

Relational Autonomy and Liberalism in the Era of Globalization

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I. Introduction

Classic theories of autonomy presume external influence by default inconducive to autonomy. Yet, in some societies, the adoption of autonomy is itself the consequence of the major external influence, *i.e.*, the imperialistic imposition of liberalism. If members of a society are forced into the situation to adopt the ideal of autonomy, and if such imposition was systemic and structural, it is problematic to conclude that these individuals are fully autonomous even when they accept the liberal way of life. While theorists of autonomy have provided thoughtful arguments about how social influences can undermine the capacity for autonomy, it is important to highlight that, in the era of globalization, the ideal of autonomy might have been one of those social influences.

“Non-Western” individuals commonly think that the liberal discourse only reflects American and European experiences. Consequently, “non-Western” individuals are often alienated from the liberal discourse, thinking that liberal values are not *their own* even when they identify with them. I label this problem as *an irony of liberal universalism*: while liberalism is designed to *respect the autonomy* of the individuals who support its values, the way liberalism is introduced and implemented in some areas of the world is *autonomy-deteriorating*. Due to this irony, “non-western” individuals who endorse liberal values seldom see themselves as a major contributor to those values. Rather, they often think that their people, including themselves, can at best import a sort of finished product that is already fully developed in “the West.” I think this is an important problem that needs to be tackled to have a truly meaningful discussion about liberalism in the globalized world.

In this paper, I argue that such alienation is partly due to the way autonomy has been conceptualized. The classic theories of autonomy which posits that autonomy and social influence are conceptually in tension with each other, cannot resolve this irony. An alternative theory of autonomy should forgo this assumption. For this reason, I propose *relational autonomy* as a

possible alternative. Theories of relational autonomy have provided useful insights into how the relationship between autonomy and social influence is more complicated than classic theorists assume. Relational theorists of autonomy show how different levels of social influence, from personal relations to broader structural relations, are important factors to be considered for a more accurate understanding of autonomy. While most classic theorists do admit that autonomy cannot be acquired in a vacuum, they usually think the effect of social influence is negligible enough to be placed in the background rather than the foreground of theorizing autonomy. In contrast, relational theorists propose social influence as one of the important elements of theorizing autonomy.

My paper consists of three parts. First, I will explain in detail what is ironic about the mainstream liberal model based on the classic conception of autonomy. Second, I propose a workable definition of relational autonomy. This will be based on the feminist theories, which provide a rich account of how personal relationships and cultural norms can have both positive and negative effects on women's agency. Then, I expand the focus to broader structural relations, such as the relationships among different social groups and political communities. In the remaining section, I aim to explain how relational autonomy can be useful to handle the irony of liberal universalism compared to the classic conception of autonomy.

II. An Irony of Liberal Universalism

An irony of liberal universalism I will explore in this section is as follows: while liberalism is designed to respect the autonomy of the individuals who support its values, the way liberalism is introduced and implemented in some societies is autonomy-deteriorating. Autonomy here does not mean the political autonomy of these societies. Limiting the political autonomy of cultural communities is not itself a fatal problem to liberalism. Rather, I argue that the imperialistic history of liberal universalism has deprived of social and political environment for the *individual* members of these societies to pursue their autonomy autonomously. To illustrate my point, I posit a hypothetical country named society_{*i*}.

Society_{*i*} is a society where the liberal model is perceived to be *imposed* on. I postulate a hypothetical situation because I have received a lot of comments about the arbitrariness of the

categorization of “the West” and “the non-West.” Although we somehow intuitively catch their meaning when we encounter these words in our everyday conversation, I agree that this categorization has many ambiguities that need to be clarified. Therefore, I concluded that “a society where the liberal model is perceived to be imposed on” better describes a kind of society I am trying to articulate than a “non-Western” society.

Society_{*i*} is a newly founded liberal democracy whose culture and political institution have been at odds with the liberal model. The core values of the liberal model, especially the ideal of autonomy, are not familiar to the members of this society and are perceived to be a foreign value fundamentally different from their own traditions. Nonetheless, this society adopted individual autonomy as one of the normative foundations of its new political institution. This was due to the combination of several reasons *external* to the validity of the liberal model. For instance, society_{*i*} has been influenced by the international trend which pushed it to adopt the liberal constitution to maintain amicable relations with foreign countries. However, this was not a completely forced decision. In fact, the society did not resist the political change. There was an increasing perception within the society that liberalism is the global standard that cannot be avoided to become part of the advanced world.

From now on, I present three examples of an agent in society_{*i*} whose autonomy is undermined. I will explain them in turn.

Agent₁: Adaptation without Identification

The primary feature of society_{*i*} is the discrepancy between the political institution and the actual social norms believed and practiced in everyday life. Liberal values that buttress the new institution are still unintelligible to the majority of the society. Most citizens adapt to the new way of life because they think it is an irresistible and irrevocable trend. The world has changed, and one should get used to the change to live a successful and lucrative life. After all, this is how the citizens of more advanced countries live. Adapting to the liberal model is generally perceived as a way to break out of the ignominy of being backward and be recognized by other advanced societies as one of them. However, since the adaptation is not based on their authentic identification with the validity of the liberal model, they still hold on to the traditional norms which sometimes contradict the ideal of autonomy. In fact, they still equate these traditional norms with what is *their own* and equate the ideal of autonomy with what *belongs to others*. In short, they are importing the liberal

model because of some external or instrumental reasons not because they deeply sympathize with it.

Let's assume a typical citizen of the society: agent₁. Can we say she is an autonomous agent in relation to the liberal values? To answer this question, I would like to present one possible image of a non-autonomous person, which Gerald Dworkin quotes from *Anna Karenina*.

Stefan Arkadyevitch always read a liberal paper. It was not extreme in its views, but advocated those principles held by the majority of people. In spite of the fact that he was not really interested in science, or art, or politics, he strongly adhered to the same views on all such subjects as the majority of this paper in particularly advocated, and changed them only when the majority changed. Or rather, it might be said, he did not change them at all – they changed themselves imperceptibly.¹

According to Dworkin, the problem with Stephan is not that his beliefs are borrowed from others but that they are borrowed without being aware of their sources and without giving some account of their validity. Stephan is not autonomous, at least in two aspects. First, he is not checking the validity of the authority he follows. He checks neither the credibility of the paper nor its views. Second, he imitates the views of the majority without identifying with them. He thinks their views are his, but he is, in fact, alienated from them.

The absence of checking on the authority and uncritical imitation of the existing projects are essential features of a person who lacks autonomy. The former is the sign of lacking moral autonomy, and the latter is the sign of lacking personal autonomy: a morally autonomous person should be able to check whether the source of the values they endorse is valid and credible; a person who enjoys personal autonomy should be able to lead her life projects by critically reflecting the existing projects and fashioning them towards to the direction that she can identify with.

Agent₁ lacks both moral and personal autonomy with respect to liberal values in a way similar to Stefan. She is not morally autonomous because she does not check thoroughly why the Western countries or the global standard, which she perceives to be the source of the values she follows, is valid and credible. She sort of takes it for granted that the global standard is something that she should follow. She neither exercises personal autonomy because she has not reflected about

¹ Gerald Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p 38.

whether liberal life projects are what she really identifies with. Instead, she accepted the liberal way of life because she noticed that an increasing number of people in her society started to live that way and because she is told that it is a way of life pursued in advanced countries. And because many citizens have adapted to the new way of life in this way, even though society_i did change in some respects, the majority of its citizens still do not identify with the ideal of autonomy, *i.e.*, the majority of citizens still think that the ideal is not *their own*.

Agent₂: A Manipulated Choice

Now let's assume a citizen of society_i, who really identifies with liberal values: agent₂. Borrowing the terminology of Gerald Dworkin and Harry Frankfurt, agent₂ has a second-order desire to desire a liberal way of life, *i.e.*, desires to desire a liberal way of life. Nonetheless, this is not easy for her because she has already developed a habit of prioritizing filial duty over her well-being or becoming an obedient housewife. However, she truly wants to become an independent person who desires to lead her own life. When she fails to do so, she gets unsatisfied with herself. Therefore, she made an effort to scrutinize her first-order desires, which habitually follow traditional customs. After making some attempts, she successfully changed her first-order desires, and actually started to make decisions that enable her to live an independent life.

The story of agent₂ might seem to be an ideal situation to some liberals. However, we cannot conclude she is fully autonomous without answering the additional question. We have to ask whether her second-order desires to desire a liberal way of life was formed autonomously: *i.e.*, whether her capacity to form the second-order desire was not the result of manipulation or coercion. Now, the imperialistic history of liberalism has shown us that liberal universalism was used to manipulate people's perception about which value systems are more desirable than others. To illustrate my point, I would like to refer to an interesting account of individual identity made by Anthony Appiah. Appiah understands individual identity as an interplay between the two major dimensions, the personal and the collective. A personal dimension of individual identity consists of socially or morally important features of a person which do not by themselves form a social category. (*e.g.*, intelligence, charm, wit, cupidity.) On the other hand, a collective dimension of individual identity which consists of the intersection of her collective identities count as social

categories, kinds of person. (e.g., religion, gender, ethnicity, sexuality.)²

Appiah emphasizes that the collective dimension is equally important to our understanding of individual identity as much as the personal dimension. All agents have life projects, in Appiah's words, have stories to tell. Appiah argues that in telling that story, how I fit into the wider story of various collectives, for most people, is important.³ Collective narratives provide individuals scripts which they can use to shape their life plans and tell their life stories. One of the harmful results of liberal imperialism is that the scripts some people identified themselves with were damaged and disparaged as negative: backward, barbaric, inferior, likely to fail, and etc. Appiah points out this is why politics of recognition gained popularity. It was inevitable that people whose identity primarily consists of the collective dimension tried to turn these scripts into positive ones, believing that such an attempt would recover their dignity.

But the collective dimension of individual identity plays a significant role even when a person does not have a deep bond with her collective identities. There can be a person whose identity primarily consists of personal dimensions, but there cannot be a person whose identity consists of personal dimensions only. So even if the person does not have a deep bond with her culture, simply knowing that many of the life scripts in the collective dimension of her identity are damaged is itself a disturbing experience. And for some individuals, the reason they reject to embrace the life scripts in the collective dimension might be because the scripts available are damaged as unattractive.

If the second-order desire to desire a liberal way of life was formed partly because the life scripts associated with her collective identities were disparaged as the consequence of liberal imperialism, it could be said that the procedural independence of the second-order identification has been violated. Since the second-order identification was influenced by the imperialistic ideology which has been gaslighting her through the stigmatization of her collective identities, her desire to desire a liberal way of life is somewhat alien to her even though she believes that she identifies with it.

² K. Anthony Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction." In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994; "Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections." In *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

³ K. Anthony Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction," In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p 160.; *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, p 22.

In other words, even though she believes that she chose a kind of desire or a type of person she wants to be, her choice was somewhat manipulated.

A similar conclusion can be made when we follow Joseph Raz's conception of autonomy. Raz proposes independence, being free from coercion or manipulation, as one of the conditions of autonomy. According to Raz, manipulation means perverting the way that person reaches decisions, forms preferences, or adopts goals.⁴ If this is a definition of manipulation, the imperialistic ideology that has been stigmatizing the non-liberal societies can be understood as a form of manipulation, even though it pushed them toward the liberal direction. Therefore, without proper dealing of these complexities, it is insufficient to conclude that agent₂ is fully autonomous. To decide whether the agent is autonomous, we have to take into account whether the agent was able to critically reflect on the imperialistic consequences of liberal universalism when she formed a desire about what kind of life she wants to live.

Agent₃: Lack of Authorship

There is another problem left to be discussed. Let's assume agent₃ who identifies with the liberal ideal after going through sufficient critical reflection on existing life projects and her own motivational structure. She is aware of the imperialistic ideology that might have influenced her desires, and she is critical about how Western actors are in the position of producing and controlling the liberal discourse. However, she still strongly identifies with the liberal model because she believes autonomy is an important ideal necessary to her well-being. She also endorses the liberal constitution, not because it is the global standard that represents a more advanced or enlightened way of life, but because she thinks that guaranteeing autonomy is an important part of recognizing the equal moral worth of all individuals and because it is an effective conceptual tool to problematize the existing oppressions and discriminations causing real sufferings to her fellow citizens. In other words, comparing to the other two cases, the agent adopted the ideal of autonomy not because of external reasons but because of her belief in its *intrinsic* value: she believes that even if individual autonomy is not the ultimate value that should never be triumphed, it is undoubtedly constitutive of the well-being of an individual.

This agent seems to have the capacity for both moral and personal autonomy. She is capable of

⁴ Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1986, p 377.

checking the validity of moral authority, in this case, the Western hegemons and the global standard they set. In this process, she successfully distinguished the imperialistic tendencies of the liberal discourse from its emancipatory aspects. Moreover, she is capable of evaluating different ways of life and has identified with the kind of life she wants to live. When doing so, she is aware of the possible manipulation that can affect her preferences and takes that into account when making the decision. So far, it is reasonable to assume that her choice is by and large independent and her motivational structure is her own.

Some may think that it is sufficient to conclude the discussion here. In fact, agent₃ is, by and large, autonomous. However, I think the irony of liberal universalism cannot be fully resolved without undermining the perception that liberalism is a property of the West. Without this process, agent₃, will always be alienated from the liberal model no matter how much she identifies with them. This is because she cannot claim *equal authorship* of the liberal discourse. The ideal of autonomy assumes that the agent should be able to become an author of the values she identifies with. Authorship cannot be equated to an invention or complete control of the values since it is empirically impossible. However, limiting its meaning to simply choosing between existing options is too narrow an interpretation. Self-authorship can be better understood as becoming a part of the creative process by adding my contributions to the discourse that affects me.

The perception that liberalism is a property of the West hinders agent₃ from perceiving herself as an author of the liberal discourse who makes meaningful contributions. For her, the liberal model is a philosophical doctrine that has been produced and developed by Western philosophers, the kind of social and political institutions achieved by Western revolutionaries, the way of life that Western people have been enjoying much earlier than her people. She learns this from the books written by Western scholars and from Western TV shows. Under such an environment, it is difficult for the agent to imagine herself as a meaningful contributor to the liberal discourse even when she is part of it. She only sees herself as the consumer of the discourse: she evaluates the existing model, applies it to the problems of her society and her personal situations, but these are only things she can do. The ideal type of the liberal model still represents something that is not hers: whites, Western peoples, advanced countries, and etc. And the influence of her people and her community on the liberal model, in general, is always marginal. In other words, it is difficult to break out of the Eurocentric interpretation of the world history that the liberal model originated

from the West through the Enlightenment, and the non-Western world has at best imported a sort of finished product that is already fully developed in Europe and North America.

This problem has not been resolved even by the liberal theorists who are sensitive about the importance of collective identities. For instance, Kymlicka seems to think that the endorsement of liberal values for the members of non-liberal communities can be equated with “leaving one’s culture” or “moving freely between societal cultures.”⁵ This is typical rhetoric that places liberalism outside some cultural communities, albeit unintentionally. In fact, this is not how agent₃ identifies with the liberal model. If the agent identifies with the liberal model even after reflecting on its imperialistic history, this is because she really believes that liberal values have some implications on the real sufferings caused by the oppressive elements of her society. And this doesn’t necessarily mean that the agent left her culture or wishes to leave her culture. Instead, it means that she wishes the values she identifies with to be *shared* by other members of her community as *part* of their culture. What she wants is not a radical departure from her cultural or political community but a liberal model that she can pursue with her fellow citizens in a non-alienating way.

Appiah makes an interesting remark on the politics of recognition of African American community. “If I had to choose between Uncle Tom and Black Power, I would, of course, choose the latter. But I would like not to have to choose. I would like other options,” he argues.⁶ Agent₃ faces a similar dilemma: she has to choose between “mimicking the West” and “maintaining our own culture,” but she thinks both of them are problematic. I think this is an important conundrum to be tackled if we take autonomy seriously.

“Adaptation without identification,” “manipulated choice,” and “lack of authorship” show that citizens of society_{*i*} are systemically alienated from the classic theories of autonomy. For this reason, I argue that we need to think about the alternative model of liberalism that is equally accessible to all individuals who endorse liberal values regardless of their situational contexts. This is why I

⁵ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1995, pp 86-90.

⁶ K. Anthony Appiah, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction,” In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p 162.; “Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections.” In *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*. Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1996, p 99.

suggest a relational model of individual autonomy as an alternative. In the next section, I articulate what relational autonomy is starting from the existing discussions among the feminist theorists.

III. The Relational Model of Individual Autonomy

The Feminist Accounts for Relational Autonomy

Feminists have good reasons to be ambivalent towards social influence. Women were often characterized as inferior beings compared to men due to the fact that they have been socialized to be more caring and dependent on family and other personal relationships. Therefore, feminists needed to reconceptualize the meaning of dependence and social relations to resist such stigmatization and give positive meanings to women's experiences and her identity. On the other hand, feminists could not always celebrate social relations because relationships have been one of the primary sources of oppression of women. Private relationships and social institutions based on patriarchal norms have confined women to specific life projects and affected their ability to think about the possibility that they could live otherwise. These two seemingly contradictory arguments lead to one common assumption: the assumption that social influence is an important factor of theorizing autonomy for a female agent.

This is why relational autonomy has been widely discussed among feminist theorists. However, relational autonomy by no means has a single definition, even more so than the classic conceptions. Theories of relational autonomy are tied very loosely to each other by the assumption that social relations are an important factor of autonomy because individuals are socially embedded beings.⁷ But apart from this assumption, each theorist proposes a very different definition of relational autonomy. There have been attempts to classify them as follows: (a) *internalist* or *externalist*; (b) *causally relational* or *constitutively relational*; (c) *procedural* or *substantive*. I will explain each of these categories in turn.

The first common classification is whether autonomy is defined by *internalist* conditions or *externalist* conditions. Internalist theories define autonomy as a particular psychological state. For

⁷ Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, "Introduction: Autonomy Refigured," In *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, New York:Oxford University Press, 2000.; Andrea C. Westlund, "Rethinking Relational Autonomy," *Hypatia* 24, no.4 (2009), p 26.

instance, Jennifer Nedelsky defines autonomy as a capacity to interact creatively with all the relationships that shape us, *i.e.*, a capacity to reshape and re-create both the relationship and ourselves.⁸ While her definition consists of conditions of autonomy that are different from the classic conception of independence and self-control, these are still internalist conditions in the sense that it is mainly about a psychological state of an individual. Andrea Westlund is another example of how relational theories take an internalist approach. Westlund defines autonomy as the disposition to hold oneself answerable to others. For Westlund, an agent is autonomous when she is capable of defending her action-guiding commitments in the face of critical challenges raised by others. Westlund explains that since such disposition is a feature of an agent's psychology, it can be understood as an internalist condition.⁹

On the other hand, externalist theories of autonomy incorporate social conditions that are external to an agent's psychological state into the definition of autonomy. Marina Oshana is famous for proposing a relational theory that takes an externalist approach. Oshana defines autonomy as having "a *de facto* power and authority to manage matters of fundamental importance to her life within a framework of rules that she has set for herself."¹⁰ And for Oshana, to have a *de facto* power is to be in "a stable social status" which makes practical self-determination possible regardless of the psychological state of an agent.¹¹ Therefore her theory is strictly externalist. Natalie Stoljar also defends externalist conditions of relational autonomy. Like Oshana, she is critical about how an internalist approach can overlook the cases like preference adaptation, the cases where an agent's preferences are formed as a result of oppressive external factors. Therefore, in her view, the presence of a proper kind of social relations is a necessary condition for autonomy.¹²

The second common classification is about whether autonomy is a *causally* relational or

⁸ Jennifer Nedelsky, *Law's Relations: A Relational Theory of Self, Autonomy and Law*, New York:Oxford University Press, 2011, p 45.

⁹ Andrea C. Westlund, "Rethinking Relational Autonomy," *Hypatia* 24, no.4 (2009), p 33.

¹⁰ Marina Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society*, New York:Routledge, 2006, p2.

¹¹ Marina Oshana, "Is Social-Relational Autonomy a Plausible Ideal?" In *Personal Autonomy and Social Oppression: Philosophical Perspectives*, New York:Routledge, 2015.

¹² Natalie Stoljar, "Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition," In *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, New York:Oxford University Press, 2000; Natalie Stoljar, "Relational Autonomy and Perfectionism," *Moral Philosophy and Politics* 4, no.1 (2017): pp 27-41.

constitutively relational concept. Autonomy is causally relational if autonomy and social relations have a causal relationship. As I have already mentioned, many classic theorists do not deny that an agent develops autonomy by engaging in social interaction with others. In other words, they recognize the possibility of a causal relationship, albeit implicitly. However, analyzing the causal relationship is usually not their main focus. In contrast, the primary interest of relational theorists is in explaining how social relations cause autonomy. They argue that the capacity for autonomy can be developed and maintained when an individual is in respectful relationships. Reversely, if an individual is in inappropriate relationships, she can have difficulties developing and maintaining the capacity. Most feminist theorists interested in autonomy agree on this point.¹³ In fact, criticizing how the existing theories have been neglecting this causal relationship was one of the main contributions of feminist theorists to the discourse on autonomy.

Yet, a theory that is causally relational does not incorporate a socio-relational dimension into the definition of autonomy. Autonomy itself is a capacity of an individual that can be conceptually separated from the social relations the individual has. On the other hand, theorists who think autonomy is constitutively relational think that social relations are an inseparable part of the definition of autonomy. Oshana's position is often presented as the primary example of this approach. If autonomy is about being in proper social status, as Oshana argues, this means that autonomy is a kind of social relation, not just a factor that causes autonomy.

There is a significant overlap between the constitutively relational account of autonomy and the externalist conception. In fact, they are often used interchangeably in the existing literature. However, Westlund argues that not all constitutively relational theories are necessarily externalist. Westlund's definition of autonomy, *i.e.*, holding herself answerable for her action-guiding principles to the external critical perspectives, requires a relational dimension as a defining condition. The concept at first seems to be similar to autonomy as a critical reflection because it emphasizes the agent's reflective capacity. However, according to Westlund, a kind of reflectiveness that enables autonomy is irreducibly dialogical; in other words, it is about being responsive to perspectives that are not one's own. In this sense, her account for autonomy by

¹³ For instance, this is the premise that is shared in the collection of essays in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, which is one of the earlier works on relational autonomy. Jennifer Nedelsky also emphasizes in *Law's Relations* that she has been influenced a lot by their work.

definition needs others who pose critical questions and therefore is constitutively relational.¹⁴ This shows that proposing autonomy as a constitutively relational concept can be distinguished from proposing an externalist condition of autonomy.

The third classification is about whether autonomy is a procedural or substantive concept. Relational theories share the assumption that socio-cultural norms affect an agent's autonomy to a significant degree. However, procedural and substantive theorists disagree on whether hierarchical socio-cultural norms are itself a constraint on autonomy. Relational theorists prone to a procedural account think that hierarchical norms should be understood as one of the materials an agent can use to make important decisions in her life, just as egalitarian norms. The content of the norms is not the deciding factor of whether or not autonomy is constrained. As long as the agent can consciously authorize her decision, she is capable of exercising autonomy regardless of its content.

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Relational theorists suggest different views on how to define the authorization process, but they typically agree that autonomy as an uninfluenced choice or self-control should be modified toward a relational direction. For instance, Nedelsky equates the authorization process with exercising capacity for creative interaction: an agent finds one's own law by interacting creatively with the social relations she faces. Creative interaction is more than a critical reflection we make as a rational agent; it encompasses an ordinary reason-giving process of the affective and embodied dimension of ourselves, which is uniquely situated within the web of relations.¹⁶ Another example is Westlund, who equates the authorization process with displaying answerability for her action-guiding principles. If an agent can give justificatory answers to legitimate critical challenges against her decisions, then it is sufficient to conclude that she has been authorized them. It is important to note that Westlund confined legitimate critical challenges to challenges that are proven to matter to both the agent and the challenger. This means that the justificatory dialogue is

¹⁴ Andrea C. Westlund, "Rethinking Relational Autonomy," *Hypatia* 24, no.4 (2009): pp 26-49.

¹⁵ It is important to note that relational theorists do not take a purely procedural position. This is because they take seriously the fact that some social relations hamper the capacity for autonomy. Therefore, it might be more accurate to use the label "weak substantive" than "procedural." Still, I stick to the label "procedural" because I think "procedure" is a keyword to distinguish the conception that considers the authorization process first and then sets up the minimum standard as a boundary and the conception that requires a clear substantive judgment independent of the authorization process.

¹⁶ Jennifer Nedelsky, *Law's Relations: A Relational Theory of Self, Autonomy and Law*, New York:Oxford University Press, 2011.

always context-based and should be relationally situated.¹⁷

By placing the authorization process, not the content, at the center of autonomy, procedural theorists try to get a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be autonomous in a seemingly oppressive situation. First, there is a significant difference between a person who has consciously authorized oppressive social norms and a person who is drifting or even forced into following these norms. While the latter clearly lacks autonomy, it seems unfair to deny that the former is exercising some degree of autonomy. Second, proceduralists try to raise a more subtle question about the meaning of oppression. If an agent authorizes certain norms as her own and is satisfied with them, on what grounds can we say these norms are oppressing her? Apart from extreme cases which seriously undermine the well-being of an agent, a more benign version of hierarchical norms might not be considered as oppression at all to some agents. For these agents, hierarchical norms are one of the materials they can use for self-creation.

In contrast, relational theorists who follow a substantive account of autonomy think that hierarchical norms are not just materials for self-creation that are neutral to autonomy but a source of oppression. Even when an agent seems to willingly endorse the hierarchical norms, substantive theorists are extremely cautious whether this is not due to the internalization of existing oppression. Substantive theorists believe that some socio-cultural norms inevitably cause practical harm to an agent's autonomy, and it is possible to decide which these norms are.

Oshana is a prominent example of a strong substantive account for autonomy. Oshana provides an example of a happy slave who made an unhampered decision to become a slave and is satisfied with the life she chose. According to Oshana, the content of the slave's decision goes directly against the kind of life we expect from autonomy; therefore, it is an oxymoron to argue that she is autonomous. While proceduralists assume that a content-neutral account logically filters out extreme cases like voluntary enslavement, Oshana thinks that they failed to defend how such filtering out is possible without relying on some kind of substantive standard.¹⁸ Moreover, it is important to note that Oshana equates autonomy with securing a particular kind of social relation that meets the substantive standard. Consequently, she makes a controversial argument that

¹⁷ Andrea C. Westlund, "Rethinking Relational Autonomy," *Hypatia* 24, no.4 (2009), p 39.

¹⁸ Marina Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society*, New York:Routledge, 2006, pp 53-60.

struggle against oppressive social structures is not itself the sign of autonomy unless they are backed up by the good social fortune which enables them *de facto* power. Although there are successful social reformers such as Martin Luther King, they are an outlier, not an example of autonomy. Oshana acknowledges that an individual in an oppressed situation can wield authority over some domains of her life. Yet, she thinks that autonomy is more about a global property that concerns important domains of her life, and this can be obtained only when the agent secures social relations that meet a substantive standard.¹⁹

Stoljar also makes an interesting argument in defense of a substantive account. One of the classic critiques against the substantive theories is that it is paternalistic and does not show respect to individuals who identify with reasonable hierarchical norms. Against such critique, she argues that showing respect to a person does not require neutrality toward the content of her view. Rather, showing respect is about how the participants in the process of collective decision-making are being treated: in other words, about whether all individuals are treated as a person with a point of view and whether their voices are equally heard during the process. Stoljar argues that this does not necessarily mean that the final decisions should be neutral to all points of view proposed during the process. Equal respect is not about maintaining content-neutrality but more about recognizing interpersonal aspects of collective decision-making.²⁰ If we follow this logic, it is possible to conclude that transforming the social structures toward the substantive account for autonomy is not necessarily paternalistic if all individuals are treated with respect as an agent with the point of view during the decision-making process.²¹

Relational Autonomy: A Concept for the Globalized World

In this section, I propose a workable definition of relational autonomy that is suitable for the era of globalization. My definition of relational autonomy is tailored to meet the following criteria, which suits the purpose of my overall project. First, I aim to construct a liberal definition of relational autonomy. This means that I am looking for a concept that can serve as the fundamental basis of a liberal political institution: a political institution that is designed to respect the equal

¹⁹ Marina Oshana, "Is Social-Relational Autonomy a Plausible Ideal?" In *Personal Autonomy and Social Oppression: Philosophical Perspectives*, New York:Routledge, 2015, pp 8-12.

²⁰ Natalie Stoljar, "Relational Autonomy and Perfectionism," *Moral Philosophy and Politics* 4, no.1 (2017), pp 34-38.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p 39.

moral worth of all individuals. Second, I aim to propose a definition that does not structurally alienate individuals situated in any particular social context. Feminist theorists proposed relational autonomy criticizing that classic theories of autonomy alienate women and their experience. Similarly, I argue that relational autonomy should be conceptualized in a way it does not alienate members of political communities that have cultural and historical narratives different from that of Europe and America.

John Christman made an important point about why autonomy is a fundamental concept that buttresses a liberal political institution. A liberal political institution posits autonomy as the basic characteristic of a citizen-subject who is capable of agreeing on fair terms of cooperation and becoming a full participant in a democratic decision-making process.²² Without the assumption that all citizens are autonomous, a liberal political institution is neither tenable nor feasible. Moreover, a liberal political institution realizes the ideal of equal respect by treating all citizens as an agent who can exercise the capacity for autonomy. A political institution cannot be classified as liberal if it assumes that only some citizens are capable of autonomy. I agree with this analysis. For relational autonomy to serve as the replacement of the classic conception, it should be conceptualized as a capacity of an individual agent.

In other words, I think a liberal conception of relational autonomy should consist of internalist conditions. I do admit that external social conditions are important for securing an agent's autonomy in a practical sense, and I agree that theorists of autonomy should be interested in what these social conditions are and in what way they affect our capacity for autonomy. However, the fact that social conditions are important for our practical enjoyment of autonomy does not necessarily explain why they should be included as a *defining condition* of autonomy. Christman has pointed out that such conceptualization can imply that citizens who reject those kinds of social conditions are not sufficiently autonomous to become the participant of principles of justice and democratic decision-making process.²³ Similar arguments can be made about citizens who are structurally deprived of these social conditions. According to externalists, these citizens are not sufficiently autonomous because they internalize social oppressions, or their attempts to wield *de*

²² John Christman, "Relational Autonomy, Liberal Individualism, and the Social Constitution of Selves," *Philosophical Studies* 117 (2004), p 156.

²³ *Ibid.*, p 156.

facto authority over their lives are hampered. However, for relational autonomy to serve as the conceptual basis of liberal political institution, the concept should be equally accessible, at least in the conceptual level, to all citizens regardless of the social conditions they are situated in.

Therefore, a liberal conception of relational autonomy should be defined as a capacity of an individual agent that consists of internalist conditions equally accessible to all citizens. The question is, then, what kind of capacity? The capacity for autonomy is a capacity for self-authorship, which includes an idea about what it means to make one's life *her own*. In classic liberal theories, an agent makes her life her own by critically reflecting existing norms and directing her life towards those norms she identifies as her true desires. The process of *critical reflection*, *self-conception*, and *self-direction* are regarded as evidence that the agent *authorized* certain norms as *her own*. Relational theorists also propose ideas about how an individual authorizes existing norms as her own. Yet, they have different interpretations about each of these three stages, and this difference is important characteristics that distinguish relational autonomy from the classic conception.

First, relational theorists generally have a skeptical view about the importance of acquiring accurate and coherent self-conception. Classic theorists of autonomy assume that an agent knows pretty well about what their authentic desires are. For instance, the Dworkin-Frankfurt model assumes that second-order desires, *i.e.*, desires to have particular desires, are an agent's true desires. However, they do not provide sufficient explanations about how second-order desires are formed and how we can know them in the first place. It is sort of given in the model that the agent has the ability to know them by herself. To be more specific, an autonomous self is often characterized as a person who is conscious of her authentic core uninfluenced by external factors. However, from a relational perspective, the process and content of self-conception are much more complicated than this.

There are roughly two reasons why this is so. For relational theorists, social relations and social norms constitute the content of an agent's self-conception. In other words, there is no such thing as an authentic core independent of social relations and social norms in which the agent is situated. For instance, Diana Meyers presumes that one's community of origin and social norms are embedded in a person's cognitive and motivational structure. This means that the intelligibility of desires is always "autobiographically situated," and therefore tracing one's group membership is

necessary to get accurate self-conception.²⁴ Nedelsky also emphasizes that the basic assumption of a relational self is that all human beings are both constituted by, and contributed to, changing or reinforcing the relationships they are part of.²⁵ This simultaneous interaction between self and the world that surrounds her is a common assumption shared by most relational theorists.

In addition, some relational theorists are critical about the assumption that all individuals can have a fixed and integrated self-conception. Again, Meyers argues that many individuals have intersectional identities, whether or not they are conscious of them. The identity of an individual consists of different dimensions of group-based identities that are either chosen or imposed. There are various ways these dimensions interact with each other; they may integrate well or conflict and create tension; all dimensions may equally be important to an agent, or some may be much more important than others. How would one be sure what her authentic desires are when one's identity is as complex as such? For this reason, Meyers objects to a Frankfurtian conception of an authentic self in which different dimensions of one's identity are integrated into a single ordering. Rather, she argues that the process of self-conception is "an open-ended process of reflection, reconsideration, revision, and refinement," which is neither finalized nor wholeheartedly integrated.²⁶ Nedelsky also makes a similar argument that finding what is one's own is not uncovering a fixed true self but engaging in an ongoing lifelong process that can be neither arrived at nor achieved.²⁷

Second, relational theorists are skeptical about reflecting capacity that is solely based on rationality. The process of critical reflection in the classic theories of autonomy is largely construed as exercising reason which all human beings equally possess. Through reason, an agent critically appraises whether the existing norms and life projects are persuasive and sound. Relational theorists do agree that reflective capacity of some kind should be exercised for an agent to be autonomous. However, they think that this relational capacity is not purely rational but includes

²⁴ Diana T Meyers, "Intersectional Identity and Authentic Self?: Opposite Attract!" In *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspective on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, New York:Oxford University Press, 2000, p 160.

²⁵ Jennifer Nedelsky, *Law's Relations: A Relational Theory of Self, Autonomy and Law*, New York:Oxford University Press, 2011.

²⁶ Diana T Meyers, "Intersectional Identity and Authentic Self?: Opposite Attract!" In *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspective on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, New York:Oxford University Press, 2000, p 168.

²⁷ Jennifer Nedelsky, *Law's Relations: A Relational Theory of Self, Autonomy and Law*, New York:Oxford University Press, 2011, p 50.

affective and embodied dimensions. This is why relational theorists propose different conceptions about how an agent authorizes certain desires as their own. As I explained in the previous section, Nedelsky proposes creative interaction, and Westlund proposes answerability as an alternative for critical reflection. Catriona Mackenzie is another example. She proposes that critical reflection should be prompted by imagistic thinking. Imagistic thinking is a capacity for self-reflection exercised by sifting through and evaluating one's own experiential memories, externalizing and appropriating those they think are significant to her.²⁸ Just as creative interaction and answerability, this includes an emotional process.

Third, relational theories have very different images of self-direction from that of the classic conception. This is a corollary of the differences in the first two stages. The typical image of an autonomous person who directs herself is as follows: as a rational being, she critically reflects the existing norms and life projects; she somehow knows what her authentic desires are and identifies with those norms and projects that reflect her desires; she then directs her actions and her life towards her choice. In this overall process, the agent and the external influence are sharply distinguished, and self-direction is construed as the agent's control over the external influence.

On the contrary, according to relational theories, an autonomous person directs her life as follows: an agent uses the existing norms and life projects as a material to make up her desires, and the content of these desires may integrate into a coherent identity or conflict and create tension; the process of self-conception is always situated in the cultural and social contexts she faces, constantly reconstituted and never finalized; as a multidimensional being who exercises both rational and emotional faculties, she reflects through this process and decides what she wants to appropriate as her desires and what is a negligible part of her identity. If the process of self-conception and self-reflection is understood in this way, self-direction cannot be equated with self-control. Self-direction in relational theories is more of a process of appropriation and reason-giving: an agent successfully directs her actions and her life when she is able to appropriate the existing norms and life projects as her own and provide her reasons of why she appropriated them. This act of appropriation and reason-giving is how an agent makes her actions and her life as her own: it is an essence of self-authorship.

²⁸ Catriona Mackenzie, "Imagining Oneself Otherwise" In *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspective on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp 124-150.

To sum up, I suggest a following definition of relational autonomy.

A multilayered capacity to direct her life towards her own principles that fit well with her self-conception. To find her own principles, she should be capable of appropriating the existing norms or life projects and giving reasons why she appropriated them.

I think this definition roughly encompasses different conceptions of relational autonomy that consists of internalist conditions. Appropriation is distinguished from simply imitating certain norms or life projects. It implies that the agent is interpreting these norms and projects in her own way, in other words, putting her own contributions to them. I think internalist conditions of relational autonomy that have been proposed in the existing literature can all be understood as different kinds of appropriation. Nedelsky's creative interaction is about how an agent reshapes and re-creates the relationships she faces, *i.e.*, how she appropriates her relationships. Mackenzie's imagistic thinking is also about how an agent appropriates experiential memories that are significant to her. Westlund's answerability is less explicit than the other two but also posits the act of appropriation. This is because for an agent to provide answers to critical challenges about her decisions, she has to appropriate the existing norms in her own way. If she failed to appropriate the norms and simply followed the norms, then she would not be able to answer to critical challenges. Reason-giving is also an important internalist condition. Westlund's answerability equates relational autonomy with the reason-giving process. Nedelsky also explicitly stated that creative interaction includes the act of reason-giving.²⁹ Mackenzie talks about how an agent deliberates with herself when making important decisions on how to define oneself, and this implies a reason-giving process.³⁰

This capacity for appropriation and reason-giving is multidimensional that involves both rational and emotional faculties. Moreover, this overall process is inevitably situated in the sense that whether or not the agent's reasons are intelligible to others largely depends on whether they share cultural and historical contexts. Surely, it is not theoretically impossible that a person who does not share the same contexts understands the reasons the agent provides. A person who is well-acquainted with the situational contexts of other agents may have a quite accurate understanding

²⁹ Jennifer Nedelsky, *Law's Relations: A Relational Theory of Self, Autonomy and Law*, New York:Oxford University Press, 2011.

³⁰ Catriona Mackenzie, "Imagining Oneself Otherwise" In *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspective on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, New York:Oxford University Press, 2000, pp 124-150.

of why they made certain decisions even though she is not under the same situational contexts with them. However, it is usually much easier for individuals who share the same situational contexts to understand the complicated nuance of reasons behind each other's decisions.

Now, this definition of relational autonomy is not strongly substantive. It is logically possible for a person to appropriate hierarchical norms and provide reasons why she decided to live a subordinate life. As long as she appropriated those norms in her own way and provided reasons that are intelligible to others who share similar situational contexts, she is autonomous even if her reasons are not fully intelligible to some. Nonetheless, I do not intend to defend a purely procedural account. Surely, a purely procedural account goes against the fundamentals of liberalism. I have argued at the beginning of this section that a liberal conception of relational autonomy should follow the ideal of equal respect. In other words, all individuals should be respected equally as an agent who can develop and exercise relational autonomy. This means that a liberal conception of relational autonomy logically entails the state protection of each citizen from the outright infringement of her development and exercise of relational autonomy.

On the one hand, such conception is sufficiently liberal in the sense that it encourages each citizen to direct her life without a serious impediment that goes against her will. On the other hand, it suggests that individuals are autonomous even when they do not live in accordance with certain kinds of substantive norms or do not attain independence and self-control. This is in some way similar to political liberalism because it promotes each individual to live in accordance with their comprehensive doctrines. Nonetheless, I think a liberal political institution based on relational autonomy is much more situated than political liberalism: the relational model implies that apart from the ideal of equal respect, the specific content of the principles of justice and basic rights may differ significantly depending on the social, cultural, and historical contexts shared by the members of the given society. More importantly, these differences should be understood as equally liberal to the extent they aim to protect the equal moral worth of all individuals. In other words, the relational model can object to the idea underlies in the current liberal discourse that there is a paragon of a liberal political institution, whether it is Western, European, or American, which all liberal institutions should approximate.

Moreover, the relational model is open to changes. In the era of globalization, who constitutes the members of a given society changes constantly in various ways. It can change because the

mind of individual citizens has changed throughout their life or because there are generational changes in the value system due to internal social movements or cultural exchanges with other political communities. It can also change because the new members were included in the society due to the increase in immigration. The relational model tells us that to protect the ideal of equal respect, the specific content of liberal political institutions should change when the situational contexts change. It also tells us that these changes, which might seem to be a deviation from the classic liberal model, do not make the political institution less liberal.

This point is related to the second reason why the externalist theories do not suit the purpose of my project. As I already have emphasized, I aim to propose a definition that does not structurally alienate individuals who are situated in a particular social context. For instance, let's think about liberal practices of an agent who is under an intersectionally oppressive structure as a woman, as a low-income worker, and as a citizen of a "non-Western" society. If we follow externalist theories, it leads to a conclusion that this agent is much less autonomous than a middle-class white man in the 1st world country who takes for granted the environment he enjoys and has not thought critically about how to lead his life. Even if she deeply reflects on what she wants and struggles very hard to lead her life in that direction, she can never be autonomous. This is because it is practically impossible to rectify all layers of structural discrimination she faces, especially the unequal relationship between the political communities. For this reason, I think externalist theories can sometimes be disempowering and unfair to the people who face multilayered structural discrimination in the globalized world.

Lastly, I recapitulate what I have discussed in this section as follows:

- (a) Relational autonomy is a capacity to direct her life towards her own principles that fit well with her self-conception. To find her own principles, she should be able to *appropriate* the existing norms or life projects and *give reasons* why she appropriated them.
- (b) This capacity is multidimensional and consists of both *rational* and *emotional* faculties. It is also inevitably *situated* in a sense that the reasons she provides are fully intelligible only to agents who understand the social, cultural, and historical contexts she is facing.
- (c) The content of an agent's self-conception is constantly reinforced or reconstituted by the situational contexts she is facing. This process is never completely finalized.
- (d) Relational autonomy is a capacity that all individuals equally possess. The relational model of liberal political institution should realize the ideal of equal respect by guaranteeing relational autonomy of all citizens.

IV. The Relational Model and The Irony of Liberal Universalism

In the remaining section, I will explain how the relational conception of individual autonomy is better equipped to address the irony of liberal universalism than the classic conception. More specifically, I return to the hypothetical country society_i, and explain how relational autonomy can resolve the three problems I illustrated in section II: “adaptation without identification,” “a manipulated choice,” and “lack of authorship.”

Let’s start with the case of agent₁, adaptation without identification. I showed that an agent who adapted to a liberal way of life without identifying with the internal validity of liberal values is not autonomous because of two reasons. First, an agent did not check the validity of the authority she follows, *i.e.*, the Western hegemony and the global standard they set. Second, an agent did not critically reflect whether liberal life projects are what she really identifies with and simply imitated the life of other people.

However, from the relational perspective, we can interpret agent₁ a bit differently. Although agent₁ did not think thoroughly about the validity of Western hegemony, she may have appropriated liberal values and liberal life projects: in other words, she may have interpreted them in a way that they fit into her situational contexts rather than identically imitating the Western model. Also, she might be able to give reasons why she chose a liberal way of life, apart from something like ‘just cause now everyone lives like this.’ In other words, she might be able to give some reasons that are intelligible from her situational contexts even if she does not fully identify with the validity of liberalism. To the extent she has done so, she is exercising the capacity for relational autonomy.

In fact, it is highly likely that this is what agent₁ has experienced. Since she has very different situational contexts from that of Europeans and Americans, it is impossible for her to accept liberal values and liberal life projects in a way identical to the Western model. More specifically, she would probably have to interpret them in her own way and try to create an equilibrium with traditional norms and life projects she has already endorsed. When creating the equilibrium, the agent would have gone through the internal reason-giving process to justify her own decisions. Even if the reasons she comes up with are not what classic theories expect from an autonomous

agent, *i.e.*, desires for an independent and critical mind, to the extent the agent is able to give reasons that are intelligible in her situational contexts, she is sufficiently autonomous.

The relational perspective also provides new explanations for the second case, “a manipulated choice.” There are several reasons why manipulation is particularly problematic in the traditional conceptions of autonomy. The traditional conceptions assume that each agent has an authentic core that consists of her true desires: an agent is autonomous only when she is able to direct herself towards these true desires. Moreover, social influence is treated as a primary factor that distracts the agent from finding her true desires or directing her life towards them. Manipulation is particularly problematic because it is a kind of social influence that has deliberate intentions to pervert and distort the agent’s self-conception and motivational structure.

However, in reality, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between manipulative and ordinary social influence, and this leads to an unnecessary dispute about how to draw the line. As I have pointed out in the previous section, the imperialistic ideology can be considered as manipulation because it has been gaslighting “non-Western” people through the stigmatization of her collective identities. But it is also true that the impact of the imperialistic ideology nowadays is much more subtle and indirect than it was in the colonial era. Therefore, if we define this as manipulation, we may have to define any kind of negative social influence as manipulation. This is certainly not a meaningful way to frame the discussion. But it is equally not helpful to simply dismiss the significant influence the imperialistic ideology has on some individuals.

On the contrary, the relational model does not have to deal with these complexities to talk about autonomy. From the relational perspective, there is no individual free from social influence that intends to push her towards a certain direction. In fact, it is quite natural that an agent goes through such experience when she makes decisions about her actions and her life. The relational model suggests that the real problem is not whether the agent’s motivational structure is free from social influence (because it is practically impossible) but whether her ability to appropriate social influence in her own way has not been oppressed and obstructed. If an agent has not attempted to reinterpret the liberal norms and life projects based on her situational contexts, and if the agent cannot give reasons why she decided to incorporate them into her actions and her life or why she thinks they fit with her current self-conception, she is not autonomous to that extent.

However, pure imitation or total absence of reason-giving is very rare. For instance, let’s assume

that agent₂ developed her desire to desire a liberal way of life after watching *Sex and the City* and wants to think and live like Samantha Jones: in other words, she wants to imitate Samantha's attitudes and lifestyle identically. Let's also assume that the reason agent₂ wants to live and think like Samantha seems to be very superficial: something like, "just because she looks cool" or "a life devoting to men and family seems out of date." If agent₂ is identifying with a liberal way of life only from this perspective, she is not sufficiently autonomous. However, it is highly likely that even agent₂ has gone through mediation between her desires to desire a liberal way of life and her previous identity affected by traditional cultural norms. And it is highly likely that this mediation process includes the act of appropriation and reason-giving to some degree.

Lastly, a relational perspective makes it easier for the members of society_i to claim authorship over the liberal discourse. As I have explained in the previous section, a liberal model based on relational autonomy is inevitably situated: in other words, the specific content of the basic rights and the principles of justice should reflect the characteristics of the members of the given society. Otherwise, these individuals will be alienated from the political institutions and the normative principles that have effects on them. If the paragon of a liberal political institution is a political institution based on the conceptions of autonomy that reflect European and American experience, and if other kinds of political institutions are treated as less liberal to the extent that they deviate from this model, liberalism will always be alienating to the members of society_i: they will never become an author of this model and will always remain as a follower. In contrast, from the relational perspective, the members of society_i can become the author of their political institutions by appropriating the existing liberal models and mediating them with their traditional norms. The difference among the content of each political institution is the consequence of the process of appropriation and mediation. It is a sign that they have made their institution *their own*. And different institutions are all equally liberal to the extent that they realize the ideal of equal respect by protecting the relational autonomy of all citizens.

The stark difference between the classic liberal model and the relational model is as follows: the classic model is structurally more accessible to the "Western" agents than the agents of society_i, whereas the relational model is equally accessible to any agents who seek it. Nedelsky argued that one of the reasons she tries to replace the classic model with the relational model is because autonomy as independence is much more difficult to achieve for some people than for others. For

example, under a modern, bureaucratic welfare state, it is impossible for most people to be fully independent: most people are dependent on some kind of welfare program. Only an economically successful middle- or upper-class male can be regarded as an ideally autonomous person. This is why lives that are economically dependent have been derided as inferior or unsatisfactory. However, the relational model reveals that middle- or upper-class male also depends on social relations, such as the relationship with his wife and his employees.³¹ Similar arguments can be made about the illusionary picture that Western peoples are more capable of distancing themselves from culture than other culture-bearing peoples and, therefore, more autonomous. The relational model exposes that all agents are going through a constant interplay with the values they endorse and the collective narratives they partake in; and that they are exercising their autonomy to the extent that they are making creative contributions to them. To put it plainly, the agents from society; do not have to think and act exactly like Western people, whatever the content of “Western” is, to become a liberal. Approximation to or resemblance with the Western people should neither be the index of autonomy nor liberalism.

³¹ Jennifer Nedelsky, *Law's Relations: A Relational Theory of Self, Autonomy and Law*, New York:Oxford University Press, 2011, p 124, p 186.