

SYNOPSIS
AGENCY AND DELIBERATION:
UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC REASON AND EMPOWERMENT

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Synopsis:

This thesis titled *Agency and Deliberation: Understanding Public Reason and Empowerment* discusses the ethical dimensions of political philosophy. I have started my work with an aim to connect agency and political participation, given that human agency, capacity to undertake action that one desires, has been a central question of philosophy: that has been dealt by diverse areas of philosophy. Political participation relates itself, to the concept of development in socio-political context, wherein certain pressing question of our times express itself in a vivid way. The area of philosophy that concerns itself with these dimensions is Development Ethics. In this context, this dissertation navigates through the works of Christine M. Korsgaard, Phillip Pettit, Jürgen Habermas, Amartya Sen and Jay Drydyk as we try to understand the concepts: Agency, Deliberation, Public Reason and Empowerment.

The first chapter is the *Introduction*, wherein I try to discuss in brief the motivations behind my work. The introduction further provides an overview of the chapters that follow.

The second chapter is titled *Agency and Freedom*, and has two sections. The first section deals with Korsgaard's (2008, 2009) analysis of human agency and the next section discusses Pettit's (2001) conception of agency with its focus on human freedom. In the first section I have started my discussion by pointing out Korsgaard's view that human action is necessary. Korsgaard argues that there is a normative obligation, which she terms as *necessitation*. Korsgaard further tries to understand how normativity operates. She disagrees with the dogmatic rationalists and sentimentalists, Hume in particular as both these theories take goodness to be effortless, which is quite contrary to our experience, which presents us with a struggle with regard to our moral

life. Korsgaard claims that the struggle is not only for being good or rational; there must be something more going within us that constitutes the struggle for necessitation, which provide us with normative standards through which we attain this psychic unity. The struggle to attain psychic unity, termed as *self-constitution*, makes agency possible. According to Korsgaard, following Aristotle, we are constituted as agents by the principles of practical reason. Korsgaard has introduced a concept of *constitutive standards*, standards that apply to a thing simply in virtue of its being the kind of thing that it is, which are the normative standards. If an object or activity fails to meet these constitutive standards then it is bad, she calls it *defect*. While dealing with self-constitution, Korsgaard observes that there is an apparent *paradox of self-constitution*: a person has personal or practical identity that makes her responsible for her actions, at the same time, it is choosing that action that creates her identity. The next argument that Korsgaard makes is regarding the constitution of the will. In doing so she argues that the hypothetical imperative can unify and constitute the will. Lastly, in this section, Korsgaard's view regarding self-constitution is discussed. The model that Korsgaard puts forward is the Constitution Model following Plato's Republic. In this model the human soul is compared to the constitution of the polis or city-state. The agent is constituted by the ultimate executive decision making by reason. Further, Korsgaard argues that a person who acts badly is not doing something different from acting in a good manner, but it is the activity of self-constitution done badly.

In the next section I have studied in detail Pettit's focus on establishing a theory of freedom that can help us understand agency, starting from the psychological dimension continuing till the political side of it. Freedom of an agent for Pettit is conceptualized as being fit to be held responsible. This freedom has three aspects that needs to be present. Firstly, the agent should be able to decide which action to perform

in any specific situation, this is taken as freedom of action. Secondly, an agent must be able to identify and feel involved in the action he performs, and not feel as a bystander, this is taken as freedom of self. Thirdly, an agent must have a place in society that makes her able to perform her actions without coercion, this is freedom as a person. Pettit first dimension of freedom is freedom as rational control, which focuses on the agent's ability to function according to their intentional states, such as beliefs and desires. The second dimension in which freedom is considered is freedom as volitional control, which Pettit describes following Frankfurt. In freedom as volitional control, an agent is free if she can form second-order desires in addition to the first-order desires, second-order desires being desires specifically about first-order desires. The first dimensions of freedom are bound with issues that need to be resolved, namely the bystander problem, where an agent does not own her actions and freedom being possible even in cases of hostile coercion. The second dimension takes care of the bystander issue, but then fixing responsibility and freedom co-opting with hostile coercion still persist. To avoid these issues Pettit argues in favour of the third dimension of freedom being considered is freedom as discursive control. In this dimension an agent shall be free when she has control in a discourse. And this control has two factors, *ratiocinative capacity*, to take part in a discourse and *relational capacity*, to enjoy relationships that are discourse friendly. "To discourse is to reason, and in particular to reason with others", Pettit (2001, 67) describes following Scanlon (1998). Further we can see the freedom as discursive control is inconsistent with hostile coercion, which is not discourse friendly. But a friendly coercion that acts like a mast to a ship is acceptable. In a discourse an agent must endorse her past commitments and act according to it, so an agent doing so has a free self, and is not bogged down by the bystander problem. Further, free action according to discursive control is based on how

an agent's act is consistent with freedom of the person and self, and in doing so an agent can be held responsible. In this chapter we see that Korsgaard's formulation of autonomy does find its reflection in the way Pettit talks about a free-self capable of discursive control. If we look at a moral agent who can form the imperatives, we see an agent who is capable of discourse with herself, who puts reason to understand her relationship with others. Such an agent can be said to have discursive control.

The third chapter is *Integrated Collectives and Responsibility*, where the first section discusses group agency following Pettit and then questions related to responsibility is considered in the second part. Pettit (2001) after analysing freedom in an agent, argues in favour of the collective agency. He begins his argument through the discursive dilemma that groups are faced with in decision making. Decisions are on opposite sides of the spectrum when on the one hand decisions are based on individual arguments and on the other hand based on premises. For example, a group of employees when asked if they want to bear a pay sacrifice for better electric safety in their office, may in majority disagree with pay sacrifice, when the decision is taken individually, while agreeing that electrical issues need to be sorted. But if the same decision is taken on premises-based manner, since electric issues need to be addressed is agreed upon, it may seem that the group is agreeing on the pay sacrifice. To address this dilemma Pettit insists on collectivization of reason. Groups that collectivize reason are termed by Pettit as integrated collectives and they apply reason at the collective level. In doing so groups are consistent with past decisions and their group identity is upheld. Pettit further has explained that the collective integrates are real in the sense they display mental properties that are not just a summation of individual mental ideas. We can better understand these aspects by considering the previous example regarding employees arguing for pay sacrifice, if reason is collectivised it is most likely that electric repair

shall be prioritized and pay sacrifice mandated, even though majority of individuals had disagreed on pay sacrifice based on other reasons. And in doing this the group shall hold on to this decision even in the future where it can prioritize important issues, above individual interests. Pettit has also argued that collective integrates can be candidates of freedom as discursive control, as integrates can interact in discourse with other integrates or individuals. Further, integrates qualify for free person, free self, and free action.

The next focus is on the concept of responsibility, List and Pettit (2011) have discussed these aspects, there can be a possible bifurcation of individual and collective responsibility and an individual can operate in multiple identities. Now we can ask: Are group agents fit to be held responsible? To indulge in this specific question, I have tried to evaluate group agency by discussing Pauer-Struder (2014) and Rovane (2014). Pauer-Studer (2014) is of the opinion that List and Pettit have only focused on the basic mechanical structure of agency. Her focus is on the constitutive account of agency, which bases itself on Korsgaard's constitutive standards. According to Korsgaard one must be constituted and guided by principles of practical reasoning that make agency possible to be an agent. If we do not deliberate to decide we cannot be agents. Action is a form of self-determination. Further, she points out that for Velleman practical thought is a desire *to act in accordance* with reason. She is of the opinion that in Velleman's approach the normative standards that guides agency directs us towards morality, but are not in itself moral norms. This provides us with an important question should we argue for a non-moralizing concept of agency. I argue that we cannot, since agency has a normative self-constitutive aspect and this does not affect autonomy if we are to consider autonomy with regard to the constitutional model that Korsgaard proposes. Pauer-Struder observes that the claim she makes regarding the constitutive

account of agency is applicable to group agency too, so they can be held responsible. Another relevant question is: How far can an individual be held responsible in the collective? Is the individual agency overpowered by the collective? Here I discuss Carol Rovane (2014), who is of the opinion that Pettit and List attempt to retain a form of metaphysical and normative individualism while alongside arguing for the realism of group agency, is unstable and untenable, because humans achieving rational unity together at the level of the whole group, tends to produce a certain kind of *rational fragmentation* in each individual human. Rovane has provided us with a detailed approach, starting with a critical analysis of Rousseau and Rawls from the view point of List and Pettit's take on group agency, that majority do not form an adequate basis for group decisions. Rovane putting forward a case study regarding the deliberations in a Philosophy Department regarding certain criteria for its PhD students and also citing the example of the Manhattan Project argues that 'if a group is to pursue its goals in rational manner, it must undertake group deliberations which are carried out by the *group itself*' (Rovane, Group Agency and Individualism 2014, 1674), because when individuals deliberate as individuals there is a certain limiting to the group point of view. But then Rovane points out through her case study that an individual may fragment her rationality to participate in the group's deliberation, even though this deliberation may not be a part of her point of view. Thus, avoiding the discursive dilemma and also settling the question of responsibility since the fragment self has participated in the deliberation keeping in mind the larger goal of the group. Rovane points out that individual's agency is determined by various factors and she may have to have participate in different settings in different groups with different agencies at various stages or settings of her life, as she suggests that a fragmented rational identity helps an individual to navigate herself. I have tried to discuss whether we can agree

with Rovane in rejecting Pettit's view regarding individual unity. If we look into the aspect of freedom from the discursive control, an individual with fragmented rationality seems to check the boxes of free person, as she seems to apparently have discursive control. But does she really count as a free self, can she really avoid the bystander problem. I have tried to argue that the bystander problem stays and the way out is to form an integrated collective.

The fourth chapter *Deliberation and the State* has two sections. The first section considers Habermas's idea regarding deliberative democracy. The second section is about Pettit's and Habermas's idea of the state. I have started the first section by discussing Habermas and his approach towards meaning and communication, and asking the question what is discourse? Then I have discussed Habermas' idea of autonomy and agency. I argue following Anderson (2011) that Habermas does not agree with the dominant concept that autonomy and authenticity are primarily individual concerns, which later manifests itself to examine socio-political situations that one faces. Habermas, on the other hand, considered autonomy, agency, identity, authenticity and the self as *fundamentally intersubjective phenomena*, which shapes itself according to situations that one faces. Anderson analysis of the five senses of autonomy is discussed in detail. The next discussion is of Habermas' moral theory, known as *Discourse Ethics*. Habermas' theory rather than answering the claim *What ought I to do?* aims to provide an understanding wherein a moral agent can successfully answer that question for themselves. Finlayson (2005) points that Habermas' *main aim* is to understand *how moral theory can answer the questions of his social theory*. Search for the underlying principles of morality, establishing valid moral norms and finding their social relevance and use is Habermas' concern. I have discussed in detail following Finlayson (2005) and Regh (2011) the discourse ethics of Habermas; firstly,

discussing the discourse theory of morality and the process of universalization and secondly the ethical discourse and its practical relevance. *The Discourse Principle (D)* and *the Moral Principle (U)* and the assumptions behind these principles are also discussed in detail, as it is significant for this thesis. The interesting aspect that this discussion of Habermas provides is that *ethics and morality are distinct* but at the same time *complementary components* of our daily life. The difference between Rawls and Habermas and further critics of Habermas is also discussed. Moving forward Habermas' conception of deliberative democracy and politics is discussed following Olson (2011). Olson observes that Habermas refers to his democratic theory as *discourse theory of democracy*. Concepts of autonomy, citizenship and rights and further structures of democratic deliberation is discussed in detail. As Olson (2011, 147) points out following Habermas (1996, 107) that "public opinion is *processed* through public argumentation to produce norms *to which all possible affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourses.*" Habermas' conception of politics has also been discussed following Finlayson (2005).

In the second section I discuss Pettit's (2001) political ideal of freedom, which is based on the theory of freedom as discursive control. Pettit observes that he wants to understand if the state has freedom, what is the ideal upon which this freedom shall be based. Taking into consideration freedom as discursive control, Pettit says that political ideal of freedom will be on the one hand *more austere* than discursive control, being concerned with interpersonal and not the intrapersonal preconditions of discursive control. On the other hand the ideal shall be *more enriched* as it shall move beyond individual agency and consider the overall environment where agency functions. The first ideal that Pettit discusses about is the ideal of non-limitation but he does not approve of this ideal of non-limitation. He points out that there are certain cases

specially the one's dealing with warnings, where freedom as discursive control no longer holds ground. And a state can very easily tend towards such policies, which though seems consistent with the ideal of non-limitation, shall seriously impact the discursive control an individual or group has. We can understand this with respect to coercive policies a state can apply pointing towards a goal which consists of removal of other limitations. The next ideal that Pettit considers is the ideal of non-interference. This ideal is based on two stages, in the first stage a person is politically free, as far as she has no interference by others, this can be considered as formal freedom as non-interference. And in the second stage she has no interference from acts arising from others non-interference, this consists of effective or real freedom as non-interference. In this ideal interference is taken as freedom compromised, while limitation is understood as freedom conditioned. Pettit does not consider this ideal to be perfect, the one specific point of concern which he points out is that related to domination. He points out there are certain agents or agencies that can have the power of arbitrary interference in an individual's life, but they rarely if ever exercise such power. He gives many instances of such relation one such example is that of a wife of an occasionally violent husband, in such a case the wife is in fear and lives in the mercy of the husband's violent nature, though it may not be there. The state can also be arbitrary in its actions, and such the individual or group may lose discursive control, even though apparently no interference is displayed. To counter this the ideal that Pettit proposes is that of non-domination. This ideal adds one more aspect to the ideal of non-interference, that is, "any exposure to a power of arbitrary interference, whether or not that power is exercised." (Pettit 2001, 139) Thus, a state where the political ideal of freedom is non-domination shall function in such a way that it keeps its citizens free from any fear of arbitrary actions and thus establish discursive control. Pettit points out that this ideal is

constitutionally and sociologically rich and further this ideal take into consideration an environment for discursive control, thus making it *more enriched*. Pettit after establishing the ideal of non-domination as politically acceptable ideal of freedom. Pettit discusses democratic principles and freedom, wherein he pitches for a republican political philosophy. A republican state shall endorse the ideal of non-domination as political freedom. There are two dimensions that a republican state needs to avoid and curb. Firstly, imperium or arbitrary power of the state or public and secondly, dominium which is the private power that certain sections, individuals, or collectives, enjoy at the expense of others. Pettit tries to point out that democracy, though imperfect holds the key to the republican state, and it is here that ideal of non-domination combined with discursive control shall help us sort out the imperfections. And thus, the state must be forced to take into consideration certain interests of the people, which is termed by Pettit as the contestatory aspect a democratic state needs in addition to the electoral aspect. I have further discussed Habermas's conception of state, where he focuses on combining the ideas of liberal democracy and civic republicanism. He has rejected certain aspects of both the ideas. Habermas's conception of democracy focuses on the fact that it should be embedded in civil society, only then formal political institutions shall be able to prove decisions, policies and laws that are rational and acceptable. Thus, civil society, with its focus on deliberation, communication and discourse, must be protected; and Habermas locates *popular sovereignty* as residing in *subjectless* forms of communication and discourse.

The fifth chapter *Public Reason and Empowerment* is divided into two parts, in the first part I have discussed Public Reason and the second part is dedicated to the concept of Empowerment. Quong (2022) has pointed out that public reason "requires that the moral or political rules that regulate our common life be, in some sense,

justifiable or acceptable to all those persons over whom the rules purport to have authority.” Drydyk (2020, 660) observes that “the idea of public reason arguably proposes to hold the state and what it does accountable, namely to the strongest arguments.” Quong mentions that Hobbes, Kant, Rousseau and contemporary works of Rawls, Habermas and Gaus have shaped the concept of public reason. I have following Quong tried to understand Rawls understanding of the scope, constituency and content of public reason. Further, objections towards Rawls interpretation of public reason have also been discussed. One of the main critiques of Rawls’ approach is Habermas. Next, I have discussed Drydyk’s analysis of public reason. Drydyk mentions Kant, Habermas and Rawls in his brief historical account of public reason. But the main concern for Drydyk, which is also essential to my dissertation, is the *opening of public reason to unrestricted participation by all, on a wider range of questions*, by considering the capability approach. In the following section I have discussed the capability approach of Sen and Nussbaum, which is essential for the rest of the chapter. Drydyk argues for *capability as midwife to public reason*, as he points out that capability concept of the idea of equal consideration for all persons, simplify the work of public reasoning. Nussbaum has termed this concept as *equal human dignity*, while Sen points this in terms of *open impartiality*. Drydyk has provided a detailed analysis of public reason, by drawing aspects of how Sen differs from Rawls, how Sen’s and Nussbaum’s formulations are different: following Crocker (2008). Drydyk argues that it can be assumed that the advocates of the capability approach hold that *one of public reason’s procedural norms is to give equal consideration to all persons*. He further discusses an important dimension that is the capability approach itself subject to public reason. He says that the *answer is an ironic ‘Yes.’* The role played by public reason in democratic practice is also analyses vis-à-vis capability approach, has been discussed following

Drydyk. Moving on to the next part Empowerment as a concept, holds significance in this thesis, bases itself on the ideas of agency, deliberation and public reason. I have mainly based my discussion of empowerment on Drydyk and Riddle. Riddle begins her analysis of empowerment by quoting Collins (1990, 34): “self-definition is the key to individual and group empowerment”, further pointing out that this self-definition “*depends upon participation.*” Riddle has looked into the works of Sen, Goulet, Deneulin, Crocker, Drydyk, Kabeer and Khader in her detailed analysis of empowerment and participatory development. To understand empowerment, I have following Riddle, discussed the Khader’s and Kabeer’s analysis on empowerment, before a detailed understanding of Drydyk. Riddle points out that Kabeer conceives empowerment as a process of change, comprising of resource and agency which comprises achievement. Kabeer is of the opinion that main focus should be on the inequalities in people’s ability to choose, rather than the differences in choices. Khader on the other hand, observes Riddle, relates empowerment, beyond having choices, to flourishing. Riddle finds Khader’s conceptualization comparable to Nussbaum’s approach. Further, Riddle discusses Drydyk’s (2013) approach to empowerment. She observes that Drydyk is in agreement with Khader and Kabeer in *conceiving empowerment as a process of change, rather than a state to be attained.* I have looked further in detail the arguments put forward by Drydyk as he connects empowerment, agency and power. Drydyk begins his discussion by pointing out that agency refers “either to a given person’s degree of involvement in a course of action or to the scope of actions that a person could be involved in bringing about”; thus, differing from empowerment which refers to *a process of change.* But Drydyk further analyses the concept of agency following Sen’s capability approach, where agency refers to *a person’s scope for achieving that person’s valued goals.* There is a defect in the way

agency is conceptualized, as it underemphasizes the aspect of active decision making. Drydyk focuses on Crocker's reconstruction of Sen's *ideal of agency*, where the core focus is on *ownership* of one's actions. Further, Drydyk (2013, 154) argues in detail that firstly, "empowerment is concerned with agency, but not reducible to it" and secondly, "empowerment cannot be defined by considerations of power alone", but development research and policy that deal with *empowerment* express concerns about power. Drydyk's analysis of power by discussing the relational dimensions of empowerment is relevant way to understand the complexity of power and empowerment.

The sixth and concluding chapter is *Participatory Development and Ethics*. In the first section I have discussed participatory development and empowerment. In the second part, which is the concluding section of my thesis, I have introduced the concept of agency centric empowerment and argued in favour of considering it as norm with regard to development ethics. In the first section I have followed Riddle (2019) and Crocker (2008) in understanding participatory development. Both Riddle and Crocker turn their focus on Development Ethics, through its principal proponent Denis Goulet. Goulet is of the opinion that subjects of development *can* exert agency, and that in order for development to be ethical, they *should*; this is what *authentic participation* should stand for. Crocker focuses on agency-oriented development and deliberative participation in local development. I have also considered Deneulin's approach towards participation, in which power *must* be taken into account. Further Riddle argues in favour of linking empowerment to participatory development; Drydyk's relational approach towards empowerment should be applied to participatory development too. Jethro Pettit (2012) has also provided insight into bridging the gap between understanding and practice of the concepts: empowerment and participation. He

provides three points for discussion regarding nature of power, interpretation of empowerment and in certain cases analytical understanding is overridden by selfish motives. Pettit tries to give responses to each of these issues and I have incorporated them in my discussion. Pettit seems to agree with Kabeer approach towards empowerment that we discussed earlier, pointing out that agency cannot be strengthened alone, without attention to *the normative conditions within which choice is exercised*. Pettit also opines that meaning of *agency needs to be stretched*, so that individual and groups can develop capacities to address norms and conditions that determine their choices. We have discussed earlier that this is exactly what Sen's approach to agency does. Lastly, Pettit observes that empowerment can happen only if existing relations of power can be changed, by imagining a different world.

In the next section, I have drawn a conclusion to my thesis. I have supplemented Drydyk's concept of agency for empowerment with Pettit's conception of agency as discursive control to form a concept that can be termed as *agency centric empowerment*. This concept elucidates the understanding of the concept of empowerment. By bringing into the forefront Pettit's idea of discursive freedom we see that agency centric empowerment can explain concern with well-being in coordination with Sen's agency, as some act done beyond well-being can be argued for by looking into the consistent legacy that an agent with discursive control possesses. Further, *agency centric empowerment* enables participatory development and is in sync with the ideal of deliberative democracy, that we discussed following Habermas' discourse ethics, since discursive control provides us with integrated collectives who collectivize reason. The next issue that is discussed is the question of assigning normativity to agency centric empowerment. Here I firstly consider that idea that we can look into agency as a normative ideal, as put forward by Korsgaard who argues for a normative psychic unity

that creates the identity of the self. I have then argued that agency centric empowerment too can be considered as a norm following Pettit's conceptualization of norm as an attitude-based derivate, which depends upon the assumptions of interaction, publicity, perception, sanction and motivation. I have also argued, with the help of an illustration of theories of punishment that ethical concepts have always in them a concern with regard to empowerment. My next concern is at arriving at the normative concept, here I have taken recourse to Habermas's *Discourse Ethics* and explained that it can be understood in this respect. Now we need to understand the nature of the state where agency centric empowerment can function as a norm. In doing so, I have tried to coordinate Pettit's and Habermas's formulations with regard to the state and argued in favour of a state where non-domination holds the key. The next question that follows: Can we locate the normative aspect of *agency centric empowerment* with respect to development ethics? Yes, I answer, taking into consideration Goulet's (2006, 49) opinion that, "what development is all about is building a world as it ought to be".

In this thesis I have navigated through aspects of individual agency, collective agency, deliberation, public reason, state, empowerment and development ethics to argue that *agency centric empowerment* as a normative benchmark shall bring forth meaningful discourse in the area of development ethics and political philosophy.

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