

Body as an Intrinsic Value of Communication

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Abstract

The Syrian Civil War has profoundly impacted many people, particularly those who have been displaced. Women, often rendered invisible, find that their voices are inadequately recognized as relevant in various contexts. However, women in the Middle East have transformed their bodies into intrinsic values to communicate with the external world. This paper analytically investigates why women's bodies hold intrinsic value in expressing the concept of autonomy. I argue that republican political philosophy has a notable shortcoming in acknowledging the body as an interactive sphere of autonomy. On one hand, republican political philosophy recognizes the significance of the body; on the other hand, it deprioritizes the value of bodily integrity in favor of non-domination. This challenge can be addressed by prioritizing the body to justify autonomy. The views discussed include those of Forst, Pettit, and Pallikkathayil. The "Freedom Portrait" serves as a case study to emphasize the importance of prioritizing the body in this justification. In contrast to Forst's conception of republican autonomy, I aim to highlight Pallikkathayil's strongest objections to the Kantian attachment to bodily rights, which she refers to as the "assurance" and "adjudication" problems. A key insight from this analysis is that as long as there is any constraint on the value of bodily integrity in favor of non-domination, the republican account of autonomy is unconvincing. This insight is crucial for revealing specific types of alternative voices as performative action not only as a dimension of politics but also art.

Keywords: Body, Freedom, Autonomy, Republicanism, Integrity

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1. Introduction

The issue of the body has been explored throughout the history of philosophy in various aspects. There are numerous discussions and inspiring contributions regarding the concept of the body in relation to the external world, particularly within the Anglo-Saxon philosophical tradition. To connect this to the idea of bodily integrity, it is essential to briefly introduce the concept of the body. Hume notes, "Nothing is more usual than to apply to external bodies every internal sensation that they occasion" (1777: 78). Similarly, Locke posits that the mind and body are crucial categories. He asserts, "The mind-body problem is not a genuine problem that we are intellectually obliged to resolve, but one created by us, and often misidentified as a problem that we can and should solve" (1998, p. 113, referenced from Kim, 2019). J.S. Mill expands this discussion in his work "On Liberty," stating, "In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute over himself, over his own body and mind; the individual is sovereign" (Mill, 1859, p. 4). Mill's emphasis on individual independence is tied to the concept of freedom and autonomy, which is significant for constructing liberal rights grounded in a democratic society.

2. On Freedom and Republican Political Philosophy

The relationship between liberal conceptions of freedom and the body's autonomy, as well as the republican conception of freedom concerning civil rights, is examined from different perspectives. One philosopher contributing to the republican ideas of freedom, autonomy, and interference is Pettit (2012). Pettit conceptualizes the problems of legitimacy, justice, and the free will of citizens through a neo-republican lens of non-domination. According to Pettit: "The slaves may not be interfered with, but on the conception of freedom as non-domination, they lack freedom. They are not their own men or women. The second implication distinguishing rival conceptions of freedom pertains to the possibility of interference without domination" (Pettit, 2012, p. 73). ****Interpretation:**** Non-domination is the primary condition for freedom, and this form of freedom can exist independently of interference. Furthermore, freedom as non-domination must operate without any interdependent restrictions.

Suppose person X is employed by person Y and works as a laborer on Y's farm. However, person X is not compensated for the work they perform. Despite this, person X fulfills their responsibilities. In this situation, it is challenging to define the notion of interference; nonetheless, X's experience suggests that no explicit interference occurs. However, this does not imply that there is no domination. According to Pettit's theory, as person X is considered to be working as a slave, the concept of freedom is constrained by the idea of (non)domination. Pettit's arguments are significant for understanding individuals' self-construction, as he states, "they are not their own men or women." Additionally, his perspective is crucial in terms of the social ontology of freedom. According to Forst, "for Pettit, republicanism is fundamentally a theory of legitimate government based on a specific notion of freedom as 'non-domination,' which signifies the social status of being relatively insulated from arbitrary interference by others and of having a sense of security and standing among them" (Forst, 2017, p.160, referencing Pettit, 2017). From this viewpoint, "a slave is an extreme example of a dominated human being who is unable to enact any law" (ibid., 2017, p.160). Later, I will connect and elaborate on Pettit's relevant perspective in relation to the case of the Yazidi woman. The second perspective is the first type of Kantian republican approach to the concepts of the body and freedom, which considers freedom as self-determination. According to Forst, "the dignity of a free person can never be understood

merely in terms of the ‘enjoyment’ of freedom or specific liberties; it is always also a matter of the freedom to legislate for oneself, the freedom of normative self-determination” (Forst, 2017, p.157). Moreover, through the notion of freedom, “the laws generated through it do not only protect freedom—they also express freedom” (Forst, 2017, p.158). Based on Forst’s relevant views, freedom embodies two main aspects. First, it relates to self-determination, wherein a person is regarded as an autonomous moral and political being. Second, it involves a person’s role as a lawmaker, reflecting their authority over themselves and their own decisions. According to the first type of Kantian republican philosophy, the concept of freedom pertains to self-determination, through which the autonomous decision-making process serves as an expression of human freedom. In other words, no law can be justified or protect a person’s freedom unless it is mutually justifiable to those whom it binds.

3. Bodily Integrity and Freedom

Returning to the question of bodily integrity in relation to freedom, Herring and Wall offer valuable insights. In their paper titled "Nature and Significance of the Right to Bodily Integrity," they define bodily integrity as "the right not to have your body touched or interfered with without your consent" (Herring & Wall, 2017, p. 568). This definition underscores the importance of autonomy and consent regarding each individual’s body. Based on this perspective, any form of violence, torture, or physical interference with a person's body is prohibited. The right to one’s body being whole and intact is fundamentally about making decisions regarding one’s own body and self-determination—that is, "the right to be free from physical interference" (Feldman, 2002, p. 241). What do I mean by suggesting that the idea of bodily integrity serves as a credible justification for freedom? The concept of bodily integrity encompasses two main meanings in the context of this paper, both related to the notion of self-ownership. Fabre notes that "in the prevailing liberal ethos, if there is one thing that is beyond the reach of others, it is our body in particular and our person in general" (Fabre, 2006, p. 1). The first meaning of bodily integrity aligns with Fabre's statement and implies the dignified treatment of a person’s integrity. The second meaning relates to the epistemic validity of bodily integrity, which involves the notion of consent. A dignified treatment of a person’s integrity necessitates viable social and moral conditions where individuals can live without the threat of slavery, torture, or violence. In other words, any form of torture, violence, or abuse directed at a person's dignity also violates their bodily integrity. This first meaning is particularly relevant when considering the treatment of marginalized individuals by radical groups. The term "invisible people" can encompass those outside the reasoning practices, motivations, and ideological preferences of such groups. For instance, the treatment of Yazidi women by ISIS exemplifies a blatant disregard for human dignity. When women are captured and subjected to abuse and violence by such radical groups, their bodily integrity is often compromised. Although such extreme cases put the concept of bodily integrity at risk, this does not imply that it is entirely ineffective in these contexts. Now, let me explain the second meaning of bodily integrity. Some may contest the idea of bodily integrity based on certain idealized epistemological reasons and motivations. The epistemic validity of the claim to bodily integrity raises questions, particularly since, in some belief systems, adherents may engage in bodily torture during specific rituals or religious practices. For example, some members of the Caferi sect of Islam may inflict harm on themselves on sacred days for the sake of their divine beliefs, claiming they do not feel pain during these acts. This consent-based interpretation of bodily integrity is not critically examined in my paper, as it appears to involve free will. However, the epistemic validity of the claim regarding bodily integrity doesn't end there.

To broaden the discussion about bodily integrity, I differentiate between Palikkathayil's objections to Kantian bodily treatment, which she refers to as "assurance" and "adjudication" problems. Palikkathayil poses the question: How can respecting your rights, in the absence of assurance, allow you to violate mine? (Palikkathayil, 2017, p. 7). She argues that the problem of assurance is not directly linked to the idea of respect but rather to the incompleteness of our rights (ibid., 2017, p. 7). Furthermore, she emphasizes the significance of the assurance problem as it relates to freedom, which is crucial for understanding interference (Palikkathayil, 2017, pp. 7-8). According to Palikkathayil, there are different ways to interpret the relationship between interference, assurance, and the concept of freedom. She explains this with two scenarios: "Suppose that you have determinate bodily rights but do not have assurance. (R1) In one way, the link between your bodily rights and your freedom is broken here, similar to the case of property rights. (R2) However, in another sense, your bodily rights continue to play a role in enabling your freedom by satisfying its preconditions." (Palikkathayil, 2017, p. 8). We can refer to these two interpretations as R1 and R2. In my interpretation, R1 aligns with the Kantian republican tradition of freedom as a token group, which relates to the theories proposed by Forst and Pettit. In contrast, R2 is connected to Palikkathayil's understanding of freedom concerning bodily rights. This second interpretation is particularly compelling as it more substantively justifies the idea of bodily rights in relation to freedom. Thus, we arrive at three justificatory accounts of freedom concerning bodily rights: 1. Pettit's view of bodily rights as non-domination for freedom. 2. Forst's view of bodily rights as self-determination for freedom. 3. Palikkathayil's view of bodily rights as a precondition for freedom. This paper focuses on the example of a Yazidi woman fleeing areas occupied by ISIS in 2015, which serves as a crucial case study. According to photographer Shahine, who documented the moment of Yazidi women escaping ISIS and reaching territory controlled by Kurdish forces, this moment is captured as a "freedom portrait." It illustrates "a woman shedding her black garments after safely arriving in Kurdish-controlled areas" in Gire Spi in Rojava, Syria.



Figure 1: Freedom Portrait. "Incredible moment elated Syrian women rip off strict Islamic robes and headscarves after escaping religious persecution under ISIS." by Jenny Stanton for MailOnline 6 June, 2015.

Was this the moment of freedom? For instance, the slave women can still be politically non-autonomous, even in the absence of interference. In this context, based on Forst's claim, it seems that freedom of normative self-determination is not a sufficient idea to address the case of the Yazidi woman, particularly since the notion of self-determination lacks normative justification when divorced from the principle of bodily integrity. Secondly, Pettit's claim appears conditionally justifiable in this context. The concept of freedom as non-domination—

rather than mere interference—should be broadened to incorporate the original position of bodily integrity. The normative dependence of freedom on the idea of non-domination should include bodily integrity as a fundamental requirement for freedom. The concept of Yazidi women being "their own" signifies their expression of actual voices, emphasizing these women's voices by affirming their bodily integrity in relation to their circumstances. Herring and Wall state that "bodily integrity is non-reducible to the principle of autonomy. Bodily integrity relates to the integration of the self and the rest of the objective world" (2017:566). Similarly, Pallikkathayil notes that "bodily rights continue to play a role in enabling you to be free."

4. Concluding Remarks

The above points two main purposes. First, it is about demonstrating why bodily integrity is the primary condition for autonomy. Second, to explain why a woman's body has a performative dimension that reveals autonomy. These aims overlap, illustrating how a woman's body serves as a space where the self comes into being through alternative interactions and expressions of voice. This remains an open question for now. Bodily rights are an essential right for human beings; they do not only represent a natural right that necessitates freedom but also a political right aimed at fulfilling human desires and capacities. Furthermore, bodily rights often involve the enjoyment of being one's "own master" over one's body in a relevant context, which can also be interpreted as "positive liberty," or freedom to act (Berlin, 1969, p. 8). The "Freedom Portrait" explores deep dimensions concerning the idea of the body and a woman's interaction with the external world, raising the question of whether these are their actual voices. It also invites normative justifications of rights in terms of the actual voices of marginalized individuals. This normative dimension, highlighting women's voices, signifies the question, "Am I an object or a subject?" (cited in Richard's essay, *The Curator-Writer*) in a performative sense. The performative artist Yayoi Kusama illustrates the significance of the physicality of art and its relation to mirroring the self-portraits of women and genders. In examining the performative aspects present in both the case of the Yazidi woman and Kusama's art, I believe we can draw connections between politics, philosophy, and art.

Note

This topic is explored in detail in the paper "Why Does the Idea of Bodily Integrity Matter?" (Gülal, 2022). Although some sections of this paper have been reformulated from previous work, the primary focus is on bodily integrity in relation to women's voices through this paper.

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