Liberalism: An insufficient medium for our relational need.

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Liberalism:
An Insufficient Medium for our Relational Need

By
Cleo Bradshaw

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Philosophy
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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Abstract

To understand human nature, one must also understand what is required to maintain autonomy and satisfy human need, two features of human nature. This thesis contrasts two views of human nature. First, I will argue that the liberal view contains the values and principles of individualism. Based on their ontology, liberals often claim that their socio-political structure can enable autonomy because it too is individualistically centred. However, by privileging individualistic values, the relational need feature of human nature is marginalized and this, in turn, can hinder people from choosing and pursuing relational need fulfilment. Yet I will argue that relational need fulfilment is necessary for autonomy. Thus, the liberal view of human nature and its means to enable autonomy are flawed.

Before exploring the relational need view of human nature, I will develop an analogy to show that the operation of the liberal structure reflects a mediation process. This analogy illustrates how the liberal medium uses one-way power to impose that individualism is the normative way to enable autonomy, to live the good life, and to experience and express oneself. The point of the analogy is to illustrate that liberal one-way power marginalizes other competing alternatives to individualism, such as the relational need theory. The relational need view claims that people are socially embedded and that autonomy is enabled by establishing relationships that have the normative features of mutual understandings, shared experiences and common relational goods, because these features contribute to relational need fulfilment.

After contrasting the two views, I argue that liberalism is an insufficient medium for relational need fulfilment and autonomy because it generates rejection. First, the choice and performance conditions of autonomy are rejected. Second, liberal one-way power marginalizes and rejects the relational need theory. Rejection is a form of harm because it can deprive people of choices and actions that pertain to other plausible alternatives of the good life. I conclude by arguing that recognition for the relational need theory can enhance autonomy because it will provide people with choices and motives to fulfil their own relational need, or their own conception of a good life.
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Chapter 1- Liberalism and Media Theory

1:1 The Analogy between Liberalism and Media Theory

Mass media messages can influence everyone's thoughts and actions. Regardless of whether they relay marketing, political, social or even shallow content, such messages can influence and interfere with a person's free will. Although the message content is important, the nature of the medium is equally important because it has the ability to relay the messages. Rendering an effect on someone's state of mind depends on the power of the medium. If the medium is very powerful, say one that is composed of a political and social structure, people may even be unaware that their thoughts and actions are being shaped by the activity of the medium. Hence, the medium must not go unexamined. Its importance has even been equated to the messages themselves. Marshall McLuhan's statement, "the medium is the message" realistically portrays how substantial the medium really is.¹

In this essay I will portray the political and social theory of liberalism as a medium. This portrayal maintains Marx's view that capitalism is the dominant structure in society, but it also provides a needed extension to his view. The liberal medium is not only composed of the economic structure, but also the politics of liberalism and the liberal view of human nature. Thus, the liberal medium has three component parts: the political, economic and social realms. These parts exist because liberalism has three theories: a democratic political theory, a capitalist economic theory, and a social theory in accord with individualism. Together, the liberal political, economic and social structures are the liberal medium. Where Marx only portrayed capitalism as dominant, I think the three structures together are more definitive of a dominant structure, and it is this structure that embodies the liberal medium.

It is common to depict liberalism as individualistic because its understanding of human nature is defined in terms of independence, self-creation and the separation of individuals from others in society. It is also common to associate liberalism with individualistic principles and values, that is, with the belief that values and rights of the individual take priority over group rights. Thus, it is fair to say the liberal medium is an individualistic structure. Contemporary liberals such as Berlin, Rawls and Nareson, and existing liberal structures continue to perpetuate individualism. As a result, individualism still comes across as the acceptable standard of human nature and for the good life. My
intent is to chip away at the traditional liberal sentiment by first arguing that liberals hold a substantive conception of human nature and autonomy and this violates their value of pluralism and their political stance of neutrality. There is an internal contradiction within liberalism. It purports to value pluralism and to remain neutral on substantive definitions of the good, but because it is a one-way power structure that reinforces individualism, it smuggles in a normative concept of human nature and a substantive conception of the good life. Liberalism violates pluralism and its political and social commitment to neutrality. However, I launch a double-barreled critique against liberalism by arguing that its support for individualism marginalizes other plausible and competing alternatives, such as the relational need theory. This theory is marginalized because liberals hold that autonomy is enabled solely through individual properties such as hard-work and self-definition, and through individualistic means such as private property rights, and not through relationships. The liberal view ignores relational need fulfilment, yet I will argue that relational need fulfilment can also help enable autonomy. By marginalizing the relational need theory, liberals marginalize a plausible view of how autonomy can be enabled.

First, the liberal medium is grounded in pluralism or the view that there are many interpretations of the good life. Liberals ought to refrain from making a moral or ethical judgement on what constitutes a good life for everyone. Pluralism prevents liberals from imposing one good on non-willing others. Pluralism is conditioned by individualism and grounded in the understanding that because we are all different, there is no definitive or determinate way to rank goods. Many liberals agree that pluralism is a basic value of liberalism. Larmore states, “at the heart of the liberal position stand two ideas; pluralism and toleration,” while Rawls states, “the plurality of persons with separate systems of ends is an essential feature of . . . [liberal] societies.” The liberal medium ought to refrain from imposing its messages, beliefs or ends on people because these issues are deemed a matter of personal choice. Moreover, the liberal value of tolerance is supposed to protect a diversity of beliefs and ends. Pluralism, as an ethical value, is coupled with the political stance of neutrality. The neutrality principle gives formal and legal declaration to the liberal stance of refraining from holding one conception of the good over others.
However, liberals hold a substantive conception of the good life that reflects individualism. This is where the first problem of the liberal medium arises: liberalism affirms substantive individualistic values and a standard conception of human nature and the good life. This individualistic standard will be known as the liberal standard. It depicts a life with minimal interference with liberty and it depicts a person who is personally capable of enabling their own autonomy. By holding substantive values, liberalism violates pluralism. Moreover, the socio-economic and political structures privilege only the liberal standard thereby violating the neutrality stance that liberals maintain. Ideally, a neutral stance should not endorse individual identity, lifestyle or a substantive conception of the good, because this would restrict people's liberty and autonomy. But a neutral medium should not marginalize other competing conceptions either because this would restrict autonomy.

The liberal medium is formally conceived of as a neutral structure, but it is really a one-way power structure. It tends to manipulate individuals with the intent to align their wants, beliefs and actions with the individualist ideal. The main effect is that liberalism, its values, principles and conceptions are powerfully relayed as the good. The medium uses its power illegitimately to endorse an acceptable standard of human nature and the good life. Liberal content is not neutral at all. By holding a substantive conception of human nature, other conceptions and values are marginalized because they are assumed to deviate from the liberal standard. I will argue that this marginalization oppresses the choice and performance conditions of autonomy because it hinders individuals from choosing and being motivated to pursue other competing conceptions. In fact, by supporting only individualism, other plausible conceptions are not even recognized. In turn, autonomy is oppressed because people are deprived of the recognition and the means needed to pursue these other conceptions. Thus, liberalism internally contradicts itself: it violates autonomy, which is harmful in the largest sense, and it violates its commitment to pluralism and neutrality.

1:2 What is a Medium?

Before one can determine the strength of any theory, or analogously of any medium, it must first be determined whether the theory or medium has: 1. one-way power, 2. neutral...
content, or whether it gives validation. In theory, a medium with one-way power is one that tends to manipulate individuals with the intent to align its wants, beliefs and actions with the message content. Power is misused or used illegitimately to overtly relay value-laden messages. Second, a neutral theory or medium is one that does not overtly endorse moral principles or ends. Pluralism, individualism and subjectivism often ground it. A neutral medium should withhold judgment and support for an overriding conception of the good. Its messages often appear to be procedural, as opposed to substantive. A medium cannot be both a neutral structure and exert one-way power, because, by definition, a neutral medium does not exert power over people. A medium like the liberal political and social structures appears to be neutral, but it is really a one-way power structure because it exerts illegitimate power over people to align their thoughts and actions with liberalism. This medium has the ability to standardize the criteria of social, economic and political acceptability. Last, a medium or theory that gives validation provides some form of due recognition to the needs, choices and ends of the members in society and attempts to collectively fulfill them. It should not prevent competing and plausible alternatives from being chosen and pursued. One-way power structures ought to recognize competing conceptions of the good, because this will end its one-way power and the oppression that is caused by it.

Since the medium is the necessary form of transmission, it is capable of defining contexts, situations or conditions by which stories, products, ideas and even people gain their power. This controlled empowerment can also oppress other ideas, products and people. The activity of the medium can be understood in reference to the three “zones” of the social structure: “signification, power, production.” First, all orders, social beliefs and practices that regularly signify or symbolize meaning, such as communication and labour, belong in the zone of signification. The relation between the messages and the latter zone can be qualified in two ways. Either the messages have manipulative intent, such that the meaning is a distortion of the truth, or the messages are a realistic and truthful portrayal of the meaningful aspects. The medium controls whether the messages have manipulative or truthful intent.

A medium with manipulative intent is one that exerts illegitimate power over the individual. Power can be used to distort the messages and even cause messages to remain
unquestioned because they are portrayed as normative. For example, television advertisements can influence individual thoughts, wants and needs. This “dependence effect” is a powerful phenomenon of persuasive advertising “that creates desires so covert that an agent cannot resist them, and then acting on them is therefore neither free nor voluntary.” Some purchasers who have been influenced by persuasive advertising claim that “it removes the very conditions of choice . . . that they themselves had not made the decision, and that they were acting on a desire engendered in them which they did not accept.” Messages with the intent to manipulate appear normative and are often unquestioned. This effect shows how power can be generated in (power in) individuals. Generating power in is subtle and it usually goes unnoticed. It can cause a person to believe himself to be free when he is being externally influenced. When power is generated in a person, “ideas and vocabulary of one’s common-sense pictures of the world,” are affected to the extent that one’s social practices and routines are directed. This sort of power is evident in the unnoticed limits of our language, such as those words and phases which define and regulate key moral notions such as ‘the individual,’ ‘a person,’ ‘identity,’ and those phases which fix us in our social space."

*Power over* and *power in* are definitive of one-way power structures that operate to impose a standard on society thereby marginalizing other competing alternatives.

A standard can also be imposed by various practices of production. By practices of production I am referring to mediums that operate to distribute and generate messages. These practices of production have the ability to influence social meaning because they have the power to standardize our conceptual framework. For example, laws, individual voices and private property rights can represent various practices of production that operate on behalf of the liberal medium to relay messages. Laws actively produce or legalize various standards, whereas people’s voices can also affect the way in which people view themselves and the world around them.

The liberal medium represents a complex process of communication. To understand the mediation process, it is helpful to apply the “communication process” model proposed by Harold Lasswell in 1948. This application has five aspects. First, *the communicator of the messages,* the “who,” must be determined. With respect to the political medium,
politicians, judges and social authorities are messengers who communicate liberal principles that either can empower or oppress individuals. Second, the communicative content, "who says what," must be analyzed. The content can be influenced by reality, by fiction, by hegemonic forces or by ideology. Ideally the content should be realistic. Liberals argue that their message content is self-evident or realistic. They purport to use a "mirrored approach," one in which the "content supposedly reflects social reality or human nature with little or no distortion." 9 Third, the content is relayed through various channels or mediums. There are micro-mediums that may affect one person, such as a book only read by one person. The audience is very small. There are macro mediums which "include social structures which are beyond the control of any one person." 10 The liberal medium, composed of its three parts, affects a global audience. Determining who the audience exactly is, is the fourth aspect. But regardless of audience size, there will be an effect on someone. The effect is the final aspect of the process. It can be relative to the activity or passivity of the audience, but is specific to the strength of the medium.

Since the medium standardizes the criteria of social, political and economic acceptability, it is vital that the messages do not prevent other competing or plausible conceptions and not contradict the grounded values that support the medium itself. This concern is not new and was first brought to light by Marx’s theory. In fact, Lasswell’s mediation process corresponds to Marx’s theory, when regarding Marx’s theory as a paradigm mediation process. His theory can be applied to the concept of the liberal medium. Marx argued that individuals are defined by or come to understand themselves as a result of the political and cultural superstructure that functioned to maintain capitalism. He believed that capitalism, and the ideology contained within capitalism, conditioned and corrupted the social consciousness. Since a medium can condition, influence and control individuals, I believe Marx alluded to portraying the economic structure as a medium, one that has power over society. He argued that the capitalist modes of production and the social conditions were mutually conditioning:

the social structure and the State were continually evolving out of the continued activity of the productive forces, i.e. as people operate, produce materially and as they work under definite material limits, presupposition and conditions independent of their will. 11
The mutual conditioning forces between capitalism and the social base shows how power can engender alienation in people. This example shows how a structure has power over people.

For Marx, the economic medium ultimately devastates society. Marx argued that the capitalist messages endorse private property rights and pertain not to man’s historical material basis of needs, but to the distorted bourgeois belief in the division of labour. The messages disguise the fact that private property is rooted in the oppression and exploitation of labour, while promoting the normative message that it really empowers human labour. For example, the messengers conceal that there is an essential connection between people and their products, and instead regard each as separate and divided. The product is said to be something alien, a power independent of the producer. In reality, the activity of labour itself sustains people: I make, therefore I am. Capitalism creates a social reality and reinforces an individual identity independent of the material truth of human nature. Marx was the first to systematically emphasize the distortion of reality that arises because capitalism ignores the material basis of labour. Capitalism marginalizes a competing and plausible conception of human nature. Instead of endorsing a “mirrored approach,” where the content “reflects social reality with little or no distortion,” the medium endorses the hegemony of capitalism. Marx believed that capitalist messages are incompatible with the truth of human nature. And because the social forces of production and capitalism are mutually conditioning, the messages and the people become a function of the economic medium. In other words, people’s actions, thoughts and beliefs reflect capitalism. Autonomy is oppressed due to this lack of choice and opportunity to act from other plausible alternatives.

Marx’s main view, that capitalism causes the separation and alienation of the bourgeois and proletariat, can be understood as an example that reveals how a medium, the economic medium, uses illegitimate power to impose a standard. Similarly, I will argue that the liberal medium uses power illegitimately to reinforce a belief in individualism. His view also illustrates how a medium, capitalism, can generate power in the individual by creating an awareness or identity (as a slave and worker, or a bourgeois and owner), and a position in
a community (as alienated from others and from one's species being). The medium is guilty of oppressing people and empowering a select few owners such that people’s reality depends on the operation of the medium. In *German Ideology*, Marx argued that “real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms,” begin to live an inverted reality. Individuals develop a false consciousness which occurs when members of the oppressing class deceive the oppressed into believing the views of the former class. For example, a wage laborer who believes in the normalcy of competition, inequality and private property rights, has been affected by a false consciousness. These effects show how a medium uses power in to influence the level of what is socially acceptable.

The economic medium is a one-way power structure that purports to be a neutral structure. Marx would have probably agreed that the capitalist medium has one-way power because he often wrote about how capitalism causes society to remain passive. The medium can cause audience passivity such that “life itself appears only as a means of life.” His view made it clear how difficult it is to interact with the capitalist medium because it does not properly mirror human nature or recognize people’s material needs. Each message has such power that people’s independent beliefs can be overpowered such that they are caused to believe in the normalcy of capitalism. Yet a medium that claims to remain neutral and to enable autonomy should not marginalize competing and plausible alternatives to capitalism.

Above I argued how Marx's theory illustrates the problematic operation of the liberal medium. The liberal medium will be more easily understood with this background example in mind. In the next chapter, I discuss the liberal mediation process and refer to the five aspects in Lasswell’s theory. I first explain who the *communicators* of liberalism are. I then argue that its message content, or *what they say*, relays individualism as the substantive conception of human nature to the *audience* or everyone in society. I also argue that the political and economic structure is grounded upon that substantive notion and thereby operates to privilege only that notion. In Chapter Three I discuss how important relationships are to autonomy, and that relational need fulfilment can help to enable autonomy. Finally, in Chapter Four, I discuss the effects of liberal one-way power on society. I argue that
liberalism imposes a standard on society that has the effect of oppressing autonomy in two respects. First, the choice and performance conditions of autonomy are oppressed. Second, the relational need theory is marginalized and this can prevent people from fulfilling their own relational need. Hence, I conclude that liberalism is an insufficient medium for our relational need and for autonomy.
Notes

Chapter One

6 Inglis, *Media Theory, An Introduction*, p.75.
7 Inglis, *Media Theory, An Introduction*, p.75.
9 Shoemaker & Reese, *Mediating the Message, Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*, p. 6.
14 Marx, *German Ideology*. Marx states "If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process."
Chapter 2 – The Liberal Medium

2:1 The Liberal Medium and Its Problematic Operation

The liberal medium refers to liberal society, which is composed of the social, political and economic structures. These parts can be reduced into the channels of communicative operation that act to facilitate liberal messages. These communicators are “the who” of the messages. For example, the channels of the social realm can include public forums, mass communications, institutions and individual voices. These areas also have a mediating function because they act to relay the messages. The political realm can involve communicative channels, such as corporations, media and governmental sectors, which also have a mediating function. The liberal medium represents all these structures together, all of which relay individualistic messages and values because these are essential to the operation of the medium.

The operation of the liberal medium is facilitated by what liberals say is a minimal and self-evident theory. First, liberals believe that their theory attempts to mirror individuals exactly. The characteristics of human nature are argued to be self-evident. Liberals conflate the descriptive condition of human nature, what actually is the case, with the normative, what ought to be the case. So the liberal medium is based on self-evident notions in which the “communicators are neutral transmitters who provide an accurate and realistic account” of the human condition, and therefore the messages should “have little or no effect on social change.” Second, the liberal neutrality principle is the substance that makes the liberal medium a minimal structure. It places a high level of restriction on government interference because liberals believe that people are essentially self-governing. The liberal medium can be portrayed as a “null effects model,” a medium that has little power to enforce or influence social change. If the liberal medium were really a null-effects model then much control would remain in the hands of the audience: the autonomous, rational and independent beings.

The liberal medium operates through the communication channels, such as individual voices, media and government. These channels support 1. pluralism and a neutral stance on issues of the good, and 2. an individualistic view of human nature. Social messages, soaked with the influence of liberal morality, have the ability to standardize or
regulate an acceptable way to experience and live life. These messages also influence a standard because liberals have their own conception of who fits into and deviates from the category of human nature. The liberal standard is the individualistic view of human nature. The liberal medium conveys that this standard ought to be followed because it is the right thing to do, right way to act or right way to express oneself.

First, by holding pluralism as a value, liberals maintain their commitment to a diversity of values because pluralism claims that substantive claims of the good are not binding because differences are pervasive in human nature. Kant argues that since society is “composed of a plurality of persons, each with his own aims, interests and conceptions of the good,” it “is best arranged when it is governed by principles that do not themselves presuppose any particular conception of the good.”2 The neutrality principle is believed to best protect the plurality of persons in society because it attempts to grant equality to different reasonable conceptions. This commitment to pluralism and the neutrality stance is purported to help enable autonomy.

Ideally the neutrality principle is absolutely applied on the private level, which consists of those areas of human conduct exempt from government interference, while on the political or public level the neutrality principle is conditionally applied. The latter distinction presupposes a certain conception of human nature. However, the liberal view of human nature is logically prior to this distinction, because if, by definition, humans are naturally autonomous and rational self-governing beings, then private matters should be exempt from government interference. By applying the neutrality principle to an extensive private level, people ideally remain free to form a conception of the good and to express themselves autonomously. At the public level, state neutrality is conditioned by the liberal values of equality, liberty, tolerance, dignity, distributive justice and mostly negative rights. For example, the “politics of equal dignity is based on the idea that all humans are equally worthy of respect.”3 This view is similar to Kant’s imperative, which claims that one ought to treat others as having intrinsic value in themselves, and not merely as a means to an end. The value of equality refers to the idea “that every citizen has a right to full and equal participation in the political, economic and cultural life of the country, without regard to race, sex, religion or physical handicap.”4 Most liberals believe that a minimal government is necessary to create an environment whereby everyone can freely, equally and with
dignity pursue their conception of the good life. The public level has a base that couples the neutrality stance with liberal values. With this base, liberals intend to strengthen human will, purpose, autonomy and freedom. For ideally any structure that operates in society should not be independent of anyone’s chosen purpose, nor inconsistent or incompatible with human nature.

Yet the operation of the liberal medium is problematic because liberalism has one internal inconsistency that it cannot overcome. This inconsistency is that liberals purport to value autonomy as the subjective capacity to choose one’s projects and goals, and to provide the means for autonomy, but they use their power to impose projects and goals in accord with the substantive notion of individualism. This chapter outlines the inconsistency of the liberal values of pluralism and individualism.

Many philosophers, such as Andrew Kernohan, Alison M. Jagger and John Kekes, have also argued that liberalism is inconsistent because it violates its core principles. Kernohan claims that liberalism violates equality. He argues that without cultural reform, such as preventing hate speech in order to end cultural oppression, the liberal environment can become “polluted” with oppressive acts and speech. This causes a “distributional social meaning to become attached to the goods of one’s culture, which in turn cause the rise of false beliefs, such that the cultural (liberal) environment can be concluded to harm and violate moral equality.” Jagger’s argument is similar. She argues that liberalism ought to advocate the protection of the equality of women because the inaction of the current liberal environment (its neutrality stance) only perpetuates the common discriminating associations of woman as inferior, passive, weak, and irrational. The autonomy, equality and liberty of women are oppressed by the inaction of liberal culture. Finally, Kekes argues that the basic values of liberalism are incompatible with pluralism. He believes that pluralism is violated because liberals embrace certain basic values when clearly other values, such as

the environment, law-abidingness, civility, peace, prosperity, security and so forth, are equally important and can take justifiable precedence over the basic values of autonomy, pluralism, equality, right and distributive justice.

Kekes states that “if liberals are committed to pluralism, they must reject the overridingness of any value.” Pluralism is the view that one set of values cannot override other sets. But it appears that individualistic values are overriding because they are held at the core of liberalism. By holding substantive values, liberals violate their own commitment to
pluralism. Kekes further states that to “not hold these values is to cease to be liberals and abandon liberalism into a vacuous state, but to hold them is to be inconsistent with the values of pluralism.” These objections convey particular symptoms of the overall problem: liberalism has the internal contradiction of endorsing a standard of human nature that effectively violates the values of autonomy and pluralism.

This essay criticizes liberalism for holding an individualistic standard for life and autonomy while also valuing pluralism. The problem is that the liberal standard is not basic to everyone’s conception of the good. Other reasonable conceptions exist. It is not necessarily the case that people will want to live their lives according to individualism, nor is this standard presupposed by everyone’s conception of the good. Because liberals hold a standard of human nature that is not fundamental to everyone’s conception of the good, other perceived conceptions are subordinated by the liberal standard. If liberals truly value pluralism, they should be open to different reasonable non-liberal standards. But liberals have a core standard of life that marginalizes other plausible conceptions. This is problematic because the liberal medium itself becomes a structure independent of a person’s chosen purpose, goals, interests and pursuits. Thus, the operation of the liberal medium is problematic because it violates its principles of autonomy and pluralism, thereby making liberalism an internally inconsistent theory.

2:2 The Message Content: Individualism and Autonomy

With respect to the liberal understanding of human nature, an individualistic standard is believed to help enable autonomy. Classical liberals adopted atomism as the defining aspect of that standard. Atomism was retained as an ontological ground because it attempts to describe individuals in themselves, not in relation to others. This emphasis on individuals in themselves is a core theme of liberalism. Atomism portrays people as the centre of their own worlds; their horizon reflects subjective personal choices. People choose their own conceptions of the good, free from social determinism. Like atoms, people are independent and isolated from others and realize their possibilities in their isolation. But because atomism could not explain or accommodate social relational features of human nature, a dichotomy between traditional liberal atomists, those who regard people as self-
defining beings who are separate from and prior to society, and communitarian holists, those who regard people as socially embedded, was firmly established.

However, as a result of recent contributions, atomism was pushed outside the core of liberalism, so a complete atomist account of human nature is no longer as convincing as it once was. For example, in Philosophical Arguments, Taylor insists that it is not necessarily the case that the presupposed ontology equals a strict practical application of that ontology.\(^\text{10}\) He accepts that the ontology, whether atomist or holist, can be related to either liberal or collective advocacy issues that structure the world. It is possible to support a holist ontological view and still prize or advocate the traditional individual-centred beliefs of liberty and autonomy. Taylor concludes that a matrix of overlapping liberal and communitarian ideas can coexist together. On a similar note, Will Kymlicka, another contemporary liberal theorist, also rejects the traditional atomist conception. In Liberalism, Community and Culture, he argues that individuals are not abstract atoms, but social beings, and that liberals should no longer abstract the individual from society but incorporate a proper description of social conditions from which people can choose their conception of the good life.\(^\text{11}\) Kymlicka’s view is similar to Taylor’s. Both are trying to realign liberalism with collective values or holist ontology. Where Kymlicka speaks of multi-culturalism and the importance of protecting cultural values as primary goods, Taylor speaks of patriotism as the unifying common good that can promote the liberal values of freedom, autonomy and equality.

While atomism has been abandoned as a social ontology, the more problematic element remains, namely that liberalism continues to impose the values of individualism onto society. A defining feature of individualism is fragmentation, or the view that individuals “come to see themselves as less bound to their fellow citizens in common projects or allegiances.”\(^\text{12}\) This notion presupposes that people are separate and ontologically prior to others in society. It ignores the social connectedness that is basic to the human condition. Fragmentation is essentially based on methodological individualism, a view that enjoins us to treat all collectivities as composed of individuals.”\(^\text{13}\) Liberals apply “abstract individualism,” where “all human individuals are abstractions of social circumstances.”\(^\text{14}\) Individuals are abstracted from these groups and then placed above the importance of the group. Kymlicka states “within the moral ontology of liberalism, there is
no room for the idea of collective rights . . . the community simply has no moral existence or claims of its own." Kymlicka believes that collective rights are compatible with liberalism, but changes are needed. The liberal standard is evident: if collectivities have no purpose, if only individuals are real, then any theory that affirms a collective good is going to ruled out.

The features of individualism are purported to help people express their autonomy. *Autonomy is the capacity to direct one’s self in one’s choices, beliefs, values or actions.* Autonomy is central to the individualism. Kekes states that “autonomy is the true core of liberalism, the inner citadel for whose protection all the liberal battles are waged upon.”

For liberals, autonomy is realized through individual effort because they regard autonomy as a function solely of the individual self. Yet, moreover, other theorists claim autonomy functions from relations between people and that it is enabled by interdependence. Although most theorists agree that autonomy is the active expression of one’s capacities, there is a disagreement on how autonomy is realized. I will later argue that relational need fulfilment contributes to autonomy and thus, autonomy is a function of relationships, not a function of independent self-direction.

Autonomy has two constraints. The first constraint is that people must have the capacity (rationality and physical ability) to self-direct. Rationality enables one to choose projects, goals, identity formation and conceptions of the good, while physical ability enables one to perform according to those choices. Thus, autonomy is about choice and performance. Second, the expression of autonomy depends on the absence of social constraints in society or upon social liberty. Autonomy depends on an *internally* free individual and on *externally* free society. Although social liberty is a very important factor, this essay will focus on the features of autonomy only. In addition to the choice and performance condition, I will argue that autonomy has material conditions that are not recognized in traditional liberal theory. Material fulfilment enables the capacities of choice and performance themselves. Jagger likens autonomy to having "free will" or "internal freedom," while the liberty in society is "being free from interference" or having "external freedom." Yet one predicament, as noted by Feinburg, can arise: we can have the capacity for autonomy without having liberty or we can have liberty without having autonomy. For example, otherwise autonomous people who live under dictatorship do not
have liberty to express their autonomy. Or conversely, a free society in the liberal sense, can exist with many self-confined people if they do not govern themselves well. If people over-indulge and have less common sense, then even a free society can have many non-autonomous people, confined by their own ignorance, foolishness or incompetence.

The features of individualism are supposed to help enable autonomy. A quick background review of traditional liberal theory and its connection to contemporary liberalism will show how this theme evolved to become the current standard. Hobbes was one of the first liberals who advocated a society in which autonomy and social liberty were attainable. He states that liberty is

the absence of external impediments; which impediments may oft take away part of man’s power to do what he would, but cannot hinder him from using the power left him according as his judgment and reason shall dictate to him.\(^\text{19}\)

This power that Hobbes refers to can be construed as autonomy because reason and judgment are capacities of autonomy. Hobbes believed that people are rational to the extent that they will use instrumental reasoning to maximize their actions. Rationality enables individuals to calculate their advantage to ensure optimal self-interested acts. Hobbes also refers to unrestrained desire, the primary and constant motivating force of individuals, as an aspect of human nature.\(^\text{20}\) Unrestrained desire drives people to fulfil desires and avoid impediments in their pursuit for freedom. So Hobbes not only recognized the importance of rational autonomy, but also recognized the physical aspect as well. In addition, he provided a clear definition of liberty, which is the absence of external impediments, in which these capacities could be expressed.

Hobbes is not the only liberal who argued that individualism and external liberty can help people realize their autonomy. Rousseau recognized these two aspects as well. He states,

we must add to the other acquisitions of the civil state that of moral liberty, which alone renders man master of himself, for it is slavery to be under the impulse of mere appetite, and freedom to obey a law which we prescribe for ourselves.\(^\text{21}\)

Rousseau's notion of moral liberty, that which makes man master of himself, refers to autonomy because autonomy is about creating and pursuing choices that we create and prescribe to ourselves. Rousseau contrasts autonomy with civil liberty or the external freedom in society. In the quotation above, he notes that prior to civil liberty, people were
living in a natural state of freedom in which people were slaves to their appetites. Autonomy is gained through the formation of a social contract because this allows individuals to move from being slaves to their desires to being self-restrained intelligent beings who operate on reasoned principles. For Rousseau, autonomy and morality go hand in hand. Rousseau reinforced individualism because he strongly depicted autonomy as functioning solely by one’s self, and not in relation to others. He believed that society was formed to maintain autonomy and that a social contract would create an unfolding of individual character such that the moral faculty will be actualized to transform individuals into moral creatures. A civil society enables autonomy to flourish. Rousseau also relates autonomy to the general will or the moral majority. His social contract allows for autonomous expression as long as it relates to the general will. Autonomy must be a product of rationality and must reflect the common good. Moreover, “the general will is always right,” because it is a product of proper deliberation and reason. Rousseau advanced individualism because he promoted the rational and moral capacity of autonomy. His focus on a person’s inner features, such as being master of oneself and letting one’s moral character be the guide, suggests support for the independent and rational aspects of individualism. Taylor agrees that the idea that “morality has a voice within and this inner voice tells us the right thing to do,” “develops from Rousseau’s moral ideal.”

Contemporary liberal theorists also reinforce the liberal standard of human nature. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls assumes ideal individualistic characteristics of people in order for him to argue that his principles of justice will be chosen. He assumes that everyone a) is rational, b) desires primary goods, income and wealth, liberty and opportunity, and the bases of self-respect, c) has a sense of justice, d) is behind a veil of ignorance, and e) is mutually disinterested. He emphasizes rationality and argues that under these conditions people will be self-maximizing agents. His ideal conditions and characteristics were chosen to justify his principles of justice. Rawls then proceeds to describe how rational self-maximizing people will choose the principles because they will want to maximize what is best for them. Individuals are risk averse and want to ensure their best outcome. Rational self-maximization is a characteristic chosen to be an aspect of human nature in order to support his theory. The problem arises because liberals accept these characteristics as *truth* in order to justify their political and social philosophy.
Rather than describing human nature, liberals instead presuppose without argument an ideal and unrealistic standard. Liberals suppose that everyone has the capacity for autonomy. Rawl's theory of the original position illustrated autonomous and rational people who were unaware of their socio-economic positions, conceptions of the good, personal attachments and talents. His theory portrayed these characteristics as essential in the deliberation process. Under these conditions, with agents endowed with autonomy and rationality, Rawls argues that a social contract will be formed with fair and just principles. Narveson, who argues that "preserving autonomy is a precondition to any free world," also argues that people are naturally autonomous. He believes "autonomy is the essence of freedom," and lists the objective properties for autonomy as "competence or the ability to critically deliberate, independence and self-control." Actions are in a sense owned by the individual and not subject to external force, interference or other "compulsions."

Narveson's view reinforces that autonomy functions solely by individuals, and does not require relations to others. In *The Concept of Autonomy*, Feinberg lists similar properties of autonomy that belong to the individual, such as authenticity, self-creation and self-legislation. These all seem to imply that there "is an important core upon which these characteristics rest," and that core reflects that autonomy is an ability or the capacity to self-govern. These are ideal properties because they depict people as self-conscious, able, rational beings who do not need others to be autonomous. These aspects of the liberal standard have been consistently argued to help enable autonomy.

In attempting to describe human nature, liberals instead prescribe an ideal and unrealistic standard. For how many people fail to meet the characteristics of autonomy or are excluded by them? Jagger criticizes liberalism because it assumes that "those who fail to develop their capacity to reason are not just different from those who succeed: but they are regarded as deficient because they have failed to fulfil their uniquely human potential." The liberal standard rejects people who do not support their view. This is one effect that liberalism has on society, and it will be detailed in Chapter Five.
Liberals regard subjectivism as another aspect of their standard of human nature. Subjectivism places individuals above society because it claims that they are the ultimate units of moral worth, have moral standing as ends in themselves and are self-originating sources of valid claims. Subjectivism fits into the liberal standard because it claims that all choices are a product of personal decision. According to subjectivism, values, morals and ideas of the good are not derived from an external or objective source (say, from a Platonic or godly source). Instead, “the inner citadel” of one’s being is the fortress that governs all judgments. Hence, decisions are ultimately rendered moral by individuals themselves. In *The Malaise of Modernity*, Taylor described “rampant subjectivism” as a view that regards subjective moral positions as in no way grounded by reason or the nature of things, instead they “are ultimately just adopted by each of us because we find ourselves drawn to them.” He agrees that because of the “massive subjective turn of modern culture, a new form of inwardness in which we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depth” has been created such that values and moral sense are now attributed to a source deep within us. This notion of subjectivism also reinforces that autonomy, choices and actions are a result of independent expression.

The neutrality principle is supposed to protect the autonomy of individual selves because it claims that a substantive good cannot be held for everyone. Similarly, it is also purported to best protect the subjective quality of people. In fact, the neutrality principle follows from subjectivism because it allows people to use their subjectivity to choose their own conception of who they want to be and how they want to live their life, rather than being forced to accept substantive conceptions. If people are really subjective determining beings, then the neutrality principle is best. This principle recognizes that no one can make a choice that is right for all people because that presupposes that universality or generality is possible within a world of difference. The neutrality principle and subjectivism lead to the conclusion that:

the nature of value is such that people will pursue different ways of living: To the pluralist, it is because values are many and conflicting, and no one life can include them all, or make the interpersonally correct choice among them; and to the subjectivist, it is because our ideas about what is valuable stem from our desires or tastes, and these differ from one individual to another.
Liberals value this compatibility between the features of individualism and the neutrality principle because it further grounds their belief that a substantive account of the good cannot be imposed on all people. If liberals are right about human nature, then the neutrality principle is the legitimate principle that can fully respect their conception. But is their individualistic conception a mirrored description of human nature, or is it a conception that is a construct of liberal power? If it is a construct of liberal power, then the neutrality principle violated. I will return to this in Chapter Four.

2:4 Liberal Politics: A Means to Enable Autonomy

It should now be clear that liberals hold an individualistic standard that is composed of atomism, fragmentation and subjectivism. This standard, coupled with the value of pluralism and the neutrality principle, is supposed to enable autonomy. The liberal political and economic structures are also in place to help people realize their autonomy because these structures are based upon the liberal standard. Liberals maintain that the political and economic structures have a procedural function because they operate to empower individualism and specifically seek to enable autonomy. Although the structures are supposed to remain neutral on issues of the good, the liberal medium violates the neutrality principle because it's individualistic means privilege only the liberal standard. A neutral stance should have one instrumental function, which is to ensure that all reasonable conceptions of the good are protected and given equal recognition, not marginalized or given negative recognition. The mere admission that the liberal medium has the instrumental function to empower only individualism suggests that the neutrality principle is violated. If individualism is not basic to everyone's conception of the good, then clearly the liberal medium is misusing its power to construct a normative standard. It is now time to examine the means that are supposed to empower autonomy.

The political medium of democracy is believed to be the means to best empower autonomy, in contrast to, say, a dictatorship. It includes political channels, such as the electoral process, passing bills and the legal system. These channels work to strengthen the liberal standard. For example, the persistent legal upholding of the freedom of speech law in the United States reveals the strength of liberal individualism. The political channels
operate directly in the public sphere, which is ideally “a common space where members of the society meet to discuss matters of common interest, to render a common decision,” as based on their free opinions formed through common reflection. Yet the public sectors seem to thrive on liberal ideology.

The political medium is structured upon the liberal individualistic view of human nature. Importantly, liberals assert that their structure does not create individuality but merely protects what we naturally have. Messages are supposed to be instrumental to preserve natural freedom, independence, capacity for choice and a subjective determination the good. These messages all concur on a standard set of liberal values which are liberty, equality, individuality, tolerance and mostly negative rights. The neutrality principle protects these values, which are believed to be basic to all conceptions of the good life. With the coupling of the neutrality principle and the liberal values, the external environment is claimed to be free so that autonomy can flourish.

Liberals remain divided on how these values can be used as means to help enable autonomy. In one camp, positive rights theorists, like Rawls, maintain that to enable autonomy the political medium must 1. provide people with various means to escape possible interfering factors that may hinder their freedom (while remaining consistent with the liberty of others). In the other camp the negative rights theorists, such as Narveson and Berlin, believe that the political medium must 2. ensure there is an absence of factors that may hinder freedom. The former view foresees a procedural maximization of the means for liberty such that positive rights are maximized to give people the ability to self-direct. In contrast, the latter principle ensures that there is an absence of factors that may hinder freedom. It “insists that people and the state interfere with freedom as little as possible.”

This principle demands a functioning minimal state to ensure maximum self-direction by allowing the expression of people’s negative rights.

The crux of the distinction is clearly between the distribution of positive and negative rights. Both bodies of rights are correlative because they entail certain duties on other people. So freedom demands recognition for both sets of rights. Positive rights give people a right to be assisted in self-direction, and they impose duties on others to help remove any factors that may interfere with self-direction. They can be burdensome because they may require monetary, emotional or physical assistance. Similarly, negative rights
theorists demand maximum self-direction but believe that it arises from "being able to do what you want, when you want while being free from interference." These rights also entail duties. For example, a negative right to privacy entails that others have a duty to refrain from interfering with people's personal space and affairs. A negative right to not be harmed in one's personal sphere implies that others have a positive duty to refrain from inflicting harm. Although rights do contribute to social liberty by providing an environment in which autonomy can be expressed, they will not be the focus because I will be arguing that a material condition of basic relational need fulfillment is prior to the social condition of rights. Need fulfillment can directly enable one's capacities for autonomy, whereas rights are secondary to enabling autonomy. Without exploring all sets of rights, the point is that both positive and negative rights theorists believe that these rights provide the means for autonomy because they provide people with entitlements to certain goods, to act and be treated in certain ways. Because liberals are extremely rights-oriented their emphasis neglects the important material condition of basic relational need fulfillment.

Although the two camps disagree on how to maximize liberty, both agree that liberty is the primary political value and that the goal is to maximize rights to attain the highest possible amount of goods because this constitutes a good life. It is simply the way to maximize the means that is disputed. To maximize goods, positive liberty theorists put forth a theory of distributive justice. First, a list of goods must be assembled and second, it must be determined how to distribute those goods, for example, according to desert, need or some other principle, such as equality. In Rawls's distributive justice theory he compiled a list of social primary goods: "basic liberties, fair opportunity, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect," and described these goods as "anything any rational person would want or will want regardless of his plan of life." All these goods must be distributed by institutions that function according to the difference principle. The difference principle allocates a distribution that must ensure an advantage for the worst off such that they must rise to a level of being as well off as they can be. It effectively distributes benefits and burdens and assigns rights and duties. Distribution is according to the "maximization principle," not according to strength, social merit, status or effort, unless an unequal distribution is to the advantage of the worst off. Rawls maintains that negative rights are protected because he lexically orders his principles with the liberty principle first.
The liberty principle supports the view that each person should have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system for all. Rawls justifies a restriction on some liberties on the grounds that paternalism can be freedom enhancing. Interference is claimed to be a viable means because it provides a minimum standard of living for everyone.

For negative liberty theorists, redistribution that interferes with one's liberty is unjustifiable. Redistribution is not usually supported as a means to enable autonomy. Instead, their position begins from a social contract position in which limitations on liberty are only justified by appealing to an explicit agreement made by rational people. A social contract refers to a (hypothetical) agreement between all persons in society through which all mutually agree to limit their natural liberty. The contract is construed as moral. This implies that, 1. morality is de facto, a product of convention, 2. that morality is reciprocal or requires the other person to uphold the contract, and 3. that morality is in everyone's mutual interest.

Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau used the state of nature as a starting point to show the progression into civil society through a social contract. So another defining feature of liberal individualism is the reason for creating a civil society. Hobbes portrays man in nature as a self-interested desiring-machine who constantly battles impediments. This situation of desire, impediment, desire, impediment, ad infinitum, left Hobbes to conclude this condition to be a combination of both felicity and misery. Individuals are forced to engage in co-operative social contracts to preserve their freedom. Self-interest motivates morality, co-operation and the birth of a political society. The contractarian view, that society was formed because free, independent and rational people came together for political reasons to better maintain their freedom, is a strong feature of liberal politics, although not all liberals are contractarians. Contractarianism strengthens individualism because it restates the natural separation between the individual and society, and the ontological priority of the individual over society. Dworkin states,

the most important task for which autonomy has been harnessed in contemporary political philosophy is to argue for a certain ideal of the liberal state. . . . The root idea is that the state must recognize and acknowledge the autonomy of the person.
The political structure was created as the means for individual empowerment. Liberals argue that people have the capacity for autonomy, but realizing that autonomy is useless without the liberty to actively express their private wills, liberals establish a political society in which they believe people can fully express their autonomy.

Since contractarians believe that people have natural freedom and equality in the state of nature, they believe that in civil society this should be maintained. Locke describes how, in the state of nature, natural law governs people. Natural law prescribes that all people are in a natural state of perfect freedom and perfect equality and they have the ability and moral right to own property. Entering into a social contract creates a civil society and a minimal government, which is deemed the only form of governing that could effectively maintain self-empowerment. Liberty is minimally limited, therefore, maximally protected. In civil society both equality and property become legal rights because the law of the land is equivalent to the moral law in the state of nature. Private property rights are the fundamental means to create a society whereby individualism could flourish. Only now the rights to freedom, equality and property will be strongly protected. According to Locke’s theory, there are very few justifications for limiting liberty. The burden of proof must be on others who wish to limit the natural state of freedom.

Liberals continue to argue for a minimal government as the political condition for the realization of autonomy. Mill was one of the strongest proponents of individualism. According to Mill, a free society has three characteristics: the region of liberty is first a "domain of consciousness which demands a freedom of conscience, thought, feeling and absolute freedom of opinion on all subjects"; there is liberty to pursue life goals and interests as efforts to live happily; and finally a freedom of association. These freedoms must always be protected from government interference. He believed that the ultimate value is human flourishing and even authority "cannot do things that repress the development of individuality or experiences that lead to the development of individuality." Mill presented a consequentialist theory, utilitarianism, based on weighing and calculating individual utility, not on an account of common goods. An action is deemed to be right when it produces the greatest good for the greatest number of individuals. Happiness is equated with human flourishing or individual development. He states: "it is not by wearing down into uniformity all that individuals are themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth
that human beings become a beautiful object of contemplation." To promote human flourishing or individuality, Mill designed a structure that he claimed would maintain people’s liberty. His minimal government only restricted individual liberty when it caused harm in the largest sense. The no harm principle or liberty principle allows people the freedom to pursue their own good in their own way, provided they do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it. This principle, according to Mill, is the best means to promote individuality. It provides a practical method to determine justifiable limits on liberty. Restrictions are justified after weighing two aspects: first, whether the act causes harm in the largest sense, and second, whether it promotes human flourishing.

With the liberty principle in mind, Mill attempted a practical application of it with respect to the issue of freedom of thought and discussion. The no-harm principle allows for freedom of thought, speech, expression and actions so that people can independently develop their capacities. He argued that the government has no right to assume authority over the citizen’s rights to freedom of thought, unless it harms others in the largest sense. Mill’s emphasis on freedom of thought and expression suggests his support for subjectivism, which “supposes that there is no locus of thought or feeling other than in the minds of individuals.” By promoting absolute freedom of thought, speech and expression (with respect to the no harm principle), Mill holds the principle that the good or the object of value is ultimately determined by what goes on in peoples’ minds or feelings. It is morally unacceptable to influence or interfere with people’s beliefs, thoughts and interests because this causes harm in the largest sense. Social progress can be hindered by censorship. Mill’s theory is truly liberal because it highlights individualism in his support for cultivating individuality, and his theory highlights the means, such as freedom of speech and expression, needed to enable autonomy.

Most liberal theorists seem to agree that a minimal government and maximum negative rights are needed to help enable autonomy. Narveson, a contemporary theorist, also argues for this perspective. He states, positive liberty may bring about excellent goals, but it violates negative liberty, and if we think liberty is important, we should think it important enough not to violate it for the sake of promoting any such goal, even if that goal is called liberty.”
Negative rights theorists believe that “you are free to do X, when nothing (no law) prevents you from doing X.” People’s capacity to determine themselves is helped by the absence of factors that would prevent anyone from doing X. There is an insistence that people and the government interfere with liberty as little as possible. Isaiah Berlin also argues for negative rights as a means to promote individualism. He states:

I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity. Political liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others. If I am prevented from doing what I could otherwise do, I am to that degree unfree. If this area is contracted by others beyond a certain minimum, I can be described as being coerced, or enslaved. . . . Coercion implies the deliberate interference of other human beings within the area in which I could otherwise act. You lack political liberty or freedom only if you are prevented from attaining a goal by other human beings.  

Berlin’s idea can be readily implemented by the power of the liberal medium. The notion of “being enslaved by duties to others” can justify the use application of liberal individualism in order to prevent what is believed to be slavery. For example, the legal and economic sectors have the ability to create laws to prevent people from having duties to others. Moreover, the medium provides individualistic means that privilege the liberal standard. With such power, the political medium has the ability to realign people’s thoughts and actions to accord with the liberal view of human nature.

2:5 Liberal Economics: A Means to Enable Autonomy

The economic realm is also part of the liberal medium. It is defined by capitalism, a system that is purported to provide as much liberty as possible so that people can realize their autonomy. Various channels facilitate the economic medium, such as corporations, business, economic trade and labour relations and media. Because capitalism requires private property rights, the economic channels claim that it is the only viable system to empower autonomy. In fact, private property rights represent a profound connection between the economic medium and the liberal individualistic standard. Specifically, private property rights are justified with an appeal to the self-ownership theory, a theory which claims that labour is an autonomous expression of the individual and not a function of relationships.
The self-ownership theory was first evident in Locke's philosophy. He argued that individuals are born with the natural capacity to self-direct, a capacity that is protected by one's inalienable rights to liberty, equality and property. Moral law governs this natural state and thus, also protects these rights. So, freedom, equality and property are natural and moral rights. Private property rights are a natural occurrence in a state of perfect freedom. Moreover, Locke argued that in the state of nature there is equal power, capacity and responsibility to attain property, for nothing in nature belongs to anyone in particular. Locke justifies his position with reference to the self-ownership theory, which states that individuals are self-determining agents who own their selves. As self-determining agents, who own their minds and bodies, individuals are fundamentally free to self-direct with their minds and bodies. And because nothing in nature belongs to anyone, a person just has to mix his labour with the land in order to gain legitimate ownership. The self-ownership theory posits a connection or a "mixing" between the self and that which is external to the self. Individuals are born into this world self-owning. They own their bodies and minds and thus, own whatever is mixed with or a product of their mind or body. Since property is understood as a part of you, it can be concluded that people don't have the right to interfere with your property just as they don't have the right to take away or interfere with your very eyes.

Private property rights reflect the features of the individualist standard. First, they affirm that people are atomistic because they claim that ownership directly follows from individual personal and independent effort because labour is a self-directed expression of one's body or mind. Any person's labour that has a valuable effect on a piece of land consequently gives that person a right to own whatever is affected by their labour. For example, consistent ploughing of the land ought to justify that one owns part or all of the nurtured land. Simply, individuals "have a right to do things, therefore they have a right to things." Second, private property rights reflect the individualistic feature of methodological individualism because such rights imply the denial of the view that property is the collective product of social labour. These rights do not value society as a whole because labour is not collectively owned. Labour is regarded as a personal, not a communal, experience and expression. Third, private property rights presuppose that labour is instrumental to individual satisfaction. Taylor states that "the operation of the market and
bureaucratic state tends to strengthen the enframings that favour an atomist and instrumentalist stance to the world and to others. Instrumentalism reflects the liberal standard because it supports the view that people will use their rational capacity to calculate their own advantage in order to optimize their self-interested acts. There is no appeal to objective standards or common goods because these would diminish the individual-centred purpose of private property rights.

The self-ownership theory captures the notion that liberty is property, and reflects the essence of the political medium: the medium is embedded in a language of individual rights talk. It was stated above that liberals are rights-oriented. Liberals believe that all individuals have natural rights to equality, liberty and property. These rights are legally supported in the United States. For example, the Employment at Will (EAW) doctrine couples negative rights and property by giving people a right to hire and fire whomever they choose and a right to quit whenever they choose. Rights are posited as the key condition for establishing a society in which autonomy can be maximized.

The legal sector of the political medium gives legal protection to the individualist standard. It provides the legal means to support the liberal standard, as in the case of the EAW law. The laws and verdicts relayed from the legal sector prohibit encroachments on private property by either the state or other people. The legal sector disperses legitimate power into the hands of the property owners and protects their rights to use and exploit labour. The economic sector, a system based on private property rights, ensures the fullest private property rights possible by allowing people to buy and sell their labour. It is “thus seen an embodiment of freedom.” These rights are regarded as the means to retain individuality. It is fair to conclude that the political medium supports liberal individualism as normative and its structure and operation privileges the liberal conception of human nature.

In this chapter I have outlined how the operation of the liberal medium reflects that liberals hold a substantive individualistic standard, which is based on pluralism, subjectivism, fragmentation, and a belief that autonomy is a function solely of the individual. With this base, liberals claim to have a neutral stance that is supposed to help enable autonomy. But by holding an individualistic standard of human nature and by
operating to privilege this standard, it appears that the liberal understanding of both human nature and the good life are constructs of liberal power and not realistic descriptions at all. Holding an individualistic standard has two effects. First, liberalism has one internal inconsistency that cannot be overcome: supporting a standard violates pluralism and the neutral stance. And second, if one's understanding of the good life and of human nature are constructs of liberal power, then autonomy is being oppressed, not enabled. Whether the liberal medium is a sufficient structure to empower autonomy depends on whether it accurately portrays the characteristics of human nature and whether it provides a sufficient means for autonomy. In the following chapter I argue that another conception of human nature exists, one that reflects the relational need theory.
Notes

Chapter Two

1 Shoemaker & Reese. *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*, p. 36.
7 Kekes, *Against Liberalism*, pp. 174-175.
8 Kekes, *Against Liberalism*, p. 171.
28 Joel Feinberg, “Autonomy,” from *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy*, p. 27-54 (for criteria), and p. 5 for reference to the specific quote.
32 Taylor. *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 228
33 http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberalism/
34 Taylor. *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 266.
36 Rawls, p. 4.
42 John Stuart Mill, from The Philosophy of Man, p. 106.
43 Taylor, Philosophical Arguments, p. 130.
44 Narveson, The Libertarian Idea, p. 32.
Chapter 3 – The Relational Need

3.1 The Relational Need Theory versus Liberalism

In the previous chapters I argued that liberals regard people as independent self-determining beings and that autonomy is a function of individuals, and not dependent upon certain social relations. Relationships and interdependence are marginalized by the liberal view. However, I will argue that human nature only flourishes given certain social relationships. In so far as autonomy is a characteristic of human nature, it depends upon these social relationships. If I am right, then by ignoring the relational aspect, liberals neglect the plausible view that relationships can enable autonomy. This is exactly what the relational need theory claims: humans have an enduring connection to others that is embedded in their relational need and, when fulfilled, autonomy is enabled. Although liberals value autonomy, they fail to recognize that it presupposes relational need fulfilment. Relational need theory escapes this foundational error by focusing primarily on need fulfilment. In this chapter I argue that a normative theory of relationships exists and that there are specific relational features required for fulfilment, such as mutual understanding, shared experiences, positive recognition and acceptance. Just as food fulfills the hunger need to enable the capacities for autonomy, so too, relationships fulfil the relational need to help enable autonomy.

The relational need theory presents a plausible theory of human nature. It identifies the “why” of relationships: people have a natural need to be connected to others. It also identifies the “how” of relationships: relationships occur through shared social expressions such as communication, touch (e.g., hand shaking) and labour, in which specific relational features or forms of validation, such as mutual understanding, we-experiences, positive recognition and acceptance, must occur during the relation. Philosophers have not neglected the fact that individuals have relations to others, and many have described these relations in a variety of ways. Yet there has been a general failure to embed these relations as a function of the relational need. Although feminist philosophers often describe people as relational selves who go through an ongoing process of socialization in which the self becomes defined in relation to his or her social situation of expressions, experiences and
connections to others, feminist philosophers do not refer to the relational need. Lorraine Code describes the "relational self" as a person who is not static or fixed, but instead created by details in the social context. Annette Baier defines people as "second persons" who have a life history of being immersed with others, and who are not fully defined until they are socialized by others. The relational need theory extends the feminist concept by claiming that there is an actual material condition of relational need fulfilment upon which autonomy depends. This argument leads into the final chapter where I argue that liberalism is an insufficient medium for autonomy because it hinders people from fulfilling their relational need.

3:2 What are Needs?

Before exploring the relational need, a background understanding of needs is required. Basic needs have specific normative requirements such that without fulfilment the agent incurs harm and may die. For example, humans have a basic need for food and a lack thereof will cause death. Food, water, shelter and procreation have a normative fulfilment requirement. With respect to food, water and shelter, fulfilment is indispensable because without it we, as individuals, would die. With respect to procreation, if fulfilment were denied for everyone, then we, as a species, would die. The absence of these requirements can affect one's capacities to the extent that one's physical and rational ability to self-direct can be restricted. The key point is that need fulfilment is basic for the avoidance of harm, for "if a person lacks what he needs, the quality of his life will suffer." In this sense, harm refers to deprivation. Without fulfilment, individuals are deprived of the good aspects needed to live a good life. People can become dispossessed from their inability to express their capacities to live that good life. John McMurtry captures the essence of deprivation. He states,

N is a need if an only if, and to the extent that, deprivation of N always leads to a reduction of organic capability, a capability that enables one to achieve what is necessary for a good quality of life, such as the agent's organic ability to move, think, and feel.
McMurtry's definition is theoretically and practically sound because it allows for empirical testing to confirm the presence or absence of harm. Although space does not permit such data, the claims made here will be put to McMurtry's test. I will argue that the weakening of one's capacities is related to a deprivation of the relational features noted above.

It is common to assess harm according to the physical or mental effect on one's capacities. But for two reasons I will not focus on harm as a state of mind or body and will instead argue that harm refers to deprivation. First, I avoid defining harm as a state of mind because this reflects a subjectivist theory of harm. Subjectivism is problematic because it maintains that moral attitudes are a matter of personal taste. Thus, value judgements about harm are lost in a relative and subjective circle of contradiction. Subjectivism is transcended by arguing that harm occurs when someone is deprived of an object that has objective value. In fact, harm as deprivation implies that the object that people are deprived of has value or is a good. Thus, value judgements about harm remain true for most everyone, regardless of personal preference, thoughts, desires and other states of mind. Moreover, focusing on an objective theory of harm can encompass harms that are unfelt by people themselves. Subjectivism would demand that people realize or be aware of the harm that occurs to their mind or body, but clearly there are many examples of harm that people are unaware of. For example, smoking can cause harm to one's mind and body, yet for years people were unaware of this harm. This problem is transcended by arguing that harm is objective, in that people can be harmed whether they know it or not. The harm registers as a reduction of some capacity, but that reduction may not register immediately in one's consciousness.

With respect to basic need theory, harm occurs when someone is deprived of an object of need, such as food, water and shelter. These are common goods and thus transcend the realm of subjectivity. It is wrong to deprive someone of these objects because doing so would, by definition, be equivalent to harm. Similarly, according to the relational need theory, the relational features of mutual understandings and shared experiences have objective value. Since these features are embodied in social expressions, such as communication, touch and labour, these expressions have common value beyond the merely psychological or subjective and can be regarded as common relational goods. So the
first reason to avoid interpreting harm as a state of mind is to prevent fulfilment from being affiliated with subjective or psychological fulfilment. The object of fulfilment should instead be interpreted as having common value. In fact, I will argue that the objects that create fulfilment, such as communication, touch and labour, are common relational goods.

The notion of common relational goods is important. These goods are a type of good because they pertain to the understanding that some things exist not just for me or for you, but for us. Common relational goods are social expressions such as communication, touch and labour because they are not merely “good-for-me” goods, but “good-for-us.” I will refer to these three social expressions throughout and show how they represent common relational goods, and how they are essential for relational need fulfilment. Social expressions are good-for-us goods if they contain mutual understandings, we-experiences and are recognized to exist premised on these relational features. Common relational goods depict social expressions with mutual value and common worth. They transcend being mere individual goods with subjective value. By showing that common relational goods exist, I set the stage to show how important they are for relational need fulfilment. Common relational goods ought to receive formal recognition because they represent one normative feature of relationships and relational need fulfilment.

Second, I avoid focusing on harm as a state of mind because previously I argued that the illegitimate power of the liberal medium influences a person’s state of mind. I argued that the liberal medium can generate power in people’s minds to subtly realign their thoughts and beliefs with liberal ideology, and how the liberal medium can exert power over people to influence their actions. It was implied that people could have a false consciousness. This is exactly why harm as a state of mind should be avoided; individuals may not know that they are being deprived of anything. Harm may be unfelt. There are two kinds of harm: harm may be unconscious or unfelt or conscious and felt. An unfelt harm occurs when someone is unaware that he or she is being deprived of anything. A simple example is that ultraviolet rays cause melanoma and eventually skin cancer. A complex example is that Marx believed that capitalism harmed people through alienation. Yet he realized that most people did not feel alienated or know they were being harmed. Alienation was not a state of mind. Yet Marx believed it was harming society because it was the
overarching aspect that structured one's thoughts in such a way that a false belief in the normalcy of competition was created. People were unaware that capitalism harmed them because they were unaware of other ideologies that focused on their material basis. Thus, human life and the unfelt harmful effects of capitalism persisted with lasting ignorance. In contrast, a felt harm occurs when someone is painfully aware of the deprivation, such as having a need for food. It often coincides with knowing the truth. With respect to Marx's theory, it can be suggested that if the workers knew the class material basis of their society and how capitalism exploits labour by alienating them from this basis, then alienation would be a felt harm because the truth would be known. Similarly, the one-way power of liberalism causes an unfelt harm because it reinforces the normalcy of individualism while ignoring the relational need. Individuals may not be aware that they are being deprived of relational need fulfilment because they do not know the truth of the relational need.

3:3 The Message Content: Relational Need Theory

The relational need is very similar to individual basic needs. The general definition of need asserts that the organic requirements of human life are food, water and shelter and their purpose is to ensure the survival of an individual. At the level of the species, procreation ensures the survival of people. Individual needs must be fulfilled because they enable the physical and mental activity of life. These needs are primitive and natural to human nature because they define the universal requirements of humanity’s existence.

The relational need parallels the basic need for food. Both needs motivate individuals to intentionally strive to fulfil their need. People eat in order to relieve hunger. Similarly, the relational need causes people to fulfil their need by intentionally forming relations with others. The relational need theory is not concerned with unintentional actions or expressions, because fulfilment does not arise from an arbitrary or accidental act. The examples of arbitrary eye contact and brushing past someone on the sidewalk represent unconscious aimless acts of communication and touch respectively. They are irrelevant to fulfilling the relational need. Relational need fulfilment is specific to whether the act was intended or not, and recall that it requires the presence of normative relational features, such
as mutual understandings and shared experiences. This relates back to the contrast between unfelt or unconscious and felt or conscious harms. Relational need theory demands that individuals be conscious of this need and its fulfilment requirements. Being aware of the fulfilment process can motivate intentional relationships. Unfortunately, because the relational need theory is marginalized by the liberal standard, people are unaware of the requirements for fulfilment and unconscious of the harm that occurs without meeting the requirements. By marginalizing the need for intentional social expressions, such as listening, eye-contact, hand-shaking, all these expressions become subordinated to meaningless arbitrary acts of the individual, not shared moments between people in which the meaning derived from them can be used as the background information for autonomous expression.

There are a variety of ways to seek fulfilment. With respect to food, fulfilment occurs by choosing to eat various foods such as meat, cheese, vegetables, sugar products and so on, or by choosing to be vegetarian, kosher and such. With respect to the relational need, fulfilment occurs by intentionally asserting the social expressions of touch, communication and labour, that contain relational features such as mutual understanding and acceptance. People can choose various ways of fulfilment, such as writing letters or listening, which are forms of communication, shaking hands, which is a form of touch, or by manual lifting, which is a form of labour. If these intended acts embody the relational features, a relationship will be formed to enable autonomy.

The final similarity between the basic needs of food, water and shelter, and the relational need is that fulfilment requires the involvement of others. All need satisfaction historically requires direct involvement and contact with others. But since basic need satisfaction has been subordinated to capitalism, which consists of a social division of labour, basic need and relational need fulfilment now diverge. A social division of labour removes the collective conditions by which people fulfil their basic needs, thus fulfilment requires only indirect involvement and contact with others (i.e. the food and clothing manufactures, the builders, the salespeople). But to fulfil the relational need, a reciprocal expression is required, and this requires direct involvement and contact with others.
First, individual need fulfilment now requires only the indirect contact of others because capitalism causes people to become increasingly separated from others. Only during the period of maturation is direct contact with others required, for this is when other people must adequately supply food, shelter and water until the dependants are forced into society to struggle to supply their own forms of livelihood. A capitalist society minimizes personal relations between people, such that individuals no longer require others directly for their livelihood. A person must now take on a role in society, as a cleaner, a cook, a builder, a politician, and play this role lifelong just to ensure his life exists at all. These roles minimize the need for others because they force self-sufficiency, outside of direct contact from others. For example, advances in technology allow people to communicate via the internet, without having direct visual or close contact with others.

On a secondary note, basic need fulfilment involves indirect contact with others because survival is maintained simply from the mere act of eating, drinking or keeping warm. Hunger is fulfilled by, say, blood pudding or haggis, even though not everyone will like these. Warmth is maintained in a shack with adequate heating, just as in a mansion with adequate heating. It is irrelevant whether people attribute value or goodness to what is eaten or how one lives, because nourishment and warmth are satisfied regardless of the subjective value judgement attributed to food or housing. Basic need satisfaction is independent of the praise or condemnation that others may give. This is because food itself is needed. Food itself fulfils a basic need (not the praise or distaste attached to it). Harm will only occur from a type of deprivation that leads to a reduction of organic capability, thus, “the object of deprivation is valuable or a good.” People are not harmed when they are deprived of a subjectively or culturally valued piece of food, nor are they harmed from not living in a mansion. Instead, the value of food lies in its nutritional not aesthetic or subjective content because it is this nutritional content that maintains life. That which maintains life transcends the realm of subjectivity. Thus, direct involvement, in the form of tastes, opinions, and cultural norms is not required for basic need fulfilment.

With respect to relational need fulfilment, direct involvement of others is necessary. Relational satisfaction does not occur from the mere expression of talking, touch or labouring because reciprocity is essential to relational need fulfilment. Fulfilment is
affected by the presence of others because it partially depends on other people who have the ability to recognize, understand and return a social expression to thereby join the intended relationship. But others can also misrecognize, misidentify or even ignore a given social expression that can prevent the relationship from developing. Recognition can be in the form of understanding or misunderstanding. If the social expression was understood, then fulfilment is more likely to occur. However, if the expression is misunderstood, is arbitrary, harmful or demeaning, then relational need fulfilment may not occur. For example, relational need fulfilment is unlikely to occur if communication is in the form of gibberish or someone speaking a different language, if a reciprocal touch is violent or unwanted, or if a reciprocal expression for labour is non-payment or not enough leisure time. The main point is that relational need fulfilment depends on the type of reciprocal expression given by others, not just on the fact that an expression is given.

Relational fulfilment does not arise from talk itself. Value is placed in the content of the communication, what is said in return or the fact that one is being listened to. Nor does fulfilment arise from a touch alone, because the touch could be violent. Touch is valued when it is intended and wanted between two people. And fulfilment does not arise from merely performing a social act of labour, but depends on how labour is recognized in return. With respect to the food analogy, this analysis would imply that it is not that something is eaten, but what is eaten that fulfils the hunger need. Clearly this analysis is backward with respect to other basic needs, but quite precise with respect to the relational need. It is not that something is said, that a touch is given, that labour is acted, but what is said, what kind of touch is returned, and what kind of labour recognition is provided. Relational need fulfilment hinges on precisely what is reciprocated because forming a relationship, and hence fulfilment, depends on the content of what is being reciprocated. The relational features, such as a mutual understanding, reciprocity and acceptance, must be present in communication, when a touch is given and when labour is recognized. I will return to this discussion in a moment.
3:4 Fulfilling the Relational Need

To fully understand fulfilment and harm from the perspective of the relational need, two questions must be answered. First, “when something harms us, what does it deprive us of?” and second, “why is what we are deprived of good?”\textsuperscript{10} With respect to individual basic needs, harm occurs when people are deprived of food, water and shelter. A deficiency in these fundamentals will cause death or incapacity to people. Food, water and warmth have common value because they enable life. Their value transcends the realm of personal taste, preference, thoughts or desires. It is true that everyone should not be deprived of these goods because they maintain life, and life is a good in itself. Food, water and shelter have instrumental value because they are the means that enable life. Thus, harm refers to a lack of instrumental goods that are needed to fulfil the basic needs because the absence of these goods can lead to a reduction of organic capability such that autonomy is oppressed. In contrast, liberals believe the instrumental goods needed to enable autonomy are private property rights, usually negative rights, the neutrality principle and such. They also believe that the absence of these goods will harm autonomy. With respect to relational need theory, validation is conducive for relationships and thus, is conducive or instrumental for autonomy.

Validation is fundamental for relational need fulfilment because it is constituted by two relational features: mutual understanding and positive recognition. Validation arises from 1. understanding or giving internal positive recognition to the intended social expression, and 2. reciprocity or giving external positive recognition or acceptance for the social expression. To fulfill the relational need, people must have validation because it establishes relationships. The process of fulfilment is quite simple. First, when a social expression is asserted other people have the capacity to understand or positively recognize the expression as familiar or common. If the other person understands the expression, then a mutual understanding has occurred. However, people can also misunderstand or negatively recognize the social expression and label it as unfamiliar or strange. A misunderstanding prevents a mutual understanding. Misunderstanding and understanding are forms of internal recognition.
Understanding and misunderstanding essentially relate to how a person recognizes the expression. There are a few distinctions about recognition. First, social expressions can be recognized either internally or externally. *Internal recognition* hinges on a person’s understanding of the expression; whether the expression was familiar, whether it made sense, or whether it was misunderstood or perceived as unfamiliar. As noted above, understanding refers to positive recognition, while misunderstanding refers to negative recognition. Both forms of understanding depend upon a person’s mental base of knowledge, beliefs, facts and awareness. Whether or not a relationship will be established from the social acts of communication, touch and labour depends on whether a person understands the intended social expression of say, talking, to begin with. Thus, it is imperative that one’s base of understanding be constituted by truth and not corrupted with false conceptions, lies or a false consciousness. False conceptions, delusions and stereotypes can create different background meanings such that people will simply not share the same meaning, and this can hinder the ability to grasp the relational expressions of talking, labouring and touch. Having a sense of familiarity or shared meaning is essential to having a mutual understanding. This sense of shared meaning is displaced in a society that embraces individuality and separateness. Since the liberal medium is guilty of perpetuating an individualistic standard, having a mutual understanding can become lost among subjective and arbitrary understandings.

The distinction between positive and negative recognition is important because it reflects the beginning of the fulfilment process. In *Philosophical Arguments*, Taylor suggests that there is a distinction between negative and positive recognition. His reference to “due recognition” is suggestive of positive recognition. His reference to “misrecognition,” “its absence” and “nonrecognition” is suggestive of negative recognition. Negative recognition is harmful and oppressive to others. It can be attributed to a corrupt knowledge base, often referred to as a false consciousness, to ignorance or to general feelings of hostility, anger or hate. Negative recognition will prevent relational need fulfilment, whereas positive recognition will create fulfilment. Taylor agrees that due recognition is necessary for need fulfilment. He states that “due recognition is a vital human need.” Taylor is correct about his view on recognition yet he fails to fully qualify the
distinction with specific reference to positive or negative and internal and external recognition.

External recognition is in contrast to internal recognition. It refers to the second feature of validation: providing a reciprocal expression during the social experience. Similar to internal recognition, external recognition also has the forms of positive and negative recognition. A reciprocal expression is positive when it accepts the other and negative when it rejects the other. With respect to communication, acceptance can be in the form of listening, while rejection can be in the form of ignoring. In touch, acceptance can be acted by copying the touch, while rejection can be avoidance. With respect to labour, acceptance can be in the form of providing appropriate wages, while rejection can refer to various forms of mistreatment for the worker. I will later examine Marx’s idea of communism as a form of positive recognition for labour, which goes far beyond just providing appropriate wages for people. Relational need fulfilment requires both internal and external positive recognition. In other words, understanding and acceptance must occur for a relationship to exist. External recognition depends upon internal recognition. Simply, acceptance or rejection of the social expression depends on whether the person understands or misunderstands the intended expression. Understanding usually triggers acceptance of the social expression, while misunderstanding usually triggers rejection. It is possible that a person’s understanding can prompt an expression of rejection. For example, a person might understand another’s person’s intent to communicate, yet believe his opinions to be narrow-minded and so refuse to reciprocate the expression. In order to reciprocate, the reciprocity must be warranted in the sense that the expression is held by both people to be of common value. Expressions must be genuine acts that have value. Similarly, it is possible for a person to give the right social expression even though he or she misunderstands the context. If this is the case, relational need fulfilment will not occur because the normative requirement for fulfilment demands that people understand the context and the content.

Fulfilment does not occur if the relationship is based upon misunderstanding, rejection or neglect for the other person’s action. With respect to communication, touch and labour, there are various examples of external recognition in the form of acceptance or rejection. First, with respect to communication, listening is a form of acceptance, while
ignoring expressions of communication and responding arbitrarily without listening are forms of negative recognition and rejection. These reciprocal acts can also be attributed to a person’s belief system. Some people may believe that returning an expression of communication with silence or meaningless words does not harm the other person, when in reality these acts fail to establish a true relationship (as based on the relational features of validation). Second, with respect to touch, people can return expressions of touch with violence. This form of negative recognition or rejection can occur from a corrupt mental base or from a belief that violence is perhaps okay. If one person is suffering from a distorted belief system about touch, a mutual understanding can be prevented. Validation and relational need fulfilment will not occur. Finally, failure to provide adequate leisure time for labour is also an example of negative recognition. This neglect can be attributed to a non-recognition for the material relationship that people have with their labour, and to a false belief that labour should only be validated through pay for survival, not leisure.

It should be clear that a mutual understanding and acceptance are crucial to the relational need fulfilment process. These relational features give the validation needed to establish a relationship. Understanding establishes the beginning of a relationship because it affirms that a person recognizes another person’s social expression as familiar. Although this bond remains hidden from the other, because reciprocity has yet to occur, this bond is still important because it represents a relationship that is comprised of a common understanding in which each person shares the same meaningful information. Reciprocity completes the relationship whereby each person participates in a meaningful shared we-experience in which a common relational good, such as communication, touch, or labour, represents their bond. We-experiences are another relationship feature. The relational need theory claims that during social interaction people experience the world in relation to others and not by oneself. By supporting the position that we-experiences exist, social expressions have common value and are not reducible to particular individual conceptions. Fulfilment requires that people understand social experience in terms of we-experiences and not I-experiences.

Validation is the substantive means that establishes a relation between people, whereby the relational need is fulfilled. When any need is fulfilled a person’s capacities are
strengthened to enable autonomy. Below, the link between validation, relationships and autonomy will be fully explored. Basically, autonomy presupposes need fulfilment. The fulfilment of relational needs can help enable autonomy. Thus, autonomy becomes not a pre-given property of individual selves, but a function of the relations between selves.

3.5 Relational Need Theory Applied

To fully understanding the relational need fulfilment process, a few detailed examples are necessary. Fulfilment requires validation: understanding and acceptance. To illustrate fulfilment, consider the example of the social greeting requirement that exists in all cultures. Social greetings are a form of communication that can include the validation features needed for fulfilment. When a social greeting is intended, fulfilment can begin when the other person positively recognizes the greeting as familiar and common. This will create a mutual understanding and a primary bond between the two. But since the other person remains unaware of this bond, reciprocity is necessary to overtly establish the relationship. Fulfilment will occur if the returned expression is positive, in the form of acceptance not rejection. For example, people should reach out to shake hands with others and not ignore an attempt to establish contact. Ignoring is rejection. Validation can be a sort of ‘copying behaviour’ whereby someone understands the expression as a common relational good and consequently models the behaviour of the other. A relationship is created when a mutual understanding and acceptance occur. Copying is appropriate only in particular instances, where this action would not violate an objective moral principle.

A key point in fulfilment is that social expressions, such as communication, touch and labour, must be valued as common relational goods, and not as instrumental goods. Common relational goods are good for both people involved. Their existence depends upon mutual value and common worth and thus, they transcend the limits of mere individual goods. With respect to social greetings, which are a form of communication, they are good for both people involved. They are not just good-for-me goods. Forms of communication exist and are premised on the relational features of mutual understandings, positive recognition, and thus, have common worth. Although communication can involve
mistrue understanding and negative recognition, it ideally represents relationships based on validation, not distorted relationships.

When social expressions are regarded as instrumental instead of common relational goods, their true relational essence is overlooked. In *Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands: How to do Business in Sixty Countries*, Wayne Conaway and Terri Morrison explore the particular cultural expressions of greetings, whether it be a “handshake, a kiss, or a bow,” that are culturally required to establish a business relationship. Some of the greetings are as follows: North Americans shake hands when meeting; the Japanese bow when meeting but have rules as to who bows to whom, how many times, when, and how deeply; Europeans shake hands, but their grip is not as strong as the Americans; Frenchmen appreciate a firm handshake, and German men bow slightly. In order to secure a business relationship, the authors concluded, a greeting like that of the host country ought to be performed. This example reveals a purely instrumental function of social greetings that neglects the common worth and relational essence of them. Since social greetings reflect that people are socially embedded, and it is this feature gives them value, they should be regarded as such.

To reduce social greetings to an ability to form business relationships is to ignore their objective value, which is that social greetings embrace a basic relationship to begin with. The various forms of communication, such as social greetings, language, eye contact, must be valued as genuine instances of relationships that contain validation. To value them as such is to admit that communication is a common relational good. Social expressions should not be reduced to insincere greetings used as a means to, for example, initiate a business relationship. Fulfilment will not arise when expressions are regarded instrumentally. The material condition must be a primary focus because it is embedded in human nature and demands fulfilment before say, a *want* for financial success. Regarding expressions instrumentally, to fulfil this want, prevents the relational need from being fulfilled. A need for relationships is an historical ever-present aspect of human nature, whereas a drive for financial success does not reflect a consistent pattern of social development or a universal aspect of human nature. This drive and even the instrumental value attached to expressions can be attributed to the development of capitalism, which is not a universal economic structure (the drive is not universal, but created by the economic
structure). The relational need is natural. It is not created by a structure, but can be oppressed by a structure.

A second example of the relational need fulfilment process is labour validation. It was mentioned above that labour is a social expression, and thus, it must also be regarded as a common relational good. The notion of labour validation rests upon the belief that people have two relationships with their labour. First, a material relationship exists between people and their labour because labour is expressed to fulfil natural or material needs. Second, a social relationship exists between labourers, for co-operation is often needed to produce something. The relational need theory can be applied to labour, in which fulfilment can arise with labour validation for the material and social relationship of labour.

First, the social, legal and political channels of the liberal medium must recognize the material relationship between people and their labour. It must be understood that labour is a necessary act, expressed to fulfil other needs. Labour is expressed to produce things that are necessary for human survival. This view reinforces the belief that people do have a relationship to their products, because these products provide the lifeblood needed for living. Marx’s states:

> But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself.¹⁵

Marx is arguing that labour is need-driven, expressed to fulfil humanity’s material requirements. Labour provides the satisfaction of basic needs. It is expressed for survival. Thus, labour is a natural and necessary activity. Individuals have an obvious connection to their labour and the products of their labour, because both enable life.

Relational need fulfilment can arise from the material relationship people have with their products. In order to provide validation for this material or natural relationship, it must be first accepted that this relationship is real. Labour validation begins with the understanding that labour is a natural expression for material satisfaction. This understanding is important in relational need theory because it influences one’s subsequent actions in society. Ideally, if labour is to be validated, then everyone who participates in the work-force ought to have this understanding. Positive recognition of the relationship
between the workers and their products and the workers and each other depends upon labour being understood according to the relational need theory.

The material relationship definitive of labour demands the understanding that the product of a person’s labour is required for material survival. A social expression of acceptance, in accord with this understanding, would not consist in upholding the division of labour or the division of the mental from the physical aspects. Instead, the mental and physical expressions of labour must be viewed as expressions to fulfil one’s basic needs, not as instrumental expressions to gain money for others. Labour validation opposes the separation of producers from their products, and opposes the separation of people from the means of production. This separation is the base for capitalism. Capitalism reflects an understanding based on the self-ownership theory, which holds that labour is an individual expression of autonomy, and not a function of the relationships between people.

According to relational need theory, private property rights do not meet the requirements of validation and thus would not fulfil the relational need. Since private property rights allow others to benefit from, exploit and own the labour of other people, they violate and deny the material condition of labour. Instead they only enable others to own the means of production, thus, neglecting the material condition. These rights do not support the principle that labour is an act to fulfil biological needs. Validation would not arise from private property rights. In fact, the inherent refusal within these rights to recognize that labour is expressed to fulfil the material condition is a clear form of negative recognition that is detrimental to autonomy. Marx also expressed this theory. He believed that the “fullest development of the human potential can occur only when human beings have transcended the realm of physical necessity.”

He states:

to have work no longer defined by the needs of capital and no longer undertaken only for profit or for pay, human beings would realize their need to not only consume, but also to undertake free and socially meaningful activity.

Positive recognition for labour could ensure people to develop and express themselves autonomously. Thus, labour could be undertaken as a free, socially meaningful and a creative act. Positive recognition can transpose the process of working from being a hated and detested act, to an act that is used as “a primary means of self-fulfilment acted to
express one's capacities. And this is essentially the goal of validation: to help enable autonomy.

Labour validation also consists in recognizing the social relationship of labour: labour is a social expression that depicts a relationship among humans. Workers are connected to each other or have a relationship with others when they work. Labour satisfies new needs beyond that of food, water and shelter, that arise from the satisfaction of one’s basic needs. In order to fulfil these new needs, social interaction must take place. Thus, labour becomes not only an activity to maintain life, but an expression of a good life. Marx states,

the production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relationship. By social we understand the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end.

Marx is stating that labour is a social activity. Hence, people have a relationship or connectedness to others that occurs from the social expression of labour. One type of validation for the social relationship of labour is found in Marx’s theory of communism.

Communism is the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus, the real appropriation of human nature through and for man. It is therefore the return of man himself as a social, i.e. really human being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development.

Communism can be regarded as a form of validation for the social relationship of labour, because, according to Marx, the workers would gain control of the means of production and labour would then be undertaken as a meaningful and enjoyable act. The workers would be in control of their destiny thereby enabling them to maintain their legitimate connections or relationships. Moreover, communism can be regarded as a form of validation because it supports the position that labour is collective power. It is the “genuine collective ownership of the means of production and collective decision making about what is produced and how it is produced.” Competition and struggle against each other would be replaced with cooperative relations with each other because the means of production would be collectively owned. Class separation, the division between owners and workers, great inequalities of wealth and finally wage labour itself would have to be abolished because these deny the
relations that people have with others that are a function of labour itself. Focusing on Marx's theory gives support to the thesis of relational need theory, which is that since a relation to oneself "only becomes objective and real through his relation to another," it is necessary to provide validation in order to establish these relations to oneself and with others.  

3:6 Relational Need Fulfilment and Autonomy

The process of relational need fulfilment was outlined above with reference to the social expressions of communication, touch and labour. However, the connection between fulfilment and autonomy must also be outlined, and this outline will show how autonomy depends upon relational need fulfilment. When needs are satisfied, the abilities to think, act and express oneself autonomously are enabled. Relational need fulfilment is one of those needs that, when fulfilled, helps to enable autonomy. Some autonomous expressions are identity formation, communication, labour and touch. These expressions of autonomy partially require a person to participate in relationships.

The relational need theory basically claims that the realization of autonomy depends, at least in part, on the fulfilment of our relational need. Above, I referred to Taylor's argument, which claims that identity formation is linked to relationships. This account can show that autonomy is linked to relationships, for ideally identity formation is an expression of autonomous reflection and action. Since identity formation requires the use of one's physical and mental capacities to decide on goals, interests and conceptions of the good, and physically pursue these ambitions as a part of a self-concept, identity formation can be construed as an expression of autonomy. Taylor believes that identity formation depends on relationships. He claims that social expressions from our "significant others" are instrumental to identity formation. He states "we define our identity always in dialogue with the things our significant others want to see in us." And similarly, he states "my discovering my identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internalized, with others." The process is "dialogical," in which "we become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves
and defining our identity through our rich acquisition of human languages of expression,” such as “art, love, and the like.”

Taylor’s idea of a dialogical relation explains how identity formation depends on relationships with others. Similarly, the relational need theory claims that autonomy depends on social relationships that contain the social expressions of communication, touch and labour. If identity formation is ideally an expression of autonomy and depends on relationships, as Taylor argued above, then, so too, the autonomous expressions of communication, touch and labour also partially depend on relationships. Taylor’s dialogical relation seems to confirm that autonomy functions from relationships. Moreover, his dialogical relationship can support the relational need theory feature of reciprocity and its link to autonomy. Taylor’s notion of “negotiating” with others in order to develop one’s identity clearly demands a reciprocal relationship with others. He emphasizes the contributing presence of significant others and even states that our identity “crucially depends on this dialogical relation.” While the relational need theory supports that if the contributing presence of others contains positive recognition, mutual understanding and reciprocity, then relational need fulfilment will occur. Relational need fulfilment requires that people provide a reciprocal act of acceptance in order to establish a relationship. The reciprocity feature in relational need theory and in Taylor’s dialogical relation shows that relationships are necessary for autonomy, whether autonomy is expressed to form one’s identity, or to communicate, touch or perform labour. Taylor seems to even confirm the relational theory when he states “we need relationships to fulfil not to define ourselves.”

Both the dialogical relation and the relational need theory claim that relationships provide the base for one’s background horizon of meaning. Autonomy is partially enabled from this relationship base, because people can choose their identity or their conception of the good according to this base. Choices can directly depend on the relationships one has with others. Taylor states “that identity requires recognition by others.” The dialogical relation provides an excellent account of how certain relationships have normative relational features, such as recognition, that can fulfil one’s need. The only limitation of Taylor’s view is his failure to embed the dialogical relation in the relational need. I stated above that philosophers have provided many accounts of relations, yet have failed to embed
relations in the relational need. Taylor provides a good description or the “how,” of the
dialogical relation, but does not include the “why” of the relation, which is that relations
occur because there is a relational need. By excluding the relational need, any account of
human nature will be impoverished.

Taylor’s dialogical relation, however, can be interpreted to reflect relational need
theory. By briefly considering communication, which is among the many languages of
expression Taylor refers to, relational need theory can accommodate his relation. Validation
in communication, and in other languages of expression, such as love, labour and such,
causes individuals to become connected together in a shared moment or we-experience.
Validation is the key aspect within all our dialogical relations that can transform individual
isolation into social unity. People maintain functioning dialogical relations only through
validation, without which individuals remain separated in their “monological” existence.
The monological ideal of human nature, which is complete independent self-definition, is
sustained by subjectivism, individualism by the belief that social expressions and
experiences are individual private goods, not common goods or shared experiences. This
ideal

    forgets how our understandings of the good things in life can be transformed
    by our enjoying them in common with people we love, how some goods
    become accessible to us only through common enjoyment.29

Communication is one of those goods that is accessible to us only through common shared
experiences, thus, it ought to be labelled as a common relational good.

The positive recognition or validation within communication has the ability to form
relations between people. Validation creates a relationship based on a shared understanding
and the acceptance of each other’s understanding. On a similar note, Marx also illustrated
that language is a shared relation. He states,

    Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that
    exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally
    as well; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity,
    of intercourse with other men. Where there exists a relationship, it exists for me.30

Essentially Marx is arguing that language only exists for the individual in so far as it exists
as a shared common need. For that reason alone, that it occurs through a necessity to have
social relationships, language exists. Not only does this passage illustrate that
communication is a we-experience, but it shows that it is expressed to fulfil a social need,
which ought to be qualified again as the relational need. Marx continues by illustrating the
"restricted relation," which is very similar to Taylor's dialogical relation. He states,

Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and
remains so as long as men exist at all. . . . Here, as everywhere, the identity
of nature and man appears in such a way that the restricted relation of men to
nature determines their restricted relation to one another, and their restricted
relation to one another determines men's restricted relation to nature. 31

In this passage Marx refers to the mutually conditioning exchange by which people develop
in relation to nature, and the mutual exchange that occurs between people. Consciousness is
not privately or independently defined, but derived through a reciprocal exchange with
others and the natural environment. The restricted relation is similar to the dialogical
relation because both reject monological creation or the independent development of
consciousness or identity. Both relations recognize that reciprocity and mutually
conditioning forces are necessarily involved in development.

By meeting the validation requirements, the relational need is fulfilled. The key
point is that fulfilment requires mutual understanding and acceptance. Unarguably,
acceptance and positive recognition are key aspects that establish relationships. While
negative recognition or misrecognition will oppress a person's capacities, because he or she
is being deprived of the needed aspect for relational need fulfilment. Since a person's
capacities can be harmed from negative recognition, autonomy can be oppressed. In The
Malaise of Modernity Taylor agrees that "denied recognition," which is a form of negative
recognition, causes one's cultural identity to be rejected, thus, causing oppression to
autonomy. 32 Taylor's account of how recognition can enable or oppress identity formation
reflects the relational need theory. Both support that recognition is necessary for personal
autonomous development. Taylor states that

identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, and thus, through
misrecognition or non-recognition of a person or group, say through a social
or individual outlet that mirrors back a confining, demeaning or contemptible
picture of that individual or group, one can suffer real damage and form a
distorted identity. 33

According to Taylor, identity formation requires recognition and lack of recognition or
misrecognition causes harm. It can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being. So if negative recognition can oppress identity formation, and identity formation is ideally an expression of autonomy, then Taylor’s account supports the claim that recognition can help to enable autonomy. This is exactly what relational need theory claims: positive recognition within relationships can provide relational need fulfilment that helps to enable autonomy (and conversely, that negative recognition can oppress autonomy).

For example, at one time blacks were negatively recognized as slaves. In order to change their identity they not only had to revise their internal belief system, but they had to physically pursue emancipation in order to change the external system in which social, legal and political negative recognition manifested. A similar argument can be made for the women’s movement. In order to form an identity as equal, able and rational people, women had to first believe they were as such and then fight to change the external negative perception of them. These examples show how the identity formation of a group was being oppressed by a social refusal to accept certain characteristics of the group. This refusal is a form of negative recognition. Since identity formation was being oppressed, so was the autonomy of the group’s members. Until validation was legally, socially and politically given to blacks and to women, *in accord with their understanding that they were equal,* (hence, the mutual understanding), these social groups would have continued to have their autonomy oppressed through the systematic denial and refusal to grant them equal recognition. By granting formal validation to social groups, such as blacks and women, relationships with others are more possible because autonomy is now fully possible. These examples reveal that autonomy is oppressed from negative recognition, from being deprived of validation. Deprivation of validation is harmful because people vitally require it for relationships, to choose their conception of the good and to live according to that conception. Just as the very core of one’s being requires nourishment for life, the core of one’s being requires validation to sufficiently live that life.

In summary, the relational need theory presents a plausible view of autonomy and human nature. Autonomy is a function of the relations between people, rather than a
product of certain individualistic criteria outlined by the liberal standard. Although the
criteria of rationality, physical ability and such, are important to autonomy, liberals take it
for granted that these capacities presuppose relational need satisfaction, and the existence of
relationships. If relationships normatively require shared experiences, mutual
understanding, acceptance and positive recognition, then these are also necessary for
autonomy. Relationships can provide a meaningful background horizon of information
upon which people can autonomously choose their conception of the good, form their
identity and pursue that which is integral to both. In the next and final chapter I argue that
liberalism hinders a person’s ability to choose and perform according to relational need
fulfilment because it provides a standard that does not recognize the features of relational
need fulfilment. Simply, the liberal standard is not a sound principle that allows for a
diversity of life projects, but instead is a construct of liberal power that directly opposes
and rejects other plausible and competing life projects, such as the relational need theory.
Notes

Chapter Three

1 Recall for example, Schultz's "face-to-face" relation, Hegel's 'master and slave' relation, Buber's "I-thou" relation, and Taylor's "dialogical" relation.
6 Taylor, Philosophical Arguments, p. 139.
7 Taylor, Philosophical Arguments, p. 190.
8 Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts.
9 Thomson, Needs, p. 37.
10 Thomson, Needs, p. 44.
11 Taylor, Philosophical Arguments, p. 226.
12 Taylor, Philosophical Arguments, p. 225.
15 Marx, German Ideology, Chapter 4 History: Fundamental Conditions.
22 Marx, Early Philosophical Manuscripts, p. 78.
23 Taylor, Philosophical Arguments, p. 230
26 Taylor, Philosophical Arguments, p. 231.
27 Taylor, Philosophical Arguments, p. 230.
28 Taylor, Malaise of Modernity, p. 45
29 Taylor, Philosophical Arguments, p. 231.
30 Marx, German Ideology, Chapter 4. The Essence of the Materialist Conception of History Social Being and Social Consciousness.
31 Marx, German Ideology, p. 158.
32 Taylor, Malaise of Modernity, p. 50.
33 Taylor, Philosophical Arguments, p. 225.
Chapter 4 – Liberalism is an Insufficient Medium

4:1 Introduction

On this journey to understand how autonomy is best enabled, both liberalism and the relational need theory were outlined. A controversy arises between the two views because both claim to accurately outline human nature and the way autonomy is best enabled. The relational need theory was presented as one journey. Although this is the road less traveled, it presents a plausible description of human nature and autonomy, and it presents another choice for a good life. The “how and why” of relational need theory takes travelers down a road into a network of connectedness. They understand that social experiences are we-experiences and that social actions are common relational goods. The travelers receive fulfillment on this journey because they understand that validation, in accordance with the relational need theory, is essential to give and receive in order for autonomy to flourish.

In contrast, we have the journey taken by most liberals who are guided by the way of liberal medium. They describe people according to the individualistic standard and they apply various means, such as private property rights, freedom of speech and such, to enable autonomy. This journey demands that travelers be independent and isolated from notions of common goods and social connections. Those who take this journey understand that they are separate from and prior to the social whole, and they subjectively view their experiences and actions on that journey. I-experiences dominate their base of understanding and social acts are deemed individual acts. Yet this is the road more traveled, for the travelers have been influenced by the one-way power of the liberal medium, which imposes a standard of human nature and a conception of the good life. Although liberals value autonomy as the highest good and they provide arguments in support of their conception, their structure still fails to satisfy the goods for the realization of autonomy. Why does the liberal structure fail? Why is liberalism an insufficient medium for autonomy?

To find the answer, one last journey must be taken to clearly understand why the liberal medium fails to be a sufficient structure for autonomy. Basically, most liberals presuppose that their individualistic understanding of human nature is a truthful account.
Consequently, they restrict their idea of the autonomous life to be confined of their own presuppositions. Liberals claim that humans are autonomous regardless of their relationships and independent of their social setting. Yet I will now argue that this understanding of autonomy is a mere construct that reflects the powerful ideological goals of the liberal designers themselves. Consequently, the liberal account excludes other competing conceptions, and thus, restricts autonomy. I will argue that the one-way power of the liberal medium privileges individualism. This oppresses autonomy because it overpowers one's choices to believe in and be to pursue other competing opportunities. This oppression of autonomy is a form of harm, as I will argue. I will conclude by briefly arguing that the liberal medium can become a more sufficient structure by recognizing the relational need theory as a plausible alternative. Recognition can enhance the choice, performance and relational need conditions of autonomy.

4:2 Autonomy Requires Choice and Opportunity

Autonomy was previously defined as the capacity to direct oneself in one's choices, beliefs, values and actions. This understanding depicts two conditions of autonomy: the internal freedom to choose and the external freedom to realize one's choices. Having the internal freedom to choose reflects the "choice condition," which enables "agents to choose to perform actions from among a number of alternatives that they reasonably believe are available." A reasonable belief is one that the agent has grounds to believe is true or one that can be grounded by philosophical, moral, ethical or other reasons. Among the agent's reasonable beliefs is that he or she has the capacity and opportunity to perform any of the available alternatives. This capacity reflects the "performance condition" of autonomy because it requires "that agents have a motive and a goal for the action," or that they have good reasons to act. Thus, autonomy hinges on the agent's capacity to choose from various reasonable beliefs, and upon the motives that provide opportunities for agents to perform or realize their choices. Together, these two conditions suggest that the autonomous individual is one who can step back from his moral beliefs and his desires and test their validity by reference to an inbuilt standard, which is his own.
tendency to rational coherence and consistency in thinking.\(^3\)

Basically autonomy requires that individuals first include in their mental base a horizon of significant information that contains as much truthful information as possible. Access to this information allows individuals to develop from this mental base their projects, goals, identity and conceptions of the good, and to actually realize these projects and goals.

The liberal medium purports to value autonomy and to provide the sufficient means to enable autonomy. But does it satisfy the choice and performance conditions of autonomy? I argued that liberalism holds a substantive conception of human nature that relays the belief that certain individualistic properties, such as independence, isolation and hard-work, belong to individuals themselves and help to enable autonomy. These aspects are relayed as normative. However, whether they are normative is, in fact, the question. If they realistically reflect human nature, then yes, the choice and performance conditions of autonomy are protected. However, I will argue that the liberal understanding of human nature and the good life are mere constructs of liberal power. In turn, I will argue that the two conditions of autonomy are oppressed by liberal power.

The liberal medium is a one-way power structure. The social channels of the liberal medium reinforce the liberal standard by using power illegitimately to exert both *power over* and *power in* the individual. The channels of the liberal medium, such as the media and government, influence various sectors of society and exert power over citizens that *prescribes*, rather than describes, an individualistic standard of life. Power reinforces the belief that individuals are self-determining in their ability to solely create an identity and conception of the good. The choice condition is essentially violated because the liberal political and economic structures exert one-way power in order to align people's opinions, beliefs and needs with the individualistic standard. Taylor captures this realigning ability when he states,

> modern society does tend to push us in the direction of atomism and instrumentalism by making it hard to restrict their sway in certain circumstances and by generating an outlook that takes them for granted as standards.\(^4\)

Liberal messages that are relayed through the social and political channels use power over to convey that individualism is the only acceptable standard. This can influence a person’s
belief system such that he or she may begin to believe that individualism is the standard that one has to aspire to, live up to and succeed in being. This influential push oppresses the choice condition of autonomy because it is a form of manipulation that prevents people from choosing their own conception of the good life. Foremost, liberal messages convey that social relations are *de facto*, being unwanted constraints. It appears that life itself exists outside of social relations, and this violates a person's choice to believe that relationships are normative.

The choice condition of autonomy is also oppressed because the liberal medium generates *power in* people, which has the ability to align individual thoughts and beliefs with liberal ideology. Because liberal messages convey deep assumptions about human nature, the good life and such, they profoundly appeal to one's sense of self. Thus, people are easily persuaded to realign their conceptual framework according to the content. The social transmission of messages is one way that beliefs can be aligned with the liberal standard. For example, language can be used as a mode of social control to generate power in a person. Whether they are experts or laypersons, people are messengers who can unintentionally influence friends and family towards a belief in the liberal standard. For example, common phrases like "you're free to do as you like; no one is stopping you," and "what's the matter, can't you do that yourself?," can intensify separation and deem that people are inadequate if they feel a need for others.

Through the social channels, the liberal medium supplies us with a ready-made definition of autonomy and human nature. This form of influence can create a belief that the liberal definition is normative, and this belief was not autonomously generated through one's own will. Yet the liberal conception of autonomy essentially demands

... that agents should judge how they should exercise their freedom and that their judgements should involve the application of some standards that they have come to accept as a result of critical reflection on them and on how they should live. 5

The liberal use of one-way power is incompatible with its very description of autonomy because it imposes a conception that is created by liberal ideology rather than personal reflection. The liberal medium uses its power to create a mass belief in and desire for the liberal way of life. In persuasive advertising the marketers are often guilty of "creating a
desire" for the advertised product and they are guilty of overriding autonomy. Roger Crisp states that “for a desire to be rational,” and autonomous, “it must not be induced by the interference of another person, against my will and without my knowledge,” as this would clearly remove the conditions of choice. Yet the liberal medium oppresses the condition of choice by marginalizing other plausible and competing conceptions.

The performance condition is also limited by the illegitimate power of the liberal medium. This condition requires that agents have motives or goals for the action, and that they have the reasonable belief that they will have the opportunity to realize their goals. However, because the liberal medium has such pervasive influence over society, people are led to believe that they do not have the opportunity to live according to other goals or conceptions aside from individualism. For example, living according to the relational need theory requires first that one have the belief that one can act according to this life. Since the liberal medium does not support the belief that the relational need theory is a normal way of life, people may not believe that opportunities exist for relational need fulfillment. The performance condition requires that people have good reasons to act, but if the liberal medium marginalizes the relational need theory, then people may also not act according to it because they will lack reasons that can justify their performance. For example, relational need fulfillment from communication requires both that people value communication as a common relational good and that they listen, understand and provide positive recognition for each other’s actions. Yet if people are unaware of the reasons behind these actions, then the possibility that each person will perform these acts is diminished. It is impossible to justify actions unless the agent understands the reasons behind them.

In summary, it is through the illegitimate use of power that the liberal medium not only violates autonomy but also violates its very own definition of it. Liberals impose a standard upon the members of society that was clearly not inbuilt or a product of critical reflection. Kekes believes that

to support that a few values should always and in all contexts prevail over the rest is to try to force the fluidity of life to conform to a blueprint that reflects the preferences of its designers rather than the ways things are.
Hence, autonomy becomes not a true function of the individual, but a constructed understanding that reflects the ideological goals of the liberal designers themselves.

4.3 Experience: The Liberal View is a Construct of Power

Liberal power oppresses the choice and performance condition of autonomy by attaching substantive values to experience and action. The basis of this argument is that through the expansive and illegitimate use of power, the liberal medium generates power in people that aligns their understanding of social experience and their actions with individualism. Messages of how individuals experience the world provide the domain of meaning upon which actions are based and judgements formed. For example, individualism demands that people must be regarded as independent agents who experience the world through a subjective lens. Thus, social acts, such as speech, touch and labour must be regarded as private, independent and subjective actions, because the understanding of communication, of touch or labour, is regarded as individual, as opposed to having a mutual or shared understanding of these actions. The understanding is derived from people’s beliefs about their experiences. The actions asserted by the individual are based on that understanding. For example, buying and selling labour are actions that follow from the personal understanding that individuals are independent labourers who own their labour, and thus, have a right to sell their labour. There is harmony between the understanding of the experience and the actions.

Locke provides a paradigm view in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, in which he regards people as independent agents who experience the world subjectively. Locke believed that it is only through sense data that knowledge and understanding are achieved. His empiricist account illustrated that through sensing many simply ideas people experience and understand the world as constitutive solely of one’s consciousness. Locke states that “since consciousness always accompanies thinking, it is that which distinguishes [himself] from all other thinking things...” and “since the mind has nothing more than its own ideas,” these individual ideas constitute knowledge. While his theory is more complex
than this, Locke was perhaps the first liberal to argue that all experiences and thoughts are self-referential private understandings.

Locke's epistemology reflects a theme in liberalism, that of experiencing and understanding the world in or by oneself, as opposed to experiencing or understanding the world in relation to others. This distinction corresponds to the two views about autonomy: liberals believe that autonomy is a function of an isolated self, while the relational need theory claims that it is through relationships that people become more autonomous. Relational need theory argues that shared experiences cannot be reduced to two separate expressions and two isolated individuals. For example, social experiences that involve communication, touch and labour are ideally experienced as *we-experiences*. They exist in context with a shared understanding and ideally have common value. Relational need theorists claim that mutual understandings and relationships help to enable autonomy. In contrast, experiencing the world in or by oneself affirms that experiences are personal *l*-experiences. Understandings of communication, touch and labour are valued independently of other people and are probably diverse. Experiencing the world in or by oneself reduces the social setting of shared social experiences and mutual understandings to particular individual conceptions.

Liberals who hold pluralism and methodological individualism as values must regard all shared experiences in terms of *l*-experiences. Methodological individualism is applied throughout much of liberal theory. A few examples previously noted are: individual rights are prioritized above collective rights; the economic medium operates according to an individual-centered base (private property rights over collective ownership of labour); their view of human nature construes individuals as separate and fragmented from society; and finally liberals hold that only individual and instrumental goods exist as opposed to holding that common goods exist. Individualism demands an application of methodological individualism to both individual experience and action because this application ensures that individuals are prioritized over and are separate from society. This application will thus, demand that social acts, such as talking, be constituted by a private understanding of what it means to communicate, and be held as an *l*-experience, not a shared experience.
Individualism requires that common goods be reduced to individual goods and that shared experiences and actions are decomposed into particular instances. For example, handshaking and hugging are acts based on an understanding of what it means to touch. Teaching or assembling parts are acts based on an understanding of what it means to be a labourer. By applying methodological individualism to these actions, the social experiences would have to be regarded as private or subjective, while the social acts would have to be regarded with individual, not common, value. The social acts of talking, touching and working must be interpreted as individual goods, when clearly these experiences and acts are shared and are often considered common goods. Yet the liberal medium demands that experiences and acts be individualized because that lens of subjectivity grounds them. This reduction is necessary because the liberal approach demands that notions pertaining to groups or collectivities be reduced to aggregates of individuals. Moreover, claiming that social acts are common goods would threaten the liberal standard, because the subjective determining ability and capacity to choose values is being violated.

The liberal analysis of experience and action constructs a way in which individuals should understand and act in the world. Although this way is purported to mirror human nature, it merely reflects the features of individualism and reinforces that autonomy is a function of the individual self and is not an emergent property of relations between selves. Now consider whether this is, in fact, realistic. Hand-shaking is an experience of touch that involves mutual consent, and involves being willingly touched by another. Both the toucher and the touchee want, act, reciprocate the touch and commonly will the act. There is a simultaneous feeling of being touched, which has other-dependency, and touching, a self-direction. Yet it is difficult to differentiate between the touch and touching. The experience of touch is shared. The moment is common to both. In this case, touch is a clear we-experience and it is a shared relational act. At that moment, the act is a common good for the two involved. Yet liberalism describes these shared experiences and social acts in personal, private and individualistic terms. According to the liberal medium, individuals must understand touch with subjective reference, as an I-experience. Moreover, the simultaneous and reciprocal touch must be regarded as two separate individual goods. Gauthier states,
as an autonomous being, the liberal individual is aware of the reflective process by which her later selves emerge from her present self, so that her preferences are modified, not in a random or uncontrolled way, but in the light of her own experiences and understanding. [Italics mine]

Essentially Gauthier claims that autonomous actions, choosing a conception of the good and other such pursuits, are derived from one's own private and independent reflection and understandings of one's experiences. He is supporting the liberal theory of methodological individualism, a method that reduces shared experiences to private experiences, and even shared acts, shared goods and even society as a whole are reduced to individual parts. Liberalism is guilty of collapsing perfectly valid and realistic shared understandings, acts and goods into private independent notions and is guilty of imposing this impoverished understanding upon society.

In order to understand how impoverished the liberal conception is, consider communication as an experience shared between people, and language as the medium of this experience. Communication is on a macro level because it is all-encompassing, while language is on a micro level because it is but one form of communication. From the relational need perspective, language should be valued as a common relational good because its communicative function fundamentally connects people to others. Yet a liberal account demands that both communication and language be judged through a subjective individualistic lens. With this approach, language can be disassociated from its current background of having common social value, to a position where it receives only subjective individual and instrumental value. Both communication and language must be regarded as individual and instrumental goods that can be used as a means to enable autonomy. Yet, communication depicts a shared experience in which both people value the expression. Communication, and language, depict a relational experience and shared action that gives evidence to a basic social connection in human nature. As such, shared experiences and acts should be recognized with common value. It is a distortion to associate the social expression of language as an I-experience and not a we-experience. But this is exactly what methodological individualism does: language is regarded as an individual and instrumental good such that it can be used as a means for some end. Language should not subordinated
to a position of instrumentalism where it only reflects individual benefit because it is essentially a relational action that depicts the essence of human nature.

Both Kymlicka and Taylor agree that language at least should be regarded as a common good, as opposed to being a good to individuals only. Their contemporary views help to dissolve more than a century of individualism. Taylor refers to the French language and the debate of Quebec distinctiveness and argues “the culture of Quebec, including the French language, should at least be seen as a common good” in the sense of being a “irreducible common good, or the goods of a culture that makes conceivable actions and feelings a valued way of life.”¹¹ My point exactly. The French culture is defined by shared experiences and reflects the fact that people hold a common understanding about those experiences. Protecting the French language is essential because the Quebec culture exists in part from and through the common value placed in the French language. The neutrality principle prevents liberals from advocating the position that language is a common good, and thus, it would judge language legislation as illegitimate or a violation of autonomy. Kymlicka extends Taylor’s argument beyond the French culture to multiculturalism. He argues that language contributes to the formation of culture and individual identity is partly constituted within the culture to which one belongs. Cultural protection of language is necessary to pursue a conception of the good life. Kymlicka concludes that liberalism “can, and must, make sense of cultural membership, as identities are dependent upon this membership.”¹² I conclude that it is not realistic to reduce shared moments to a set of individual acts, given their embedded common value. Although the liberal medium purports to be neutral regarding conceptions of the good, it acts as a one-way power structure to privilege an individualistic standard of human nature that proposes an individualistic way for people to experience and express themselves in the world. In summary, the liberal medium oppresses the choice and performance conditions of autonomy because it fosters judging experiences and actions from an individualistic perspective. This marginalizes other plausible and competing alternatives, such as judging experiences and acts from a social perspective.
If the relational need theory were not marginalized by the liberal medium, there could be many changes in the way people interact with others. I am only going to outline one relational need notion that is wrongly marginalized by the liberal medium, and this will indicate how a world based upon relational need theory would look like. First, social acts, such as communication, touch and labour, are valued by the relational need theory as common relational goods, while liberals value these social acts as individual goods. The notion of common relational goods has a strong connection to relational need fulfilment and autonomy. These goods represent the core of relational need theory because they describe people as functioning within a social context of shared we-experiences and mutual understandings. Moreover, they support the idea that social acts have common value that transcends the purely individual level, given the fact that people voluntarily seek to embrace social actions. Currently liberal messages from the social, political and economic realms give no recognition to common relational goods. This failure of recognition reflects the liberal belief that a substantive good cannot be endorsed because all people are distinct and should be allowed to choose their own goods. However, it is time to seriously rethink this rejection by considering whether common relational goods are realistic, and whether failure to recognize is conducive to enabling autonomy.

First, is it realistic to accept that common relational goods exist? Yes, realistically social actions, such as communication, touch and labour have their goodness grounded in mutual understanding, shared experiences and common worth. Social expressions are good because of these relational features. Social acts are common relational goods because they are “irreducible social goods” or goods “that root their goodness as an object of a common understanding.” Social expressions have two defining features of irreducible social goods. First, they are good because they incorporate the value of mutual understanding and thus, are the basis for relationships. If mutual understandings failed to exist, then the reciprocal social acts would fail to be an object of goodness because they would be purely instrumental goods. For example, according to relational need theory, a mutual understanding must occur for people to feel fulfilled when communicating. Without that
common understanding, communication becomes idle chatter and meaningless noise.

Communication is a common relational good because its value is grounded in a common understanding, and this creates a relationship premised on reciprocity and meaning. Communication, touch and labour have value because they are defined by their relational features, and this fact alone makes them irreducible social goods that cannot be reduced by methodological individualism.

Second, social expressions are irreducible social goods because “they represent the goods of a culture that make conceivable actions, feelings and such, a valued way of life.” Social expressions are good in themselves, and the fact that people attach deep value to them and voluntarily pursue them strengthens this point. Language, social greetings and some expressions of labour, represent cultural goods that constitute culture itself as well as individual identity. Culture is impossible to understand without considering the relational goods that belong to it. For example, Quebec is a culture defined by the social expression of the French language; the Native culture is partially constituted by the expression of powwows. These expressions are cultural goods because they make actions and feelings valued ways of life. Common relational goods, whether they are in the form of language, social greetings or some kind of dance, embrace common value that cannot be reduced to individual goods.

The liberal value of methodological individualism interprets social acts as instrumental and individual goods. This false interpretation arises perhaps from a failure to distinguish the content of the social acts from the social acts themselves. This confusion is problematic because social actions can lose their intrinsic worth and goodness. While the content of a social act can be instrumental for fulfilment because it can contain recognition and respect, the social acts themselves should retain objective value. Recall that it is not that something is said, that a touch is given, that labour is acted, but what is said, what kind of touch is returned, and what kind of labour recognition is provided. Fulfilment hinges on precisely what is reciprocated. The content of the social act is instrumental towards fulfilling the relational need, whereas the social acts themselves have intrinsic worth or goodness that cannot be reduced to individual worth. Social acts are not contingent goods because we do not have to assess or identify whether they are good for A, B or C. They
are good for everybody. But we do have to assess whether the content was good for our self-esteem, good for our relational need or good for autonomy. Although methodological individualism correctly understands that the content of social acts can have an instrumental function, it is a narrow-minded interpretation because it fails to recognize a distinction between the social act itself, which has intrinsic goodness, and the content of the act.

Common relational goods ought to be recognized for the goodness that resides in their inherent social features. They "presuppose that we have formed a unit, a 'we' who understand together, and this is by definition analytically indecomposable." Common relational goods are a plausible alternative to the liberal claim that social actions are individual and instrumental goods. Although liberals hold that "a good is a good only because it benefits the individual," or because it gives satisfaction to the individual,18 this view is unrealistic because society, we-experiences and common goods all become dispossessed from their collective reality into abstractions from that reality. Society is reduced to the individuals who exist there; we-experiences are reduced to private I-experiences, and common goods are reduced to individual goods. For liberals, applying methodological individualism ultimately shows their rejection of the collective and reaffirms that only individuals are real. It is more realistic to value touch, labour, and communication as common relational goods because they reflect relations between people, rather than being mere acts of the self or properties of the individual. People thrive on social actions. Methodological individualism seems to reduce all the goodness that social acts embrace.

Common relational goods represent significant information that can contribute to a person's mental base from which a person chooses their goals, conceptions of the good and such. Autonomy is best enabled when people have as much truthful information as possible. Since common relational goods represent a condition by which people participate in mutual understanding and we-experiences, people can choose and be motivated by this condition, and not solely by individualism. For example, accepting communication as a common relational good can lead people to respect the meaningfulness of communicating. Since communication proves that people function, express and experience themselves in relations, these relationships may be valued collectively and not instrumentally. Instead of regarding
communication as nothing but a means to advance individual flourishing, speech and other acts of communication may be expressed to promote the full flourishing of all. If people believed that communication was socially and relationally meaningful, perhaps people would strive to listen more, try to identify what the other person is saying, and respond with acceptance or other forms of positive recognition. The subjective or personalization of this good in which people regard communication as “I am talking to you,” can be replaced with collective value in which communication can be regarded as “we are talking.” With listening and mutual understanding the notion of “we” arises to form a relationship between people. Finding this “we” is essential because it realistically mirrors the human experience of social interaction and social expression.

Similarly, handshaking, a social expression of touch, also depicts a we-experience and embraces a mutual understanding. Yet the liberal procedure of methodological individualism demands that handshaking be regarded instrumentally as a means to initiate, for example, a business deal. It is also highly regarded as mannerly, customary, and “the thing to do” in social situations. The formality of these associations can marginalize the intrinsic relational goodness of social greetings. Acceptance of common relational goods can encourage that reciprocity be present in various forms of touch, communication and labour. Thus, these acts will be respected based on their common relational value and not on individual or instrumental value. If people believed that touch was socially and relationally meaningful, they might strive for each touch to contain a mutual understanding or try to identify or familiarize themselves with the practices of others.

Relational need fulfillment may also begin by accepting that labour is a common relational good. It was previously argued that labour reflects a relationship between people, rather than an individual expression of property rights. Labour represents a form of social interaction in which people are connected to each other or have a relationship with others that helps to satisfy their needs. Labour depicts a we-experience and a good-for-us good. Surely the benefits of labour ought to be reaped by the whole of society, because the whole of society contributes. If labour is relational, then it should be accepted as a common relational good. Yet liberal proceduralism maintains that labour cannot be regarded as a common relational good. The point is that liberal proceduralism and its application of the
liberal standard does not embrace all that is necessary for autonomy. Autonomy clearly requires that people have the choice and opportunity to pursue goals and reasonable conceptions of the good life.

Liberalism, on the other hand, marginalizes other plausible choices for a good life. The liberal standard appears as the "highest, universal, permanent, invariable, prima facia or absolute" conception. This mere perception can cause a struggle between individualism and other seemingly available reasonable alternatives. The liberal standard appears as the only reasonable choice. This can cause people's horizon of information, from which they choose their conception of the good life, to be restricted to information that pertains only to individualism, subjectivism and fragmentation. To believe humanity is comprised of interdependent beings that have a relational need is simply not presented as a rational alternative in society. The choice condition of autonomy is clearly oppressed by the liberal medium because it uses its power to influence people to choose nothing but individualism, such that people are not even aware of other conceptions. The relational need theory is subordinated by liberal power to a position of unfamiliarity and misunderstanding such that it does not even appear to be a truthful account or reasonable belief that could motivate goals, projects and pursuing a conception of the good life.

4:5 The Good Life: The Liberal View is a Construct of Power

Because of the power of the liberal medium and the all-pervasive character of its sound dissemination, liberal individualism seems inescapable. By exerting power over society and generating power in its members, the liberal medium imposes certain ways of thinking and feeling that may themselves facilitate social change, but when this comes about on a massive scale, it can entrench these ways and make them appear inescapable. . . . social atomism becomes more and more entrenched.

Although Taylor here refers to the particular problem of atomism, his claim can be extended to show how the liberal medium uses illegitimate power to promote certain ways of thinking. Although liberalism tends toward the promotion of self-government, it fails to realize that its structure is so strong that it overpowers people and oppresses autonomy. The
liberal medium uses *power over* to influence the active life of the individual. It is the political medium that has the ability to legally direct and control people’s life, work activity and the way in which individuals ought to regard their working and living experience. For example, Kymlicka refers to Prime Minister Trudeau’s White Paper in which Trudeau outlined the elimination of all special designation and rights for the Natives. Although Trudeau’s attempt did not materialize, he clearly intended to use liberal power to enforce the liberal standard in order to rule out the common relational goods definitive of Native culture.

Now consider these other examples of how the liberal understanding of the good life reflects a construct of their power, and oppresses the choice and performance conditions. The protection of freedom of speech and expression has a grounded connection to liberal individualism. First, freedom of speech and expression are regarded as means to empower autonomy. They are not valued in themselves, but are regarded as individual and instrumental goods. Both types of freedoms are grounded in subjective individualism. The connection is as follows. Since individual actions are believed to enable autonomy, there is much hesitation to put limits on freedom of expression because these limits will deny and severely threaten the purported conception of human nature. The connection occurs because liberals cannot seem to get beyond the immediate experience of one’s self and move towards the mediated experience of a relation. Experience and expression remain on the primary level of belonging to one’s inner self and not on a relational level as occurring between two people. As such, freedom of expression and speech are labelled as independent acts that contribute to individual flourishing. These labels are justified because liberals believe that experiences, such as communication, are private I-experiences. Thus, limits on freedom of expression and speech are not justified. Even Mill’s liberty principle justifies limitations only when the expressions can cause harm in the *largest sense*.

The liberal messages relay the principle that freedom of expression and speech do not embody common experience or have embedded shared value. These freedoms have only internal significance. Individuals are the only legitimate agents who can apply significance to these expressions. Although cultures and groups can apply common meaning or value to language and others shared expressions, the liberal medium does not
recognize this common meaning because this would violate the neutrality principle and the belief that there is no substantive good that can be rendered binding on all people. Since these messages have enough power over the public sector, they illegitimately advance a conception of the good life, one that accords with the individualistic view of human nature. The individualistic conception marginalizes choices and actions that pertain to cultural values, shared moments and beliefs that common relational goods do exist.

The liberal medium can reject other conceptions of the good and it can marginalize other people who are excluded by the liberal standard. The French Culture almost lost its conception of the good life. The Natives were also rejected because of the intentional non-recognition of their shared experiences, cultural practices and common acts that constitute the Native culture. Taylor states that the lack of respect for multiculturalism results from the liberal view that “this is how we do things here,” and

it has a lot to do with the imposition of some cultures on others, and with the assumed superiority that powers this imposition. Western societies are thought to be supremely guilty in this regard, partly because of their marginalization of segments of their populations that stem from other cultures.\textsuperscript{22}

Taylor is essentially arguing that liberalism marginalizes others who do not embody liberal values. With respect to the liberal medium, it too can be suggested that its powerful support for the individualistic standard not only marginalizes other values and beliefs, but rejects people who may hold other values. The individualistic standard is asserted to be the only acceptable way of life, such that other choices appear unreasonable and unacceptable.

A substantive conception of the good life is also conveyed through the economic medium. This medium demands that labour be aligned legally, socially and politically with the liberal standard. By aligning one’s life according to the self-ownership theory, capitalism can manipulate people’s life, time and leisure. The self-ownership theory is a paradigm example of manipulation because it influences how individuals should experience and express their labour. The experience of being a labourer is understood to be a private I-experience through which one personally exerts effort from one’s mind and body. This understanding constitutes the background meaning and provides the motivation for labour. As a result, labour can be disconnected from the other because it is regarded as a product of one’s private self-determining ability. If labour is understood as an autonomous act, as
expressed solely as an independent act of one's private will, then individuals are influenced to express their autonomy according to this understanding of labour. Labour is not viewed as a collective activity, and can consequently be fragmented from other people or separated from a collective reality. In *German Ideology* Marx argued that private property presupposed many types of fragmentation, such as

the division of the conditions of labour, of tools and materials, and thus the splitting-up of accumulated capital among different owners, and thus, also, the division between capital and labour, and the different forms of property itself. The more the division of labour develops and accumulation grows, the sharper are the forms that this process of differentiation assumes. Labour itself can only exist on the premise of this fragmentation.23

Marx is describing the various types of fragmentation, such as alienation and a class division of labour. Liberalism reinforces these types of fragmentation by holding that labour is nothing but the isolated act of supposedly free individuals. As a result, people are forced to live their lives and choose their conceptions of the good life according to this fragmented notion of labour. By beginning from a fragmented ontology and structuring the social, political and economic medium upon that ontology, liberalism can cause the ordered world to be fragmented and disconnected as well.

The power of the liberal medium marginalizes choices and acts pertaining to other understandings of labour. If liberalism sets the standard that labour has only subjective value and individual reference, then the counter-belief that labour is collective power or a production necessary for material existence is marginalized. Liberalism cannot permit the belief that labour is a life affirming activity with intrinsic value because this would imply that the liberal medium is guilty of exploiting our labour and thus, exploiting our life. So based on this imposed standard of living, individuals are forced to express themselves in accord with capitalism. Jagger argues,

in the conditions of capitalist society, most people experience work as the repression rather than the expansion of their creative abilities . . . consequently they express laziness, turning their interests from production to consumption.24

This quotation conveys the principle that liberalism realigns people's beliefs and actions with the liberal standard. This imposed belief system creates a false consciousness, which arises when people are conditioned or influenced into believing that their life has one
purpose and thus, they “breathe, work, love, suffer and die,” according to this purpose. For example, when people sell their own or buy another’s labour power they believe that they are expressing an autonomous act that represents flourishing. But both the experience and subsequent act are mediated products of the liberal ideology. Liberalism relays the belief that work is instrumental to satisfying an accumulation of individual wants. Yet Marx argues that labour is not voluntary, but a natural necessity. He states,

... activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided. Man’s own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. ... For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood. 25

Although Marx is making reference to alienation, he is essentially grounding this claim in the fact that people exert their labour based on a material necessity for survival. Yet this belief is marginalized in liberal society. Instead, the buying and selling one’s labour is believed to constitute the good life. Money from labour opens the door to the so-called good life. Labour is regarded as another means to enable autonomy and to achieve the good life. The economic medium obscures the ways in which the members of a society are interdependent, because it sets individuals in competition with each other. Hence, they are unable to perceive their mutual dependence, and if they do perceive it, they are unable to live it. Thus, people conceive of themselves as isolated individuals, alienated from each other, rather than as beings who are necessary social. 26

4: 3 The Neutrality Defence: A possible objection

Liberals will object to the claim that their theory contradicts the choice and performance conditions of autonomy. Yet even the most reasonable objection that liberals can give may be refuted. This objection relates to the “neutrality thesis,” a thesis that is used to justify the liberal support for the values of equality, tolerance, liberty, dignity, distributive justice, usually negative rights and the value of pluralism. This thesis claims that these values are basic to any conception of the good life, and thus, holding them does not render liberalism inconsistent. But can this thesis also justify the overriding liberal
standard? Before we answer this, first let’s see how this thesis justifies liberal values and pluralism. Some philosophers, such as Kekes, have objected that liberalism is inconsistent because it holds the value of pluralism in highest esteem but also holds overriding values central to liberalism. Kekes’s point is that, by definition, pluralism recognizes a diversity of values and thus demands that no one conception of the good be overriding, so liberalism cannot consistently hold pluralism and a set of substantive values. For example, Berlin and Narveson hold liberty as the overriding value, Dworkin thinks equality and respect are highest, and Rawls thinks justice is the highest value. The neutrality thesis responds to this objection. It holds that the liberal values of equality, justice and such, are presupposed by every conception of the good life, meaning that everyone’s conception of the good life is compatible with or contains the values of liberalism. Therefore, pluralism and liberalism are compatible according to the neutrality thesis.

Can this argument justify liberals holding an individualistic standard? The extension of this argument entails that the individualistic standard be attributed overriding status and presupposed by all conceptions of the good life. But after being enlightened by the relational need theory as a conception of the good life, it can be concluded that the liberal standard is not presupposed by all conceptions of the good life. The neutrality thesis cannot justify the liberal standard since it is supposed to protect a pluralistic society from the overt privilege and dominance of one ideology by allowing all individuals to choose their own conception of the good life. Liberalism is an inconsistent theory because it is not compatible to hold an individualistic standard and to value pluralism when clearly other plausible conceptions exist. If the liberal standard were presupposed by all conceptions of the good life, then enjoying a life consummate with relational need fulfilment would be attainable. The liberal standard makes it very difficult to form relationships that have the relational criteria needed for fulfilment. This inconsistency of liberalism alone reveals that it does not have a viable response to my argument.
4:5 Enhancing Choices, Opportunities and the Relational Need

There are other plausible alternatives to individualism. In order to meet the choice and performance conditions, other alternatives, such as the relational need theory should be recognized. People could then reflect upon both choices as a conception of the good life. Since the socially predominant value system is liberal, people must struggle against this value system in order to reflect upon other plausible alternatives to individualism. Specifically, the relational need theory is overridden and appears irrational or implausible next to the liberal norm. In fact, liberalism directly opposes the relational need theory. In so far as people conform to the liberal standard, they fail to live a life according to relational need fulfilment. It “remains a fact of life that as one of two conflicting values is chosen, the agents must put up with missing out on the other.” For example, an independent, self-determining life in which people only value themselves is not compatible with shared values, common goods and we-experiences. Conforming to individualism can cause people to miss out on other reasonable ways of life. If autonomy is about choice, liberalism clearly violates this condition.

In fact, liberalism only provides “positive recognition” to choices, beliefs and actions that pertain to individualism. Positive recognition refers to understanding and acceptance. Liberalism does not recognize or accept choices that pertain to the relational need theory. I argued that the liberal medium gives impoverished recognition to common relational goods and the relational need theory, and throughout the essay, I argued that liberals give misrecognition to the function of autonomy by failing to understand that it can be a function of relationships. Negative recognition is a form of rejection because it does not validate people who choose or believe in other alternatives to individualism. Negative recognition can create a false belief in the normalcy of individualism, and this can prevent people from attaining the relational aspects required for relational need fulfilment.

Misrecognition can be harmful because it can cause people to continue to be unaware of the relational need and its fulfilment requirements. Relational need theory claims that true relationships are based on mutual understanding and reciprocity, and that without these features people are deprived of fulfilment. Thus, recognition for the relational
need theory is essential because it can make people aware of goods that are lacking in their life. Without recognition, a flattening and disembedding of mutual understanding and shared experiences can occur within society. In fact, without recognition, people can incur an unfelt or unconscious harm because they are not even made aware that they are being deprived of fulfilment. Harm essentially occurs when a person is deprived of good aspects that are needed to express his or her capabilities to move, think, feel and live a good quality of life. Misrecognition or non-recognition can prevent people from being aware of any competing alternatives to the liberal standard such that they are not aware of the harm being caused to them from a lack of fulfilment. The unfelt harm in society, caused by the liberal medium, persists because of ignorance. If people do not regard themselves as being deprived of any value, it never occurs to them to be dissatisfied with life without that value. Thus, recognition for other competing alternatives is essential because it can make people aware that their life is being deprived of what may be a legitimate good. In contrast, misrecognition and no recognition for the relational need theory can foster a social misunderstanding such that people may come to regard themselves as truly isolated and dissociated from others, and regard their social actions and experiences as merely instrumental and not as reflections of social unity.

Enhancing the choice and performance conditions of autonomy requires that other competing alternatives, such as the relational need theory, not be marginalized by the liberal medium. Recognition for the relational need theory will encourage a choice between, for example, regarding communication as a common relational good and an instrumental good. The existing liberal structure does not provide this choice and people are forced to conform to the liberal view. Unfortunately the social dominance of one ideology becomes the social acceptance of that ideology. Society is dominated by liberal ideology in politics, economics and social interaction. Hence, people are motivated to perform social acts in accord with individualism simply because other opportunities for actions outside of individualism do not exist, or if they do exist, they are marginalized or deemed to be irrational. Since the liberal medium uses one-way power to undermine the choice and performance conditions of autonomy, its power is an “autonomy-defeating factor,” a factor that imposes a constraint on autonomy by hindering agents from exercising sufficient control over their
own life. Yet a core part of autonomy requires that agents have a form of control that involves an unforced choice among alternatives which the agent can reasonably evaluate in light of a sufficient understanding of the alternatives. The liberal medium oppresses this control by powerfully influencing a standard that is devoid of reference to alternatives. Thus, people are oppressed in their choices and their actions because they are not able to sufficiently reflect on other choices or act according to them. Recall that autonomy requires that people create their own inbuilt standards of what constitutes a good life. By presenting the relational need theory as a competing alternative to liberal individualism, both alternatives can be reflected upon.

The choice condition will be met if the relational need theory is formally recognized. For example, people will then have a choice of how to understand experiences and actions. Since the relational need theory accepts that social actions are we-experiences and are derived from shared understandings, choice is enhanced because people are given the opportunity to reflect on whether relationships constitute their conception of the good life or whether pure individualism does. Unless the relational need theory is understood to begin with, the choice condition remains impoverished by the liberal imposition of individualism. There must be a choice between fulfilment on a relational level and fulfilment on an individualistic subjective level. The additional choice of relational need theory can enable autonomy because it presents another choice about living a good life.

Moreover, recognition for the relational need theory provides motives that can enhance the performance condition. Since the relational need theory emphasizes that relationships are the material condition of autonomy, this emphasis can motivate people to perform or act beyond the realm of subjectivity such that people may seek out and maintain their relationships. The relational need theory not only gives people the ability to reason within a social context, but gives people motives to act within that context. These conditions enhance the choice, performance and material conditions for autonomy. In contrast, these conditions can be oppressed by the liberal medium because it reinforces a normative standard that is devoid of real choices. Hence, this lack of choice and opportunity can hinder people from fulfilling their own relational need. Although it remains the responsibility of the individual to fulfil his or her own needs, this responsibility can
only be exercised if the basic sound structure is organized such that the citizens have the basic intellectual requirements to fulfill their needs. Liberal power is an obstacle that prevents people from using their intellect to choose and seek relational need fulfillment. Since people already have the intellectual and active faculties that make relational need fulfillment and the choice and performance conditions of autonomy possible, the only thing missing is to eliminate the dominance that hinders people from cultivating their abilities to live according to other conceptions of the good life.

4:6 Conclusion

If autonomy is the core value of liberalism, and liberals claim to hold the values of equality, tolerance and the protection of all reasonable conceptions of the good, then the core of liberalism ought to also recognize and accept competing alternatives that also pertain to these values. I have argued that the one-way power of the liberal medium, in fact, violates its own values of autonomy and pluralism because it illegitimately privileges individualism as the standard for autonomy and the good life. Liberalism marginalizes other plausible choices and actions for autonomy and living the good life. The overt privilege of one conception of human nature does not reflect the basis of a structure that purports to enable autonomy, let alone a structure that purports to value equality, tolerance and respect. Competing alternatives to individualism ought to receive validation from a structure that is built upon these values. On a similar note, Taylor argues that

equal recognition is the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society, and its refusal can damage those who are denied it. The projecting of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress to the extent that it is interiorized.32

In this case, Taylor is arguing that social structures ought to give equal recognition to people because he believes that identity is dependent upon social recognition without which one’s identity can be oppressed and distorted by structures that do not give this recognition. By extension, social structures ought to give equal recognition to competing and plausible conceptions of the good life because without this recognition both the choice and
performance condition of autonomy can be oppressed, thus, causing damage to those who are denied recognition.

If relational need fulfilment is truly required as material condition for autonomy, if people are socially embedded and do have emotions, beliefs, abilities and so on, only in so far as they are embedded in a social web of interpretation that serves to give meaning to the bare data of their inner experience and behaviour, then oppressing a belief in the relational need theory will harm people because they will be hindered from fulfilling their own relational need. Since I argued that the liberal medium overtly relays value-laden messages that thereby oppress both the choice and performance conditions, and the material condition of relational need fulfilment for autonomy, the liberal medium is an insufficient structure for relational need fulfilment and autonomy. It can become a more sufficient structure for autonomy by recognizing plausible alternatives to liberal individualism such that people can cultivate their own abilities in reflection, understanding, experience and action according to their true nature and no longer according to a nature constructed by liberal one-way power. Although it remains the responsibility of people to create their own fulfilment in life, if they are directly overpowered and prevented from realizing their fulfilment, then surely it is the responsibility of the oppressed to change the system of oppression, in order to end the oppression itself. People cannot act according to their true human nature until they live under a truly human structure.
Notes

Chapter Four

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20 Taylor, Malaise of Modernity, p. 58.
22 Taylor, Philosophical Arguments, pp. 250-251.
23 Marx, The German Ideology, Chp. 9
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27 Kekes, Against Liberalism, p. 156.
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32 Taylor, Malaise of Modernity, pp. 49-50.
34 This quotation is inspired and taken out of context from Marx
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Vita Auctoris

Cleo Bradshaw is of German descent and was born in Toronto, Ontario. However, she grew up outside of Toronto, and even experienced part of her youth living on a farm, which, she often claims, was the best time ever. After high school, where she excelled on the tennis, basketball and badminton teams, she attended the University of Waterloo, where she received her honours Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy. She also concluded a year of philosophical study at the University of Toronto. Cleo has always been somewhat of an idealist because she always questions what the good life really is and tries to make the good life a reality for all. Her love for seeking truth, knowledge and understanding influenced her to complete her Masters degree in Philosophy at the University of Windsor. She believes that Windsor provided the most rewarding and thought-provoking program yet. Aside from studying philosophy, in her spare time Cleo enjoys many other activities, such as tennis, chess, cycling and oil painting. She currently live in Toronto where she will be attending York University in order to complete her Doctorate in Philosophy. Cleo will continue to develop her relational need theory in order for this theory to be well known academically and practically in society.