

## Mary Wollstonecraft and Relational Autonomy

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Although best known as an early and pioneering feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft has more recently become recognised as a wide-ranging moral and political philosopher (Bergès and Coffee 2016, Bergès, Botting and Coffee 2019). One ideal that is of central importance within her philosophical framework is that of social and personal freedom understood as independence from arbitrary control. Although I generally prefer to speak of ‘freedom’ or ‘independence’ with respect to Wollstonecraft, these being her own terms, the concept that she uses can be understood in terms of a form of autonomy. In particular, it can be argued that Wollstonecraft develops an idea that anticipates and foreshadows the contemporary notion of relational autonomy (Mackenzie 2016, Coffee 2018).

The ideal of freedom as independence is historically associated with the republican political tradition. It is better known today as freedom as non-domination, following Philip Pettit (1997). However, while Wollstonecraft’s use is recognisably republican in Pettit’s sense, since my focus is on the particularities of Wollstonecraft’s concept, I shall distinguish Wollstonecraft’s ‘independence’ from Pettit’s ‘non-domination’. The ideal of independence is separable from the republican tradition, and it is not necessary to endorse any wider set of political ideals in order to appreciate Wollstonecraft’s position on freedom and autonomy.<sup>1</sup> All that is needed is a willingness to see freedom not as a standalone ideal but as a cluster bringing together several related values and concepts including independence, social and political equality, the ability and willingness to reflect critically on one’s preferences, and the common interests of the population.

In the first section of this chapter, I shall say a little about Wollstonecraft’s conception of independence in comparison to Kant’s by way of bringing her work into focus with one source of contemporary discussions of autonomy. In the second section, I discuss the relation between the central elements that comprise independence. Finally, in section three, I place Wollstonecraft’s conception in discussion with today’s ideal of relational autonomy.

### I

I have said that I prefer to use Wollstonecraft’s own terms, freedom (or liberty) and independence, rather than autonomy. Nothing much need turn on the terminology, however, so long as the context and Wollstonecraft’s meaning is understood. Freedom, independence and autonomy are terms of art, each typically being associated with a particular literature and often used with overlapping senses. In essence, however, each refers to an ideal of self-government. Indeed, in the republican tradition independence was often used interchangeably with being *sui iuris* which is etymologically equivalent to autonomy, with each indicating the status of, or capacity for, self-legislation or self-direction, drawing on the Latin and Greek respectively for “self” and “law”.

In contemporary republican discourse, freedom as non-domination tends to represent a political ideal in which citizens are protected from unwarranted, or arbitrary, forms of interference. Discussions about autonomy, by contrast, can often refer to a person’s individual capacity to ‘be one’s

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<sup>1</sup> For discussions of the wider implications of reading Wollstonecraft as a republican, see several of the essays in Bergès and Coffee 2016. For some more critical perspectives, see Karen Green 2019 (with a reply by Coffee 2019) and Hirschman and Regier 2018.

own person', living according to one's own, possibly authentic, decisions rather than being controlled or manipulated by external influences. These two emphases are, of course, clearly related. The republican ideal of non-domination or independence often being described as 'living on one's own terms', while those liberals who regard autonomy as a central good often see that as generating the case for a full set of liberal civil and political rights (e.g. Dworkin 1988, and Raz 1986; see also Christman and Anderson 2005). For Wollstonecraft both senses of self-government are integral to her conception of freedom as independence, such that free individuals must be able first to think for themselves and then to act upon those decisions. This was also true for other republicans at the time, including two of her key influences, Catharine Macaulay and Richard Price.

This same twofold structure of free thought and free action is also found in Kant, whose work often serves as a reference point for present-day analyses of autonomy. While Kant has been very influential in the liberal political tradition, his approach also shares several affinities with the republican framework, and with Wollstonecraft's ideal of self-government, as we shall see. I mention this only in order to show some commonalities with the familiar Kantian framework, rather than to make any claims about influence, which would in my view be speculative. Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and Kant (1724-1804) were contemporaries, and Wollstonecraft was certainly familiar with some of Kant's work from her time as a writer for the *Analytical Review*, an intellectual journal published by Joseph Johnson in the 1790s. Indeed, the journal had a link with the Jena-based *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* which frequently discussed Kant's political philosophy (Bergès 2013, 36). Kant's most significant works had not yet been translated into English when Wollstonecraft wrote, and wonders how well equipped she would have been to read the originals (Carlson 2019). Wollstonecraft had made a valiant effort to teach herself German as an adult, and though she confesses to have struggled with this (Wollstonecraft 2003, 159), it should be noted that she was able to produce a translation of Christian Gotthilf Salzmann's *Elements of Morality* (Botting 2013). This much said, in the absence of any direct evidence, in my view, the similarities between aspects of their concepts of freedom and autonomy are more likely to be the result of Wollstonecraft's and Kant's respective reading of shared sources such as Rousseau, as well as of ideas in common currency at the time, such as the basic republican structure of freedom as independence, rather than of influence. Nevertheless, the similarities between Kant and Wollstonecraft are worth noting.

The rationale upon which the state is founded, Kant explains in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, is the fundamental right human beings have to freedom (6:313; 2003, 90). Freedom itself implies two further components, which Kant describes as duties of right and virtue. Duties of right correspond to an external form of freedom and can be legislated for by the state, while duties of virtue relate to internal freedom since they derive from ends which agents must set for themselves (6:239; 31). Together, these two ideals make up an ideal of political and agential freedom. The state is defined with respect to the external form of freedom – that which can be legislated for – as “a union of a multitude of human beings under laws of right” (6:313; 90) where the most basic right is that of freedom. “Freedom (independence from being constrained by another's choice), insofar as it can coexist with the freedom of every other in accordance with a universal law, is the only original right belonging to every man by virtue of his humanity” (6:237; 30, all italics original). Freedom, being grounded in humanity, implies an “innate equality” between the members of the state meaning that each citizen is entitled to be equally free, which Kant outlines in republican terms as “a human being's quality of being his own master (*sui iuris*)”. External right, however, is only one part of freedom. What the law cannot do is to equip or compel people to think for themselves – to set ends for themselves, in Kant's words – since this represents “an internal act of the mind” (6:239; 31). In order to think freely, people must resist the “impulses of nature”, which represent obstacles within the mind, and employ

their capacity for reason (6:380; 145-6). Kant refers to this as virtue (“the part of the general doctrine of duties that brings inner, rather than outer, freedom under laws is a *doctrine of virtue*”).

Wollstonecraft shares the same basic outline of freedom as a twofold concept that entails independence, equality and virtue. One clear difference between them, however, is that, while freedom is a moral concept for both Wollstonecraft and Kant, their respect bases for this diverge. For Kant, human beings are autonomous in the sense that they determine the principles by which they will act. Our wills must not be governed by anything external to us, and so we define the moral law by which we obligate ourselves. Though this law is grounded in the requirements of reason, its content is not fixed by any external standards (which would be heteronomy rather than autonomy). If our actions were not governed by any principles, we would be chaotic. These principles do not impede our freedom because we ourselves set them. On Wollstonecraft’s account, reason is also a liberator. We do not, however, set the moral law for ourselves, but rather reason always leads us to God’s immutable principles, something it is always in our best interests to follow.<sup>2</sup> “To submit to reason,” Wollstonecraft argues, “is to submit to the nature of things, and to that God, who formed them so, to promote our real interest”, adding that for this reason, “it is the right use of reason alone which makes us independent of every thing—excepting the unclouded reason—“whose service is perfect freedom”” (2014, 186, 148).

## II

In spite of its connotations today, independence in Wollstonecraft’s sense is not a celebration of individualism or self-sufficiency. While those values did, perhaps, form part of republican attitudes, including in her own time, they are neither conceptually nor logically entailed by the structure of the philosophical ideal of freedom.<sup>3</sup> Freedom as independence is, rather, a response to the perennial question in political philosophy of how human beings can be individually free given their inevitable and extensive interdependence. Republicans start from the position that freedom invariably concerns two perspectives, as captured by the old image of the ‘free man in the free state’. The two sides are reciprocally connected: the free state requires free citizens to create and maintain it, while free citizens can only develop in a free state. Free persons must be given sufficient individual latitude to create a life that is meaningfully their own in the midst of an abundance of social relations – personal, political and economic; wanted and unwanted – on which we rely and which give our lives their shape and purpose but which also constrain us and intrude in various ways.

Social relations are not only inevitable, they are also theoretically necessary. Republican freedom has a resilient character that means that individuals must be free by right rather than by good fortune. Resilience cannot be had by individuals in a solitary condition apart from society since they would be vulnerable to attack or bad luck. Instead, it takes a collectively-backed power enforced by other people to provide an assurance of one’s standing and rights as a free person. If social relations cannot be altogether avoided, then, they can nevertheless be tamed, or in the republican language that Wollstonecraft uses, their power over us can be made non-arbitrary. Free persons have a social and political standing whereby only certain kinds of influences can exert power over them. They are given certain civil and political rights, opportunities and empowerment, including most significantly a voice in determining the nature of the power over them. In order to be ‘non-arbitrary’, controlling power must reliably conform to and promote what is in the acknowledged common good. The

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<sup>2</sup> Reuter 2018 gives the best discussion of Wollstonecraft and reason that I know of.

<sup>3</sup> I discuss this in some detail in Coffee 2018.

common good, in turn, must be genuinely reflective of the interests and perspectives of all those who are subject to the laws of the nation where the sole job of the law is, precisely, to uphold that shared concern.

In principle, every individual must be included in both the determination of what is held to be in the common good, and in its enforcement. In practice, however, women were historically excluded, having no political standing of their own and being subject to – and therefore dependent upon – the wills of their husbands or fathers. This exclusion was, incidentally, something that Kant explicitly acknowledged for his part: “the only qualification required by a citizen” he stipulated, “(apart, of course, from being an adult male) is that he must be his own master (*sui iuris*), and must have some property (which can include any skill, trade, fine art or science) to support himself” (8:295; 1991, 78). While the exclusion of women was standard in the eighteenth century, Kant’s own omission is particularly jarring since it conflicts with his own meticulous articulation of freedom in abstract, universal terms – freedom is seen as “the only original right belonging to every man by virtue of his humanity” and based on “innate equality” and “a human being’s quality of being his own master” (6:237; 2003, 30) – in the *Metaphysics of Morals* published shortly afterwards.<sup>4</sup> Wollstonecraft, by contrast, was fully aware of the contradiction between justifying freedom in the abstract and yet conferring it only on men, though in her case it was against Rousseau that she took aim. She argues that restricting the status of freedom to men is both theologically flawed (“the nature of reason must be the same in all, if it be an emanation of divinity, the tie that connects the creature with the Creator; for, can that soul be stamped with the heavenly image, that is not perfected by the exercise of its own reason?” 2014, 80) and metaphysically absurd (“not only the virtue, but the knowledge of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree, and that women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, ought to endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the same means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of half being”, 65).

Women, then, should be independent in just the same way and to the same extent as men. They should have the same participation in the political process (“women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government”, 179) and the social and economic freedoms that would prevent them from falling under the power of men (“she must not be dependent on her husband’s bounty for her subsistence”, 175). There is a question as to whether, in what sense, and to what degree, Wollstonecraft believes that women have a specific and special natural duty to be mothers and primary carers for young children and what the implications might be for her view of women’s equal freedom as independence. My own view is that, while those women who choose to become mothers do have associated ‘natural’ duties in Wollstonecraft’s eyes – and these are onerous to be sure – there is a corresponding ‘civil’ duty on the whole of society to ensure that all women remain independent on men (Coffee 2015). Neither the natural nor the civil duty has priority over the other, and neither should we focus primarily on the individual duties of mothers rather than on the collective duties of society. These must all be taken together, and there is an absolute imperative to ensure that women’s independence is not compromised by the fact of motherhood. Wollstonecraft does not spell out what measures would be required but, in contemporary terms, we might think of paid maternity and

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<sup>4</sup> Although Kant denies women citizenship in the *Metaphysics*, he does so on the grounds of their being inherently dependent. Citizenship is denied to any dependent agent, including male domestic servants. Women’s dependence, however, goes more deeply than male servants, who can work towards becoming independent and so enfranchised, since women must inevitably depend on men for their physical protection. For a subtle discussion of Kant’s view of women, independence and moral agency, see Mikkola 2011. Kant’s understanding of women has been much discussed, generally. See also Botting 2016.

paternity leave, child-care support and flexible working arrangements at the minimum and, more comprehensively, a complete rethinking of the social organisation of employment.

Although the reason women's independence cannot be compromised is principled – grounded in innate right and natural equality – it is also pragmatic. The various elements that make up the collective freedom necessary for individuals to be free are held together in a delicate harmony. If any component is missing, this is said to have a corrosive, or corrupting, effect on the other components, thereby undermining the conditions necessary for freedom. If any of these elements are missing in sufficient quantities in society, then this negates the possibility of freedom in society, men's as well as women's. The causal relationship is this: inequality leads to dependence, dependence is incompatible with virtue, and without virtue there can be no freedom.

By equality, strictly, what is entailed is that all citizens are protected to a comparable degree from becoming dependent. At a minimum, then, this would require an equal standing under the law. In practice, however, a high degree of equality is necessary across a number of important spheres in life because of the tendency for inequality in one area to negate the effect of any equality in another. If a wife, for example, has a full and equal set of legal and political rights, but is financially dependent on her husband because there are no economic opportunities available to her, then the value of her legal rights is diminished and she remains unfree. By contrast, a wife who is financially self-sufficient in a society in which she lacks full legal standing in her own name, but is represented by her father or husband, will also find herself dependent rather than free.<sup>5</sup> In general, then, Wollstonecraft's conception of independence requires substantial legal, political, economic and social equality. The rich, she argues, can easily bypass the provisions of law to secure their interests, just as the well educated can dupe the ignorant.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, inequality in social standing can be as damaging to independence as any other sort. Wollstonecraft describes the character of Jemima, born out of wedlock, in *Maria*, as "chained" to slavery both by poverty and "infamy" (2005, 32, 38).

The link between virtue and freedom operates at both an individual and a collective level. Individually, one must be in a position to think for oneself rather than following either the received ideas of their society or their own brute inclinations over their considered reflections. Given both their lack of education, training and incentive, and the weight of inhibiting social norms, women's lack of ability to think for themselves leads them to take ideas on trust and to be influenced by what they read or hear. This, she argues, "makes them all their lives, the slaves of prejudices" (2014, 139). Independence of mind, therefore, is a very demanding condition that requires not only formal education but a supportive social context. For this reason, virtue must also be exhibited collectively. The laws and institutions which govern us must operate on rational principles, supported by a public that is both willing to and capable of restraining themselves to deliberating rationally according to the best arguments in pursuit of what is in the common good.

The incompatibility of dependence and virtue is both conceptual and empirical. Conceptually, dependent people simply are not in a position to act on principle (a point also acknowledged by Kant) but must either placate or deceive their masters (women, "dependent on their husbands they will be cunning", and "govern their tyrants by sinister tricks" [Wollstonecraft 2014, 171, 174]) or simply follow

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<sup>5</sup> Wollstonecraft illustrates a similar scenario in her novel, *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1797). The protagonist is initially financially secure but having no legal rights she must surrender her inheritance and subsequent earnings to her husband. Even if she were able to keep control of her finances, her husband was the legal guardian of her child, and Maria lacked the ability either to leave her husband or to take him to court.

<sup>6</sup> "You must have seen the clogged wheels of corruption continually oiled by the sweat of the laborious poor... you must have discovered that the majority in the House of Commons was often purchased by the crown" (1999, 20).

orders. Empirically, it was widely held in Wollstonecraft's time that virtuous habits had to be inculcated from an early age, and that the unvirtuous habits learned by the subordinate shaped their characters indelibly. It is important to emphasise here that the corruption of virtue was said to operate to the same extent on *both* the dominant as well as the dominated. Masters were corrupted as much as their slaves, noblemen as much as peasants, and husbands every bit as much as wives, a point that Wollstonecraft emphasises throughout her work.<sup>7</sup> This is in part through the necessity to protect their advantage and in part because the dominant become used to hearing flattery and untruths from their dependents. "Virtue", Wollstonecraft concludes, "can only flourish amongst equals" with the one who submits and the one who dominates being "on a par, for both are radically degraded by the habits of their life" (1999, 61).

### III

Although it shares a similar overall framework and reliance on the capacity for reason with its Kantian counterpart, Wollstonecraft's conception of autonomy or self-government emerges as a far more socially-embedded ideal. In particular, Wollstonecraft is highly aware of the potential for a person's capacity to reason independently, and impartially, to be compromised by their social positioning and context. While 'unclouded reason' is necessary for independence and so autonomy, the effect of living in a patriarchal society is that "deeply rooted prejudices have clouded [people's ability to] reason" (2014, 38). Rather than deliberating impartially in a spirit of attempting to discern the truth or common good, "men, in general, seem to employ their reason to justify prejudices, which they have imbibed, they cannot trace how, rather than to root them out" with the result that "truth is lost in a mist of words, virtue, in forms, and knowledge rendered a sounding nothing, by the specious prejudices that assume its name".

The fact of human vulnerability to social and cultural context represents a severe challenge to the idea of autonomy as self-government, particularly for those accounts in which one should be guided by reason and the moral law. People may variously imbibe uncritically beliefs, values and desires from their surroundings, adapt their preferences according to their conditions or the wishes of others in society, be motivated consciously or unconsciously by personal or partisan advantage or by group loyalty, or internalise a sense of psychological inadequacy (or unmerited superiority), any of which could plausibly undermine a person's claim to have acted either authentically or by rational reflection. It is this concern that led to the development of relational theories of autonomy (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000). In general, accounts of relational autonomy take the emphasis away from the individual autonomous agent, placing us in relationship with our social surroundings and influences but without losing sight of our individual agency. Wollstonecraft's ideal of independence has been identified by Catriona Mackenzie as prefiguring several of the themes and insights adopted by contemporary relational autonomy theorists (2016).

Whether the notion of relational autonomy is either viable or desirable is a matter of some controversy (for critical views, see for example, Christman 2004, Khader 2020). Although I cannot rehearse all the arguments here, I shall briefly outline one line of criticism aimed at relational theories of autonomy that Wollstonecraft's conception of relational independence may be better placed to withstand. This is that relational approaches may have the effect of impugning the autonomy, and so denigrating the dignity of those people who find themselves in social circumstances that are not

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<sup>7</sup> See for example, chapter 1 of the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

conducive to, or supportive of, autonomous behaviour. In contrast to procedural conceptions of autonomy that look only at the processes of personal reflection and decision-making undertaken by the agent, relational theories are said to contain a substantive component, either in the kinds of reasons that have guided the agent or in the nature of the social and political environment in which the agent is situated (e.g. Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, Christman 2004). From the preceding discussion, Wollstonecraft falls into this latter category on both grounds. The problem with substantive conceptions, it is argued, is that where the stipulated conditions do not hold, then the agent is said to be non-autonomous. In other words, if you happen to live in a highly inegalitarian and oppressive society in which you are from a subordinate class, then irrespective of the depth and quality of your personal reflection, you will be considered non-autonomous. This, it is argued, is both to insult oppressed citizens by diminishing a marker of agency, and practically harmful. “To say”, of a socially oppressed citizen, argues Christman, “that she is not autonomous implies that she does not enjoy the status marker of an independent citizen whose perspective and value orientation get a hearing in the democratic processes that constitute legitimate social policy” (2004, 157). It also leaves the victims of unjust treatment, Khader adds, open to paternalistic interference, which is again both degrading and potentially harmful since it is the oppressed themselves rather than onlookers who best know what is in their interests (2020, 504).

Although Wollstonecraft’s framework has some clearly substantive components it is a conception of self-government as independence rather than autonomy. One important difference in the way that these two concepts have been developed, is that, whereas autonomy theorists seem to focus on identifying, and then evaluating, individual capacities for *agential* decision-making, independence represents an analysis of the *interagential* context – including background social and institutional – in which agency is exercised. So, if autonomy typically represents an assessment of internal capacity, independence addresses external conditions. The emphasis of the independence framework, then, is on rendering the cultural and institutional structure non-arbitrary rather than in passing judgement on individuals. Moreover, to the extent that the external environment is flawed – meaning that conditions are unequal such that they do not reflect the inclusive common good – then it is not just the agential capacity of the *subordinate* individuals of class that is affected, but that of the *dominant* too.

So, to use an oft-cited example, one should not criticise those women who choose to adopt a traditional domestic lifestyle as a ‘submissive housewife’ as acting non-autonomously. Rather, we should recognise that in an inegalitarian and patriarchal society, the autonomy of both men and women generally (if not universally) has been corrupted. It is not possible to pass particular judgements on individual cases given that each individual will make his or her own choices under non-ideal circumstances. Though some choices may perhaps be better than others, this cannot be determined according to any idealistic behavioural blueprint. This proviso may sit oddly with the republican tradition’s longstanding denigration of dependent people – including especially slaves, the poor, and women, all of whom were specifically ruled out of eligibility for citizenship rights on the grounds that they lacked the requisite capacity for virtue. However, we must be careful to separate the historic cultural attitudes that prevailed in republican society from the strict internal logic of the framework according to which virtue and as the capacity for reason and independent thought is diminished equally in the dominant and the subordinate. One of Wollstonecraft’s contributions to the development of republican theory was to expand its focus from legal, political and institutional forms of oppression, to the social and cultural forms which affected women so badly. In this way, she highlighted the harm done by these historic attitudes (here, we can perhaps point to the tension between Kant’s focus on the abstract capacity for reason in his formulation of universal doctrine of

right, and his blindspot concerning the contingent nature of women's exclusion from the category of independent).

Just as Wollstonecraft's conception gives us no licence to impugn the dignity of the dependent, neither is there any exposure to paternalism. It must be remembered that republican independence is measured against the possibility of arbitrary interference, rather than of any interference at all (as some accounts of autonomy have it). This means that *every* citizen is exposed to a degree of interference from external coercive powers, including from the government, so long as this can be justified according to the agreed and inclusive common interest. Although republican accounts differ as to just how light-touch this notion of non-arbitrary interference should be, there is no getting away from the fact that individuals face a continual possibility of interference based the shared interest in maintaining the freedom of the political community as a whole. This differs conceptually, however, from paternalistic intrusion into the lives of the social marginalised ostensibly 'for their own good' by those who claim know better. We can illustrate this by reverting back to the case of the submissive housewife.

There is certainly a duty on all citizens to maintain their independence insofar as they can. This, however, must be set against other social goods such as freedom of conscience and diversity in lifestyle options. There is, therefore, a broader collective obligation to ensure that individuals can maintain their independence even while pursuing their individual life plans. Traditional housewife roles do not exist in isolation but are part of wider and entrenched social, cultural and religious practices that affect a range of spheres of life. While some of these practices are, perhaps, more valuable and sustainable than others, collectively the only non-arbitrary reason for outside interference by the community is whether these ways of life give rise to destabilising patterns of dependence. If only certain select individual women are affected by the practice, then this could be accommodated by the community providing sufficient supportive resources and exit opportunities (such as education, income support and pensions, retraining schemes and so on). If the way of life of submissive housewives were at any point to become too large, so that it generated an unsustainably dependent population that threatened the freedom of the community as a whole, then intervention by the state would be justified as non-arbitrary. This, however, would not be from the paternalistic perspective of 'knowing better' but would be a pragmatic move made deliberately by the community in the name of preserving the common good.

#### IV

I have presented Wollstonecraft's conception of freedom as independence from arbitrary control as an ideal of self-government that overlaps substantially with that of autonomy. In particular, while not identical to the concept of relational autonomy, it can be said to occupy a similar theoretical space and address many of the same concerns. In this connection, Danielle Wenner has suggested that the neo-republican concept of freedom as non-domination, as outlined by Philip Pettit, represents a preferable alternative to relational autonomy (2020). Wenner builds on the sorts of criticisms raised by Christman and Khader, as well as raising the issue of the conflation of internal agential capacities and external social conditions. In refraining from attempting to adjudicate between autonomous and nonautonomous choices, and focusing solely on ensuring that the institutional background and distribution of social resources robustly serve the common interests, she argues that freedom as non-domination achieves several of the aims set by relational autonomy theorists without the conceptual cost.



Pettit's own conception, however, relies no less crucially than Kant's on an unfettered access to a notion of practical public reason which can serve as a non-arbitrary mediator through which citizens can identify and uphold their common good (Coffee 2015). Wollstonecraft's version avoids this weakness by broadening the focus from the right use of public reason to the construction of an inclusive and representative social background in which conceptions of public reason are used.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> A related point that Wenner also notes is that Pettit's approach also focuses exclusively on the threats to freedom that come from social structures. Wenner remains confident that "the domination framework has room to accommodate the ways in which structural features of our material reality can restrict individuals' options sets" (2020, 44). While personally, I agree with her on this, it is a highly contested point in current republican discourse, and it's far from easy to determine how structures fit within the republican model (Coffee forthcoming). On this point, I argue that Wollstonecraft's framework provides us with a possible solution.

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