

*Platz, research statement, draft October 13, 2013*

In my research I explore the connection between freedom and morality and the idea that the norms that we ought to live by – whether as individuals or as collectives – protect and realize freedom. While the questions I work on are not questions about the history of philosophy, but about the truth in matters of ethics and political philosophy, I approach these questions by combining historical and analytical methods. Questions have histories and I believe that we better understand both a question and the range of plausible answers to it, when we understand the history of that question and the ways in which philosophers have tried to approach it.

In the following I sketch how I pursue the connection between freedom and morality in three related subjects of inquiry.

### 1. Autonomy and ethics

It is not terribly controversial that freedom is of ethical concern, but there is widespread disagreement about the nature of that concern. I seek to articulate and defend a Kantian view of the relation between freedom and ethics – a view that ties ethics and freedom together in the idea of autonomy.

The Stoics argued that freedom is realized only through virtue. Kant took this idea a step further and argued that the laws of morality are laws of freedom. The idea is at once both strange and attractive: true freedom is realized by obeying the dictates of pure practical reason and these dictates, in turn, are the reasons of autonomous willing. It is one thing to say with the Stoics that freedom requires virtue, it is another thing altogether to say that virtue is what it is, because we are and ought to be free. It is this Kantian idea that I want to make sense of.

To see how dramatic Kant's idea really is, contrast it with the idea of autonomy that has found a place at the center of contemporary ethics. There the idea of autonomy dictates that mature and well-informed persons ought to determine for themselves what to do, so that autonomy supports norms of personal authority, consent, and anti-paternalism. Kantian autonomy implies norms of personal authority, consent, and anti-paternalism, but Kantian autonomy balances these norms with norms of personal responsibility and grounds them in a theory of morality as autonomy. Kantian autonomy has two parts: the part that emphasizes the determining self and the part that emphasizes the laws that the self ought to determine herself by. The first part supports norms of personal authority, independence, and self-determination so prevalent in contemporary ethics. The second part, however, supports norms of responsibility, interpersonal concern, and self-control as necessary complements of the norms of personal authority. Contemporary ethics neglects the second part of autonomy and, therefore, overlooks how authority implies responsibility. Moreover, and even more dramatically, Kantian autonomy is a theory of morality, not just a source of norms: folded into the Kantian idea of autonomy we find moral ontology, moral epistemology, and moral phenomenology.

If Kant is right, then, freedom and ethics are connected not merely in the Stoic sense that we cannot be free without virtue, nor merely in the contemporary sense where autonomy protects personal independence and authority, but in the sense that freedom is virtue and virtue is what serves freedom, so that autonomy is the central term of the source, experience, and content of morality. I think that this is a wild and wonderful idea and I'd like to make sense of and defend it.

So far, my work on this subject of inquiry has focused on Rousseau's and Kant's ideas of autonomy. In the future I hope to use Rousseau and Kant to argue that the idea of autonomy as the supreme principle of morality deserves renewed attention.

## 2. Liberty and justice

That justice and liberty are closely connected is one of the most powerful and influential philosophical ideas. It is in this idea that we find the philosophical foundations for liberal democracy. But, as with the relation between freedom and ethics, the relation between liberty and justice is a matter of deep disagreement. I aim to map the sources of disagreement and to articulate and defend a contractualist approach to the relation.

Different liberalisms suggest different ways to connect justice and liberty, and these connections, in turn, offers competing visions of liberal democracy. In classical liberalism liberty and liberties are seen as essential instruments of peace and prosperity. Smith, Hayek, and Friedman, for example, argue that "a system of natural liberty" increases the productive powers of society to the benefit of all its members. By contrast, natural rights oriented strands of liberalism view certain liberties as rights that determine both ends and limits of government. Grotius, Locke, and Nozick, for example, argue that the point of government is to provide the institutional conditions necessary for reliability of contracts, security of property rights, and protection of the person from foreign and domestic enemies. Finally, social contract liberals have seen liberties as necessary parts of the fair terms of cooperation between free and equal persons. Rousseau, Kant, Rawls, and Tomasi, for example, argue that the social contract must respect and protect a list of basic rights equally for all citizens (though they disagree about what rights to include on the list).

Classical liberalism, natural rights liberalism, and contractualist liberalism thus offer three different views of the relation between liberty and justice – and these are merely the three most prominent options. The question, then, is how we should navigate this terrain of options. So far, I have tried to map the options, and I have argued that the natural rights approach has serious problems. I have also suggested that the contractualist approach needs to better specify the criterion that decides what liberties we ought to protect as basic and I've taken steps to articulate a better criterion. Currently, I'm working to rearticulate and make clear the attractions of classical liberalism, but I also to argue that the conditional commitment to equal liberty that classical liberalism supports leaves it vulnerable. The upshot, I argue, is that the contractualist framework offers the better approach to the relation between liberty and justice, but also that the

contractualist framework is in need of further development and support. So, in future work I will develop and support contractualism.

### *3. The relation between autonomy and liberty, ethics and justice*

Connected to the question of how liberty and justice are connected is the question of the relation between justice and ethics. One promising approach to the relation between justice and ethics connects this relation to the relation between autonomy and liberty. The idea is that justice is the part of morality that is concerned with the social and political preconditions of autonomy and that liberty is the central concern of justice, because liberty (or liberties) is (are) necessary for autonomy. This idea was, I believe, articulated and defended in different ways by Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel, and we also find traces of it in Rawls. I began working on this idea in my dissertation, which was on the relation between freedom and justice in the philosophies of Rousseau and Kant. I am still working on it.