Chapter 2
The Universality of Psychological Autonomy Across Cultures: Arguments from Developmental and Social Psychology

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Psychological autonomy is one of the ancient concepts covering the exclusive human modes of living and behaving, which have been the objects of debates and arguments among philosophers and researchers for centuries (Augistine, 1968; Baer, Kaufman, & Baumeister, 2008; Erasmus-Luther, 1988; Murphy & Brown, 2007; Paul, Miller, & Paul, 2003; Schneewind, 1998). Are human autonomy and the psychological freedom that comes with it ever possible? What role do society and culture play in the emergence and functioning of psychological autonomy? How do autonomous individuals relate to other people and broader communities? These are only a few of the questions that scholars try to answer. The debates about the nature of human autonomy and its role in people's motivation, functioning, and well-being have arisen again in the recent decades because of the emergence of positive psychology and the economics of happiness, and because of the dissatisfaction scholars have with both behaviorist and cognitivist approaches to human behaviour and its motivation (Chirkov, 2011a; Chirkov, Ryan, & Sheldon, 2010; Jenkins, 2008; Pugno, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2006). Neurophysiological studies have had a strong impact on the recent debates about human freedom of will and agency, giving rise to ideas which have been labelled 'brain determinism' – theorizing that considers brain rather than the active conscious self to be the ultimate determinant of individual's social actions and behaviours (Baumeister, Mele, & Vohs, 2010; Baumeister & Vohs, 2011; Lowe, 1999; Magni, 2009; Mele, 2009; Murphy & Brown, 2007; Pockett, Banks, &

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Gallagher, 2009; Sternberg, 2010; Stillman, Baumeister, & Mele, 2011). Another area of intensive debates about human autonomy and agency is the cultural relativity of autonomy and the social construction of human agency (Becker & Marecek, 2008; Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Ewing, 1991; Hollan, 1992; Kenwood, 1996; Mines, 1988). These debates are becoming more relevant as the issues of globalization, the intensive migration of thousands of people around the globe and the emerging problems of their health, well-being, and successful functioning move to the foreground of public and scientific debates (Chirkov, 2007, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Chirkov & Lebedeva, 2011; Chirkov, Lebedeva, Molodtsova, & Tatarko, 2011; Kagitcibasi, 2003; Leung, Pe-Pua, & Karnilowicz, 2006; Rumbaut, 1991): To what extent are individuals autonomous in their course of actions within and among different cultural communities? Are cultural and societal prescriptions unavoidable frameworks for people's thinking, feeling, and behaving? Do individuals have the power to move beyond their cultural heritage and act autonomously and responsibly relatively independently of their social and cultural backgrounds?

Despite of the long history and crucial importance of psychological autonomy for people's efficient and happy living, this concept is still a marginal one in mainstream psychology and is not a frequent topic for theorizing or empirical research in different areas of psychology.[1] One area of argument and research is the domain of psychological autonomy and human relationships (Gaine & La Guardia, 2009; Jenkins, 2001; Martin, 2008). Networks of human connections are regarded both as the source and the outcome of a person's autonomous functioning, and thus the important questions here are: How do autonomous individuals emerge within the network of social, communal, and interpersonal relationships and how does their autonomous mode of functioning relate to and influence these relationships? Do different socio-cultural communities construct the meaning of psychological autonomy differently, and, as a result, treat autonomous people differently? In this chapter, I will try to elaborate on and provide some answers to these and related questions using philosophical, theoretical, and empirical arguments. The arguments here are driven by the idea of dialectical relations between human relationships considered at the different levels – interpersonal, communal, and cultural – and the psychological autonomy of individuals. This dialectics means that human autonomy emerges only within the context of meaningful, symbolic social interactions among human beings who belong to a particular cultural community; it also means that social communities and their intersubjective networks of meanings and practices are crucially important for maintaining and facilitating the functioning of autonomous individuals as well as for limiting or even destroying their autonomy if the conditions are not favourable. This dialectics also manifests itself in the ability of mature autonomous individuals to reflect on and either accept or reject the existing communal and cultural practices and, in the case of rejection, to be the source of culture change. Autonomous individuals who accept the existing cultural milieu serve as the major supporters and maintainers of it through mindful and reflective externalization of their own self-determined values and moral prescriptions in interactions with other members of their community.

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[1] For examples of autonomy research in social and personality psychology see the self-determination theory studies (Ryan & Niemiec, 2009); in developmental psychology see (Brandtstädter, 1999; Grolnick, 2003; Helwig, 2006; Kagitcibasi, 2007; Keller, 2007; Rogoff, 2003); in psychotherapy see (Gruen, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2008; Shapiro, 1984).

This chapter will start with a short introduction of the concept of psychological autonomy and its components and levels of functioning. Then I will discuss the role of symbolic meaningful interactions in the emergence of autonomy from potentiality to actuality and will show that human autonomy is a universal human capability that may emerge in any cultural community as long as meaningful symbolic interactions among its members exist. The emergence of a sense of self as a fundamental condition for autonomous functioning will also be covered. Finally, I will discuss the major problems and confusions that accompany the study of psychological autonomy in different cultural contexts.

Introduction to the Concept of Psychological Autonomy

My impression is that philosophers from different times and countries, not psychologists, contributed the most to our understanding of nature of psychological autonomy.[2] Psychologists only recently started addressing this issue (Ryan & Deci, 2004; Ryan, Deci, Grolnick, & La Guardia, 2006). It is not surprising that, because of these dispersed opinions and articulations, there is confusion among scholars and lay people about the nature of this phenomenon. Summarizing the available interpretations and the author's reflections about human autonomy (Chirkov, 2010, 2011b), the following defining description of autonomy can be provided. It is important to distinguish personal and motivational forms of autonomy. *Personal autonomy* relates to an individual's life as a whole, which he or she wants to be *self-directed* (enacted according to his or her own goals and values) and *self-governed* (coordinated by the rules, norms, and laws which he or she prescribed to him or herself) (Oshana, 2003; Uyl, 2003). *Motivational autonomy* refers to particular actions or segments of a person's life where he or she acts autonomously or heteronomously. This form of autonomy may refer to academic activity, health-related behaviours, work performance, volunteering, helping others and many other forms of everyday. The conditions of self-directedness and self-governance are relevant here too, but in a more specific and particular manner, depending on the type of activities they apply to.

Psychological autonomy is a specific mode of functioning of human beings that includes: first, a set of self-generated life-goals and values accompanied by self-determined moral norms and rules which they use to attain these goals. These goals, values, and moral norms are the core of autonomous functioning because consciousness, which makes people free from animalistic instincts as the major regulators of their lives and behaviour, creates a condition of existential freedom for human beings (Fromm, 1955/1976) which requires guiding principles in order to navigate one's life in the sea of opportunities and possibilities of human actuality. Without them, humans' lives become aimless and meaningless (Bettelheim, 1960; Frankl, 1971). As such, life values and moral laws for one's life and behaviour serve as a 'compass', and the more self-determined this compass is the more stable is the course of the ship. These guiding principles should be built on the understanding of the nature of things and how the world, societies, and people's lives are actually run.[3] They have to incorporate people's understanding of their own needs, capacities, and skills, so that these goals work as realistic and achievable objectives. They also have to be based on insights about other people's needs and goals as well as the conditions and characteristics of the communities wherein they live. Second, autonomous functioning is comprised of awareness and reflections on various bodily, sensual, and affective impulses, urges, and desires that naturally happen in a course of every person's life. Autonomous persons have the power and skills to understand the origins, mechanisms, and consequences of these urges and impulses for their lives. Based on this knowledge and guided by the compass of their life-goals and moral laws, they may decide to follow them, or to postpone their gratification, or to reject them as detriments to their life course or actions (Solomon, 2003). People's struggles with their emotions and desires is probably one of the richest topics ever presented in religious and philosophical texts as well as in art and literature. In modern time this struggle is a main concern of clinical psychologists and psychotherapists in dealing with people's psychological problems and concerns.

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[2] The main contributors to this endeavor are Stoic philosophers (Bobzien, 1998; Cooper, 2003; Hadot, 1995, 1998; Long, 2004), Spinoza (Spinoza, 2000; Uyl, 2003) and Kant (Guyer, 2000, 2003) with a strong input from existential, humanistic psychologists, and moral philosophers (Maslow, 1968; May, 1981; Oshana, 2003). Modern interpreters of Confucius and his followers tackle the problem of the Ancient Chinese interpretations of human self, self-determination and free will and demonstrated that they are similar to the Western understandings of the same phenomena (Chan, 2002; Cheng, 2004; Chong, 2003).

Third, autonomous people are aware of and understand the cultural and societal demands and expectations that they, as members of a community, inevitably have to deal with. Autonomously functioning individuals comprehend the sources and dynamics of influences of these demands and expectations, and the effects these influences have on their lives. Similar to sensual desires, these people may decide to go along with these demands, postpone them, or reject as being detrimental to their life course or actions. The struggle of autonomous individual with different societal institutions – church, governments, educational institutions, etc. – is another highly explored topic in literature, cinematography, and theatre. These three elements of autonomous functioning – life goals and moral laws, affective and sensual demands, and social norms and expectations – constitute the essential components on which psychological autonomy is built. In order for autonomy to function, each of these components has to go through three levels of processing: awareness/mindfulness, reflections, and rational decision making.

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[3] Starting with the Stoics and followed by many religions and philosophical doctrines, this proposition of following the nature of things has been associated with understanding the gods' divine script about the universe and human beings in it and acting in accordance with it (Cooper, 2003). This spiritual component of autonomous functioning has for the most part been neglected in modern thinking about autonomy. For atheists this proposition means that autonomous people have to acquire a high level of knowledge about the world, societies, and human beings so that their goals and values do not go against the ways in which the world functions.

Awareness or mindfulness is a state of mind when individuals are fully aware of and focus their attention on a situation where they are, on their bodily sensations, emotional states, motivation, and societal demands (not necessarily all at once). Mindfulness has recently become an intensively studied topic and a factor of high importance in the treatment of emotional disorders and other aspects of human malfunctioning (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002; Teasdale, Segal, & Williams, 1995). But mindfulness has never being considered as a prerequisite for autonomous functioning or the process through which psychological autonomy manifests itself. According to the understanding of autonomy presented here, in order to be autonomous an individual first must be aware and mindful of his or her own conditions and circumstances, goals and aims, of bodily sensations, emotions, and impulses that are occurring to him or her, as well as of the presence of other people, their concerns, and the demands that they and the current situation impose on a person. If a person is not mindful about these and many other aspects of his or her life situations, he or she cannot be considered ready for autonomous functioning. Recent studies on mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003) demonstrated that this trait positively relates in day-to-day activities to the relative prevalence of autonomous motivation for engaging in these activities over controlled one. Another study (Levesque & Brown, 2007) also demonstrated that mindfulness is involved in the manifestations of autonomy in everyday activities. Mindfulness is beneficial because it is a constituent of psychological autonomy, which in turn brings benefits to people's lives.

To progress to mature psychological autonomy, mindfulness should be accompanied by reflection: the process of psychological distancing oneself from the objects of awareness and attention; first, from a person's thoughts, feelings, and intentions, second, from societal prescriptions and expectations, and, finally, proceeding to contemplations about them with regard to their origins, mechanisms, and consequences. If we were to function autonomously, "we are to subject our different beliefs and desires to a critical, normative evaluation, it is not sufficient simply to have first-personal experience of the states in question. It is not enough to be immediately and implicitly aware of them" (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008, p. 65). These processes of mindful reflections constitute perhaps the most important component of psychological autonomy.

> Autonomy is defined *not* by the presence or absence of external influences but rather by one's consent or assent to such influences. … Autonomy entails endorsement of one's actions at the *highest order of reflection*. Thus, people could reflect on motives that emerge from them, and they would be autonomous to the degree that they act in accord with the reflected appraisal of those motives. They might turn to evaluate their autonomy with regard to acting on that appraisal by again reflecting on it from yet a higher-order perspective. (Ryan & Deci, 2004, p. 453).

Recently a group of Israeli psychologists empirically addressed these processes of reflection and their relations to students' autonomy and other academic and well-being outcomes (Assor, 2012; Assor & Kaplan, 2001). These researchers differentiated educational and parenting practices of "supporting value examination" and "fostering inner directed valuing processes" from a psychological process of "reflective value/goal exploration" (Assor, 2012). The 'supporting value examination' practice "refers to acts that encourage youth to engage in activities, experiences and discussions that allow them to examine and reflect seriously and critically on their goals, values and interests" (Assor, 2012, p. 429). The 'fostering inner–directed valuing process' includes: "(a) enhancing students' ability to withstand confusion and take their time before they make serious decisions, (b) encouraging the examination of one's values and goals when faced with a difficult decision and/or social pressures, and (c) encouraging the consideration of alternatives and relevant information before making a decision" (Assor, 2012, p. 436). Empirical studies that assessed the role of supporting value examination in students' academic activity indicated that the utilization of this practice promotes students' sense of autonomy for academic behaviour which is accompanied by engaging in studying and a feeling of vitality while in school. Another study (Assor, Cohen-Malayev, Kaplan, & Friedman, 2005) tested the full model of the reflective internalization of religious beliefs of young Israeli Jews. The support for values examination that parents encourage in their children through critical religious thinking resulted in "the willingness to withhold judgment, to entertain uncertainty and paradox (…), to accept the coexistence of non complementary systems of explanation, and to engage in complex self-reflection and reasoning" (p. 117). A combination of these critical and reflective skills in young men and women supported a relatively harmonious integration both religion and modernity into their identity.

Another reflective practice: perspective taking – the active contemplation of others' psychological experiences – has been one an intensively studied techniques for improving social interactions (Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, & White, 2008). As I will describe later, the ability to contemplate other people's perspectives and imagine oneself in the 'shoes' of another person constitutes one of the most fundamental human capacity that promotes social coordination as well as the development of mature and autonomous self (Mead, 1934/1962). This practice has recently received attention from social psychologists who study various forms of prejudice and stereotypes and has been empirically investigated with regard to fighting racial biases; its beneficial effects have been registered (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Todd, Bodenhause, Richeson, & Galinsky, 2011).

The third type of processing during autonomous functioning is a rational decision-making regarding the results of the reflections and contemplations. The essence of this process is comprised of deciding what to do with internal (emotional, motivational, and cognitive) and external (social and cultural) demands: either to follow them or to ignore them. These decisions may be deeply intimate and personal and may be concerned exclusively with reinterpreting and re-evaluating one's personal meaning of the events, other people, one's feelings and actions, or they may guide a person's actions and thus be publicly noticeable. The mindful reflections and decision making that happen deep inside a person's self constitutes what is called 'intrapsychic autonomy' (Ewing, 1991), or, following Rollo May's labelling, 'authentic inner freedom' (1981). Through the externalization in behavioural acts, psychological autonomy becomes a motivator of a person's actions and a driving force of people's autonomous agency and self-determined behaviours, and thus presents itself as behavioural autonomy/freedom (Chirkov, 2011b). Thus, autonomous functioning starts with awareness of and mindfulness about inner events, then moves to reflections and contemplations about them, and, finally, determines a person's decision making with regard to his or her life or actions. This is how Bettelheim (1960) described personal autonomy:

> (…) The concept of autonomy used here has little to do with what is sometimes called "rugged individualism," the cult of personality, or noisy self assertion. It has to do with man's inner ability to govern himself, and with a conscientious search for meaning despite the realization that, as we know, there is no purpose to one's life. It is concept that does not imply a revolt against authority qua authority, but rather a quiet acting out of inner conviction, not out of convenience or resentment, or because of external persuasion or controls. (…) The continuous balancing and resolving of opposing tendencies within oneself, and between self and society – the ability to do this in keeping with personal values, an enlightened self interest, and the interests of the society one lives in – all these lead to an increasing consciousness of freedom and form the basis for man's deepening sense of identity, self respect and inner freedom, in short his autonomy. (p. 75)

In his book, Bruno Bettelheim, a psychoanalyst and survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, provides one of the best accounts of the role psychological autonomy plays in prisoners' physical and psychological survival (see also (Marcus, 1999)). He extends his analysis into the role modern mass society plays in diminishing and reducing people's autonomy and what can be done to protect it.

The components and processing of psychological autonomy work universally across cultures – regardless of the specific contents of people's goals, emotions, and social demands, which are indeed culture dependent – the same way as human consciousness, language, and other higher mental functions work universally across all representatives of human species. Conversely, their contents are socially and culturally specific. Before I move to the topic of relationships of an autonomous person and his or her cultural milieu, it is important to introduce the concept of self as it is used in this chapter with regard to such processes as self-directions, self-governance, and self-determination.

The Role of the Self in Autonomous Functioning

It is natural to ask, who is actually aware and reflective of all the circumstances of a person's life and condition? Who is reflecting on bodily and emotional impulses? Who is making decisions? And who, finally, acts upon these decisions? In medieval times the scholiasts invented the idea of *'homunculus'* – a metaphorical minuscule individual who sits in a person's head, observes the world, and guides his or her actions. This invention of the homunculus metaphor, which inevitably failed because it required the explanation of the behaviour of a homunculus, was a result of the high complexity of the topics of self-consciousness, self-reflection, and self-determination that medieval scholars were trying to explain. The modern concept that addresses these and related phenomena is the notion of self or the sense of self that every healthy person develops during the course of his or her life. From the point of view of modern phenomenological cognitive psychology (Damasio, 1999, 2012; Gallagher, 2000; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008), a person's sense of self consists of two aspects: a core experiential pre-reflective self and an autobiographical, narrative, and reflected self. Both these aspects of the self participate in and are crucially important for people's autonomous functioning. The experiential aspect of the self "possesses experiential reality, and is in fact identified with the first-personal *appearance* of the experiential phenomena" (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008, p. 204). This means that all persons perceive their life-worlds, including their own bodies, mental functioning and actions, as *their own*. The functioning and actions are referred to and emanate from *them* and not from others, and they are given to *them* and not to others. It is *their* view of the world and it is *they* who act upon this world. Due to this the experiential-phenomenological self the "experiences that I live through in the first person perspective are *my* experiences" (p. 204). These experiences are pre-reflective and presented to us as implicitly given our first-hand subjective phenomena of different quality (visionary, auditory or pure mental) and delivered through different modalities. With regard to potential autonomy and agency there are two aspects of the experiential self that are relevant here. According to Gallagher (2000) these two aspects are: first, *a sense of ownership* of acts of living, "the sense that I am the one who is undergoing an experience. For example, the sense that my body is moving regardless of whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary" (2000, p. 15), and the second is *a sense of agency,* "the sense that I am the one who is causing or generating an action" (2000, p. 15). These are the building blocks of the phenomenology of psychological autonomy: to sense oneself owning and initiating one's own actions. In order to unfold into a mature autonomous functioning this pre-reflective first-person experience have to be reflected upon, verbally framed, referred to previous episodes of actions and non-actions as well as to the contextual conditions of acting, meaning that this experiential sense of self has to be transformed into the autobiographical/narrative and reflected self. Through "the narrative self – a self linked to sociality, memory, and language" (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008, p. 205) a person articulates verbally and connects socially his or her experiential self to his or her history and to the social and cultural conditions of his or her life. The narrative self participates in organizing verbally and culturally the reflections and contemplations regarding the representations that an experiential self produces and encounters. Through this self individuals acquire their reflective and agentic powers that enable them to contemplate not only on the world but on themselves and their actions in this world. As soon as this type of self emerges, it, together with the never-ending experiences of the phenomenological self with its first-person perspective, becomes the major producer, regulator, and executioner of psychological autonomy. These are persons with elaborated narrative selves that are capable of adjusting themselves to different social environments by constructing different 'public' or 'social' selves that work as 'personas', or 'masks' to cover and protect their inner authentic self. Individuals with fully elaborated autobiographical selves are capable of initiating the actions that go in their determination beyond pure bodily or environmental pressures. This is where the power of self-direction, self-determination and, based on them, the possibility for autonomous and agentic actions come from. A fully developed autonomy is founded on complex interactions between the experiential first-person perspectival self (Martin, 2008) and the culturally and socially-shaped narrative self. An autonomous person has both aspects of his or her self fully developed and functional in the face of life and action decisions.

> This is a self understood as *an embodied first-person perspective (an 'I'), the worldly experience of which enable a constantly evolving self-understanding (a 'me') with sufficient stability and coherence to permit generally effective personal functioning in the biophysical and sociocultural world in which it develops* (Martin, Sugarman, & Hickinbottom, 2009, p. 110). (…) The reality of the *self* as a unified inner entity capable of exerting agentive influence that goes beyond relevant sociocultural determinants and practices. (p. 107)

The experience of a sense of self and the duality of this experience is a universal feature of any socialized human being across times and places. That is why it is not surprising that the contemplations and writings of Indian and Chinese philosophers are so relevant and complementary to the Western conceptualizations of the phenomenological self (Chong, 2003; Elvin, 1985; Lo, 2003; Sanderson, 1985). For example, Cheng (2004) identified in Confucius's and his followers' writings a similar dual-composite structure of a person's self. In particular, he stated that the Chinese notion of self is conceptualised as *ziji,* and consists of two parts: *zi* "the active and initiating aspect of self or the self that can take action upon oneself, whereas the use of *ji* suggests that it stands for the reflective aspect of self or the self that is the result of the reflective action on the self" (p. 126). "The human self is hence *[sic]* a union and unity of the reflective-substantive *ji* and the initiative-reflective *zi*, hence the resulting notion of *ziji*" (p. 127). As in the above contemplations about self-determination and autonomy, this Chinese understanding of self leads its followers logically to the conclusion that the self is capable of self-transformation and self-directedness: "Upon reflection, the self acquires an identity as well as a power for self-transformation" (p. 126) [and for self-determination and autonomy]. It was Mencius (1970), the principal interpreter of Confucius, who recognized the will of the human self and labelled it "the *zhi*, that is a choice and decision that self makes in view or in recognition of an ideal value or a potential reality that can be achieved through one's efforts" (p. 131). This is a definite formulation of the autonomous power of self similar to the Western one presented above. The ancient Chinese philosophers came to a similar understanding as modern Western scholars regarding the ideas of self-determination and autonomy (Cheng, 2004; Chong, 2003). Here is their conclusion: "Thus *zhi* is not a physical human desire, nor a mental wish, nor simply a recognition of a truth. It is nothing more and nothing less than an independent power of free choice that could choose a goal based on considerations, which could lead to the successful creation of a life-world" (Cheng, 2004, p. 132).

These cross-time and cross-cultural comparisons of the structure and functions of the sense of self reveal the fundamental universality of the experiential-phenomenological and narrative-reflective side of the human self, and its potential power for self-directedness, self-transformation, and self-determination – psychological autonomy.

The Socio-Cultural Origins of Psychological Autonomy

In this section I will address the topic of the origin of psychological autonomy and show that, as all the higher mental functions of human beings, psychological autonomy has socio-cultural origins that are enabled through a person's active interactions with members of their cultural community. The body, brain, and a socio-cultural community, combined together into a system by meaningful social actions and interactions of individuals, work together on the systemic level in producing human psychological autonomy (Chirkov, 2010).

The psychological basis for autonomy is constituted by the symbolic representations (Murphy & Brown, 2007) of the primary sensual, bodily, perceptual, affective, and cognitive presentations, which are given to us directly without linguistic or other symbolic transformations (Damasio, 1999). Symbolic representations, mostly in the linguistic forms, constitute the second layer of our apprehension of internal and external realities and the skilful and meaningful manipulation of these representations constitutes the backbone of any form of autonomy (Deacon, 1997). Another important developmental achievement that makes autonomy possible is the emergence of a person's autobiographical self (Snow, 1990), which is built upon the nascent or proto-self (Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010; Stern, 1985), and emerges based on the experiential self. The autobiographical self has access to the symbolic representations and through their manipulation acquires its own power for self-transformation and self-determination. But how do they all come to life? This is the fundamental question for the psychology of human autonomy development.

Any socio-cultural community has a fundamental core of attributes that makes it "the species-typical and species-unique 'ontogenetic niche' for human development" (Tomasello, 1999, p. 79). These attributes are: a collective of people, who speak the same language, have an established way of life and practices that these people successfully utilise for their living; they create and share the meanings of different aspects of their physical and social reality and these shared intersubjective symbolic meanings constitute the milieu within which the socialization and enculturation of new members happens. The third component is the network of meaningful interactions among the members of the community and between its new members and their caregivers. Meaningful linguistically mediated social interactions are the medium of human development, which constitute the vehicle that make enculturation and socialization possible (Tomasello, 1999). These universal features of any cultural community make the development of healthy human being into mature and fully functioning adults achievable regardless of the specifics and idiosynchronicity of particular communities. These specifics, related to different values, practices, and meanings, constitute particular cultures, such as national cultures or sub-cultures of different ethnic and social groups. An important cultural particular for our analysis here is the meaning and value that these communities assign to personal autonomy in people's functioning, which can be either supportive and facilitating, or restrictive and diminishing.

According to modern theorizing on child development, in their first months of life infants play out the skills and capacities that they are equipped with from their birth: some perceptual, cognitive, and social skills as well as an inherently proactive way of engagement with the world (Tronick, 2007). Based on their first interactions with the world, infants start developing their proto-self or 'ecological-self (Cicchetti & Beeghly, 1990; Neisser, 1988; Stern, 1985), which becomes the cornerstone of their future more elaborated selfhood. "Of special importance, in directing behaviors at external entities infants experience their own behavioral goals as well as the outcomes of their actions on the environment as external entities accede to or resists their goal-directed activities" (Tomasello, 1999, p. 60). Their pre-reflective sense of self is a source of their own activity that is different from the external objects toward which it is directed. Through this experience, their experiential self starts developing (Stern, 1985). It becomes even more powerful as infants incorporate the sensations and schemas of their bodies into their proto-self (Gallese & Sinigaglia, 2010). The first fundamental breakthrough in children's development toward their future autonomy happens within their first 9–12 months of life. As Tomasello (1999) worded this breakthrough, infants "begin to understand other persons as intentional agents like the self. Intentional agents are animate beings who have goals and who make active choices among behavioral means for attending those goals, including active choices about what to pay attention to in pursuing those goals" (p. 68). This understanding emerges through the 'joint attentional behaviors' (Tomasello, 1999) that infants share with the adults who care for them. Joint attentional behaviors happen among the infant, the adult, and the object of their attention. When the child and the adult jointly attend to the object, when the child follows the attention of the adult toward the object and when the child directs the attention of the adult toward the object, he or she starts to develop his or her understanding of other persons' possessions of an intentional (directed toward external objects) capacity, and the realization that this capacity can be managed and manipulated by this person him or herself or externally. This understanding of others as intentional agents combined with the infants' sense of proto-self agency creates a new understanding that they are also intentional agents whose intentional activities can be managed either by them or by others. The discovery substantially complements their sense of proto-self first by acknowledging that they are similar to others in their intentionality and that they may become objects of the intentional activity of others (Meltzoff, 1990). This new and fundamental acquisition concerns the ability of children to look at themselves as others look at them; the proto-looking-glass sense of self lies at the basis of a crucial component of the future self-system, specifically the concept of 'Me'. In addition to these new understandings, infants "have come to differentiate the goals they are pursuing from the behavioral means they use to pursue that goal much more clearly than in their previous sensory-motor actions" (Tomasello, 1999, p. 73). These new revolutionary emergencies are universal and happen to the infants in all cultural communities at about the same age (Tomasello, 1999).

Due to infants' new capacity to understand others as intentional agents like their own selves,

> a whole new world of intersubjectively shared reality [culture – VC] begins to open up. It is a world populated by material and symbolic artefacts and social practices that members of their culture, both past and present, have created for the use of others. To be able to use these artefacts as they were meant to be used, and to participate in these social practices as they were meant to be participated in, children have to be able to imagine themselves in the position of the adult users and participants as they observe them. (Tomasello, 1999, p. 91)

Children themselves are part of their cultures and, when adults direct their culturally shaped intentional activities, the assigned meanings, and emotional attitudes toward them, children's own sense of self starts developing from the proto-self into the experiential and then into the autobiographical sense of self (Neisser, 1988).

Another breakthrough in developing the basis for psychological autonomy is the acquisition of language and the emergence of symbolic mental representations of children's internal and external worlds (Bates, 1990; Wolf, 1990). When linguistic symbols are applied to children's experiencing and imaginary objects, actions, events, feeling, intentions, thoughts and other physical and mental events and phenomena, this opens a unique opportunity to manage these phenomena not physically but mentally by distancing oneself from them, by applying different perspectives to seeing them, reinterpreting their meanings and either accepting or rejecting them (Fonagy & Target, 2002). Language and other symbols of any cultural community "embody the myriad ways of construing the world intersubjectively that have accumulated in a culture over historical time, and the process of acquiring the conventional use of these symbolic artefacts, and so internalizing these construals, fundamentally transforms the nature of children's cognitive representations" (Tomasello, 1999, pp. 95–96). The nature of this transformation lies in the transition of a child's cognition from non-symbolic sensory-motor representations into symbolic ones. This is how Tomasello described this process:

> (…) Today's child is faced with a panoply of different linguistic symbols and constructions that embody many different attentional construals of any given situation. Consequently, as the child internalizes a linguistic symbol – as she learns the human perspectives embodied in a linguistic symbol – she cognitively represents not just the perceptual or motor aspects of a situation but also one way, among other ways of which she is aware, that the current situation may be attentionally construed by 'us,' the users of that symbol. (p. 126)

Symbolic representations open the opportunity of a 'perspectival' view of the world, people in this world, and the self. As soon as a person becomes capable of voluntarily manipulating these different perspectives, he or she actually becomes capable of psychological autonomy with regard to the existing and future conditions of living. Therefore, it is possible to say that psychologically autonomy is rooted in the intentional and perspectival manipulation and regulation of the symbolic representations (Chirkov, 2010). "The way that human beings use linguistic symbols thus creates a clear break with straightforward perceptual or sensory-motor representations, and it is due entirely to the social nature of linguistic symbols" (Tomasello, 1999, p. 126). The benefits of these symbolic representations for knowing the world and regulating one's own activities in it are enormous (Damasio, 1999). They allow a person to create abstract concepts and to think about events in a psychologically distancing way; they serve as the basis for a person's theory of others' minds and, based on this theory, together with the ability of 'other persons' perspective taking to manage his or her social interactions with people in very sophisticated ways, they allow people to plan their future actions and entertain different courses of actions without necessarily executing them; they open up practically unlimited opportunities for self-reflections and self-transformations that are impossible to do based on sensory-motor presentations. Finally, they allow a person to start constructing his or her own autobiographical/narrative self as well as his or her personal and social identities. This narrative self, together with the identities, constitute the centre of a person's social and cultural experiences as well as of their experiences of his or her life and actions ownership, self-determination, and autonomy. At approximately the same time children become involved in the development of moral reasoning based on "reflective discourses in which children make comments or ask questions involving the beliefs and desires of others or themselves" (Tomasello, 1999, p. 181; see also, (Cicchetti & Beeghly, 1990)).

The emerging capacities for self-determined action as well as for moral and other forms of psychological autonomy are built upon the skills that developmental cognitive psychologists have labelled 'metacognition', self-regulation, reflective and representational redistribution capabilities (Cicchetti & Beeghly, 1990; Fonagy & Target, 2002; Tomasello, 1999). The first step to the development of these skills is the internalization by children of instructions, rules, and regulations that adults use to manage children's behaviour. This management happens through dialogs between the adult and the child. By the means of internalization these dialogs move from the interpersonal domain to the intrapersonal sphere of a child's self. The child applies the same rules and instructions to him- or herself that adults direct to him or her and starts practicing self-regulation of his or her own behaviours. They acquire the skills of not only self-regulating own behaviour but the capacity to consider their own thinking and thus, self-regulate their mental activities as well. These metacognitive mental self-regulation skills give rise to what Karmiloff-Smith (1992) labelled 'representational redistribution': "My claim is that a specifically human way to gain knowledge is for the mind to exploit internally the information it has already stored (both innate and acquired), by redescribing its representations or, more precisely, by iteratively re-presenting in different representational formats what is internal representations represent" (p. 15). Children all over the world acquire these skills as long as they are born into cultural communities and have adults who care about them (Rogoff, 2003). These skills create a cognitive basis for psychological autonomy – behavioural, moral, emotional, motivational, and personal.

One of the arguments toward the universality of psychological autonomy has been the thesis about the evolutionary basis and adaptation advantages of autonomous functioning (Waller, 1998). Although there are no doubts that psychological autonomy is built upon universal evolution-based mechanisms of the human brain, some scholars argued that autonomy could be an exaptation of other more fundamental evolutionary adjustments (Tomasello, 1999). According to Panksepp and Panksepp (2000), "At present, it remains possible that most of the higher aspects of the human brain/mind arise largely from the interaction between general-purpose neural systems of the multimodal cortical association areas and the very basic life experiences encoded by more ancestral emotional/mind systems that all mammals share" (p. 112). These evolutionary supported cortical associations lay at the basis of the "general-purpose representational abilities (e.g., internal imaginary and language)" (p. 115) which sustains humans' higher mental capacities. Tomasello (1999) speculated that "the ability of human beings to reflect on their own behaviour" [the cognitive basis of autonomy – VC] may be an "ontogenetic elaboration" [or exaptation – VC] of the primary "evolutionary adaptations, aimed at the ability of human beings to coordinate their social behavior with one another – to understand one another as intentional beings" (p. 197). This means that the capacity toward autonomy emerged as a consequence of the adaptation to the social life of human groups; specifically, of people's necessity to understand each other and coordinate each other's activities. This fundamental mental advantage of understanding others' minds is built on the general-purpose representational abilities that became specialized for this social regulation purpose. Psychological autonomy has probably emerged as a consequence of this adaptation.

This collection of skills: understanding others as intentional agents, seeing the world from others' perspectives, developing symbolic mental representations and being able to do their redistribution and reformatting, in addition to metacognitive and reflectivity skills and the skills for self-regulation and self-transformation forms the cognitive basis for psychological autonomy and are acquired by all children around the world, but of course to the different extent. In order for autonomy to become a fully pledged transformative capacity, individuals have to undergo other important developments.

Autonomy, as it is presented here, is not a mere collection of specific cognitive skills, rather it is a state of mind and a mode of being that a person chooses for him or herself; it is a specific motivation to live one's life and act as one decides to do. Thus, in addition to described cognitive skills a person has to have a well-articulated and reflected autobiographical self which is equipped with elaborated personal and social identities. An autonomous person has to have knowledge about the world, society, other people and oneself, so that he or she is not swamped in illusions, unjustified expectations, and superficial knowledge. He or she has to develop a system of values and life-goals that will work as a higher-level organizer for all the reflections, representations, and intentions that a person develops in his of her life. All these components of autonomy can be developed only within cultural communities through meaningful interactions with their members. In the next section I will address some of the problems and confusions with regard to the understanding of the interaction of culture and autonomous persons.

Individualism and Collectivism, Cultural Models of Self, and Psychological Autonomy Across Cultures

Every cultural community develops a set of ideas about what a person and his or her elements (self, motivation, intelligence, etc.) mean to its members. This set of ideas is known in the literature as the cultural models/theories of a person and self (Hollan, 1992). The most known cultural models used to understand a person are individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1995) and independent and interdependent self-construals of personal selves (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These are cultural and ideological constructions created either by lay members of a community and which constitutes a part of the community's folk psychology or by academics who are reflecting on the social and cultural arrangements of a particular society (Morris, 1994).

Psychological autonomy, on the other hand, is based on an individual's first-person perspective on the world, awareness of his or her situation, reflection on all the demands that he or she has to deal with and then making a decision about either reinterpreting the situation or changing his or her actions within it. Autonomy is an experiential, cognitive, and motivational phenomenon that belongs exclusively to the subjectivity of an individual. Autonomous individuals act and function within the existing cultural models and theories of the world, community, person and self, but they are in no way a mirror reflection of these models. The lack of differentiation of cultural models of self from the experiential selves of particular members of a community is one of the most widely spread confusions of cross-cultural and cultural psychologists. In his treatise of a category of person, Mauss (1985) devised these two aspects:

> Nor shall I speak to you of psychology, … I shall leave aside everything which relates to the 'self' (*moi*), the conscious personality as such. Let me merely say that it is plain, particularly to us, that there has never existed a human being who has not been aware, not only of his body, but also at the same time of his individuality, both spiritual and physical. … My subject is entirely different, and independent of this. It is one relating to social history. Over the centuries, in numerous societies, how has it slowly evolved – not the sense of 'self (*moi*) – but the notion or concept that men in different ages have formed of it? (p. 3)

This confusion has led to the conflating of individualism with psychological autonomy, the independent self-construals with agency and the interdependent ones with a lack of it (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2003). In addition, it has led to an idea that members of collectivist cultures are more responsible toward their close ones and members of individualist cultures strive for independence from social obligations (Miller, Das, & Chakravarty, 2011).

Hollan (1992) continued elaborating this distinction:

> (…) 'Cultural models', [is] the presupposed, taken-for-granted, commonsensical, and widely shared assumptions which a groups of people hold about the world and its objects. Cultural models (of selves or anything else) present a simplified and often idealized conception of objects and processes in which much of the blooming, buzzing complexity of phenomena is either suppressed or ignored.... If cultural models of the self, like most of other types of cultural models, are simplified and/or idealized, then we should not mistakenly assume that they encompass all aspects of the experiential self or that they alone should serve as the basis for a comparison of the self. (pp. 285–286)

Many anthropologists as well as cultural and social psychologists, according to his opinion, "too readily assume a close correspondence, or even identity, between cultural model or theories [of self – VC] and subjective experience" (p. 284);

> just as one cannot assume that cultural models of the self are merely projections of individual phenomenology, one cannot assume that the individual's experiential self can be reduced to the concepts and terms which are used to talk about it. While the two are no doubt intimately and dynamically related, the extent to which they influence and shape one another should remain an empirical question. (p. 287)

If, according to Hollan, anthropologists and psychologists want to work with the sense of self related to the subjective experience of oneself and others as subjects and objects of intentional actions, (which is similar to the notion of self presented in this chapter with regard to psychological autonomy and self-determination), they have to ask questions about the origins of this self and the role cultural models and ideologies about the self play in shaping and formatting personal experiential and narrative selves. The theorists who emphasize a close match between theories of self and experiential/narrative individual selves practically leave no space for the idiosyncratic, perspectival, particularistic and, finally, autonomous shaping of one's self through self-reflections, self-transformations, and self-development.

> (…) By emphasising a one-to-one correspondence between cultural models and the experiential self, one underplays the extent to which aspects of subjective experience are also a product of psychobiological propensities (Hallowell, 1955, 1959) and social encounters (Mead, 1934; Cooley, 1922; Blumer, 1969) which may actually run counter to, or contradict, ideal cultural representations. (p. 286)

In the empirical part of his article, Hollan (1992) provides vivid examples of strongly relational aspects in the Americans' experiential/narrative selves, which are considered by the cultural model to be highly independent and autonomous, as well as examples of autonomy and self-determination of the experiential/narrative selves of the members of a highly sociocentric tribe in Indonesia.

The same arguments about the differentiation from and non-equivalency of the experiential selves of Indian persons with the socio-centric and highly prescriptive cultural model of self in Indian culture is provided by Mines (1988). His conclusion, which is based on interviews with various representatives of this culture, is that Indians, just as other people around the world, have their own first-person perspectives on the realities around them, can freely identify their self-interests and exercise mastery and ownership over life-important decisions, and are capable of practicing and getting satisfaction from their psychological autonomy. Indeed, we need to accept that the dynamics of the development of autonomy in communities with different cultural models of self may take different trajectories, but neither the presence of individualism nor collectivism prevent people from developing their autonomous experiential selves.

An important condition for the development of psychological autonomy is the communities' attitudes, norms, and practices toward people who demonstrate autonomous functioning. As Benson (2001) commented, "Some societies value the individual as a responsible co-creator of her own life and work to give her the skills and values to do this, thereby building in her powers of autonomy and choice. Others require and produce selves that largely reproduce what they have become without the sense of need or the ability to change the model" (p. 92). This statement means that cultural communities construct systems of ideas regarding the value, meaning, and cultivation of psychological autonomy. These systems are embedded in the more general cultural models of a person. Many social scientists confuse the cultural valuing of autonomy with the ideology of individualism as well as with the conditions of independence or interdependence of individuals within their groups.

Cultural valuing of autonomy means that communities recognize and respect an individual's first-person perspective on the world which is based on their needs, values, and goals. The communities take them into consideration and provide conditions for exercising these attributes. Such communities deem the meaning of autonomy and self-determination as a valuable commodity of any human being, a commodity that needs to be respected and cared for. This valuing may happen within the ideologies of either collectivism (interdependence) or individualism (independence) and can easily be observed through different parenting practices (Rogoff, 2003). One example of the conflict between the ideology of individualism and the value for autonomy is the Western practice of infants' independent sleeping. "Folk wisdom in European American middle-class communities has portrayed nighttime separation of infants from their parents as essential for healthy psychological development, to develop a spirit of independence" (Rogoff, pp. 196–197). This is the ideology of individualism and the cultural model for the development of independent individuals. On the other hand, an infant has his or her fears and a need to have a secure haven for a comfortable sleep. If parents are to respect infants' autonomy they have to respect this need and help them gratify it. But this does not happen in the strict culture of individualism: "Infants and parents in this community frequently engage in conflicts over independent nighttime sleeping, in which parents and infants often act as adversaries in a battle of wills" (p. 197). This battle of wills is a direct indication of disrespect for the infants' autonomy for the sake of the culturally prescribed development of independence and individualism. Another example of an attack on human autonomy within Western cultural traditions may be found in the recommendations of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, with regard to upbringing children: "Break their will betimes, begin this work before they can run alone, before they can speak plain, perhaps before they can speak at all. Whatever pains it costs, break their will, if you would not damn the child" (Rogoff, p. 206). Thus, the ideology of individualism may pretty brutally go against valuing and practicing autonomy.

Rogoff (2003) also provides ample examples of respect for children's autonomy and freedom of choice within various, so-called, collectivist communities, the communities that highly emphasize coordination among members of groups, an orientation toward the collective and the ability to smoothly function within various social roles and obligations. The respect for autonomy in such highly 'interdependent' communities means that there is a belief that "people can both coordinate with others and act autonomously' (p. 202). In this case "people in many communities have the responsibility to coordinate with the group but the freedom to do otherwise" (p. 202). For instance, "'Inviolability of the individual is a central value widespread among North and Central American Indians. … At any age, people have the right to make their own decisions about their own actions; it is inappropriate to force others to do something against their will" (p. 202); and further, "individual autonomy is respected with Mayan infants because it is inappropriate to go against people's self-determination, even if they themselves do not understand how to act in a responsible interdependent way" (p. 203). She also provides examples of autonomy valuing in such traditionally collectivistic communities as Mexican and Japanese families. Her conclusion is: valuing personal autonomy can peacefully coexist with the collectivistic and interdependent prescriptions for communal life and can be antagonistic to the demands of the ideology of individualism and independence.

Confusion with regard to the understanding the role motivational autonomy plays in different communities also arises with regard to the autonomous versus controlled execution of socially prescribed prosocial behaviours. This problem with autonomy, interpersonal relations, and culture can be summarized as follows: In many cultural communities the behaviour of its members is frequently driven by traditions and a strong feeling of obligation to perform one's duties within the range of assigned social roles and related expectations. Some examples of such behaviours are: helping the poor, filial piety, helping family members, friends and strangers, respecting elders and authorities. It is not surprising that these interpersonal relations have become strongly socially regulated because they maintain the fabric of societal harmony, cohesiveness, and structure, without which the mere survival of these communities could be jeopardized. Different cultural communities endorse and require the execution of these obligations to different degrees, thus leading to the identification of 'tight' and 'loose' cultures (Gelfand et al., 2011; Triandis, 2004). What role does psychological autonomy play in these conditions? Are people in 'tight' cultures less autonomous in executing their social obligations than people in 'loose' cultures? These questions may be elaborated further: Do, for example, Indians or Chinese people choose their prosocial actions exclusively on societal norms or can they exercise their own deliberations in choosing their own course of prosocial actions? Can they critically evaluate the existing normative prescriptions regarding prosocial behaviour and reason their own course of actions? Although a reader may find these questions confusing with regard to their counterintuitive nature (of course, Indian or Chinese nationals are capable of autonomous and self-determined actions!), they are still legitimate for many social psychologists who are addressing helping behaviour in different cultural settings: "(…) Do people from a Hindu Indian cultural background, which tends to emphasize collectivist cultural values and role-related obligations, feel a reduced sense of agency when they meet their role-related obligations, just like North American folk psychology suggests people do?" (Miller et al., 2011, p. 46).

Self-determination theory (SDT) clearly differentiates these and similar aspects of cultural ideologies and personal functioning by acknowledging that practices of individualism and collectivism as well as practices of socially prescribed prosocial actions may be executed due to different motivation: people may be autonomously collectivistic or be controlled individualists, meaning that peoples' personal motivation behind executing cultural prescriptions and prosocial behaviour may vary strongly along the continuum from external to highly autonomous (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003; Chirkov, Ryan, & Willness, 2005; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010).

In their recent study Miller et al. (2011) decided to challenge this conclusion of the self-determination research by investigating different motivation for helping family members and strangers among American and Indian students and studying the relations of this motivation to students' satisfaction, feeling of choice, and autonomy. The initial hypotheses of this study were that

> among the Indian respondents, but not the U.S. respondents, duty/responsibility to help family and friends would be positively associated with autonomous reasons for action as well as with satisfaction and choice. We also hypothesized that only among the U.S. respondents and not among the Indian respondents the presence of strong compared with weak social expectations to help family and friends would be linked with less autonomous reasons for actions and with a lesser sense of satisfaction and choice. (pp. 48–49)

It is clear that both of these hypotheses are built on a flawed confusion of cultural models of self (in India – duties and obligations driven interdependent selves; and in the U.S. – obligation-free independent selves) and the actual behaviour of individuals based on their experiential/narrative selves, which determines the levels of their personal endorsements of the helping behaviours. SDT predicts that in both cultures the execution of family duties may be perceived either as external coercion or as freely chosen prosocial actions. Not surprisingly, the actual results of this study confirm the SDT prediction and not the 'cultural models' hypotheses.

> The results of the present studies are congruent with the claims made in SDT that choice is central to agency universally. … The results imply that in a collectivist cultural context involving strong social expectations to in-group members, normative obligation to be responsive to the needs of family and friends may come to be internalized so that individuals experience a sense of agency that involves choice in meeting them…. In sum, the present results challenge certain earlier assertions of some theorists within cultural psychology and support the claims of SDT that choice entailed universally in the internalization of social expectations. (p. 58)

This study and its related theorizing invite social and cross-cultural psychologists to pay more attention to the nature of autonomous motivation with regard to its execution in different cultural contexts. The confusion of cultural models of self with the experiential and phenomenological self of an acting person should be clearly addressed.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to clarify some propositions about the nature of psychological autonomy, its socio-cultural origin and dialectical relations of autonomous people with their cultural environment. These clarifications can be summarized as follows.

Psychological autonomy is a fundamental and universal capacity of all human beings, and is a derivate of their sociality, consciousness, and language. It has a sociocultural origin that is based on the presence of cultural, linguistic, and moral communities, in which members interact meaningfully with newly born children and care for them. The development of the cognitive prerequisites for psychological autonomy goes through a relatively universal sequence of stages by the mediation of meaningful symbolic interactions with adult caregivers. Cultural values systems including the valuing of psychological autonomy play an important role in shaping people's capability for autonomous functioning. Autonomous people are able to reflect on their culture and be the agents of its change. Many cross-cultural studies of and theorizing about psychological autonomy, both personal and motivational, are contaminated by several confusions: equating autonomy with individualism and independence and thus denying the value of autonomy in, so-called, collectivistic and interdependent cultures; as well as confusing cultural theories of self with a first-person experience of the ownership of one's actions, which is executed through a person's narrative autobiographical self. These confusions need to be theoretically and empirically clarified and resolved in order to provide a more conceptually refined understanding of the psychological autonomy functioning in different cultural settings.

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