

# **G. DWORKIN ON THE NATURE AND VALUE OF AUTONOMY**

Bioethics: Autonomy and Health (Fall 2012)

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# DEVELOPING A THEORY OF AUTONOMY

- Many *conceptions* of the *concept*
- Theory: “a study of how the term is connected with other notions, what role it plays in justifying various normative claims, how the notion is supposed to ground ascriptions of value, and so on” (7)
- Need **conditions of adequacy** to evaluate proposed theories

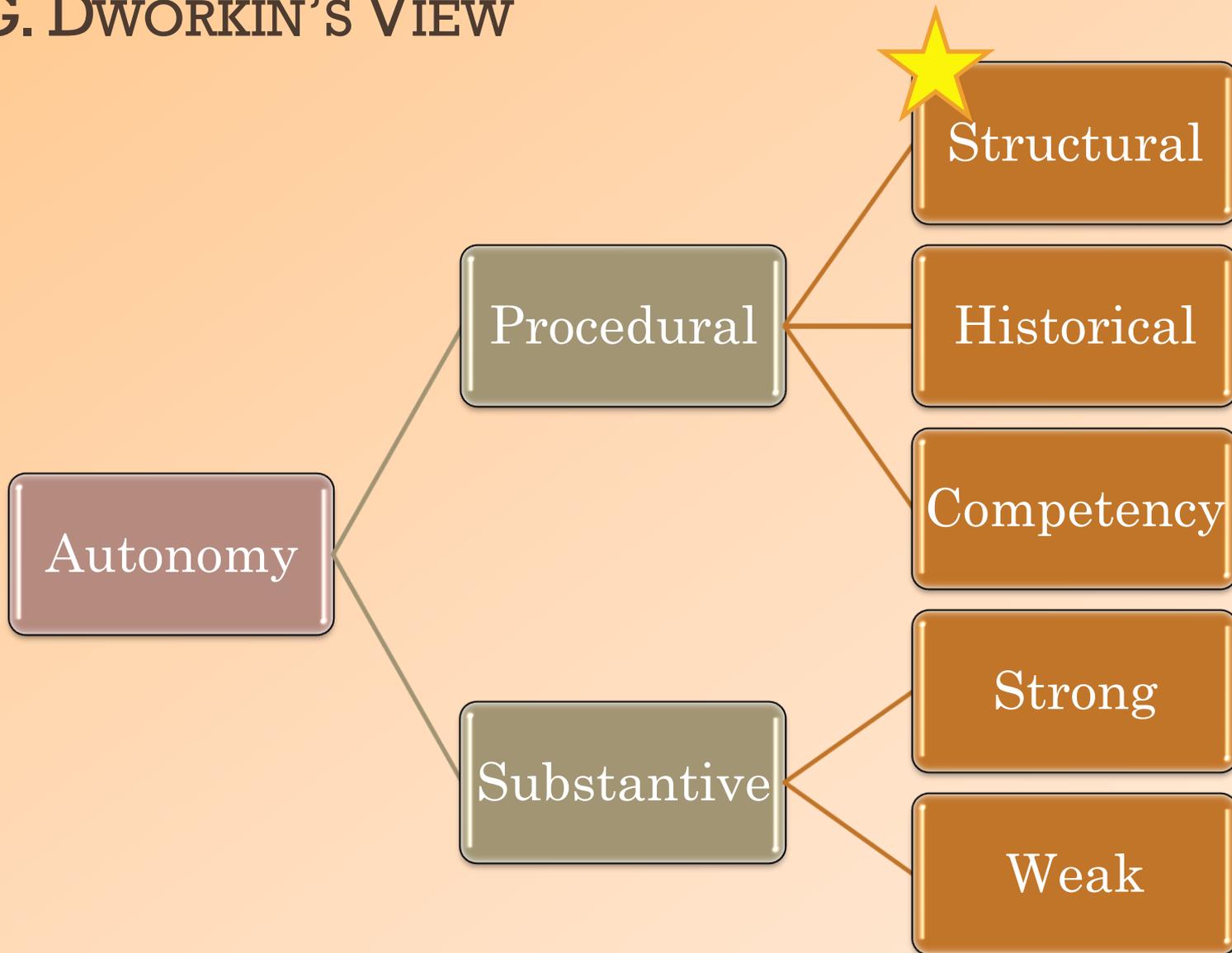


# CONDITIONS OF ADEQUACY

- Logical consistency
  - Internally and in relation to other consistent concepts
- Empirical possibility
  - (at least initially...)
- Value conditions
  - As a fundamental good
  - Logical compatibility with other important values
- Normative relevance
  - Can explain and make sense of philosophical uses
- Judgmental relevance
  - In accord with crucial judgments we make about it



# G. DWORKIN'S VIEW



## G. DWORKIN'S HIERARCHICAL VIEW

- Autonomy: “capacity to raise the question of whether I will identify with or reject the reasons for which I now act” (15)
- Should be able to reflect critically (second-order) on motivations/desires/values/beliefs (first-order)
- Also should have some ability to change preferences based on critical reflection
- Second-order reflection + procedural independence
  - **PI**: choices of who one wants to be are not unduly coerced or influenced; choices remain authentic



## G. DWORKIN'S HIERARCHICAL VIEW

- Avoid intellectualism, elitism, unjustified exclusion
- “shown not by what he says about his thoughts, but in what he tries to change in his life, what he criticizes about others, the satisfaction he manifests (or fails to) in his work, family, and community” (17)





## REJECTION OF SUBSTANTIVE INDEPENDENCE

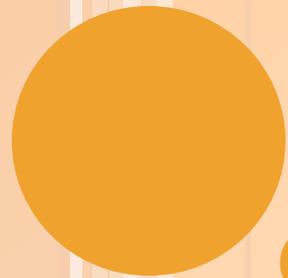
- **SI:** cannot ever defer independent judgments or let others make decisions for you
- Trust and occasional dependence on others for decision-making necessary for loyalty, friendship, commitment, worship, obedience
  - Promises and commitments can be authentic
- “Someone who cares for others must recognize that he is less free than those who are callous” (23)
  - But unrestricted freedom is not desirable or morally praiseworthy



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What might be problematic about a hierarchical view of autonomy?
- Mill champions substantive independence. Has Dworkin convinced you that SI should be rejected?
- Dworkin argues that autonomy is a **fundamental** and **important** value, but not supreme. Do you agree?





**QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?**

