscribe to a certain religious view and practice this belief publicly (for instance by wearing a head scarf), even if it curtails her immediate freedom of choice. As long as there is an exit option for her to leave the religious association freely, the condition of non-domination seems to be met. Non-domination does not prescribe that all potentially freedom-limiting cultural practices are banned from the shared social space, in order to advance a supposedly perfectly neutral form of liberalism.²¹ Moreover, non-domination properly construed is also aware of the fact that not all hierarchies are always bad as especially in our highly specialised economy certain forms of expert-knowledge and expertise are unavoidable.²²

Non-domination is about giving and protecting people's voice in society, their ability to freely give reasons and participate in discursive practices as a recognized free and equal member of the community. Non-domination thus challenges the existence of major social inequalities with their harmful effects on people's life-chances (Schuppert forthcoming), as well as the current mode of production with its endless chains of dependency and exploitation, especially with respect to global production and trade patterns. Non-domination is a call for more social and global justice precisely because many existing social and economic structures and relationships are rife with domination. Moreover, non-domination is tightly connected to the idea of democracy, or at least some form of being able to make oneself politically heard, which means advocates of non-domination champion a person's right

²⁰The distinction between *dominium* (i.e. the arbitrary interference by private actors in civil society) and *imperium* (i.e. the arbitrary interference by institutions and agents of the state) was put forth by Pettit (1997, Chap. 5).

²¹For an excellent discussion of issues related to this point, see Laborde (2008), especially Chaps. 4, 7, and 10 and Laborde (2006). In this way the connection between non-domination, freedom and autonomy, as they are understood here, leads precisely not to those strong liberal perfectionist claims (in the name of autonomy and the morality of freedom) as Joseph Raz (1986, Chaps. 14 and 15) presents them at the end of his book.

²²For an in-depth discussion, see for instance Lovett's (2010, Chap. 3) critique of the imbalance of power conception of domination.

to communicative freedom (Bohman 1997), or discursive control. In many ways, then, non-domination seems to go hand in hand with Rawls's (1999e, p. 580 FN 22) account of public reason which calls for free public discussion beyond 'the curse of money', which is a direct criticism of the dominating effects of the growing economization of politics.

Non-domination thus has to be sensitive to the corrupting effects of monetary influence on decision-making procedures and current lobbying practices as they are potential sources of both domination and alienation. Especially with respect to potential instances of domination in party politics it becomes clear that non-domination calls for democratic institutions which institute a robust culture of public justification, as specified by the idea of public reason. However, as I will return to this issue in Chap. 5, let me move on to the last threat to agency and briefly outline the dangers of ossification.

Ossification is the third threat to agency. While alienation ultimately manifests itself in distorted relations-to-self, for instance because an agent experiences a feeling of purposelessness as she struggles to find a recognised role within the work-life driven culture of consumer capitalism, and domination chiefly presents itself in the existence of agent-agent and agent-institution relationships, as in the case of the unemployed person whose freedom is constantly curtailed by a bureaucratic machinery, ossification is a threat which is hard to put its finger on. Ossification is often the underlying reason when it seems extremely difficult in a situation to discern who dominates, or alienates, whom, and how a certain agency-threatening structure is kept in place. Ossification thus mainly refers to a lack of fluidity and exchange, which ultimately leads to formerly open, discursive and participatory relationships becoming ossified, hegemonic and exclusionary structures. Routinization also is often a form of ossification (Thompson 2013).

Ossification captures those instances in which theoretically effective media and institutions of public life have become hollow bodies of hegemonic discursive practices, or fragmented meeting places without proper dialogical exchange. In many of these instances domination and alienation centred approaches fail to grasp the complex interrelatedness of lacking participation, reason-unresponsive communication and pseudo-recognitive relationships. One such example is Lovett (2010, p. 25) who claims that structures cannot dominate people, 'as if there can be subjects of domination without there also being agents'. While Lovett is right in maintaining that all structures and institutions are ultimately held up by some (group of) agent(s), his analysis neglects the cumulative effects of habitual practices. Not all harmful structures are actively upheld and many theoretically useful public forums simply fall into a status of oblivion.

Ossification highlights the fact that the protection of free and autonomous agency through a society's institutions, practices and norms is a process, no perfectly institutionalised settled system without re-evaluation, (ex)change and innovation. However, ossification, other than domination and alienation, cannot be grasped in a principle which demands protection from the negative and harmful influences of others. In fact, ossification stresses the importance of every person's responsibility to actively engage in society's discursive practices and to exercise her rational agency freely and autonomously. Being a free rational agent does not only mean that one takes responsibility for one's reasons and actions but is also means that one contributes to the sustainment of one's free and democratic public culture.

Taking all three kinds of threats to agency together it seems quite clear that these threats can manifest themselves at many different levels which means that people's freedom and autonomy is under threat in a range of places and relationships such as alienating working conditions, global trade patterns, sexist family structures, normalizing popular culture, ossified representative politics, synchronised and commercialised media enterprises, and large social inequalities in wealth and income. In all of these instances the conditions for the free and autonomous exercise of our rational agency are in danger of being fully subverted.

Therefore, the conditions for the exercise of our rational agency, namely freedom as recognition and autonomy as responsible endorsement, need to be safeguarded by principles of non-domination and non-alienation on the intersubjective, socio-economic and (international) institutional level. It is in working towards achieving this task that the egalitarian elements of our account of freedom and social justice become clearest.

2.5 Freedom, Fairness and Equality

As I mentioned earlier, the majority of existing normative theories of social and global justice are in one way or another egalitarian. Thus far, I have said relatively little about equality and the egalitarian credentials of Hegelian and republican theory. So the question is, what kind of role does equality play in this theory, and if it plays a role does it mean I am an egalitarian?

As discussed in Chap. 1, free and autonomous rational agency is only possible in a community of free and equally recognized reason-givers. Being a free rational agent who can participate in discourse, give and respond to reasons, and take responsibility for her judgments depends on being properly recognized by others and vice versa. This idea we expressed in

the concept of freedom as recognition, or as Hegel (1970b, §24A) puts it: ‘freedom is this: to be with oneself in the other’. The underlying idea is that proper reciprocal recognition only exists within equal social relations, as forcefully expressed and argued in Hegel’s (1970c, §178–196) master–slave dialectic. Enjoying equal social relations appears to be a key requirement for freedom as recognition.

When at the beginning of this chapter we examined how the normative idea of freedom as recognition could be translated into a socio-political concept, we discovered that being a socially free person, who is fit to be held responsible and enjoys discursive control, also requires standing in equal social relations. As Pettit (2001a, p. 78) observes our discursive control is threatened if we lack social and relational power, that is, if we suffer from domination and alien control.

Both the normative and the political dimension of my account of free rational agency then suggest that equality is of central instrumental importance for us. That is to say we do not have to value equality intrinsically as a value which is good in itself and should be always promoted, but that we value equality for the role it plays in achieving and securing the exercise of our capacity for free and autonomous rational agency.²³

The fact that my theory is primarily concerned with achieving, exercising and securing our rational agency means that my account of social and global justice, and hence also my account of equality, is particularly sensitive with respect to the vulnerability of agency, as seen in the discussion of non-domination, responsibility and non-alienation. It therefore seems clear that the ideal of equality my republican account of freedom as non-domination and autonomy as non-alienation champions, must go beyond mere formal equality and initial equal starting gate positions like the luck-egalitarian theories discussed earlier.

Formal equality builds on the idea that all human beings, because they are of equal moral worth, deserve equal respect and concern. Thus, formal equality suggests that all members of society should enjoy an equal set of basic rights. Formal equality therefore presents a form of status equality, that is, its principal aim is to guarantee each and every person the equal status of being a rights-bearing citizen.

However, formal equality is often criticised for advocating a toothless pseudo-equality (Schwartzman 1999), as for instance in the case of a country in which all citizens have equal political rights, but due to

²³The question of whether equality is a value which matters intrinsically, or only instrumentally is the subject of heated debates within egalitarianism, as Parfit (1997), Lippert-Rasmussen (2007), Persson (2007) and O’Neill (2008) explain.

widespread corruption, material inequalities and oppressive power relations a small economic elite rules the country and controls its judicial institutions. Hence, egalitarians today advocate substantive forms of equality, on top of mere formal equality (Holtug and Lippert Rasmussen 2007). Substantive conceptions of equality mostly come in some form of distributive equality, arguing that equal status, which most often is construed in the form of legally secured social, political and economic rights, requires at the same time the (almost) equal distribution of (some fundamental) material and non-material resources.

As we have seen in our discussion of threats to agency, postulating a state of formal equality, namely that all persons have a right to participate as free and equal members in the discursive practices of society, can only be the first step towards achieving and sustaining a community of free and equal reason-givers, as material and non-material inequalities threaten to lead to instances of alienation and domination. Thus, in order to achieve a state of affairs, in which the exercise of every person's free and autonomous agency is safeguarded, we seem to require substantial equality, that is a combination of formal and distributive equality.

However, for the same reason, to wit, for safeguarding every person's free and equal membership in society, the distribution of material goods, such as medicine, income and food, most definitely needs to be *deviating from strict equality*, in order to make sure that each and every person enjoys the same worth of liberties (Daniels 1989). Strict distributive equality would disadvantage those people, who need special medication, expensive treatment, or additional food in order to become fully free and equal members of the community (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007). That is to say that strict material equality would, for instance, treat a disabled person who might need special assistance (which requires a higher amount of material resources) to be able to do the same things as a healthy person, in exactly the same way as the healthy person, which thereby would significantly disadvantage the disabled person, even though the disabled person cannot be held morally responsible for her disability (Cohen 1989).

What this means is that republicans like me who value non-domination because of its agency-protecting effects, do not actually care about distributive equality. Instead a freedom-based theory like my own should first and foremost care about *social equality*, that is, a combination of status equality, material distribution, social institutions and societal practices according to an equality-informed principle.

Social equality aims to provide every person with the (material and non-material) goods necessary to be a free and equal member of society through

providing a network of free and equal social relations.²⁴ The ideal of social equality simply stresses that all social relationships must be arranged in such a way that the distribution of property, resources and power does not curtail any person's standing as a free and equal rational agent. Social equality thus includes the idea of non-domination, as pointed out by O'Neill (2008).

Needless to say, the conditions for the exercise of our free agency must also be safeguarded in all political decision-making procedures, which means that the idea of social equality as equal social relations goes hand in hand with ideas of democratic fairness and impartiality.

Impartiality is commonly seen to be a centrepiece of any contemporary theory of justice, as it expresses the simple, but powerful and important, idea that all interests and opinions should be judged as objectively as possible without unduly advantaging any position from the get go.²⁵ Impartiality does not require of us to treat all cases alike; what impartiality does prescribe is that we treat like cases alike, and different cases equally different. In short, impartiality calls for the unprejudiced and unbiased assessment of reasons, interests, preferences, and arguments, which in a certain way seems to make it indispensable for any form of rational reasoning, both theoretical and practical (Putnam 1981).

Democratic fairness, meanwhile, refers to a procedural property, or rather quality, which decision-making processes should have. The basic idea of fairness in decision-making processes, however, refers (within most existing theories of justice) not just to the idea of a simple coin flip (which is fair as all outcomes share the same probability), but it rather expresses the ideal of free and equal decision-making. While a coin flip is fair as nobody's interests are disadvantaged by the procedural mechanism chosen, the coin flip fails to incorporate the idea of giving every affected person a say in the decision making process, an ideal closely connected to Pettit's concept of discursive control.²⁶

However, the idea of being freely and equally able to participate in, or at least influence on a lower level, the decision-making processes can be itself

²⁴The idea of social equality as a separate ideal of equality has only recently gained traction within normative political theory. Thus far, however, the term social equality is used by different theorists in different ways, which leads to a fair amount of confusion. For a collection of the most important positions on social equality and its merits, see Fourie et al. (forthcoming).

²⁵See also Barry's (1995) excellent discussion.

²⁶The intuitively appealing idea of enfranchising all affected interests is a rather problematic one (Goodin 2007), a point I will leave aside for the time being, as I will return to it in Chaps. 5 and 6.

interpreted in a range of ways. Some theorists claim, for instance, that it matters less who actually makes a decision (e.g. a king, the government, an adjudicator) than that all interests were treated equally, all relevant arguments were heard and the decision was based on reasonable grounds, which means that it theoretically could be agreed-on by all affected parties (Christiano 1997; Habermas 1996, Chap. 7 and pp. 463–490). Champions of direct democracy and inclusive forms of deliberative democracy, however, would claim that direct participation in the decision-making process is a core condition for the legitimacy of socially binding decisions (Cronin 1999; Estlund 1997).

With respect to the concept of equal social relations and the ideal of free and equal persons, it seems rather straight forward that we must subscribe to democratic fairness as the idea of giving each and every person the possibility to participate in, and influence (up to a degree), the decision-making process, and to guarantee all, for the decision relevant, interests equal consideration and weight. Whether this conceptualization of democratic fairness necessarily requires directly democratic decision-making structures, though, is a different question, and one I will discuss in Chap. 5. Judging from the arguments advanced thus far, however, it seems reasonable to assume that a representative democratic system, which satisfies the conditions of democratic fairness and social equality, and which guarantees every person in political debate her free and autonomous agency as discursive control, might be just as good as (if not better than) direct democracy.²⁷

In general there seem to be two key-aspects which political decision-making processes have to be sensitive to if they are supposed to sustain and support the conditions for free and autonomous rational agency: first, decisions need to track the interests of all parties involved equally and impartially; second, within a given decision-making procedures each person must – at least theoretically, that is by means of virtual discursive control – have the ability to get her voice heard, be it in the initial stages of deliberation, or in some other editorial, or contestatory form, as set out in Pettit's account of a republican democracy.²⁸

²⁷I will return in Chap. 5 to the issue of democratic decision-making. In Chap. 5, I will also argue for institutions which offer a range of different channels for members of the community to become politically active and voice their concerns and interests.

²⁸I will come back to editorial and contestatory forms of discursive control in political decision-making procedures in Chap. 5.

2.6 Conclusion

I started this chapter by analysing the connection between our normative account of rational agency, defined as freedom as recognition and autonomy as responsible endorsement, and contemporary republican theories of freedom. I highlighted the fact that recognition is actually an undervalued key-component of Pettit's theory of freedom as discursive control, which allowed us to trace the intricate relationship between freedom, recognition, responsibility and non-domination.

The next step of the investigation was to clarify what it means to hold people responsible and how doing so must be done carefully so as to sustain and support people's free and autonomous rational agency. This led to a brief account of three prominent threats to agency, namely, alienation, domination and ossification.

In the final part of the chapter, then, I stressed the fact that our rational agency is best protected within a society which promotes equal social relations and tracks people's interest fairly and equally in its decision-making processes. However, in order to make clear what that actually entails, I will have to give a more detailed account of the kinds of interests which morally matter and which a political system should track. Moreover, I still have to put forth an account of rights which clearly states which basic goods and benefits we are entitled to and which duties to others we have. Thus, the following chapter will do exactly that, namely, present a theory of interests and use it to ground a set of social, political and economic rights.

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