

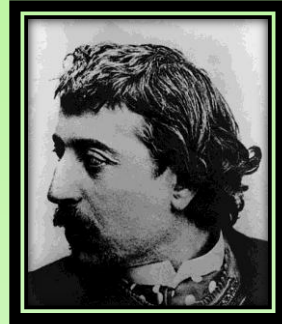
Bioethics: Autonomy and Health (Fall 2012)

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RELATIONAL AUTONOMY

CONCERNS ABOUT THE HISTORY OF AUTONOMY IN PHILOSOPHY

- Often based on paradigm of privileged men
 - Socialized to prefer separateness
 - More opportunities to remove themselves from (some) relationships at will
 - Minimal restraints and repercussions for bucking norms
- Autonomous capacities might, as a result of oppression against (e.g.) women, show up less often in women
 - Reinforces notion that ideal autonomous agent will have masculine traits



ROLE OF EMOTION

- Historically believed men are ruled by reason, whereas women are ruled by emotion
 - Reason as the better, “more human” faculty
- But making a rational decision need not preclude emotional assessments
 - Ignoring emotion can even be *irrational* (e.g., marriage proposal)
- Reason can be informed by emotions and *vice versa*
 - Not isolated faculties



FRIEDMAN'S PROCEDURAL ACCOUNT

- Must appropriately reflect on choices without autonomy-undermining interferences
 - Reflective self-understanding + internal coherence
- “socialization does not as such impede autonomy, whereas [undue?] coercion as such does so” (37)
 - Socialization is crucial for development of mature autonomy competency
- Need to value relationships and communities as necessary for our agential development
- ...What if I'm socialized to be servile, self-sacrificing, and repressed? Line between socialization and coercion?

AUTONOMY AND RELATIONSHIPS: IN CONFLICT?

- Concern: If we should value relationships, and if autonomy necessarily undermines relationships, then autonomy should not be valued.
- When parties to a relationship critically reflect on that relationship, they will consider viable alternatives and lose the stability of their relationship
 - Not all relationships should be saved
- But critical reflection can also strengthen a relationship
- Autonomy neither necessary nor sufficient for disrupting a relationship



THE NEED TO BE VULNERABLE

- “Being open, receptive, flexible, and tender, being emotionally invested in relationships or committed to undertakings” (Carse 35)
 - Risk loss, failure, heartache, security, confidence
- Vulnerability necessary for flourishing
 - Otherwise would not have close affiliative bonds
- Morally obligated to be vulnerable and to embrace interdependency
 - Cannot be fully committed to projects or to others without taking risks

MYTH OF THE "IN-CONTROL" AGENT

- “self-sufficiency, independence, a capacity for deliberation and rational transcendence of emotion” (Carse 36)
- Useful for critiquing unjust paternalistic interventions
- But it “is morally costly, for there is much about the human condition that it obscures, ignores, distorts, and effectively denigrates in virtue of its silence about our vulnerabilities” (36)



OPPRESSION AND AGENCY

- Trauma & oppression → loss of control, overwhelming emotions, indecision, lost sense of self, felt powerlessness, inability to communicate
- Can be overcome through empathy, compassion, and supportive communication
- Renewed “control” through empowerment and “exercising capacities for mutuality through which we can emerge out of isolation” (Carse 45)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When does oppression threaten autonomy?
 - Can agency ever become completely frozen or immobilized?
- Given our vulnerability and interdependence, what moral obligations do we have in supporting each other's autonomous agency?

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?
