

**Relational Representation:
Acknowledging and Engaging Agency**

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Now the blindness in human beings...is the blindness
with which we all are afflicted in regard to the feelings
of creatures and people different from ourselves.

-William James¹

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Introduction: Rethinking Representation

In recent years there have been a number of attempts to rethink political representation in ways that adapt to the changing features of global politics and better explain the many senses in which people feel represented.² Theorizing about representation is often limited by a series of seemingly irresolvable difficulties including the following: the claim that authorization is necessary for legitimacy, the imperfection of institutional mechanisms for apportioning representatives, and the supposed tradeoff between participation and representation. I argue that the problem of *objectification* is the root of each of these recurrent theoretical difficulties.

The tendency to objectify one of the persons in the representative relationship is driven by the strong demands of liberal autonomy, which hold that liberty exists only when a person is self-sufficient, independent of others. By the measure of autonomy, the representative relationship appears structured to compromise the autonomy of both actors except in the

¹ James (2000), 267

² The literature on representation in new contexts is growing quickly. A few notable recent efforts include Rehfeld (2006, 2009); Saward (2006, 2009); Urbinati and Warren (2008) summarize the state of the literature; and more recently, Disch (2011) and L. Taylor (2010).

extremes when either the representative or the represented are able to wholly control the other, reducing the other to an object. In her classic analysis of the concept, Pitkin shows the irresolvable conflict by dividing theories of representation between mandate theories, in which the represented person acts freely, and trustee theories, in which the representative acts freely.³ This conflict is most evident in theories of legislative representation. Is the legislator a trustee, acting in place of her constituency as any free person would, or is she bound by a mandate, charged to mirror the views of her constituency? Thus, in these extremes, autonomy is achieved for one of the actors at the expense of entirely denying the subjectivity of the other.

The apparent inevitability of objectification has traditionally made democratic theorists uncomfortable with representation. Pitkin saw it as a sign of a conceptual incoherence in representation.⁴ Others have taken it to show that representation is anti-democratic because it necessarily undermines respect for individuality by replacing participation with mediation.⁵ In this paper, I argue that both views are wrong. Representation is not incoherent; the assumption of liberal autonomy is. The dynamics of representation do not require the objectification of one of the actors; that is the result of defining autonomy as self-sufficiency. Once autonomy can account for the self as always within a network of relationships, then representation can be reconciled with democracy. Representation can enable autonomy through relations that descriptively and normatively recognize the subjectivity of the persons involved in the representative relationship.

³ Pitkin (1967, 1968). Rehfeld (2009) attempts to work out of this paradox by rethinking the analysis of representation. He selects three criteria by which to distinguish theories of representation: aims, source of judgment, and responsiveness.

⁴ Pitkin (1967)

⁵ The literature on participatory democracy set itself explicitly against the representative institutions of liberal democracy. See Barber (2003) and Pateman (1970). From the perspective of representation, see Saward (2009).

In the larger project of which this paper is a part, I attempt to fundamentally rethink representation as an intersubjective relationship. I call this *relational representation* because it approaches representation as a set of practices that occur within an ongoing relationship. From this view, representation is an emergent phenomenon, not a particular act. Relational representation prioritizes the practices that constitute the relationship over the identity of the participating persons, and the active agency of the actors over the other-negating demands of autonomy.

In this paper, I focus on establishing the intersubjective foundation of relational representation. To do this, it is necessary to look beyond representation itself and to ground it in a foundation common to all political action. One of reasons that theories of representation tend to end in objectification is that they treat representation as a unique, particular form of action. That is, they talk as if there is some action called *representing*, but this is not the case. Rather, representing is a descriptive label given to a set of everyday relational practices. By placing representation in this context, many of its apparent irresolvable problems disappear or are greatly mitigated.

I turn to theories of recognition as the appropriate grounding for political action, and thus, for representation because they confront the problem of autonomy and objectification. One view of recognition sees it as an activity focused on identity; I label this view throughout the paper as “identity recognition.” Across its various articulations, identities are treated as more-or-less fixed and complete and, yet, somehow in danger of being misrecognized or misrepresented. Since these identity-based understandings focus on identities as set things, the process of recognition ends up treating persons not as active subjects but as objects bearing particular identities. The difference between being a “bearer of particular identities” and a dynamic, active subject is the

difference between being subordinated to one's identities and working on the identities to create a meaningful self, respectively.

Given the problem with focusing on identity, a competing understanding of recognition has developed that takes intersubjectivity to be the foundational condition of the relationship. Following Markell, I call this intersubjective view *acknowledgment* to distinguish it from identity recognition.⁶ Acknowledgment serves as an orienting stance toward the other in an intersubjective relationship. Acknowledgment does not depend on the correct and complete recognition of the other's identity; it, instead, focuses on responsive practices that promote attentiveness to and care for the agency of the other in the relationship. As an "orienting stance" or "habit" of understanding, acknowledgement is (or *can be*) a part of all human action. Grounding relational representation in acknowledgment reveals the intersubjective potential of representation. Placing a value on intersubjectivity also creates several normative principles that can be used evaluate the effectiveness of particular representative relationships. These principles are answers to the simple question: Does the relationship respect the agency of the participants?

This paper proceeds as follows: In §2, I examine the problems with relying upon identity recognition and its analogue in representation theory. In §3, I address the advantages of acknowledgment's agency-centered approach to recognition and its incorporation into relational representation in order to avoid objectification of the actors. And in §4, I begin to trace the normative account of relational representation that derives from the incorporation of acknowledgment into representation.

⁶ Markell (2003) speaks of *acknowledgment* as a particular form of recognition, which is agency-based. The term derives from Cavell (1979, 2002a, and 2002b), who attempts to describe reciprocity in human relationships where knowledge does not necessarily entail understanding.

Identity & Objectification: Limiting Recognition and Representation

The aim of theories of recognition is to articulate what it means to have respect as a *human being*, but they differ on what it means to “recognize” and, consequently, what exactly is being recognized as fundamentally deserving of respect. The theories view “recognition” as either a specific type of action, distinct from other actions, or as a component of action, occurring prior to and incorporated into any number of actions.⁷ Theories of recognition that treat recognition as a specific action take the purpose of recognition to be the affirmation of identity. Since recognition is itself an action, it operates with a performative dynamic that necessitates in each interaction the act of recognizing the other’s identity requires one to objectify the other, reducing her to the identities she presents. As such, identity recognition tends to respect the identities, not the human beings bearing them.

The failure of identity recognition serves to illuminate the failures of many theories of representation. They take representation, like recognition, to be a specific type of action that, in some way, depends on tying the actor’s identity to the action. And like identity recognition, these theories of representation reproduce role-determined identities within the relationship – *I am a representative* or *I am represented by another* – rather than engaging in activities that work to represent the people.

⁷ The strongest articulation of this debate occurs in Fraser and Honneth (2003). It is a series of article exchanges between Nancy Fraser, who views recognition as a distinct good, and Axel Honneth, who views recognition as already implicated in all social goods. Fraser defends a theory of justice that treats redistribution and recognition as two distinct things (see also, Fraser 2009). To Honneth, redistribution always already implies recognition, and therefore, they cannot be treated as analytically independent of one another.

§2.1 Identity recognition

Recognition, following Kojève's interpretation of Hegel's 'master-slave' dialectic, has often been cast as a struggle with the highest stakes: it is a matter of social life and death.⁸ In Kojève's account of this contest, only one emerges with recognition, with the respect deserved as a human being. The other is denied recognition, dominated and understood only through the categories and terms of his subordination. The severity of this interaction results in the "master" being recognized and free to use his liberty, to be autonomous self, while the "slave" remains the permanent other, a use-object in the master's world whose actions serve only to confirm the recognition of the master. Many accounts of identity recognition modify and qualify the extremity of this struggle though, in the end, they tend to retain its adversarial character; that is, the recognition of one's identity remains an *absolute demand* upon the other. The adversarial dynamic precludes interactions between the actors as fully engaged subjects whose agency is capable affecting the relationship. Instead, it makes the demand for recognition a *spectacle*: one person expresses an identity that demands recognition; the other, as nothing more than a spectator, accepts (or does not) the presentation of the first person. This situation actually undermines the recognition of both persons. By accepting the spectacle, the spectator acts as a passive audience, failing to use her own agency in the interaction and, thus, giving no reasons to deserve recognition herself. The person that expresses a particular identity succeeds in achieving some form of recognition, but it is only the recognition of the presented identity – which is, only by extension and then only partially, a recognition of that person as a human being.

While the spectacular situation compels the spectator to recognize, at the least, the presented identity, it does not mean that she recognizes that identity in the way that the presenter

⁸ Translated into English as the somewhat less severe 'lord-bondsman' dialectic, see Hegel (1977), 111-119. For several generations, Kojève's interpretation dominated existential-influenced thought (Markell, 2003). Honneth (1995) recovers the elements of reciprocity and intersubjectivity found in Hegel's dialectic.

intended it. This problem of *misrecognition* derives from the focus on recognizing identities, rather than persons. The misrecognition occurs when the spectator either misses the significance of the identity or frames it as a negative, inferior identity. By extension, the presenter of the identity is also devalued. Observing the dangers of this form of misrecognition in identity recognition, theorists developed a political response, called either the “politics of recognition” or “identity politics,” to counter the misrecognition.⁹ There is, however, a second problem of misrecognition that lies beyond the contested field of identity recognition. Identity recognition assumes that recognition of an identity *is* the recognition of a person, but this is not necessarily the case. While one might have an adequate understanding to meaningfully recognize an identity, it does not imply that one understands the significance or meaning of the identity *to* the person who has presented it. In other words, the expression of an identity is situation-determined and, like any single experience, should not be treated as equivalent to a person’s subjectivity.

The “politics of recognition” works to affirm particular identities within the political community. Identity recognition is the product liberalism’s promotion of toleration as a political strategy for respecting difference. Liberal democratic politics achieves toleration through the creation of free political space that allows for the widest expression of diverse opinions and identities without harming the integrity of the participants or the space itself.¹⁰ Accordingly, toleration holds the free *expression* of identities to be a political good. In this regard, liberal democratic theory often relies on “free” in the sense of negative freedom, the ability to move within a space (physically or metaphorically), or in Hobbes’s definition, the absence of

⁹ The term “politics of recognition” derives from Charles Taylor’s influential article of that name (1994), and the contours of the debate of this position are presented in the collection, *Multiculturalism*, edited by Gutmann, which includes Taylor’s essay and several responses to it.

¹⁰ JS Mill’s *On Liberty* remains the most forceful articulation of this vision of liberalism, a mix of romanticism and utilitarianism.

obstacles.¹¹ The politics of toleration tends to focus on the integrity of the *space* for free expression. For example, which identities and opinions cannot be tolerated within this space? Answers vary with particular attention paid to those identities and opinions that explicitly reject toleration itself as a good. Similarly, can accommodating too much plurality endanger the unity necessary for a community? And relatedly, does the liberal democratic state function simply as a neutral arbiter between identities, or does it present its own thick identity that demands accommodation *from* all those within the state?¹²

The politics of recognition developed, in part, to address problems with toleration that were not simply spatial in nature. Toleration focuses on the inclusion in and provision of expressive space, remaining silent on the reception of the expressed opinions. The politics of recognition incorporates toleration's concern with inclusion, but it also addresses concerns about certain opinions and identities that are *formally* included but stigmatized and marginalized within the community in ways that cause some form of harm to the expressers of the marginalized opinions or identities. This additional concern can be understood in terms of equality. The politics of toleration views equality as formal opportunity, a matter of allowing opinions and identities to be expressed; whereas the politics of recognition views equality in a substantive way, holding that a certain set of identities should not only be formally equal, they should also receive equal respect. The hope of the politics of recognition – which has been successful in

¹¹ Berlin (2000) contrasts liberalism's negative liberty with the philosophical strains of positive liberty, which he fears promote authoritarianism. The revival of republican thought through the work of Skinner (1988) and Pettit (1997) argue for a third concept of liberty, *nondomination*, which falls in-between negative and positive liberty. For Hobbes's definition of liberty, see *Leviathan* 14.2.

¹² Taylor (1994) is not unaware of these concerns, but they are pursued more explicitly in Walzer's comment to Taylor's essay (1994a) and in his *Thick and Thin* (1994b). On the impossibility of neutrality by the state and the need for the state to take a strong position against forces of intolerance, see Marcuse (2007). For a recent thoughtful attempt at rethinking toleration as a value, see Forst (2004).

many instances – is that respect for an identity translates into respect for the persons that bear that identity.

However, respecting a category of persons is not the same as respecting the persons themselves. The politics of recognition treats persons as identity-expressers, deserving respect as reflections of their identity, rather than as complex subjects with agency, participating in the creation of individual constellations of identities and meanings. It follows that one's participation in self-formation ought to be the basis of human dignity and respect, not the bearing of any particular identity.¹³ The focus on identity, rather than agency, opens the politics of recognition to two problems. First, while the struggle for recognizing a particular identity is necessary for the recognition of those in that group, it can only ever be a partial recognition because the person is always more than an identity signals. The risk of the partial recognition is that the formerly marginalized identity may subordinate the other identities the persons in the group might have. The result is a second struggle by members of that identity not to be *determined* by that particular identity. This type of struggle is evident, for example, among women and homosexuals *within* minority ethnic groups. The focus on the ethnic or cultural identity obscures the ongoing struggle to recognize their gendered or sexual identity.¹⁴ The result is the increased fragmentation of identity into more specific subgroups, risking the reification of divisions rather than broadening communities. Identity recognition, then, does not treat the space between a person and her identity as significant. As such, identity recognition cannot address questions of the *relationship* between the person and her identity or the constellation of identities in which

¹³ Ignatieff (2001) presents a compelling attempt to ground human rights explicitly on human dignity and respect as that which is prior to the concrete articulation of any rights.

¹⁴ Appiah (1994), 162-3.

she participates. Placing primary value on the person's agency rather than her identity can capture this relationship.

The second problem with focusing on identity rather than agency is that identity recognition treats identities as static, things knowable independent of the persons expressing them. While most accounts of identity recognition gesture toward the fluidity of identities, one consequence of the spectacular structure of the moment of recognition is that it necessitates treating identities as objects of knowledge. To know an identity, for the politics of recognition, is to recognize the person expressing it. For recognition to function this way, it must be assumed that an identity can be, in the first place, an object of knowledge and that, in the second, knowledge of that object can mediate one's recognition of another person. Both assumptions are difficult to defend since they fix identities that are fluid in both their historical meanings as well as the personal significance individuals give them in their own lives. Thus, identity recognition has difficulty accounting for human agency in the *formation* of identity, and, consequently, it misses that the respect human beings deserve from one another derives not from the identity but from the agency that constitutes and adapts that identity.

Charles Taylor's *dialogical self* is the most compelling attempt to incorporate agency into identity recognition. However, Taylor's dependence on moral autonomy to give the expression of identity meaning results in the same problem as other accounts of identity recognition, namely recognizing an expressed identity is not the same as recognizing the agency of the person. That Taylor's approach fails overcome this problem shows that it is inherent to all theories of recognition that make identity the object of recognition. Taylor's dialogical self incorporates agency into the process of identity-formation prior to its expression, but it fails to view that agency as significant in the moment of recognition itself. Recognition, for Taylor, is meant to

affirm the moral autonomy and integrity of the expressed identity – to recognize its value, not to play a constitutive role in the identity-formation.

Taylor articulates the primary concern with identity in the politics of recognition as involving both the self and others:

[O]ur identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.¹⁵

There are three claims embedded in the passage. First, for Taylor, this is a question of “identity” in the singular, in the sense that each person has an individual identity. The focus on subjective identity solves the concern over recognizing partial identities because they are already integrated into an individual person. Yet, focus on the subjective identity does not change that recognition is dependent on the spectacular dynamic that treats identity as a knowable object.

Second, for Taylor, one’s identity is rooted in one’s *strong evaluations*, those qualities that are essential to the way I think of myself “because these properties so centrally touch what I am as an agent...that I cannot really repudiate them in the full sense.”¹⁶ Recognition affirms the expression of one’s identity, and misrecognition, then, harms a person by rejecting her expressed identity, and thus her strong evaluations, as deserving respect. In this way, Taylor’s identity recognition builds upon the politics of toleration by holding that a truly free space for expressing identities requires a substantive equality in the form of respecting the identities and strong evaluations of others.

The third claim embedded in Taylor’s passage quoted above is that there is a repeating pattern of identity formation, followed by its presentation, and then its recognition. Since the

¹⁵ Taylor (1994), 25

¹⁶ Taylor (1985b), 34. Taylor expands on strong evaluations in Taylor (1989 and 1994).

pattern is iterative, misrecognition can have a cascading harmful effect on the misrecognized person. Incorporating the misrecognition by another into one's sense of self causes one to invest one's identity and the strong evaluations that form it with negative values. This negative evaluation becomes the basis of the person's next self-expression and is thus further reinforced. While Taylor includes the response of others in our identity formation, the interaction is episodic and not truly intersubjective. The expression of the identity remains spectacular. The audience responds, recognizing it correctly or incorrectly. The expresser of the identity internalizes it, reworks the identity (apparently alone), and then re-presents it. As result, the expresser, in the moment of recognition, is alienated from her own identity until it is returned to her with the affirmative value of recognition or the negative counterpart of misrecognition. There is no indication of an ongoing relationship in which the identity is constituted *through* the interactions.

The moment of recognition must be spectacular and not relational for Taylor because a person must exercise moral autonomy by making strong evaluations as the basis of her expressed identity. Taylor, then, faces a difficulty: moral autonomy demands that a complete identity as the *source* of expressive action while still holding that misrecognition harms the *formation* of identity.¹⁷ In other words, Taylor's theory accounts well for misrecognition that causes the political harm of marginalization – denying a person's full appearance in public – but not for psychological, developmental harm.¹⁸

Taylor advances the *dialogical self* to resolve the difficulty.¹⁹ The dialogical self views persons as incorporating the plurality of the world in which they live as a part of the

¹⁷ Markell (2003), 39-61.

¹⁸ The primary example in Taylor (1994) bears this out. Taylor subordinates developmental harm to the political harm because he focuses on a political situation in which the marginalized identity, the Quebecois in Canada, have a rather strongly developed identity. The political conflict is over what accommodations constitute proper recognition of the Quebecois identity, not whether the identity itself is culturally significant.

¹⁹ Taylor (1994), 32

considerations prior to the morally autonomous decision about one's strong evaluations. Taylor develops the dialogical self as a critique of strong "atomist" autonomy, the idea that individuals are self-sufficient.²⁰ Unlike the atomist self, the dialogical self captures a person's experiences harmonizing her strong evaluations with her expressive actions and the public responses to them. Because of this consideration of others in the world we inhabit, Taylor refers to the dialogical self as "an agent with depth" as opposed to the atomistic self.²¹ In this way, the *dialogue* of the dialogical self occurs *within* the individual person.²² She takes in information from experience, interprets it, and uses that to further refine her strong evaluations and to prepare her for the next expression of her identity. In this way, Taylor is committed to maintain an understanding of identity as a coherent and authoritative expression of who one is. And since Taylor relaxes the developmental autonomy of the atomistic self by incorporating others' views into the dialogical self, he must retain a strong sense of moral autonomy if the strong evaluations are to have meaning as belonging to oneself.²³ Two difficulties arise from Taylor's dependence on a dialogical but morally autonomous self. First, moral autonomy demands an ethics of authenticity that manufactures individual coherence and forgetting the acknowledged plurality that is fundamental to the dialogical self. Second, the moment of recognition remains spectacular because moral autonomy requires that the identity expressed is morally complete in its presentation; it has no need of others.

²⁰ Taylor (1985a)

²¹ Taylor (1985b), 34

²² Concerned with similar limits of Taylor's dialogical self, Leitch (2008) argues that Taylor's incorporation of Bakhtin's *dialogicity* is incomplete because it misses the radical constitutive claim that the self is constituted through the dialogicity, through reciprocal practices.

²³ Markell (2003) calls the dependence on moral autonomy the "mark of sovereignty" left in Taylor's theory, by which he means that for Taylor there remains a sovereign "I" that maintains a true unity of the self in the expressed identity.

While Taylor rejects the absolute authenticity of the atomistic self, his reliance on moral autonomy commits him to an ethics of authenticity that demands similar self-coherence in the formation of identity as well as to maintaining that action is expressive, not constitutive. Moral autonomy assumes a sovereign “I” that judges the dialogue within the self in order to produce an authentic “I.” For Taylor, authenticity is the value of “being true to myself,” which includes being able to act on the strong evaluations of my identity.²⁴ Moral autonomy requires a (moral) *self* to whom I can be true. As such, the “self” is a moral space over which one can exert meaningful (and perhaps absolute) control. This vision of the morally autonomous self demands a coherence belied by the plurality premised by the dialogical self. There is no reason why dialogicity necessarily produces a coherent unity, something readily identifiable as the “authentic self.”

Taylor’s dialogical self finds itself between reproducing the authenticity of a coherent morally autonomous subject, and a theoretical tradition that views the self as open and always more and different than any particular expression may suggest. Whitman’s poetry and Montaigne’s *Essays* provide two examples of the tradition to which the dialogical self belongs. Whitman and Montaigne both conceive of the self as plural and, importantly, impossible to capture in its entirety, and thus, to the extent that authenticity is possible, it is found in an honesty about the limits of such a project in the first place. Whitman declares, “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)”²⁵ For Whitman, the self is a subject constantly taking in all its encounters, resulting in a gathered self that retains

²⁴ Taylor (1994), 28-32. Tully (2000) notes this: “The traditional concept of recognition is closely related to the concept of a fixed, authentic, or autonomous identity” (p479).

²⁵ Whitman, “Song of Myself” §51.6-9

the integrity of plurality and resists resolving into a knowable, coherent, singular “I.”²⁶ Montaigne’s project in the *Essays* is rooted in a skepticism drawn from an awareness of uncertainty in the human condition. Montaigne takes himself as the subject of his *Essays* discovering in the course of writing that his subject is impossibly elusive. He writes, “[A]nyone who studies himself attentively finds in himself and in his very judgment this whirring about and this discordancy. There’s nothing I can say about myself as a whole simply and completely, without intermingling and admixture.”²⁷ To the extent one can speak of an authentic self in Montaigne, it is located in the sprawling casuistries of the entire *Essays*, which, as with Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, was in constant revision until his death. For Montaigne authenticity is not an achievable end, it requires certainty on a subject – the self – that is contradictory and constantly changing, and which, therefore, remains open. As he summarizes well, “If my soul could only find a footing I would not be assaying myself but resolving myself.”²⁸ Taylor’s dialogical self is indebted to the tradition of the open self, but the demands of moral autonomy require resolution – an affirmative answer about who “I” am. If, following Whitman and Montaigne, such certainty eludes us, then the resolution within the dialogical self is never more than ephemeral or a fiction. In this way, the expression of identity is always uncertain and can only appear coherent by forgetting the uncertainty and acting *as if* a person can know herself. In other words, the formation of a moral unity out of the plural conditions of the dialogical or open self require an act of deliberate self-misrecognition.

²⁶ On Whitman, see Frank (2010) as a radical democratic response to Kateb (1992).

²⁷ Montaigne, *Essays*, II.1, “On the inconstancy of our actions” (p128). Similarly, “I am unable to stabilize my subject: it staggers confusedly along with a natural drunkenness. I grasp it as it is now, at this moment when I am lingering over it. I am not portraying being but becoming.” (III.2, “On repenting”, p232).

²⁸ *ibid*, p233

The demand of moral autonomy requires identity to be prior to action, meaning that action is expressive not constitutive. In other words, it is spectacular; it does not remain open to the world and others. The expressive character of action is a product of moral autonomy requiring the dialogue of the dialogical self to remain within the person, rather than between persons. In this way, the dialogicity in Taylor remains a strangely solitary act; the individual receives information from outside herself and then works on that information alone in a self-dialogue until she is prepared to re-express her identity. Even if one were to grant the presence of an intersubjective dialogue, in order for a person to be truly morally autonomous and capable of authentic self-expression, she needs to temporarily *forget* the ongoing nature of the dialogue that has brought her identity to the present and that will, after its expression, continue to affect it.

While Taylor weakens the monological character of atomistic autonomy, he ends up reproducing a subject that must act *as if* she is self-sufficient, at least morally. Under these conditions, an expressed identity is necessarily distinct from the person expressing it. This leaves Taylor's identity recognition open to the same problem as other identity recognition approaches: the demand is to recognize and respect an identity, not to recognize and respect a person as an active agent. Intersubjectivity is impossible in the midst of a spectacle aimed at identities rather than people. Without an intersubjective component focused on the agency of the acting persons, it is impossible to understand the meaning and relationship that any expressed identity has to the actual living person who expresses it.

§2.2 Autonomy and objectification in representation

Traditionally, liberal democratic theories of representation build the representative dynamic based on the demands of the autonomous person, in the atomistic sense of being self-

sufficient. As a result, these theories of representation follow a similar pattern of spectacle and objectification as theories of identity recognition. For autonomy to be possible in the representative situation, at least one person must be self-sufficient. This demand necessitates two limitations to the representative situation. It requires the actors to treat their role in the relationship as a part of their identity. This prioritizes identity over action; a person, for example, is a representative *before* she ever engages in representative action. This, in turn, makes the representative situation into a spectacular display in which one person claims her autonomy by objectifying the other person in the relationship. In other words, while aiming to satisfy the demands of autonomy as self-sufficiency, representation like identity recognition cannot allow for intersubjective relationships.

While Pitkin does not use the language of *spectacle*, her classic analysis, *The Concept of Representation*, details the two spectacular poles of liberal democratic representation: the trustee (or independence) model and the mandate model. The two models arise from opposite assumptions about *what* representation means and, thus, *who* serves as the appropriate focus of representative activity. The trustee model views representation as acting in the place of another, and therefore, it focuses on the activity of the representative. The mandate model adopts the opposite view, holding that representation ought to communicate the desires of the represented without distortion, and therefore, it focuses on the activity of the represented person or persons. The two models do, however, share the liberal assumption that the goal of politics is to allow autonomous action; they just differ on whose autonomy is to be maintained based on whom they view as the principal in the representative relationship. The paradoxical element here is that the autonomy of either the representative or the represented is possible, but not both at the same time. Whereas Pitkin's analysis focused on the practical conflict in our competing models of

representation, I argue that the problem is not rooted in the concept of representation itself, but in the demand of autonomy that necessitates prioritizing the subjectivity of one over the other in the representative relationship. To show how autonomy necessitates the objectification of the other in the relationship, I look at the mandate and trustee models in turn.

Mandate models of representation aim to have the represented's interests re-presented without distortion in a place and time that the represented, for whatever reason, cannot be. This pole of representative theory often takes the form of descriptive representation, similar to the mirroring argument of the Anti-Federalists.²⁹ Mandate theories focus on the composition and expressed opinions of the represented, thereby measuring the effectiveness of representation based upon its ability to re-express the authentic identity of the represented. In other words, the goal is to make the represented fully present *as they are* when they are not, in fact, literally present.

In order to accomplish the full expression of the represented's identity, mandate theories negate the agency of the representative, reducing her to being a means of communicating the represented's identity. The communicating function of the representative can appear in several forms, ranging from the "soft" version in which the representative is only bound by the represented's interests without specifically mandated actions to the "strong" version in which the representative serves merely as the messenger of the represented, re-presenting their will and fully formed decisions. In essence, the representative's only function is to be the physical presence in order for those not there in person to express their identity.

²⁹ Manin (1997) sets up the mirror/filter distinction to describe the differences between Anti-Federalist and Federalist positions on representation in the republic. Manin points out that the two visions had quite a bit in common. Neither rejected representation, so it was not a representation vs. democracy argument. It was about the proper *means* of representation. The Anti-Federalists maintained that the legislature should *mirror* the people in its make-up, containing persons from the different geographical areas and the different vested interests and professions. The Federalists' *filter* focused not on the aristocratic belief in the best persons governing but on the democratic one that the best interests of the people must be able to be considered within the legislature.

There are two practical problems with the mandate model. One centers on the plurality of interests within a particular represented constituency, and the other on whether it is even possible to clearly determine the will of the represented. Beyond those practical problems, the implication of mandate models is clear: the subject of representation – that is, the acting agent – is the represented. The represented, either a single person or a group of persons, exercises her or their liberty in order to arrive at an actionable decision that is an authentic expression of her or their identity. In this process, the representative’s agency is not engaged; she is an object used only for the transmission of the represented’s will. Thus, in preserving the autonomy of the represented, mandate models rely on the objectification of the representative. The result is that the representative situation retains a spectacular character and fails to engage the representative and represented in an intersubjective relationship.

Trustee models of representation view representation as the activity of the representative; she makes herself present *in the place* of others who cannot be. As the one who is present, she makes decisions as any autonomous person gathered in that place at that time would. In this way, trustee models understand representation as the self-presentation of the representative, who as a *trustee* bears the authority to speak and act in the name of those whom she represents.

Accordingly, the representative is not bound to the will or any particular interests of the represented, though most trustee-leaning theories attempt to create accountability by connecting the interests of the represented with the decision-making considerations of the representative.

There are several familiar forms of the trustee model in political theory: Burke’s virtual representation, the Federalists’ filtering argument, and in an extreme form Hobbes’s sovereign representation.³⁰ Burke points out the commonsensical aspect of the trustee model: “Your

³⁰ Pitkin (1967) uses Burke as her example of an independence theory. Complicating Burke’s model of ‘virtual representation,’ see Coniff (1977) and M. Williams (2006). On the Federalists’ “filtering” theory of representation

representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”³¹ A representative to the legislature is meant to engage in politics, which includes listening to testimony, compromising with other representatives, and making an informed decision, all of which is impossible in mandate models because the representative appears in the legislature with a decision already in hand.

A mirror image of mandate models, trustee models make the representative the subject of representation. Accordingly, the expression of the representative’s autonomy comes at the cost of objectifying the represented. They are incorporated as objects into the representative’s identity *as a representative*. As a consequence, everything done by the representative – whether aligned with the interests of the represented or not – is representative because it is done by a representative. As Burke suggests, the opinions of the represented – that is, their use of their agency – compromises the capacity of the trustee-representative to develop her own independent, considered judgment. Trustee models are dependent on subject-object relations in order to allow the representative function autonomously – that is, self-sufficiently. As such, the trustee model is the mirror image of the mandate model, prioritizing the representative at the expense of the represented. Therefore, in the same way, trustee models create a representative situation that retains a spectacular character and fails to enable an intersubjective relationship.

Liberal democratic theories of representation, whether anchored in a mandate or trustee model, view representation as a political practice based on the strong sense of autonomy as self-sufficiency. This atomistic autonomy aims at the full and authentic expression of a person’s identity. Yet in the representative situation, it is impossible for either the representative or the

see the previous note on Manin (1997). On Hobbes’s theory of representation, see Lyon (2010) and Runciman (2000).

³¹ Burke (1999), 156

represented to act autonomously without objectifying the other. One actor is an active subject – an autonomous agent – while the other is used without regard to her agency, becoming the means to enable the subject’s autonomous expression. This is the paradox of liberal democratic representation: in order to accomplish the aim of autonomy for one person, the dynamic of representation *requires* the domination, objectification, and *harm* of others in the community. Thus it appears that the practice of representation is at odds with liberal democratic goals.

In this way, the representative situation mirrors Kojève’s understanding of recognition as the master-slave dialectic. The objectification of one person (the negation of her agency) is necessary in order to achieve the authentic expression of the other. In both mandate and trustee models the pattern of subject-object relations repeats in the same way as identity recognition. The demands of autonomy drive both representation and recognition toward the objectifying dynamic. As with recognition, it is necessary to rethink representation independent of atomistic autonomy and in terms of agency and subjectivity.

The rethinking of recognition and representation are related. An agency-centered theory of recognition is able to function as the grounding for an agency-promoting theory of representation. In order to make the shift away from atomistic autonomy toward agency, we need to two changes to the way we understand the political situation in which recognition and representation occur. It is necessary to adopt a theory of action is more than expressive; it must also be constitutive in the sense that the *interactions* ought to affect the meaning of the action. Allowing the constitutive capacity of action transforms both recognition and representation into *relational* concepts. As such, representation is first and foremost a human relationship, not an expressive spectacle. Following on the relational insight, it is necessary to maintain intersubjectivity in order for recognition and representation to work. Accordingly, any situational

dynamics that depend on objectification are incapable of producing *any* recognition or representation. If the intersubjective conditions disappear, the relationship becomes one of domination – marked by violence rather than respect. In order to rethink representation as an intersubjective relationship, I turn first to *acknowledgment*, an agency-centered theory of recognition capable of promoting reciprocal recognition and escaping the dominating outcomes of objectification.

3

Acknowledging Agency

Acknowledgment³² responds to the limitations of identity recognition; it values the agency of the actors by focusing on actions that affirm and build relationships through iterative reciprocal responses. Unlike identity recognition, which relies upon *knowledge* of an identity, acknowledgement requires only a response to what has been done.³³ The contrast between acknowledging actions and knowing something parallels Arendt’s distinction between *understanding* and the finality of knowledge. She writes, “[Understanding] is an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in this world.”³⁴ As with understanding, acknowledgment aims to make sense of one’s relations to others and the world. Whereas understanding can be understood passively here – reconciling oneself to what *is* –

³² The concept of acknowledgment presented here is based on Markell’s account in *Bound by Recognition* (2003), but also draws on the insights of Honneth (1995, 2008); Tully (2000, 2004); and Ricoeur (2007a). A note on the vocabulary used here: Honneth, despite discussing Cavell’s *acknowledgment*, continues to speak of a new understanding of *recognition* because he emphasizes the forgotten dimension of *cognition* in the discussion of recognition. Markell shifts from *recognition* to *acknowledgment* in order to avoid confusion and to highlight the distinction (see 2003, 32-33). Tully uses both. Here I maintain Markell’s convention for the sake of clarity.

³³ Cavell (1979, 2002a, 2002b) contrasts acknowledgment to *knowledge* rather than recognition. See also, Markell (2003), 34.

³⁴ Arendt (2004), 307-308. Arendt covers similar ideas in the essay “Truth and Politics” (2006).

acknowledgment is an active understanding in two senses. First, acknowledgment manifests through responsive actions, and second, its effort “to be at home in this world” requires not only the affirmation of what is, it leaves the relationship open to future responses.

One of the reasons that identity recognition requires a spectacular dynamic is that it takes “recognition” to be a specific action itself: while one expresses her identity, the other recognizes it. Acknowledgment is not a specific action; it’s incorporated into one’s direct response to the other.³⁵ In responding to another, one must acknowledge, in some sense, what has been said and done. In this way, acknowledgment fits with a pragmatic view of human relationships. Even in moments that, in ordinary speech, we would consider an explicit recognition, such as thanking a person for a kindness, it still would not count as “recognition” because the thankfulness is not about knowledge of the other, but an affirmation of the act of kindness. Acknowledgment accounts for this, viewing the spoken thanks as affirmative of what has been – the kindness done. Here, acknowledgment is contained within other specific actions, in this case giving thanks, that are direct responses to the actions of others. As such, it is appropriate to think of acknowledgment, not as an action itself, but as a habit or orienting of the self toward others and the world in order to respond in ways that affirm and build the relationship. The example of thanking a person for a kindness also demonstrates the second way in which acknowledgment is an active understanding: it should keep the relationship open to continue. Accordingly, giving thanks not only affirms the kindness, it also invites future response, establishing a (potential) relationship.

As a theory, acknowledgment has several advantages over identity recognition. Acknowledgment conforms with the nature and character of relational interactions in ways that

³⁵ On the debate about recognition as a specific action or as prior to specific actions, see Fraser and Honneth (2003).

call for a specific act of recognition does not. Following from this, the aims of acknowledgment are more measured than those of recognition. Whereas recognition demands full authenticity of the actors, acknowledgment works only to affirm specific actions and leaving the relationship open to development. In this way, acknowledgment accepts the elements of time and change within relationships, thereby never needing to claim or demand full knowledge or complete recognition of one's identity; it is sufficient to keep the responsive relationship open with the other. Tully fittingly summarizes the relational situation of acknowledgment as a continual process of self-disclosure and acknowledging of the other.³⁶

§3.1 Agency and acknowledgment

By focusing on the actions that constitute a relationship, acknowledgment treats a person not as the bearer of an identity, but as an actor whose actions, in eliciting responses from others, are always more than the mere expression in the action. Ricoeur captures the active dimension of human beings with his concept of *capable persons*, agents who intervene in the world to create change and meaning.³⁷ To think of relationships in terms of capable persons allows one to make a distinction between agency and capability.³⁸ The gap between a person's agency and her capabilities is critical to understanding why human interaction should not be thought of as episodic and momentary, but rather, as an ongoing process of continual disclosure. Since agency is the capacity to act, no one action makes a person's agency completely evident. Thus, if an action fails to achieve its end, this limitation is one of capability, and not necessarily of agency.

³⁶ Tully (2000)

³⁷ Ricoeur (2007a), 1-3

³⁸ While outside the scope of this paper, it is, in my estimation, critical that acknowledgment and representation connect to Amartya Sen's *capabilities approach* to justice. It grounds politics in human agency and focuses practical energy on the promotion of capabilities – that is, the capacity to use one's agency. See Sen (1999 and 2009). For a related elaboration of capabilities, see Nussbaum (1992 and 2006).

Through the linked iterations of the responsive relationship, one is able to develop an understanding of the other that can move between actuality and potentiality.

For acknowledgment, it is important to understand the “world” that Ricoeur’s capable persons intervene in is a social world. It is the world we share, including the natural environment and what human beings have created.³⁹ Since a capable person works on and is worked on by the world, the differences between the person’s agency and her current practical limits evolve in the context of a complex network of relationships with the objects of the world and the other capable persons taking part in it. The necessity of the world for the capable person to use her agency precludes the possibility of an atomistic autonomy, of thinking of the person as self-sufficient. Instead, the capable person is necessarily *dependent* upon other persons and, yet, *not determined* by them. In this sense, acknowledgment as enacted by capable persons revives a conception of humanity as inherently *sociable*.⁴⁰ Human sociability suggests the human condition is risky; by engaging others, one can only find liberty *through* relationships that also always risk domination.

The risky nature of sociable humanity requires an understanding of capable persons as having a non-atomistic autonomy, but one that accounts for the constitution of the self through relationships with others. The appropriate conception of autonomy ought to push one step beyond Taylor’s dialogical self. Like Taylor, the demands for self-sufficiency must be dropped in favor of a sociable agency. But unlike Taylor, the demand for moral autonomy must be similarly relaxed since it was in treating the subject *as if* self-sufficient in each moral decision that a sovereign “I” crept back into the analysis, thereby obscuring the relational possibility of

³⁹ Ricoeur (2007a) and on “worldliness” see Arendt (1998).

⁴⁰ The question of human *sociability* is outside the scope of this paper, but in brief, I mean to recognize that the atomist fantasy of the individual in isolation and deterministic versions of humanity are both missing the ways in which humanity is constituted through human interaction. The tradition of sociability is found throughout the canon of Western philosophy. I would start with Montaigne and Whitman, discussed above, and include the strange ambivalence of Rousseau and Kant, the latter of whom refers to our *unsociable sociability*.

the dialogical self. To retain the relational possibility, both practical and moral autonomy must open the subject to the continuous impact of internal dialogue and external interaction as a continuing part of every belief, action, and response.

If “autonomy” is to be practically meaningful in describing persons, then it needs to capture the fact that the existence of one’s self is continually created through interactions with other acting subjects in relationships through which one articulates desires, narrates a coherent self, and navigates between principles and particulars. Axel Honneth gives a compelling account of what this practical autonomy looks like.⁴¹ Honneth calls for the “decentering” of autonomy, by which he means shifting it from self-sufficiency to agency, the capacity to act and respond. By focusing on agency and action, Honneth uncovers the problematic assumption that allows Taylor to assume moral autonomy in the dialogical self. Honneth notes that Taylor wrongly maintains “the transparency of our desires and the intentionality of meaning.”⁴² That is, Taylor assumes that when one acts, it is from a position of self-knowledge and self-understanding with the capacity to control the creation and the attribution of meaning (though in practice total control necessarily eludes one). Accordingly, being *dialogical* requires an intersubjective self and must, therefore, exclude a subject’s capacity for certainty in both her own self and the expectations of the ways in which others receive her actions.

Concerned to connect intersubjectivity with autonomy, Honneth proposes three decentering principles that make autonomy available for capable persons. The first principle replaces the transparency of desires to oneself with a focus on the capacity to articulate desires through language. Without assuming transparency, one cannot expect that a person’s actions are fully expressive of her identity. Instead, one must see expression as a process of refining

⁴¹ The next two paragraphs draw extensively on Honneth (2007), 185-188.

⁴² Honneth (2007), 185

imperfect communication with others. The second principle substitutes biographical consistency for giving one's life a narrative coherence. With the second principle, the finality of self-knowledge and the need for self-sufficiency in order to express oneself is replaced by the less demanding capacity to give an account of one's self that makes sense without necessarily being complete. The third decentering principle challenges the assumption of objectivity. It holds that one's orientation toward universal principles – evident in the Kantian principle of autonomy, willing the law by which one lives – must also incorporate a supplemental moral sensitivity to context. For Kant, reason is capable of deriving universal principles *without* context, *without* interacting with others. A decentered autonomy must accept the necessity of context because we necessarily exist in a world among others. Thus, interactions are meaningful and must deal with whole persons – reasonable, emotional, and only somewhat certain of themselves and others. Honneth's decentering principles open to a conception of autonomy in which the affirmation of one's own agency is bound to the acknowledgment of the agency of others. They cannot be unraveled as the objectification of any agent destroys the autonomy of all those involved. As a result, a person cannot strive for self-sufficiency or sovereign control over her own self, and must, instead, cultivate her agency through intersubjective relationships.

As an orienting stance, acknowledgment requires a person to cultivate habits of moving between herself and the other, in order to constantly adjust her understanding of both. In an intersubjective relationship it is easy to forget the provisional character of understanding and to start treating it as knowledge. Acknowledgment requires habits of self-awareness as well as active, open engagement with the other to cultivate intersubjective relationships in which the participants can enable their agency – that is, to be recognized as capable persons.

The habits of self-awareness that make acknowledgment possible remind a person of the “basic ontological conditions” of her life, which are that she is changing, she acts in a world she cannot control, and shares it with others whom she can harm.⁴³ Markell captures this awareness of one’s self-limits well with three claims. The first limit is that our identity is always incomplete, and thus, we always “risk its fate” when we act.⁴⁴ Since the self is constituted through relationships with others, we must remain aware that all of our actions are incomplete in themselves because they require a response from others, which we cannot control. This means that one’s agency is always vulnerable to others. Second, we must remain aware of finitude, particularly “as a matter of [our] practical limits in the face of an unpredictable and contingent future.”⁴⁵ For Markell, finitude is not a claim about the radical unknowability of the self; it is the fact that one’s knowledge will never be complete, and yet, actions still demand responses. And third, we must surrender our desire for domination – either of oneself or of others – because tension and conflict are constitutive elements of our basic condition.⁴⁶ In essence, Markell’s three limits understand acknowledgment as arising from habits of self-awareness chastened by attending to the difficulty of knowing the self in a certain and complete way. By developing habits of self-awareness that remain attentive to the ways in which we are unable to exert absolute control over the use of our agencies and senses of self, we are forced to recognize the presence of others in constituting ourselves. This recognition allows persons not only to develop

⁴³ Markell (2003), 10

⁴⁴ Markell (2003), 24. Markell notes Arendt’s claim in *Human Condition* that identity is only tangible once a life has ended (1998, 193). Benjamin (1968) makes a similar claim in “The Storyteller.” Benjamin reflects on the claim that ‘A man who dies at the age of thirty-five...is at every point of his life a man who dies at the age of thirty-five.’ For Benjamin the statement is false because it is only true in *remembrance*. While living, the meaning of that man’s life was open and changing. It only gained the sad or tragic character following his death at a young age (p100).

⁴⁵ Markell (2003), 38

⁴⁶ Markell (2003), 38. He does not use the term *domination* here, but it repeats throughout the text as the reason that for the inescapable agonism of human life. Markell (2008) articulates the role that the principle of nondomination should play within democratic theory.

sympathy for others in the same ontologically bound situation as themselves, but also to remain attentive to the ways that all thinking about the self *already involves* others.

Acknowledgment incorporates the concern for other's agency by cultivating an active, open engagement with the other. In order to act towards the other in open engagement, one must develop habits that remain attentive to the agency of the other. Whereas people will tend to forget their own limitations in determining themselves, they will all too easily forget that others have an active agency. This forgetting results in a tendency for one to objectify the other, to treat the other as a thing in *my* world, rather than as a subject in her own right. Honneth argues that acknowledgement requires habits that constantly re-cognize, literally to think again, the other because our everyday cognitive habits tend to work against recognizing the agency of others. Honneth effectively emphasizes this other-forgetting cognitive habit through a repurposing of Lukács's concept of *reification*, so that it includes the tendency to treat persons and relationships as mere objects. The reification of others is not typically a conscious activity, an attempt to dominate others, but rather, it is a *forgetting* of the other's agency and the existential meaning other agents give things, their surroundings, and their practices.⁴⁷ Reification, then, is about a loss of attentiveness to the world one shares with others. Through reification, one loses the capacity to approach the world as being constituted by a plurality of active agents, each constantly generating meaning through their actions that they too attach to things and relationships. To remedy the tendency to forget the other, acknowledgment serves as orienting stance toward others that continuously calls on oneself to re-cognize others as agents engaged in the same meaning-creating activities that one is. In re-cognizing the other, one is called to actions that remain attentive to the agency of the other.

⁴⁷ Honneth (2008) elaborates: reification occurs when "in our objectifying behavior we ignore the existential meanings that these persons have conferred upon their natural surroundings" (p64).

Acknowledgment is an orienting stance toward the agency of the other that maintains an appreciation for the ways in which one's own self is created through intersubjective relationships. The habits of attentiveness to the self and others that constitute the orienting stance of acknowledgment are necessitated by the fact that capable persons share a *world*. Acknowledgment enables relationships to unfold *in time*. The temporal existence of relationships determines what types of actions should be considered as attentive to the agency of oneself and others. These actions should open the self to others and invite the continual growth of the relationship. Accordingly, the action should first and foremost be a response to and anticipation of the actions of the other. In this way, it affirms and builds the relationship, providing the means for its continued existence. Responsiveness functions as a measure to determine what practices arise from a stance of acknowledgment and which tend, instead, towards domination and forgetfulness of the other. In other words, while acknowledgment establishes cognitive habits of attentiveness, such thinking is meaningless without a practical manifestation in the actions one takes. The attentive cognitive habits should encourage responsive actions that are evident in practices that *care* for the agency of the other.⁴⁸ Caring practices work on the practical manifestation of agency; they promote the capabilities of the capable person. In caring for the agency of the other, a person also cares for her own agency, by keeping a responsive relationship open and, thus, cultivating a situation in which one's own capabilities will potentially continue to be promoted.

Responsiveness serves as a measure for the attentive habits that constitute acknowledgment and the caring practices they encourage, but it also provides a way to think about practices that fail to acknowledge others. Practices that enact or promote objectification or

⁴⁸ Honneth (2008) develops the concepts of *caring practices*, adapted from Heidegger's existentialism, and *habits of attentiveness*, from William James's pragmatism. The distinction between the two and the elaboration of the relationship are, I believe, my own.

domination destroy the intersubjective quality of a responsive relationship. Such actions attempt to prevent the other from using her agency in response to what one has done. When a relationship loses its responsive quality, it is a sign that it has ethically and practically lost its grounding in acknowledgment and ceased to be, in a truly intersubjective sense, a relationship.

Drawing on the ways in which one tends to forget oneself and others, the habits of attentiveness to agency and the caring practices of promoting capabilities that constitute acknowledgment serve to reorient the conception of recognition away from the achievement of particular ends toward an awareness of enacting relationships. The pattern of responsiveness takes precedence over one's intentions or the consequences one is aiming for. This results in acknowledgment serving as the grounding for "practices of freedom" rather than as the justification for a systematic "theory of justice."⁴⁹

§3.2 Acknowledgment and representation

Autonomy-centered conceptions of representation share the problem of objectification seen with identity recognition. By requiring the self-sufficient expression of one person in the representative relationship, the pattern of objectification was treated as an irresolvable choice in which only one person in the relationship can be an active subject while the other is reduced to a means for enabling the subjective expression of the other. While autonomy as self-sufficiency leads representative theory to a dead-end, it is possible to rethink representation in a way parallel to the shift from identity recognition to acknowledgment. Placing agency at the center of the

⁴⁹ This approach is borrowed from Sen's *Idea of Justice* (2009) in which he approaches justice through practices that lessen injustice instead of attempting to achieve specific ideals of what justice *is*. Similarly, the sentence above is a rephrasing of a claim made by Tully (2000) concerning this new approach to recognition: "Rather than concentrating primarily on the goals of these struggles (specific forms of distribution or recognition) and the theories of justice which could adjudicate their claims fairly...one should look on the struggles themselves as the primary things. The primary but not exclusive orientation then would be practices of freedom rather than theories of justice" (p469).

representative relationship opens it to non-spectacular interactions in which an intersubjective relationship is possible. One limit to the parallel has to do with the character of acknowledgment. Since identity recognition treats recognition as a specific type of action, it was analogous to autonomy-centered representation in structure and, therefore, it was not available to be integrated into the representative situation. However, acknowledgment is not itself a particular action but an orienting stance that characterizes the habits and practices necessary to intersubjective relationships. As an orienting stance, acknowledgment is available to serves as the grounding for an agency-centered theory of representation. Building a theory of representation on acknowledgment opens the intersubjective potential of representation; it is the basis of a *relational representation*. Relational representation, then, describes a set of practices that follow from the stance of acknowledgment. In this way, a relationship is representative to the extent that the particular practices enable the agency of the other by promoting her capabilities. That is, representation is evident in a set of caring practices.

Relational representation allows us to see a deeper problem in the autonomy-centered conceptions of representation. The objectification of one person in the relationship already makes representation a suspect institution for democratic communities, but the insights of acknowledgment recast the problem as a failure to respect agency of all involved in the relationship. That is, autonomy-centered representation produces a double objectification, disabling the agency of both persons in the relationship. By satisfying the demand to forget the other as a capable person in autonomy-centered representation, the remaining person is actually also forgetting her own agency in her attempts to express her autonomy because she forgets that she is constituted through relationships. Acknowledgment, with its prioritization of action over identity, shifts the focus of the representative relationship away from the roles of the persons and

towards the responsive character of their action. As such, the roles emerge over the course of the relationship, established and affirmed in the pattern of responses. One's claim to represent gains meaning only through a series of responses that show the actions to be representative of the other. Accordingly, the meaning of being *representative* is connected to responsiveness and the practices appropriate to acknowledgment.⁵⁰ In this way, representing is not understood as a *speaking for* or a *standing for* but as a *responding to* or *speaking along with* another.⁵¹ Relational representation as a set of caring practices, attentive to the agency of the other, reveals the possibility of using representation in a democratic capacity. Relational representation describes a practice of freedom, an attempt to increase the capacity of persons to use their agency to affect their world.

4

Conclusion: Engaging Agency through Relational Representation

Grounding relational representation in acknowledgment makes it possible to sketch a normative account of the types of practices that count as representative. The specific practices are relationship-dependent since it is a matter of the *relational* pattern of responses between the persons. This dynamic requires an awareness to the physical and temporal contexts of the relationship. Some practices that, at one time, count as representative may eventually given the particular pattern of responses end up becoming unrepresentative. For example, taking a case of political representation in which a nongovernmental organization (NGO) is working in a community. When the NGO begins its work, perhaps because of drought, there is a need for

⁵⁰ The responsive element of representation is emphasized by a few, see Hudson (2001) and Rehfeld (2009).

⁵¹ Pitkin (1967) defines representation as a literal re-presentation that requires one to either “speak” or “stand” for another.

basic food supplies. The provision of these food supplies promotes the capabilities of the community by alleviating the deprivations of famine. In this way, the NGO allows the community to be re-presented (that is, presented again) as a more capable community. However, when the drought is over, the continued provision of food aid can have destructive effects on the local economy. At that point, the same practice (food aid) ceases being representative as it is not responsive to the agency of the other; it is, rather, a usurpation of the capabilities of the community. In other words, to the extent that the representative relationship is successfully representative, one ought to promote the capabilities of the other, increasing her or their capacity to use her or their agency.⁵²

The normative account of relational representation, which is the direction this study is headed, grows out of the demands of acknowledgment and the cultivation of an intersubjective relationship. In other words, the normative account attempts to develop what it looks like to develop the habit of being attentive to agency and the adoption of practices that care for that agency through the promotion of capabilities. Practices that care about the boundary conditions of the relationship are fundamental to the integrity of the relational dynamic. They must foster openness, and it should permeate every level of the relationship.⁵³ It requires transparency of and availability to each agent, which serves as an orientation to the self as well as an invitation to the other.⁵⁴ Openness keeps present the permanent incompleteness of the relationship and the temporal awareness that accompanies it. And lastly, openness reminds one that no relationship, no particular action or response is determinative of a subject; the participants are capable persons

⁵² List & Koenig-Archibungi (2010) are part of an attempt to develop an understanding of ‘group agents’ that captures the often collective nature of political subjects without relying on the paradoxical sounding ‘group persons.’ Throughout this chapter, I continue to refer to the ‘persons’ of the representative relationship, but it should be understood that a ‘person’ might be an individual or groups of individuals.

⁵³ A. Keenan (2003), 1-24

⁵⁴ On transparency and availability, see Strong (2012).

with the capacity to use their agency to affect the world and their lives in new and unanticipated ways. The commitment to openness enables the responsiveness central to acknowledgment and critical to relational representation.

The purpose of this paper has been to establish that liberal democratic conceptions of representation and identity recognition result in objectification because of the demands of autonomy. In order to rescue representation as a practice of freedom, it is necessary to rethink it around the concept of agency. The rethinking in recognition points towards acknowledgment. Since acknowledgment is an orienting stance prior to any particular action, it can serve as the grounding for an intersubjective or relational representation.

While there is not the space to develop the set of responsive values I think are implicit in relational representation, I want to introduce them briefly here for the sake of discussion. Responsiveness requires both self-limiting practices and those that care for others. The most appropriate limiting principle is that of *nondomination*.⁵⁵ The only way to maintain the intersubjectivity of relational representation is to remain aware of the risks of domination produced by one's actions. The caring practices that are responsive and promote capabilities are those that claim and reinforce the participants' commitment to the relationship. Two such values that ought to characterize the caring practices are *solidarity* and *responsibility*. Solidarity is demonstrated in practices that affirm the ways in which one relates to others. By solidarity, I do not mean *commonality* exactly, but rather an *acting together*.⁵⁶ That is, solidarity does not confuse one's own agency with the agency of the other; it affirms the shared relationship

⁵⁵ I agree with Markell (2008) that the republican interest in nondomination alone is not sufficient. It is also important to focus on the potential of usurpation as equally harmful to the capabilities of others. See Alexander (2010) for a good summary of the principle of nondomination in the republican literature.

⁵⁶ On solidarity, see Brunkhorst (2002) and Principe (2000), both of which serve as a critique on the version of solidarity as commonality put forward by Rorty (1989).

between them. Responsibility derives from its root in responsiveness.⁵⁷ Responsible practices are those that affirm the pattern of responsiveness, accepting culpability for past actions and, looking forward, assuming the risk for continuing the relationship implied by one's response.⁵⁸ Emerging from these responsive practices is an ethical view of representation; it is a practice of freedom, a relationship-determined set of caring practices that works through its representative claim to promote the capabilities of the represented.

⁵⁷ See Cavell (1990), Niebuhr (1999), and Ricoeur (2007b). The best account of the possibilities of responsibility is B. Williams (1993), 50-74.

⁵⁸ On the prospective model of responsibility, see Ricoeur (2007b) and Young (2011).

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