

**IN RESPONSE TO THE AUTONOMY-BASED ANARCHIST
CHALLENGE TO POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

By

Elena Pokrovskaya

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Department of Political Science

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Supervisor: Professor Janos Kis

Second Reader: Professor Andras Bozoki

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Abstract

This thesis on the theoretical basis of Robert Paul Wolff's autonomy-based philosophical anarchism aims at assessing his specific interpretation of the concepts of individual autonomy and (political) authority. Evaluation of the initial premises of his view reveals inevitable problems related to the limitations placed on the key concepts. Thus, a plausible way to criticize Wolff's idea of the impossibility of legitimate authority must involve their reconsideration. Therefore, addressing the adequate conceptions of autonomy, recognizing the role of rationality and incorporating them within the framework of Joseph Raz's idea of normal justification will outline a possibility of deducting authority and refute conflict between autonomy and political authority asserted by Wolff.

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Introduction

Political authority and political obligation are the central concepts in political philosophy. They establish the foundation of the claim that people who find themselves under jurisdiction of states have a general duty to comply with their directives: most subjects of political authority must obey most laws on most occasions. The very idea of a liberal democratic state is inconceivable without addressing the concept of political authority and its supremacy over individual citizens.

In contrast to this, the autonomy-based anarchist position rejects the obligation to obey political authority. Philosophical anarchists claim that the state and other institutions such as legal sanctions should be abolished since they place constraints on individuals' autonomy. They question the moral possibility of legitimate political authority itself, and conclude that it is never attainable; therefore, they refute the necessity of the state and the duty to comply with state-issued directives¹. Since legitimate authority of de facto states can never be established, state institutions such as laws should be abolished.

A noteworthy challenge to political philosophy is clearly presented in Robert Paul Wolff's essay *In Defense of Anarchism*. Although published in 1970, it still remains a prominent manifesto of autonomy-based philosophical anarchism. Wolff's essay can be viewed as a plausible threat to the idea of political authority and obligations in the contemporary world since it appeals to the notions of individual freedom and responsibility which are crucial for a democratic society.

¹ See, for example, Chaim Gans, *Philosophical Anarchism and Political Disobedience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 11-12.

In Defense of Anarchism draws attention to the difficulty of justifying political authority and acknowledging the intrinsic value of moral autonomy of free individuals at the same time. The author's goal is to reflect on this fundamental problem of political philosophy, and to show that individual autonomy can never be logically compatible with the legitimate authority due to the very nature of the notions. Thus, justification of the latter concept is impossible, and that is why it is only natural that people who understand and value their autonomy will ultimately deny state authority. The conclusion the author derives from the impossibility of harmonizing these concepts states that a thinking individual has no choice but to become a philosophical anarchist, if autonomy is to be retained.

The essay indeed reflects on a very interesting and relevant question of both moral and political philosophy. On the one hand, autonomy is generally viewed as a virtue and a necessary condition of free and self-determined way of life. On the other hand, the mere existence of state authorities (distinguished by different degrees of respect and promotion of individual autonomy) supported by large amounts of people seems to point towards the idea of justifying authority as a legitimate concept. Moreover, the authoritative nature of state institutions alone does not presuppose that a well-ordered liberal society is impossible.

Of course, *In Defense of Anarchism* does not focus on the practical feasibility of organizing an anarchic society or the controversy and problems of dealing with antisocial behavior; what is important is that the proclaimed impossibility of a reliable *theoretical* base for political obligations inevitably leads to reasonable individuals rejecting the authoritative power of any legal sanctions or institutions.

I therefore believe that examining the anarchist arguments is a significant part of understanding the idea of political obligations. Focusing on the practical side of undermining

anarchism, such as discussion of how just state practices can be ensured in real life is a separate issue; instead, I would rather engage myself in a debate on the theoretical grounds. Though being brought up in the essay, alternative political arrangements and their plausibility are outside the scope of my paper, although they are undoubtedly worth evaluating.

However, Wolff himself recognizes that his essay leaves out the discussion of practical recommendations regarding conditions for an anarchist society. It is also a part of the reason why it would make much more sense to assess the way the essay's theoretical premises are constructed instead of criticizing anarchism as a variant of social organization. Besides, it is certainly true that elaborating on concepts crucial for the theoretical basis of political philosophy might have implications for the existing political authority and state institutions.

Thus, my concern in this paper is to refute the specific philosophical anarchist claim and reinforce the idea of justified authority by reconstructing and evaluating Wolff's position. I suggest that a useful strategy of approaching this topic shall include addressing two closely connected families of questions: first, I will examine the premises and structure of the argumentation developed in *In Defense of Anarchism*, and second, I will concentrate on the problems in Wolff's account.

The purpose of the first chapter of my paper is to analyze the particular challenge of philosophical anarchism expressed in the essay, and to consider the counter arguments made by supporters of political philosophy. In order to provide grounds for plausible criticism of the anarchist position, it is mostly essential to understand how Wolff and his opponents approach the two crucial concepts, namely those of authority and autonomy, and the relationship between them.

Therefore, following the structure of the essay, I will first be addressing the conception² of authority employed by Wolff with particular attention to the interpretation of obedience. I will also consider the difference between *de jure* and *de facto* authority, and pay attention to a possible way of justifying state authority suggested by Joseph Raz in his *Morality of Freedom*. Second, I will be focusing on an elaboration of the notion of autonomy used in the essay. More precisely, I will highlight the interpretation of autonomy as an individual moral duty, and turn to the cases of the undesirable forfeiture of autonomy discussed by Wolff. After that, I will move on to the proclaimed utter conflict between authority and autonomy so as to approach the idea that justification of legitimate authority is not as impossible as the author suggests it is.

The rest of this paper will be dedicated to extending the analysis of the starting points of Wolff's essay by elaborating on the concept of rationality. Although it is not treated as a separate notion in the essay, it is an interesting point to include in assessing the plausibility of the challenge of *In Defense of Anarchism*.

In the second chapter, I will look closely on the meaning of autonomy and introduce its connection to rationality. Since Wolff's anarchism is autonomy-based, it is necessary to derive the adequate conception of autonomy. At this point, arguments suggested by Gerald Dworkin, Richard Lindley and Scott Shapiro will be employed for reconsidering the theoretical foundation of the essay³. Then, I will turn to the relation between authority and rationality. In the third

² Following Richard Lindley's logic, I am referring to *concept* as a notion that can be basically agreed upon by different parties, while *conception* represents "a particular interpretation or analysis of a concept". The requirement for an adequate conception is to conform to the scope of the basic concept. For more explanation of the distinction between the two terms related directly to the key notions discussed in this paper see Lindley, *Autonomy* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1986), 3-4.

³ Due to the limited scope of this paper I will not refer to the question whether Wolff uses the correct understanding of the Kantian notion of autonomy, and whether the incompatibility between autonomy and authority can be actually derived from the Kantian view, although this point certainly deserves comprehensive consideration. For more on this issue see, for instance, Patrick Riley, "On the Kantian Foundations of Robert Paul Wolff's Anarchism" in J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman, eds. *Anarchism: Nomos XIX* (New York: New York University Press, 1978): 294-319.

chapter I will briefly outline a way of deducting political authority by combining the reconsidered conceptions and the idea proposed by the normal justification thesis.

Provided the aforementioned framework, I believe, it is possible to construct an embracing account of the reasons why Wolff is mistaken in his proclaiming the conflict between individual autonomy and political authority with a specific focus on the interpretation of the key notions. Finally, the conclusion will once again enumerate the problems discussed in this paper, and emphasize what has been left out of the essay's interpretation of these concepts.

My guiding thesis statement is that a closer evaluation of the use of the core concepts of his autonomy-based anarchist claim will reveal its weaknesses due to the initial limitations placed on the very notions of autonomy and authority. That is why it is necessary to reconstruct the logic of the essay's theoretical premises in order to approach their specific nature, and establish the links between the main concepts. My main effort is aimed at criticizing Wolff's use of autonomy, authority and rationality and incorporating the revised conceptions with the possible justification of legitimate authority suggested in Raz's approach.

I would like to finish this introductory part with another reference to the limitations of this paper. I must admit that a truly comprehensive approach to understanding such important concepts as autonomy, authority and rationality definitely requires much more attention accompanied by extensive links to concepts in moral philosophy and to their accounts offered by outstanding scholars. Besides, a proper evaluation of the whole essay should imply as well possible propositions concerning the way in which practical solutions suggested by Wolff might be changed to correspond to the present-day political arrangements.

Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize that examining the foundation of this particular form of philosophical anarchism certainly contributes to understanding the major ideas and the scope of political philosophy as a discipline. In addition, the main reason why I find *In Defense of Anarchism* interesting and why it drew my attention to some particular problems of political philosophy that will be discussed in this paper is that Wolff's theory appeals to specific strong conceptions of autonomy and authority.

Chapter One: Wolff's Approach to the Key Concepts

1.1 *The Obligation to Obey*

1.1.1 Origin of the conceptual conflict: authority

As Wolff himself states, the underlying reason for the incompatibility between the key concepts and, consequently, the denial of any form of genuinely legitimate political association is in no sense “the imperfect rationality of men” or their failure to pursue what is just and good. Similarly, the essay does not derive the origin for the dilemma from limitations placed on intellect and knowledge of ordinary people. Wolff’s belief is that even a utopian society is unable to provide reconciliation of autonomy and authority; thus, a just state belongs to the category of oxymorons. This is the imposing magnitude of the problem *In Defense of Anarchism* is concerned with⁴.

Wolff’s aim is to argue that it is only natural for a thinking person to accept and support anarchism because there are no theoretical foundations of state authority. As stressed by A. John Simmons, claiming that all states are illegitimate is a very essential element of the anarchist position in general. Moreover, it is this denial of state legitimacy that leads to the denial of political obligation.

In this sense, Wolff’s essay represents the position of *a priori* anarchism: its initial claim is that of the moral illegitimacy of the state. According to this line of arguments, since it necessarily possesses undesirable and suppressive conditions for its being a state, its legitimacy should be rejected⁵. The type of political arrangement plays no role; it does not matter if the state

⁴ Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), 70-71.

⁵ A. John Simmons, *Justification and Legitimacy: Essays on Rights and Obligations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 103-5. As for *a posteriori* anarchism, it is based on the idea that all existing states are

allows substantial amount of freedom or represses individual liberties altogether. Overall, the existence of authority itself is under attack. For instance, Wolff clearly repeats that there is no *a priori* reason that makes democratic government superior to other forms of state authority⁶. Thus, even the state based on democratic values is inherently illegitimate. Examining the concept of authority further will make this side of characteristics of the state more clear.

According to *In Defense of Anarchism*, authority stands for “the right to command, and correlatively the right to be obeyed”. Wolff rightfully points out that it should be distinguished from having power which means possessing the mere ability to compel compliance via threat or force⁷. Unlike power, authority presupposes being acknowledged by its subjects even in case of “cheating” that may happen from time to time.

However, it is important that the problem brought up by Wolff concerns not the right to rule as it is, but the duty to obey. He argues that the conflict between authority and autonomy is unresolvable because by complying with the state individuals inevitably bind themselves to obey it by subjecting their own will to authoritative commands. Demanding compliance and acceptance of the duty to obey lacks legitimate justification, therefore, people are not bound by state-issued regulations. For a state to be legitimate it is required be “consistent with and following from the notion of individual autonomy”⁸: hence, the very concept of *de jure* state can not be logically grounded.

Wolff uses the aforementioned conception of authority to formulate the guiding statement of his essay in a very specific manner. Since the duty to obey always “conveys an abdication of

illegitimate not because a legitimate one is impossible. It is the contingent characters of states that inevitably results of the failure of their legitimacy.

⁶ See, for example, Wolff, 71.

⁷ Wolff, 4.

⁸ Rex Martin, “Wolff’s Defence of Philosophical Anarchism,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 24, no. 95. (April 1974): 142.

autonomy”⁹, he concludes that philosophical anarchism is the only plausible “political belief for an enlightened man”¹⁰, that is, a person exercising moral autonomy as “the right and duty to be responsible for one’s action and to conduct oneself in the best light of reason”¹¹. His initial claim is that it is only natural for individuals to deny obeying authority in order to exercise their autonomy and maintain personal freedom and self-determination.

1.1.2 Authority: *de jure* and *de facto*

Wolff makes a valid point by emphasizing that it is the legitimate or *de jure* authority that is “the matter of the *right* to command, and of the correlative obligation *to obey the person who issues the command*”¹². At the general level, a *de facto* concept is a concept that is not *de jure* because it does not result from some kind of a “unique grant of exclusive right”¹³. Thus, only a *de jure* state is the one having political authority, that is, exercising “the general right” to impose binding directives and policy on its subjects who, in their turn, take on correlative general political obligations¹⁴.

What is more, there is no doubt that the concept of *de facto* authority inevitably presupposes *de jure* authority because it is the former that is taken for the latter by its subjects. Besides, the existence of *de facto* authority is not contested¹⁵: in reality, the majority of people prefer not to oppose the already existing states claiming authority. However, the mere existence of such situations adds nothing to the conceptual legitimacy of *de facto* authorities.

⁹ Joseph Raz, ed., *Authority* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 4.

¹⁰ Wolff, 19.

¹¹ Raz, 4.

¹² Wolff, 9.

¹³ For precisely this wording (which can be applied generally) see, for example, Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 109.

¹⁴ Simmons, *Justification and Legitimacy*, 110.

¹⁵ Scott Shapiro, “Authority”, in Jules Coleman and Scott Shapiro, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Jurisprudence and Philosophy of Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 386.

Wolff takes into consideration situations when it “might be thought”, first of all, that certain individuals possess legitimate authority because it is obvious that some people actually believe in others’ authoritative supremacy. Second, the notion of *de jure* authority itself might presuppose the existence of certain claims to authority that are true and legitimate. However, he clearly states that such argumentation is not suitable when looking at *de facto* versus *de jure* authority. The reason for such statement comes simply from the fact that the notion of right which is “the key component of both concepts” therefore, it has already been *deducted*. This being one of the initial limitations of his essay stated as early as in the introductory part¹⁶.

Nevertheless, it is important that Wolff specifically refers to particular circumstances under which *de facto* states actually make citizens submit to their power. In such cases, “the evil consequences of defiance” or “beneficial effects” promised by the government are the reasons why individual choose to comply with the state’s commands. In fact, the deceiving “myth of legitimacy” that serves as a compelling tool of domination¹⁷ is not a rare occasion even in the contemporary world.

Also, there even may be moral reasons not to confront sanctions issued by illegitimate states in some specific cases¹⁸. What is more, people may actually wish for some type of political arrangement either for the sake of the joint pursuit of external national goals (e.g. national defense, territorial and economic expansion, etc.), or because of the common need to reach internal goals involving many people (e.g. traffic regulation, city construction, etc.), or out of recognizing the necessity to maintain industrial economy with its complexity and high levels of differentiation and integration. As it follows from the essay, such authority is certainly not

¹⁶ See Wolff, 9-10.

¹⁷ Ibid., 9-10, 79.

¹⁸ Simmons, *Justification and Legitimacy*, 109.

legitimate; but this is what most people consider to be the power enforcing their political obligations.

1.1.3 The initial inconsistency

Another remark regarding Wolff's conflict between autonomy and authority concerns the way how he places emphasis on "*deduction of the concept of the state*". This must prove that the concept is legitimate. Carrying out such deduction requires more than demonstrating that specific circumstances make individuals feel obliged to comply with authoritative directives of *de-facto* authorities. The need for deduction itself is valid because it underlines the normative nature of concepts. However, what is significant at this point is that Wolff immediately links the necessity of deduction of the concept of the state with the idea of "obedience" as a matter of complying with someone's orders "because *he tells you to do it*"¹⁹.

This appears to refer "only to personal commands, not laws" and corresponds to his definition of state as some individuals empowered with authority. In fact, Wolff begins addressing the concept of authority from defining the notion of state as "a group of persons" possessing supreme authority within a certain territory or over a certain population²⁰. Thus, it might appear that his doctrine of anarchism involves mostly denying any claims to *de jure* authority "by one man over the other"²¹.

As a result, this tends to efficiently exclude from the very beginning any further elaboration on the "deduction" the essay appeals to. I would question whether Wolff's reference to such a definition of the state as a group is a correct premise for starting an argument for the impossibility of normative conditions for states' existence, and, consequently, for the failure of

¹⁹ Wolff, 8-9, 79.

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹ Ibid., 72.

“any theoretical justification for the authority of the state”²². Given the overall main focus of the essay it would seem much more plausible to approach the claim of autonomy being in constant conflict with authority with a more general reference.

Therefore, it seems rather natural that in the absence of the emphasis on genuinely theoretical definition of political authority, such “conditions of *personal* rule” lead to the impossibility of autonomy. Moreover, the essay stresses the problem of *de jure* authority perceived as a matter of the right to issue commands together with the obligation to follow the person who does so²³. This establishes an immediate link to submission one’s will to another person and reminds of slavery-like conditions.

Undoubtedly, if the emphasis is placed on undesirable and unjustified obedience to personal directives, authority becomes a rather unattractive concept. “Connotations of servitude” understood as “waiting in ignorance for commands” which one cannot predict or elaborate on certainly limit individual autonomy to a dangerous extent. This unreflective compliance can be opposed to following ordinary rules (such as traffic regulation) that do not present “a threat to freedom”²⁴.

Nevertheless, Wolff’s insistence on the necessity of deduction of the state means that what he really demands is a proof of authority as a truly legitimate concept in order for obedience to be justified. Thus, one problem with his conception is that the inconsistency in the starting points of his arguments.

It is interesting, however, to consider whether the justification of the concept of legitimate political authority is plausible without accepting that there is a general duty to comply. Wolff harshly treats a *prima facie* duty of obedience as “merely a superstitious submission to

²² Wolff, viii.

²³ Ibid., 9.

²⁴ Lisa H. Perkins, “On Reconciling Autonomy and Authority,” *Ethics* 82, no. 2. (January 1972): 115-16.

authority”²⁵. Political philosophy tells us that the duty to obey the law is neither general nor content-independent: its significance depends on a particular law and “the character and consequences of the actions available to the actor” at a given time²⁶. Wolff’s conclusion is that the fact that whether an individual acts in accordance with a law or not has no “independent weight” in the “full moral evaluation” of the action²⁷. It inevitably involves unjustified “double counting” of reasons which leads to favoring the significance “of the *de facto* state in any dispute between it and an individual”²⁸.

Wolff’s rejection of even a non-absolute *prima facie* duty corresponds to the second proposition of Edmundson’s “Inconsistent Triad” which describes the problematic possibility of *de jure* authority in the absence of the notion of *prima facie* obligation. Even though, while considering the conflict between the duty to obey and other moral values, philosophers may agree that the duty to obey “is instrumental to realizing values”²⁹, and that individuals should obey the law “whenever there are good independent reasons for doing so”³⁰, the need for an adequate basis for a *prima facie* duty is still an important issue.

Nevertheless, as Edmundson argues, refuting the *prima facie* nature of political obligation does not necessarily result in “the philosophical anarchist conclusion that there can be no legitimate state”³¹. The anarchist challenge is founded on “general moral reasons that deny the state any right to rule”³². However, in order to oppose this assertion, “the correct view of political legitimacy” should be employed involving the true and consistent Triad of propositions.

²⁵ Perkins, 104.

²⁶ William A. Edmundson, *Three Anarchical Fallacies: An Essay on Political Authority* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Wolff, 105.

²⁹ Edmundson, 8, 15.

³⁰ Joseph Raz, “Authority and Consent,” 67 *Virginia Law Review* 103, 130 (1981), quoted in Edmundson, 14.

³¹ Edmundson, 33.

³² A. John Simmons, “The Anarchist Position,” 16 *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 268, 268 (1987), quoted in Edmundson, 32.

For the purpose of this paper the most important part is “the idea of a general *prima facie* duty not to interfere with the administration of a just (or at least reasonably just) state’s laws”³³. Therefore, the notion of an individual obligation to a legitimate authority cannot be denied; what is more, it is possible to reconcile it with the political authority of states.

The ground on which Wolff calls himself a philosophical anarchist is the asserted self-contradictory nature of legitimate political authority. But the statements he makes concerning the various types of democracy actually oppose his own idea of legitimate authority being “inherently incoherent”. Wolff agrees that democracy “founded upon the citizen’s promise to obey its commands” is genuinely legitimate. However, the next idea he introduces harshly contradicts this hope for a possible solution: he ultimately concludes that no political association combines moral autonomy and legitimate authority³⁴.

As noted by Harry G. Frankfurt, this contradiction arises from two distinct issues being confused in Wolff’s essay. In fact, “the question whether there are conceivable conditions” for an authority to exercise *de jure* legitimacy and “the question of whether it is morally justifiable to bring about those conditions”; thus establishing an authority that has the legitimacy to command while its subjects are bound to obey are two separate questions.³⁵ Wolff’s attention to the conflict between political authority and individual autonomy is directed at providing a negative answer to the second problem while mistaking it for a negative answer to the first one. His consideration of autonomy vs. authority is aimed at depicting the latter as undesirable; the discussion of the

³³ For more on “the Consistent Triad”, see Edmundson, 48-49.

³⁴ Wolff, 69.

³⁵ Harry G. Frankfurt, “The Material Anarchism of Robert Paul Wolff,” *Political Theory* 1, no. 4 (November 1973): 405-6.

possibility of it being legitimate is left out. Therefore, *In Defense of Anarchism* lacks an argument to support logical incoherence of the concept of legitimate authority³⁶.

1.1.4 Raz's normal justification thesis

A possible way of opposing Wolff's claim involves discussing Joseph Raz's arguments on the establishment of *de jure* authority. This approach to acknowledging legitimate authority involves the so-called normal justification thesis:

[T]he normal way to establish that a person has authority over another person involves showing that the alleged subject is likely better to comply with reasons which apply to him (other than the alleged authoritative directives) if he accepts the directives of the alleged authority as authoritatively binding and tries to follow them rather than by trying to follow the reasons which apply to him directly.³⁷

Raz's outline of justification is worth mentioning in more detail. It refers to practical authority which primarily concerns "the power to require action"; the nature of considerations directing such legitimate authoritative actions is pre-emptive. This is important for understanding "the limit of an authority's rightful power": not only are its directives restricted by "the kinds of acts" it can or cannot control, but they are also limited by "the kind of reasons" on which it relies, and by the kind of reasons its directives pre-empt³⁸. Thus, authoritative decisions are subject to challenge on certain grounds.

According to the dependence thesis, commands issued by authority should be based on reasons which already independently apply to its subjects. Combined with the normal justification, it leads to the conclusion that "acknowledging an authority involves refraining from actions based on reasons relating to the contents of its instructions"; simultaneous direct

³⁶ Frankfurt, 405-6.

³⁷ Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 53.

³⁸ For more on the pre-emptive thesis see *The Morality of Freedom*, 46-47.

reference to such reasons means double counting them³⁹. This combination, as Raz points out, reflects “the service conception of the function of authorities”⁴⁰: the primary goal of legitimate authority is to serve people which can be expressed, for instance, through coordination efforts.

Indeed, this is a very attractive understanding of authority. Although it is true that directives necessarily claim that they are legitimate, they might not possess legitimacy. The service conceptions offers clarification: authority is justified simply as long as it works for people⁴¹. Otherwise, it cannot be considered legitimate.

Further reasons for accepting authority include arguments that its directives provide individual identification with a group and allow rules to act as mediators between “deeper-level” reasons and “concrete decisions”. The role of authority is to assess reasons applying to its subjects and to determine or approve rules that will help people to conform to the balance of the reasons involved. Thus, justified mediation of authorities improves the subjects’ “compliance with practical and moral principles” What is more, authority acting as a mediator actually facilitates promoting pluralistic culture by uniting different individuals at “low or medium” level of generalizations.⁴².

It is nevertheless argued that the normal justification thesis suggests grounds for partial acknowledgement only. Full justification means demonstrating that “there are reasons for accepting the authority” along with the absence of “reasons not to accept it”⁴³. However, this thesis states the possibility of legitimate authority and shifts the emphasis on the grounds for its acknowledgement from *de facto* to *de jure* authority.

³⁹ Gans, 37.

⁴⁰ Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 56.

⁴¹ Shapiro, 402.

⁴² Ibid. See also Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 56, 94.

⁴³ Gans, 37.

In fact, the normal justification thesis is about acknowledging authority only if it entails improvement of “one’s compliance with reasons”; it reinforces the significant notion of the duty to obey authoritative directives. In addition, the service conception of authority normatively describes the conditionality of de jure authority and provides guidelines for its conduct⁴⁴.

Therefore, Raz’s view provides an outline for demonstrating that legitimate authority does not enslave the freedom of autonomous individuals. This argumentation deserves being employed while evaluating Wolff’s position; besides, it is also necessary to look closely at the conception of autonomy used in *In Defense of Anarchism*.

1.2 The Duty of Autonomy

1.2.1 Origin of the conceptual conflict: autonomy

Wolff’s view can be generally opposed by the idea that such concepts as freedom and autonomy are not self-sufficient and self-explaining. This view, as, for example, formulated by Raz, purports that “freedom to perform certain actions in certain circumstances is valuable only if it serves other values”⁴⁵. However, individual autonomy is the basis of the liberal tradition, and its primacy and significance should not be rejected for the purpose of criticizing *In Defense of Anarchism*.

The reason why Wolff’s essay doubts the possibility of the notion of legitimate political authority is first and foremost linked to his distinguishing understanding of moral autonomy. It is viewed in the essay as “the primary obligation of man”⁴⁶; precisely, individual free will and the capacity to reason is accompanied by obligation to take responsibility for one’s actions. It is his

⁴⁴ Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 63.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁶ Wolff, 18.

variant of autonomy-based reasoning that leads Wolff to the conclusion that political authority is self-contradicting, illogical, and, therefore, theoretically unacceptable.

According to the essay, freedom of will (or freedom of choice) by itself does not generate personal obligations to take responsibility. It is because of the capacity to reason that the responsible person should continuously be held accountable for their actions. Therefore, such individuals, possessing “both free will and reason” that make them reflect on their every decision, may even consider and declare themselves responsible in cases when deliberation about the consequences of particular actions is excluded. At the very least, such behavior is advanced in comparison with failing to take responsibility. But then, in addition, there is also a duty to scrutinize one’s decisions and actions.

To sum up, this is the way how understanding and accepting the existence of their moral obligation is carried out. In other words, a genuinely responsible person “does not neglect the duty of attempting to ascertain what is right” (as Wolff wisely points out, this idea in no sense presupposes that such person always chooses to do the right thing)⁴⁷.

In accordance with this logic, although the essay discusses that forfeiting one’s autonomy and agreeing to obey is possible, as in the case of democracy, individuals should never refuse to take responsibility. “Forfeiting autonomy” in this case does not imply “position of servitude and mindless obedience”; it is rather voluntary restriction of personal freedom and the ability to act at will. Therefore, individual obligation is about taking responsibility for one’s actions which means being able to make decisions about what one should do in a certain situation⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ Wolff, 13.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 13-15.

1.2.2 Autonomy as a moral duty

Claiming to have followed Kant's logic concerning moral authority as "a combination of freedom and responsibility", Wolff asserts that, since moral autonomy permits submission to self-made imperatives only⁴⁹, autonomous individuals should be contrasted with those allowing "their actions to be determined by decisions that are made by others". Since exercising autonomy should be understood as acting upon self-issued commands, any submission to commands excludes reasonable decisions and prevents individuals from fulfilling their duty to be autonomous⁵⁰.

John Horton points out that the reason Wolff's autonomy-based anarchist challenge seems imposing is because it incorporates both the claim that people must enhance their autonomy and the claim that the commands issued by others must not be viewed as the moral reasons for actions. Thus, responsible self-legislation serves as the moral ideal of his essay: individuals have a duty to strive for reaching maximum autonomy⁵¹.

As contrasted to the views on autonomy as just "a necessary condition for moral responsibility" or "the capacity to choose"⁵², Wolff's peculiar idea of autonomy treats it as an independent moral duty that involves incessant scrutiny and deliberation. An autonomous person is morally obliged to examining and reflecting on every aspect of their moral life; otherwise, the duty to act autonomously is being violated. This part of his anarchism deserves further detailed consideration.

Wolff does not reject moral constraints placed on the *responsible* person; this rejects examples of any outrageous "capricious or anarchic" conduct. What is crucial for viewing

⁴⁹ Wolff, 14.

⁵⁰ Frankfurt, 407.

⁵¹ John Horton, *Political Obligation* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1992), 126.

⁵² Shapiro, 387.

individual autonomy as the primary duty is that all moral constraints are determined and judged by the individual. Even acquiring information on what these constraints might be should be no different than careful assessment of mathematical arguments performed by an inquiring scientist as contrasted to unreflective acceptance⁵³. This idea only adds emphasis to the reflective nature of the notion of autonomy employed in *In Defense of Anarchism*.

Without elaborating on the essay's correct relation to Kantian philosophy, it can be assumed that Wolff's initial appeal to metaphysical freedom of individuals is rather reasonable and attractive. Indeed, freedom in the sense of being able to choose one's course of actions does constitute a necessary but not sufficient condition for responsible behavior; however, another requirement is the actual *taking* responsibility, which, in Wolff's own words:

... involves attempting to determine what one ought to do, and that [...] lays upon one the additional burdens of gaining knowledge, reflecting on motives, predicting outcomes, criticizing principles, and so forth⁵⁴.

Therefore, individuals must exercise freedom of will and capacity to reason about their choices. Next, they simply cannot give up their responsibility for what they do because it would mean abandoning the primary obligation of human beings. Furthermore, people's moral condition demands that they refuse to be ruled. Also, individual moral constraints are self-produced; thus, authoritative commands of the state have no binding moral force.

1.2.3 The initial inconsistency

One challenge to the plausibility of the essay's conception of autonomy is exactly the interpretation of responsibility as engaging oneself into the complicated process of reflection and

⁵³ Wolff, 13.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 12.

deliberation. This leads to the difficulty of obtaining all the necessary information that can be required for a responsible individual to make reasonable “final decisions about what one should do”⁵⁵ and act according to self-legislated laws. Wolff underestimates the possibility of even responsible people preferring “not to have an opinion on a subject” due to the simple fact that every individual’s life consists of a variety of all kinds of important and time-consuming things that also involve personal dedication and use of other resources.

Thus, what should be considered more carefully by Wolff in his account of moral autonomy is that the obligation to control the uses of one’s resources rationally is primary in comparison with the obligation to keep oneself informed about all the facts required for retaining autonomy. The example of determining and assessing national issues (such as defense policies) does nothing but stress this point⁵⁶.

In addition, *In Defense of Anarchism* provides no link of the aforementioned obligations to the obligation to preserve autonomy by refusing to submit to another’s commands⁵⁷. Therefore, Wolff’s sharp contrast between individual autonomy and submission to someone else’s commands exposes his idea of a truly autonomous person to the problem of perfect information being unattainable in reality.

Besides, his interpretation of the notion of autonomy ought to be supplemented with a more detailed attention to actual politics. Wolff’s evidence in favor of anarchism is heavily dependent on his idea of autonomy conflicting with authority. Therefore, evaluation of the

⁵⁵ Wolff, 17.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Wolff’s illustration of individual responsibility referring to the example of a responsible American aware of nuclear policy. While acknowledging that there are significant obstacles to “complete and rational autonomy, he still insists that there is an obligation to act as “the authors” of commands one may obey, *In Defense of Anarchism*, 17. For more on discussion of this example, see Frankfurt, 407-8.

⁵⁷ Frankfurt, 408.

extent to which his conception of autonomy is relevant “to the analysis of political relationships”⁵⁸ appears as an important step of criticizing the essay.

A very important observation concerning the proclaimed impossibility of harmonizing autonomy and authority is that the individualistic framework of the essay is inadequate for social and political analysis. This line of criticism appealing to distinguishing politics from morality emphasizes that Wolff treats the concept of a legitimate state in an *apolitical* manner. The major point here is that neglecting the difference between political and moral spheres will inevitably result in problems with the applicability of the idea of individual autonomy. It is suggested that “autonomy and authority are really just two sides of the same coin”: the concept of authority itself cannot be conceived without the existence of some governmental institutions which practices and rules are subject to a public criteria of correct judgment. At the same time, it is due to the existence of these criteria that judgment and, therefore, autonomy, is possible⁵⁹.

Of course, an anarchist following Wolff might object to this by stressing the aim of his theory is to appeal to the value of moral autonomy of free and responsible individuals, and not to provide the adequate placement of a person within a political arrangement. Nevertheless, he himself acknowledges that there is a difference between types of political organization of the society. What is more, if the concept of state as a political institution is left unclear, Wolff’s analysis of the notion of authority can not be considered completely systematic⁶⁰.

Another significant inconsistency in Wolff’s application of the concept of autonomy lies within his assertion that an autonomous individual never obeys a command “unless he himself

⁵⁸ Frankfurt, 407.

⁵⁹ Greenville Wall, “Philosophical Anarchism Revisited”, in *Anarchism: Nomos XIX* (New York: New York University Press, 1978): 287-9.

⁶⁰ For more details on this argument, see Wall, 273-93.

approves the course of action he has been told to follow”⁶¹. This means that the individual’s own rational reasoning would have resulted in the same course of action even in the absence of commands from another. However, the examples Wolff employs does not necessarily imply that while complying with orders individuals always attempt to exercise independent judgment of “the goodness or wisdom of what is commanded”⁶².

1.2.4 Explaining forfeiture of autonomy

According to the general line of the essay’s argumentation, the imperatives on which the autonomous individual acts must be strictly self-given. The autonomous person may do what they are told to do by another, but not *because* they have been told to do it. This is what Wolff calls being free “in the political sense of the word”. Also, that is the major reason why the essay ultimately denies legitimacy of the state’s commands since an autonomous individual must always be self-legislating, and autonomy should be achieved wherever and whenever it is possible to do so.

However, it is remarkable that *In Defense of Anarchism* certainly does not overlook the variety of different cases of forfeiture of autonomy. Autonomy cannot be “put aside”⁶³; nevertheless, individuals may either refuse to acknowledge it on purpose or fail to perceive it as their moral condition. Still, forfeiting autonomy *at will* and deciding to obey commands without judging whether they are good or bad must not be confused with total refusal to be responsible for one’s actions.

⁶¹ Frankfurt, 409.

⁶² See Wolff’s example of commands to man lifeboats on a sinking ship, *In Defense of Anarchism*, 15-16.

⁶³ Wolff, 13-14.

A rather remarkable point is that, as the aforementioned examples⁶⁴ demonstrate, the very fact of commands being issued can make submission to orders “desirable”⁶⁵. This submission is different from “blind” obedience because it is justified by the individual’s belief that “certain *additional* conditions”⁶⁶ he or she regards as being critical are considered in case of compliance. Individual autonomy is preserved since it is the individual reasoning that determines the conditionality of personal commitment to submit to commands.

This idea reveals a weakness of Wolff’s arguments against political authority in the sense that they are true only when autonomy is totally suppressed by absolute and unconditional acceptance of authority. In contrast, “limited and conditional acceptance of authority”⁶⁷ does not mean undesirable forfeiture of autonomy.

Besides, *In Defense of Anarchism* tends to equal “subjection of the will” to “surrender of moral autonomy”. However, such an undesirable surrender happens only when an individual “acts against his or her overall judgment” concerning his or her acts. In its turn, this idea presupposes a two-fold condition: that is, moral autonomy is subject to surrender, if the orders are viewed by the individual as both orders that should not have been made and should not have been carried out⁶⁸. Therefore, it is incorrect to imply that the duty to obey the law because it is the law always results in relinquishing moral autonomy.

Another important observation on the reasons for action that can be accepted by autonomous persons is made by Shapiro. His approach recognizes that Wolff is criticizing the very character of authoritative directives because they are supposed both to preclude deliberation and to be taken as reasons for action “simply because they have been issued”. An autonomous

⁶⁴ See footnote 60.

⁶⁵ Frankfurt, 410.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 411.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Gans, 17.

person does not acknowledge such reasons; what is more, treating authoritative commands as possessing the peremptory and content-independent character results in failing to take responsibility for one's conduct⁶⁹. It is, in fact, the capacity and eagerness to take responsibility that matters, not simply holding oneself responsible for one's actions.

1.3 Preliminary Assessment

On a general overview, Wolff's rejection of the moral possibility of legitimate authority can be criticized due to his use of the very concepts of autonomy (whereas inconsistency is found even in reference to his claim of autonomy being absolute and rigid) and authority (described as morally undesirable and lacking theoretical justification). Besides, the concept of political legitimacy in the correct sense does not imply a *prima facie* duty to obey commands just because they are commands; it rather involves a *prima facie* duty not to interfere with the administration of just laws.

Thus, a preliminary evaluation of the premises of Wolff's theory reveals the peculiarities of his concern with theoretical relations between political authority and moral autonomy. As it is evident from the essay's argumentation, autonomy is presented as the single primary moral obligation of individuals that is viewed as a combination of freedom and responsibility. Personal responsibility is a result of individuals being endowed with the capacity to choose their own actions and act on self-issued imperatives.

Although some specific circumstances may require obedience to authoritative directives, individuals must never comply with the law just *because* it is the law. The moral condition prescribes that free and responsible individuals must strive to achieve autonomy, thus excluding moral obligation to obey authoritative commands. The virtue of autonomy is genuinely

⁶⁹ Shapiro, 389-90.

recognized by a philosophical anarchist only; for such a person, rejection of the concept of a *de jure* state is the only plausible and inevitable political belief.

The ultimate conclusion is that it is never possible for the idea of a legitimate state to be *deducted*. Even democracy as an attempt to extend “the duty of autonomy to the realm of collective action”⁷⁰ is an insufficient solution to the problem of autonomy versus authority; even the idea that unanimity, as the recognized method of arriving at decisions “which is most obviously legitimate”⁷¹, establishes state legitimacy does not stand real-life implications. Hence, a question arises: what will be the response from political philosophy? The logic of *In Defense of Anarchism* appeals to the true political freedom of moral beings⁷²; this seems to undermine the grounds of the democratic liberal state itself.

Thus, I would promote the view that a plausible way to defend political philosophy is to demonstrate that there are more adequate alternatives to Wolff’s conceptions of autonomy and authority. The idea is not to reject them as absolutely implausible thus making his anarchist challenge irrelevant. The idea is to modify these conceptions in such a way that his claim that legitimate authority is unattainable will be defeated. The point brought up by Shapiro is especially valuable because it appeals to reasons for action and can be related to Raz’s justification of authority. However, its application to the theoretical premises of the essay requires some preparations.

In particular, further undermining of Wolff’s denial of the theoretical foundations of state authority can be achieved by contesting the adequacy of his interpretation of autonomy, and, consequently, by introducing the notion of rationality. More precisely, in order to reject the anarchist claim by proving that the purported incompatibility between autonomy and authority

⁷⁰ Wolff, 22.

⁷¹ Ibid., 27.

⁷² For the previous reference to freedom in the political sense see footnote 52.

cannot be held as the reason to reject political obligations, it is necessary to address the following questions further:

1. What is the correct conception of autonomy?

This issue entails the need to consider subgroups of related questions:

- a) Does it constitute a primary moral obligation of individuals as Wolff understands it? Can autonomy really be considered a separate specific moral duty?
 - b) Does it mean that a particular duty of autonomy of a particular individual is conferred to him/her exclusively? Or is it implied that by adhering to self-made commands and critically evaluating of every action an individual follows a moral duty owed to others?
2. What is the connection between autonomy and rationality? Are they co-extensive, overlapping or exactly the same?
 3. What can establish the link between rationality and authority?
 4. How can the relationship between rationality, autonomy and authority undermine Wolff's position? How can this be situated within Raz's approach to justifying *de-jure* legitimacy?

Chapter Two: Wolff's Conflict and the Notion of Rationality

2.1 The Meaning of Autonomy

Provided the fact that *In Defense of Anarchism* has been a subject to numerous criticisms that have revealed some serious theoretical inconsistency with its argumentation, the anarchist view has become less persuasive; at the same time, political authority appears less intimidating. I would like now to suggest that additional attention to the essay's main premises is a plausible way to address its objection to such important issue of political philosophy as justification of the legitimate state. I would like to look at Wolff's theory from a specific angle and evaluate it via introducing the notion of rationality and reflecting on its role in harmonizing autonomy and authority.

I am proposing that starting this chapter from reconsidering the notion of autonomy is justified due to several reasons. First of all, it is necessary to explore how the term "autonomy" can be viewed in an alternative manner with relevance. Since Wolff's notion of autonomy implies a very specific ideal, it is interesting to look at what exactly autonomy means. Without indulging into any kind of linguistic analysis (since the word itself is a combination of *autos* (self) and *nomos* (law) borrowed from the Greek language), the purpose of this is to highlight the problems with how *In Defense of Anarchism* treats autonomy as a moral duty, thus providing the grounds for questioning the basis of Wolff's anarchism further.

The second important point is that linking autonomy to rationality will lead to exposing serious doubts in his theory related specifically to the strict conception of autonomy developed in the essay. It will be followed by reference to the paradox of authority and rationality. Also,

introducing rationality will pave the way towards incorporating the findings of Raz's approach into criticizing Wolff's conceptual theoretical framework.

Thus, this chapter will be devoted to reconsidering his use of the terms "autonomy" and "authority" via developing a view focused on the significance of rationality. Although not concentrating in particular on the place of the adequate conceptions of the re-evaluated terms in such interesting parts of *In Defense of Anarchism* as those devoted to discussion of various democratic solutions and utopia-like suggestions for organizing political arrangements, it will ultimately suggest how understanding rationality can be used for establishing the foundation of the *de jure* state authority - the idea which Wolff's theory is highly suspicious and critical of.

Before moving on to the issue of the true meaning of autonomy, it should be acknowledged that it is virtually impossible to single out an exact definition that could be applied universally and rule out all other "incorrect" uses of the term. As Gerald Dworkin remarks, it might even be associated with actions, beliefs, reasons for acting, rules, the will of other persons, thoughts, or principles. That is why, in fact, it is possible for us to use the notion "autonomy" while addressing such matters as "intuitions, conceptual and empirical issues, and normative claims"⁷³. Nevertheless, this section is dedicated to investigating how the nature of Wolff's autonomy might be related to other concepts (among which rationality will be treated as the one of the most significant concerns later in this chapter).

In fact, Wolff's insistence on viewing individual autonomy as an ideal can be justified by the need to derive such a notion separately from other essential categories such as freedom, ignorance or voluntariness. For one instance, the case of deceiving a patient shows that individual liberty (a recognized concept that can be understood roughly as the ability to do what

⁷³ Gerald Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 6-7.

one wants, and to have options) is different from individual autonomy⁷⁴. Also, it is true that preventing someone from exercising their actions in a voluntary character does not necessarily means preventing them from self-determination altogether (precisely, from exercising one's ability to choose their "mode of life"⁷⁵). Therefore, at this point it seems that autonomy does constitute a separate moral duty.

Next, it is useful to consider the difference between first- and second-order motivations (this also refers to preferences, desires, values and ideals); they may contradict each other to a high degree, and this idea questions what is the genuinely voluntary act or decision⁷⁶. However, the problem in Wolff's account lies within his specific view on autonomy as a moral duty. That is why the primary concern is to examine in what way his notion of autonomy is lacking rather than to doubt whether it really is a significantly separate ideal.

Thus, in order to emphasize that the essay's use of the key concepts suffers from being too strict, and, thus, over-limited in its applicability, and to appeal to the notion of rationality, elaborating on several relevant definitions (characteristics) of the term "autonomy" can be useful:

- (i) I am autonomous if I rule me, and no one else rules I⁷⁷.
- (ii) I, and I alone, am ultimately responsible for the decisions I make, and I am in that sense autonomous⁷⁸.
- (iii) [A]cting autonomously is acting from principles that we would consent to as free and rational beings, and that we are to understand in this way⁷⁹.

⁷⁴ For more on this example see Dworkin, 14.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁷ Joel Feinberg, "The Idea of a Free Man", in *Education and the Development of Reason*, ed. R. F. Dearden (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1972), 162, quoted in Dworkin, 5.

⁷⁸ J. R. Lucas, *Principles of Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 101.

⁷⁹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 453.

What I am suggesting here by referring to a number of definitions is that such list of consequent ideas will contribute to unfurling the meaning of autonomy step-by-step, thus ensuring its adequacy. Wolff's conception presented earlier in Section 1.2 of this paper certainly incorporates the appeal to freedom and absolute self-determination as well as the reference to responsibility evident in definitions (i) and (ii) respectively.

However, (i) and (ii) alone do not provide a sufficient account of the notion of autonomy because they do not specify what the driving force determining individuals' decisions is, and what the origin of their particular actions might be. Being able to take responsibility must be supplemented by some kind of an idea of guiding principles; otherwise, it is not clear what makes people adopt responsible behavior.

Therefore, the next step takes us further by acknowledging the notions of *freedom* and *rationality*. These are the crucial characteristics of people that determine their behavior. Definition (iii) proposed by John Rawls implies that there is no contradiction between freedom and *reason* because individuals act in accordance with *objective* principles that are supposed to be followed by everyone. It is also used to refer to the Rawlsian idea of a well-ordered society in which objectivity is encouraged while personal autonomy is affirmed⁸⁰.

Of course, the meaning of definition (iv), in its turn, refers back as far as to the Categorical Imperative. However, the most essential part of the argument (for the sole purpose of this paper) is that the Rawlsian conclusion is the following: autonomy is not violated if objective principles are being followed correctly and consistently, and individual agents agree to be responsible for the consequences of their actions. Moreover, the very principles that best express

⁸⁰ Rawls, 456, emphasis added.

the nature of people as the one of “free and equal rational beings” promote the accountability of individuals⁸¹.

As rightfully pointed out by Lindley, an important condition of autonomy is a properly “developed self” to whom one’s actions can be attributed. This notion involves realizing oneself as a conscious being acting on reasons: one’s own ends can explain his or her behavior. Also, autonomous individuals’ obtaining of these ends must be free from external constraints. This is expressed in their possessing a will of their own and striving to achieve what they think they need⁸².

Wolff’s approach attributes autonomy to reasonable, responsible, and self-legislating persons who would be extremely reluctant to give up pursuing their goals because of external directives. In addition, such individuals possess reflective capacity. However, it does not define how and when the process of scrutiny and deliberation can or should be happening: first, it is difficult to imagine a person engaged in the kind of constant scrutiny (see Section 1.2.2) derived from Wolff’s conception; second, it is unclear what this person ought to do once their reasons change.

Of course, it is always possible to speculate within the frame of the essay’s account of autonomy. Perhaps, some distinguished individuals are genuinely capable of both incessant *and* successful reflecting on their reasons and behavior. But the actual situation is, in fact, quite different: using Wolff’s own words, most people comply with the claims of authority made by nominal rulers⁸³. This may even lead to the extremely unattractive observation that in reality our society has very few autonomous individuals who are able of realizing the importance of their moral condition to the full degree. They are politically free, but “parasitic upon the obedient,

⁸¹ Rawls, 455.

⁸² Lindley, 6.

⁸³ Wolff, 16.

authority-respecting masses”⁸⁴. Not only is such conclusion undesirable from the moral point of view, but it also might produce questions whether autonomy must be the universal duty of all human beings.

Moving further, another level of understanding autonomy involves more emphasis on second-order reflection rather than self-determination at all means:

(iv) Autonomy is conceived of as a second-order capacity of persons to reflect critically upon their first-order preferences, desires, wishes, [...] and the capacity to accept or attempt to change these in light of higher-order preferences and values⁸⁵.

Thus, being autonomous means that individuals should be able both to evaluate critically their first-order motivations, and to modify them when necessary. The capacity to control one’s immediate impulses is the proof of having a will. This point does not imply that everyone is always capable of abandoning or changing their first-order preferences. Instead, it only presupposes the capability to deliberate on one’s own motivations, accept the altered outcomes of their own reflection, and to make these changes *effective* in their actions⁸⁶.

Moreover, it is suggested that substantive autonomy should not be the ideal conception since it is inconsistent with categories that are essential for a moral being. Not only does respect for autonomy in Wolff’s sense reject the possibility of a legitimate political authority because it inevitably presupposes forfeiture of autonomy by unreflective compliance with state-issued laws; it also has a consequence that some undoubtedly crucial values, such as loyalty and tradition, expertise and objectivity, love and commitment, etc. are “inconsistent with being autonomous”⁸⁷.

⁸⁴ Wolff, 82.

⁸⁵ Dworkin, 20.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 16, 17, emphasis added.

⁸⁷ See *ibid.*, 12, 21, 109. The *substantive* notion of autonomy implies that only certain decisions allow retaining autonomy while others result in forfeiting it. Thus, a person’s decisions cannot have just “any particular content”.

In particular, Wolff mentions that a personal promise to obey laws generates political obligation but deprives the person of autonomy⁸⁸. I do acknowledge that his main purpose is to demonstrate that deviation from direct democracy annihilates legitimacy of issued directives, and that one's promise to obey cannot be the sole ground for one's duty to obey. Nevertheless, this is how Wolff approaches the relation between autonomy and some other significant values. That is the reason why Dworkin's criticism of substantive autonomy constitutes a serious contradiction to the notion used in *In Defense of Anarchism*, since the essay's emphasis is on autonomy as a moral duty. Also, an important related question arises: whom do individuals owe this duty to?

Of course, Dworkin himself acknowledges that his characterization of autonomy (iv) may be considered insufficient since it provides no links to the specific content to the decisions taken by the autonomous individual. Thus, the conflict of autonomy with other notions is only *necessary* if the former is perceived as a substantive notion. However, it is reasonable to agree that it is the substantive nature of Wolff's view of autonomy that fails to make it "the supreme value"⁸⁹.

Therefore, it should be taken into consideration that adhering to the strict notion of substantive autonomy neglects the actual formation of individual choices in the sense that people do not learn to make decisions in a vacuum; our decisions are to some extent influenced by the values acquired from the outside (this should not be confused with such cases as unreflective submission to traditions). What is more, it leads to underestimation of promises and commitments. This inevitably results in doubting the rejection of legitimate authority (or deduction of the state) that is based on Wolff's main claim which is the unresolvable contradiction between autonomy and authority.

⁸⁸ See his critique of representative democracy, *In Defense of Anarchism*, 29.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 25-6, emphasis added.

So far it is quite clear, even on the preliminary observation starting from the level of the definition, as demonstrated above, that significant difficulties tied specifically to the essay's strict understanding of autonomy have been revealed. It should be, however, admitted that it is certainly plausible (and desirable) to examine how this notion is characterized by other prominent scholars. Nevertheless, even such selective approach indicates that justifying an alternative conception of autonomy is an important part of critical evaluation of the theoretical premises of *In Defense of Anarchism*. After all, it is ultimately aimed at resolving the utter conflict with the existence (or the possibility of the existence) of the *de jure* state an autonomous person is supposed to experience.

A possible objection to the arguments presented above may be that a conception of autonomy that acknowledges substantive independence is absolutely required and, therefore, perfectly justified, in order to recognize individual responsibility. In fact, the value of the latter is vigorously stressed by Wolff: as it has been mentioned before, autonomy is a personal duty of responsible moral beings.

However, lack of substantive independence does not free people from actually being responsible for the consequences of their decisions and actions. Generally speaking, neither absence of responsibility in case of acting on someone's command, nor failure to recognize, think over and/or change one's own preferences is presupposed by refusing the substantive nature of autonomy⁹⁰. Therefore, the required connection between autonomy and responsibility remains.

Thus, if moral autonomy as an obligation of individuals is understood primarily as their ability and responsibility to reflect on and reconsider their moral motivation, it has several noteworthy advantages in comparison with the strict understanding. This presumably "weak"

⁹⁰ Dworkin, 28.

notion of autonomy (as contrasted with Wolff's conception) is also more attractive from the moral point of view due to a variety reasons: it is compatible with respect for others, achieving equality, etc.

Most importantly, this conception is highly conducive to the acknowledgment of alternative meanings of life accepted and preferred by different people⁹¹. In any case, morality must recognize the diversity of lifestyles. Indeed, this "weak" notion is characterized by a remarkable degree of universality, and the very nature of morality is best treated as "what is owed to everyone"⁹². Wolff's account tends to overlook this idea, also because it is not focused on reconsidering the reasons on which individuals act in the way definition (iv) is.

2.2 Autonomy and the Need for Introducing Rationality

In fact, an analysis of the correct view of moral autonomy is not sufficient if it only considers freedom, responsibility and the reasons on which people act. It should also involve discussing the concept of rationality among other notions within the imposing scope of moral philosophy. It is generally accepted that moral beings are supposed to exercise rationality to some extent (and if not, as in the case of overwhelming passions, the irrational nature of such motivations is again defined through the notion of rationality).

Thus, a very useful approach to evaluating Wolff's position incorporates evaluation of the place of the idea of rationality in his argumentation and, subsequently, addressing the paradox of rationality and authority. I suppose that linking autonomy and rationality should be the main step in this approach because after that it will be easier to move on to the relation between rationality and authority by considering an autonomous and rational being facing claims of authority.

⁹¹ Dworkin, 31.

⁹² Ibid., 31.

One of the essay's most noteworthy references to the notion of rationality incorporates it into the conception of autonomy. Precisely, Wolff is emphasizing the role of rationality by saying how a person striving to achieve "a complete and rational autonomy" will have to experience insurmountable obstacles while recognizing responsibility for one's actions, acknowledging the power of one's reason and accept the incessant obligation to make oneself "the author" of the laws one may obey⁹³. Then, does this mean that the purpose of using the notion of rationality is to address the notion of autonomy? If not, what is the adequate relation between them?

At first glance, the initial connection between the concepts of autonomy and rationality should result from the asserted Kantian foundation of *In Defense of Anarchism*. It can be accepted that only rational beings have the capacity to choose among alternatives and make reasonable decisions on their own. Being autonomous means acting at will and relying on self-legislation; this also defines the nature of motivation autonomous individuals are driven by. In brief, the "Kantian" link between autonomy and rationality is demonstrated in the following abstract:

To be autonomous is to act on self-chosen principles. Rationality is, at least, the faculty which enables a person to make the best use of his ability to choose, and someone who makes better use of this ability is more in control of his decisions than a person who uses it less well⁹⁴.

An important remark concerning the notion of rationality is that it is supposed be *perfect*, i.e. based on purely rational universal reasons for action that apply to all rational beings possessing a will "simply in virtue of their rationality"; again, this is a reference to the

⁹³ Wolff, 17.

⁹⁴ Lindley, 28.

Categorical Imperative. Therefore, such account of autonomy and rationality (described as the “Kantian” view by Lindley) considers these two concepts as co-extensive⁹⁵.

As it has been shown in the previous chapter, not only does Wolff start from stating that autonomy is the primary duty of human beings, but he also insists on extending autonomy to the most: individuals must strive for it by all means. However, if we consider Lindley’s reflection on the “Kantian” approach further, it ultimately turns out that being autonomous in the full sense is the same as to be a *fully rational* agent. Otherwise, in the absence of genuinely pure rationality, one is not exercising the capacity to choose and make reasonable decisions appropriate for an autonomous being.

Moreover, equating moral autonomy with pure rationality within the “Kantian” frame tends to result in conflating moral responsibility for action with autonomy as well as presupposing that individuals are morally responsible only for actions performed on rational reasons and not on any other motivations (inclinations, impulses, etc.)⁹⁶. However, as demonstrated in the previous section, recognizing the significance of autonomy involves differentiating orders of motivation, inclinations, beliefs and suchlike.

Hence, it should be taken into account that a person’s goals serving as the basis for structured reasons are influenced by non-rational inclinations: while being rational for the individual, such goals are relative to this individual’s distinct characteristics. Thus, unlike the “Kantian” account which is outright critical of personal inclinations as contradicting with or irrelevant to rationality, this view acknowledges the importance of genuinely individual inclinations⁹⁷.

⁹⁵ Lindley, 16, 18-9, 21.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 20, 24.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 43, 52, 63. This view reflects what Lindley refers to as “Mill’s conception of autonomy”.

Therefore, although rationality and autonomy are related, this does not result in any kind of a strict conception of the latter. Then, the next question is what the precise adequate way of perceiving autonomy and rational agency is. In order to outline this, I would like to turn now to elaborating on Shapiro's approach because it offers a clear distinction between the notions.

As emphasized in his reflection on Wolff's argumentation, the distinguishing characteristic of autonomous individuals is that their will is never determined by the will of others. An authoritative command plays no role in the individual deciding whether to perform acts it requires; it is only the content of the command that matters. Therefore, autonomous people are those who do not accept authoritative directives as content-independent and peremptory reasons for making decisions⁹⁸. This point (already mentioned in Section 1.2.4) can be now addressed to a fuller extent, provided that such notions as autonomy, reasonability and rationality have been discussed.

Thus, it is most remarkable that, if perceived in this way, autonomy is not a separate duty that one person owes to another; being morally autonomous only defines "the *space of reasons*". In other words, autonomous agency means recognition of either content-independent or peremptory reasons only. Besides, there is no point in thinking that the autonomous individual has a moral duty towards others: since one's actions are correct, others should not be concerned⁹⁹. This idea rejects the specific strictness of Wolff's account and clarifies the role of rationality, thus revealing a very serious difficulty with his conception of autonomy.

This emphasis on the reasons for action also sheds additional light on the very concept of rationality by remarkably distinguishing it from autonomy. Rational agents aim to act on a balance of reasons, that is, such individuals have the obligation to make sure their actions

⁹⁸ Shapiro, 390. See also note 56 on Wolff's examples of an autonomous person deciding to comply with commands.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 387, 390.

conform to the substantive standards they are personally committed to¹⁰⁰. Also, if being rational means aiming to act on “undefeated reasons” and “in accordance with that aim”, being autonomous is, first of all, acting on non-content-independent and non-peremptory reasons.

Hence, an autonomous agent is not necessarily a rational one. On the one hand, following content-independent and peremptory reasons that are perceived as undefeated constitutes rational but not autonomous behavior. On the other hand, it is possible to act on content-dependent reasons that are considered defeated by the individual; autonomy is preserved while rationality is abandoned. This significantly clarifies the notion of rationality discussed above: there is no need to decide to what degree it interferes with autonomy since it is possible to act rationally but not autonomously, and vice versa¹⁰¹.

Overall, such clarification can contribute greatly to resolving Wolff’s autonomy-based claim of the impossibility of legitimate authority. To be precise, the most significant implication of Shapiro’s distinction between autonomy and rationality is the reference to the nature of different reasons for action. This line of argumentation should be kept in mind while appealing back to Raz’s normal justification thesis which will be considered in the next chapter of this paper.

2.3 On Reconsidering Authority

Before moving on to outlining possible justification of authority, one more point is worth mentioning: what is the connection between rationality and authority provided the aforementioned approach, and how emphasis on reasons for action affects the conception of the

¹⁰⁰ Shapiro, 393.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 392. Rationality is a *formal* ideal: it does not presuppose any particular standards for actions; the appeal is to the agent’s substantive standards.

latter. According to Shapiro's approach, Wolff disagrees with the claim of authoritative supremacy over individuals because:

Directives are intended to be "content-independent" reasons for action, meaning that they are supposed to be reasons simply because they have been issued and not because they direct subjects to perform actions that are independently justifiable¹⁰².

Following this, two important observations concerning the nature of authority can be made. First, once issued, commands are supposed to prevent deliberation from the side of the subjects (thus serving as peremptory reasons). Second, commands should be obeyed, and not because there are some good reasons to act on their content (content-independence)¹⁰³.

Indeed, Wolff's essay intends to stress that authoritative commands as they are can never serve as reasons for action: autonomous agents should determine such reasons by themselves, upon independent deliberation. Also, according to the logic presented in the section above, being autonomous does not always implies being rational at the same time.

Besides, rational individuals must always act on undefeated reasons. An important remark is that the balance of reasons, by its definition, includes all of them, content-dependent as well as content-independent reasons; that is precisely why a decision to obey an authoritative directive with "wrong" content might be a rational one. This is because the obligation of rationality demands that an individual is committed to following his or her substantive standards¹⁰⁴.

At this point it is useful to recall the so-called general paradox of authority and rationality that is referred to by Shapiro: the requirement to prefer only undefeated reasons for action leads

¹⁰² Shapiro, 389.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 393.

to either compliance with commands being unreasonable (in case of an inadequate command), or to rational agents performing the required actions anyway, according to their own balance of reasons, and compliance is irrelevant and the command redundant (in case of an adequate command). However, the specific problem with obedience in Wolff's account is, in its turn, the following: authoritative demands are neither content-independent and peremptory nor undefeated reasons¹⁰⁵.

Therefore, it is again the nature what provides a link between rationality and authority. However, a proper reconsideration of the latter concept will extend beyond the scope of my thesis. I will omit elaborating on this issue since I am mainly concerned with the autonomy-based character of Wolff's anarchism.

¹⁰⁵ Shapiro, 391-2.

Chapter Three: Back to the Normal Justification Thesis

After having reconstructed the adequate conception of autonomy and discussed the notion of rationality, it is time now to re-emphasize how Raz's approach of justifying authority via testing it with the normal justification thesis refutes the claim of *In Defense of Anarchism*. Looking back at the thesis's logic presented in Subsection 1.1.4, I would like to highlight the following points:

1. According to the dependence thesis, the directives issued by authority (in the sense of the service conception) should be derived from reasons that are relevant to the actions in a particular situation and apply independently to the subjects of the authority. In other words, such directives should be based on the balance of dependent reasons¹⁰⁶.
2. The pre-emptive thesis prescribes that the very fact that authoritative commands require actions constitutes a reason for such actions that overrides and replaces all other relevant reasons¹⁰⁷.
3. Supposedly, there is an authority whose legitimacy is confirmed by normal justification. Following from the thesis, such authority means that it carries out better judgment of reasons: "it is more likely than its subjects to act correctly for the right reasons"¹⁰⁸. That is why rational subjects would not deliberate on commands or rely on their own independent judgment concerning the required actions¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁶ Raz, *Morality of Freedom*, 47. See also Shapiro, 404. The "dependent" reasons in Raz's account correspond to the idea of "content-dependency". However, his "pre-emptive" reasons are the reasons "not to act" on other reasons, moreover, they replace the latter ones; while "peremptory" reasons only excludes certain reasons from deliberation.

¹⁰⁷ Raz, *Morality of Freedom*, 46.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁰⁹ Shapiro, 406-7.

4. As emphasized by Shapiro, it is important that Raz's justification is not contradicting with treating autonomy as a "thesis about the space of reasons"¹¹⁰. It is less strict conception compared to Wolff's ideal; and that is why it does not clash with acknowledging authority.

Therefore, along with the virtues of the service conception of authority, Raz's approach corresponds well with the reference to the linking autonomy and authority with rationality.

¹¹⁰ Shapiro, 408.

Conclusion

My goal in this paper was to reconstruct and evaluate the theoretical foundation of the autonomy-based anarchist view expressed by Wolff. Through close examination and reflection on his use of the core concepts I was able to organize a detailed account of the reasons why that it is rather implausible.

My main effort was dedicated to criticizing Wolff's limited use of autonomy, authority and rationality and, eventually, to turning to incorporation of the revised conceptions within the possible justification of legitimate authority suggested in Raz's approach.

Therefore, in the first chapter I have reconstructed the logic of the starting points of *In Defense of Anarchism*, and showed how their specificity results in the conclusion that political philosophy inevitably loses to the anarchist challenge. In order to analyze Wolff's simple but imposing claim I have examined the two crucial concepts that he presents as being intrinsically incompatible.

The essay's conception of authority perceived as the right to rule together with the correlative duty to obey is considered to be the hallmark of the state. Conception of autonomy viewed as a primary moral duty inevitably results in the rejection of submission to authoritative rule. Hence, harmonizing the obligation to be autonomous with the commands of authority seems impossible; legitimate authority is unattainable. Having analyzed the problems with the supposedly conflicting notions, I identified the need for further deliberation through distinguishing the concept of rationality.

Thus, in the second and third chapters I have examined the way introducing rationality might contribute to constructing a frame for justifying legitimate authority. Keeping in mind that

Wolff's anarchist position is autonomy-based I concentrated on elaborating on the alternative conception of autonomy by reflecting on a sequence of characteristics attributed to autonomy.

The reason why I referred to Shapiro's account of reasons for actions was its clear differentiation of autonomy and rationality, and the implications it might have for the concept of authority. Understanding autonomy as the space of reasons for actions is much more promising: at the very end of this paper I have outlined how incorporating these notions into Raz's framework reinforces the idea of justified legitimate authority.

As for the broader implications of such approach to assessing the anarchist challenge, a way to develop the ideas discussed in this thesis further involves closer attention to the second part of the essay. Indeed, Wolff's reflections on majoritarian, representative and unanimous direct forms of democracy (undoubtedly, not necessarily limited to criticizing the validity and feasibility of his own propositions concerning the latter form and its inevitable restrictions) can also be revised by assessing their relation to citizens' rationality. Besides, applying the revised *adequate* conception of autonomy is a plausible way to establish further discussion on the idea of the liberal democratic state and its relation with its citizens.

I must also acknowledge that another possible and challenging direction should involve embracing the entire scope of Joseph Raz's logic of justifying political authority. Besides, the impact that introducing rationality may have on the evaluation of authority is also a subject of a separate discussion. Due to the limitations resulting from the length of this thesis and the complexity of the concepts involved I would suggest that it is a matter of a separate inquiry.

Nevertheless, emphasis on the analysis of the starting points of Wolff's essay core concepts and appealing to the actual possibility of a de-jure authority has proved to be a plausible way to respond to his challenge of philosophical anarchism.

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