Revising the 'independent variable problem'--
Individual autonomy as normative core of democratic welfare statehood

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Abstract: Welfare state change is mostly analysed in terms of reduction of benefits or social expenditure and outcomes are framed as 'retrenchment', 'restructuring' or 'liberalisation' of the welfare state. Research addresses the logic of social policy provision by introducing concepts like 'de-familiarisation, 'new social risks' or 'dualisation' and point out the 'erosion' of the European social security systems. As adequate as these diagnoses might appear, they cover but a part of the ongoing changes, because the tool box of the 'redistributive paradigm', to which these analyses implicitly or explicitly refer, is limited in its scope. As the 'moral economy debate' or recognition theory has pointed out, social policies are more than a mechanism of income distribution, they rather shape the citizen's life courses and expectations. I am claiming in my paper that the Welfare State's main task is to enhance its citizens' individual autonomy which shall be defined as the individual's ability to develop a unique and stable social identity, to engage in non-antagonistic reciprocal relationships with their co-citizens and to productively define his or her place and role within a given social and political context. I therefore suggest to "bring the autonomous citizen back in" to the debate about the political objectives of welfare state reforms which would allow us to gain more profound insights and a more adequate representation of the outcomes of social policy reforms. By suggesting an elaborated concept of individual autonomy as an alternative approach to the analysis of welfare state change, I readdress the relationship between democracy and welfare which is relevant in western industrialised countries as well as in other regions of the world.

I. Introduction

How can we analyse the impact of present welfare state change on the citizens' well-being? This is the question I suggest to discuss in this article, as I think there is a need to reconceptualise the 'dependant variable' of welfare state change. The predominating categories that dominate the present academic debates, are social expenditure or 'social rights' in terms of the material well-being of the citizens as well as their institutional form. Accordingly, governments' responses are conceived as strategies of retrenchment, recalibration or restructuring of our social security systems focusing on the *extent* of social provision (Ferrera/ Rhodes 2001; Ferrera 2008: 93f; Häusermann/ Palier 2008). Undoubtedly, these findings are rich and have provided a comprehensive knowledge about the distributive dimension of Welfare States and its development. But I think that these

categories underestimate the complexity of the continued change and do not capture the qualitative dimension of welfare state change.

In this article I argue, that the normative or democratic dimension of welfare statehood is equally important, if we agree that the Welfare State's crisis is more than a crisis of coverage but also a crisis of legitimacy and participation (Beland/ Hansen 2000). Consequently we need, beside material well-being a more comprehensive and adequate category in order to analyse the effect of the changes to our systems of social security on an individual level. Having defined the welfare state as a set of normatively derived mechanisms establishing social norms and ruling the mutual recognition and social positioning of the citizens in society, contributions to the 'moral economy' debate (Mau 2004) or recognition theory (Nullmeier 2000), may serve as a good alternative starting point. This rather sociological or cultural perspective represents a major key to our understanding of how legitimacy is produced in a democratic Welfare state. What would then be appropriate categories for measuring welfare state outcome?

I am claiming that the concept of individual autonomy, if reconceptualised in normative *and* analytical terms can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of **outcomes** of social policy reforms. Instead of focusing on income alone, the concept of individual **autonomy** as main dependant variable would allow us to consider both, material and non-material aspects of individual well-being. Unlike current concepts of 'inclusion' or 'exclusion' the concept of individual autonomy offers a relational approach that considers individuals as socially bound and distinguish three interrelated dimensions of individual autonomy: The respect of a citizen's social identity within a given social, historical and cultural context, the patterns of interaction with co-citizens as well as the citizen's more or less active relationships with the welfare state as the main public institution (see for a related argument Goul Andersen 2005). At the best, social policy reforms support a high level of the citizens' self-confidence and self-awareness, enhance respectful social relations and strengthen a solid and active commitment and trust into public institutions, as the implicit objectives of public social policy. The impact of social policy reforms would then be assessed in terms of the increase or reduction of individual autonomy of the citizens.

This article proceeds in three steps. The first section scrutinizes the current categories of analysis and argues for reconsidering the dependant variable of welfare state change. The second section comprises the analytical definition of the concept of individual autonomy. In the last section I will draw some general conclusions for the (re)design of social policies which take the citizens' autonomy into account.

II. Social policy: means of need satisfaction or context for developing life perspectives?

The social insurance benefit regulation and the citizens' material well-being have been the most current dependant variables of analyses of the output and outcome of social policy reforms. Other, especially feminist authors have shown earlier, that sticking to these categories would unnecessarily restrict our analytical perspective and leave a major dimension of welfare state change uncovered. The following arguments will substantiate the need to develop a more appropriate and fundamental approach to take account of the basic normative objective of welfare policies and to reformulate the 'dependant variable' of welfare state change in terms of enhancement or reduction of individual autonomy.

De-commodifiation: just a part of the story

Since the publication of Gösta Esping-Andersens *Three worlds* (1990) the concept of de-commodication represents the reference category for identifying or describing the outcome of welfare state change in comparative perspective. Since then, the performance of welfare regimes is measured and compared according to the degree of how employees are protected from social risks in periods of non-employment (or, "de-commodified") in terms of unemployment, pension and health care insurance coverage. The degree of universality or selectivity allowed to distinguish 'Beveridge Regimes', displaying a universal mode of welfare provision from Bismarckian Regimes' that offer selective status-related social security. The nature of welfare states, in this perspective was conceived as the regulatory mode of the state-market relationship; and the nexus between paid employment and social protection represented the constitutive core of welfare statehood. This work was influential, because it contributed to surmount the too narrow focus on social expenditure and spending and added a qualitative aspect to the analysis of social security provision. Since then, analysing social security schemes in terms of social rights, their effectiveness (coverage) and generosity (level of benefits) has become a common research perspective (Scruggs/ Allan 2006; Scruggs 2007).

An important critique to the redistributive perspective (that was just provoked by Esping-Andersen's work) consisted in the assessment that a major part of welfare provision was neither provided by the state nor the market but by the 'private' sphere of the family (Jenson 1986; Lewis 1992; O'Connor 1993; Orloff 1993; O'Connor 1996). Feminist research demonstrated very thoroughly, that social security schemes were based on the implicit assumption, that private care work decisively complemented public provision without being identified as a critical and constitutive source of welfare. And, introducing the term of the "male bread-winner-model" research further identified institutional regulations, such as employment-centered entitlements or income tax-systems that established and upheld this

gendered labour division (Lewis 1992). It became widely acknowledged that welfare regimes were structured such that women and men's benefits were very different in scope and extent. The main issue of this early debate was, to claim women's equal access to paid work as the main source of emancipation (Orloff 1993).

The need to provide public care services was easily integrated into the basic model, as there was tailwind from the European Employment strategy identifying a high level of employment as one major political objective (Jenson 2008). Since the end of the nineties, mainstream academia and social policy makers identified women's access to the labour market as the major challenge to national post-industrial social policy making (Esping-Andersen 1999). Within this process of academic awareness raising, the concept of de-familisation, which actually addressed the question of (in-)dependence within family care relationships was transferred to the mainstream discourse. It was, however, conceptually reduced to the question of economic (in-)dependance of carers and ignored the social dimension of emotional and power relationships. Scholars concerned by the incomplete transfer of the concept, have argued that the social character of care-giving would inhibit an easy solution. Consequently, economic de-familisation was not necessarily coupled with social and emotional de-familisation as the responsibility was attributed to women by cultural and normative social expectations (Lewis/ Guillari 2004; Leitner/ Lessenich 2007).[1]

The feminist critique to the distributive perspective illustrates the need to account for social diversity and to question the pretended universality of welfare provision in the light of differences of social identities. Especially the debate on the concept of de-familisation demonstrates, that different forms and degrees of (in-) dependence exist which obviously require a more differentiated policy approach.

Social risk coverage: how to deal with structural changes?

The second major aspect in comparative welfare state research is the Welfare state's lack of response to social modernisation and labour market change. In fact, the selectivity of welfare

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[1] Even if the social de-familisation would be supported, e.g. by intra-family sharing of care work, this would not automatically result in economic independence by paid employment, as there is no guarantee for women to be re-integrated even more in times of tight labour market, possibly, labour income could be insufficient for making ends meet or inflexible working hours could be a barrier for accepting a job. On the other hand, social familisation would persist, if care responsibilities remain attributed to women albeit the public provision of care (Leitner/ Lessenich 2007: 255).

provision, which, at least in social insurance states, is more or less strictly connected with paid employment (and insurance contribution), has become a predominant subject in welfare state research. But what kinds of concepts have been suggested in order to capture origins and remedies of these dysfunctions? Scholars in social policy have demonstrated, that a growing share of working citizens, such as women, part-timers, marginal workers or migrants are excluded from full social rights (Lister/Williams et al. 2007). Policy responses to these dysfunctions would consist in 'new social policies' that would be different by their nature (Bonoli 2005). According to the 'old' logic of social risk coverage, this phenomenon has however been denominated as 'new social risks' (Taylor-Gooby 2004; Bonoli 2005). This debate underlines the fact that social modernisation and the growing diversity of life courses have been recognised as serious challenges to our welfare systems.

The basic analytical and political categories of social risk or employment centeredness as major modes of allocation are not conceptually (nor politically) questioned in this perspective, although it is exactly this mechanism of bureaucratically defined and incidence-related security provision which exacerbates rather than attenuates the selectivity of social security schemes. There are three objections to the continued use of the concept of risk as a category of reference for social policy analysis, even in its modernised version. *First*, benefit reception is not anymore incidentally distributed and accidentally necessary, but the usage of benefits has become structural, in some times predictable and foreseeable in many cases (in times of rising unemployment; parenthood; old age). It has, during the 'golden age' of welfare state expansion, become a (latent) pillar in the citizens' life planning rather than a parsimonious instrument of risk coverage. At least in Western Europe, social security schemes have formed our cultural and historical understanding of justice and security (Kaufmann 1973; Kaufmann 2003). Social security provision including social services represents thus more than the ad hoc satisfaction of temporary material needs as the 'risk perspective' suggests. It has rather become a constitutive element in our all-day life and culture and a reliable framework condition for the development of life perspectives and employment careers (Lessenich 2008). At least in Social Insurance States the main objective is to secure an average standard of living and level of qualification. Reconciliation policies, further education or high quality health care provision or labour market programmes are designed to respond to these more comprehensive and *latent* needs – providing secure life perspectives (Kaufmann 2003). *Secondly*, social modernisation and economic globalisation have enhanced and diversified our options for employment careers, private consumption and life courses in general. These mega-trends potentially enable citizens to make arbitrary and conscious decisions in many fields of their lives and change their way of life as a whole (including regional mobility). At the same time labour market changes have led to a de-standardisation of employment careers and reduced the reliability of paid

employment as main source of an independent living. Accordingly, forms of social insecurity – and social needs - have become more heterogeneous. On the one hand, the general need for services and public infrastructure has increased and changed the demand for social security provision in qualitative terms. On the other hand, due to growing insecurity in the labour market (mass unemployment, increase of precarious work etc.), the capacity for acquiring and maintaining professional qualification and for developing a decent (average) standard of living has decreased for a large share of citizens. The expectations towards the social state have changed accordingly and have become much more heterogeneous – maybe even polarised - than in the founding stage of our welfare states. As a result, the concept of risk does, thirdly, not reflect anymore the factual patterns of social justice (for a diagnosis of a 'triple' crises see Beland/ Hansen 2000). In its origin, the Bismarckian model was based on the liberal political project to cover the mere 'risks' of workers – first of all industrial injury – in order to pacify working class, not to promote equality or material well-being (Alber 1982). Later, with the introduction of the social insurances or, more precisely, since the reinstitutionalisation of the social insurance schemes after World War II, the legitimacy of the insurance system then rooted in the equity principle (Nullmeier/ Vobruba 1994). But, the introduction of exception clauses and derived entitlements, "perforated" the equity principle and the employment centeredness of social security provision. In fact those basic principles never existed in their pure form but, as a result of political dispute, exception clauses have always complemented the basic rules. Existing schemes represented since the beginning a specific social contract rather than the realisation of abstract, ideal type models (ibid.). The introduction and the present expansion of social services contribute to putting the equity principle in perspective as they emphasize the more egalitarian aspects of allocation (for these basic terms cf. Schmid 1994). The logic of allocation of social provision has, at least in Germany, always been a mixture of different principles, but the main reference had become the maintenance of the social status of the middle class. This historically grown principle has been questioned by the emergence of the activation paradigm which prioritises a quick labour market re-integration instead of optimising the match between expectations and capacities of labour supply and demand (Bothfeld/Sesselmeier et al. 2009). Both, the most vulnerable citizens (low income workers, low qualified workers, new entrants on the labour market) but also middle class citizens are confronted nowadays with a higher level of insecurity. Consequently, the factual dividing line is not between new and old social risks but between groups of citizens with good and bad chances to gain their own living (Davidsson/ Naczyk 2009). Political tensions (in Bismarckian welfare states) exactly arise from the fact that the implicit social contract on the social protection as reward for training investments and employment efforts, grown in the 'golden age' of the Welfare state is now being questioned.

Analytical concepts like decommodification, defamilisation and risk coverage obviously reflect the old Welfare State's logic and principles which have become inadequate. These concepts are not appropriate to take account of the gendered effects of social security schemes, the changes of the nature of social needs and demands, the increasing social diversity and the erosion of legitimacy of our social security systems. Taking account of these developments, the concept of individual autonomy I will develop in the following section might serve as both, as an analytical tool as well as a normative reference for social policy-making.

III. Three dimensions of individual autonomy

The concept of individual autonomy, if defined properly, might be a more comprehensive and adequate category, as it combines both, the provision of material and immaterial goods. As a relational concept it allows us to take account of growing social diversity and avoid ascriptions of individual needs and capacities. We have, however, to avoid a too simplistic definition that conceive individual autonomy as the individual's capacity for (self-directed, independent) action (see for a similar critique Ullrich 2004). In contrast to this widespread view I claim that individual autonomy comprehends some ontological ideas about identity, reciprocity and capacity of solidarity.

The dimension of affiliation

In social policy the citizens' (economic) independence is often considered as one of the main objectives and the prerequisite for autonomous action. As the discussion of the concept of familisation has demonstrated, economic independence is not necessarily equal to social independence, as the concept of independence often ignores that perceived social constraints or opportunity are connected to individual experience and identity.

Socialisation theory, especially the concept of 'social bonds' clarifies the relationship between the individual and society (Geulen 1977; Geulen 1999; Leu/ Krappmann 1999). According to this theories, socialisation processes take place within the framework of *constant* interaction between the individual and their social, i.e. concrete material, cultural and social environment. These interactions do not merely constrain the subject, but they represent a constitutive condition of becoming a subject: "We are subjects not although, but because we have been socialised and our state of being a subject is realised particularly through our social action." (Geulen 1999: 37). For this reason, a personality model that from the outset considers the personality components created through socialisation to be heteronomous and assumes that an original subject existed that was not first created through socialisation (ibid. 41) is to be rejected. Consequently, the impact of social (and sometimes institutionally transmitted) norms and values already unfold during the genesis of the subject.

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Instead of considering individuals to be 'independent' in the sense of being free from the influences of their environment and able develop their own personal options for action I argue that we should start from the idea of basic 'affiliation', that takes account of social bonds without denying the possibility of self-determination. In this perspective, self-determination – or autonomy – arises from three mechanisms.

Firstly, the processes involved in developing a social identity do not produce the same result for each individual. Even if they are not always aware of it, individuals are 'vulnerable', i.e. mortal and imperfect, and must live with this experience. Consequently different horizons of (historic) experience systematically apply to men and women – but also for other social groups (members of a specific race or class) in particular and specific ways (Anderson 2003).[2] Membership of a community is therefore not simply a matter of course but also established through acts of inclusion that define the mechanisms and norms of affiliation (Anderson 2003: 153). The nature and extent of social affiliation are defined through moral principles that elude the individual's direct access because they are produced and reproduced through social interaction and are partly institutionalised through general social and political conditions. A greater or lesser degree of self confidence and self esteem develop accordingly – through positive or negative feedback to the individual's statements or behaviour. As such, self esteem which denotes the individuals' attitude toward herself and her present life situation is the product of biographical processes in a social and cultural context, and not of the distribution of goods (alone). It is not measurable or divisible but it gives rise to the capacity for the conscious development of personality as well as to attitudes of empathy and solidarity towards others – regardless of social differences. *Secondly,* the development of identity occurs in a reciprocal process of identity assimilation and identity accommodation. That means that new social experiences are either "sorted out" and adjusted to the personality or change the identity that confronts them. As such, the development of identity rests on personal experience, which can confirm or negate prior experience. Social policy shapes personal experience in several ways, directly and indirectly and thus may have a far-reaching impact on the well-being of citizens over time. As sociological research has demonstrated, phenomena like poverty or educational

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[2] Above all feminist theorists stress that the concept of identity always bears reference to the social context and therefore must be understood as a relational concept (see the contributions in Mackenzie/ Stoljar 2000).

achievement is a matter of generational experience, such that we have to take account that social policies affect the identity of citizens not only of the present but also future generations. However, the development of identity is not an irreversible process during the course of which the subject's sense of coherency and perception of meaning continually increase. The development of an "authentic" identity with a high degree of "individual aspects" however takes place on the basis of "the experience of one's own identity" (Anderson 2003), which enables the individual to connect social experience with the "mature identity", i.e. to combine it with their personal history.[3] The combination and the way these processes are worked through allows the identity to become a special and unique phenomenon (Leu/ Krappmann 1999: 95). *Third and finally, the* realisation of "independence" is always spatially and temporally limited, i.e. bound to a specific biographic and historic situation. The possibility of realising one's personal objectives is therefore not static and universally available. The individual identity and lifestyle are influenced not only by individual and collective experience but also by historical developments and upheavals. The individual always attempts to create a coherent interpretation of his or her identity, which is constructed through the process of narration. This presumes the individuals' creativity but also a certain measure of social participation and 'reasonable contact to reality' in which personal experience can be reflected within the context of community life (Leu/ Krappmann 1999: 81f.). As every structure of action and identity is created through narration (Benhabib 1995: 12), individuals are by nature unique and contingent.

Ideal practical autonomy is thus created in a dialectic process of attempting to maintain the constant coherence of one's own 'identity narrative' and the acceptance on one's own inadequacies (Anderson 2003: 158). The restoration of coherence is necessary when changes in social conditions – perhaps through social upheaval or the change in individual life situation – are so great that inconsistencies and breaches occur between the perceived self image and the social norm. A constant (incremental) adjustment to altered context conditions is necessary in every individual life. Since the basic assumption of an inherently independent individual must consequently be rejected as unrealistic, it is also impossible to maintain the idea of the condition of complete autonomy (Bielefeldt 1997: 149; Anderson

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[3] The numerous positions of the moral philosophical debate hold different opinions on the question of how individuals generate new knowledge through 'internal reflection' (Christman 2003:4f).

2003: 150). Social affiliation on the contrary, denominates individual autonomy as the 'uniqueness' of an identity.

The dimension of reflexivity

Autonomy is often equated with freedom of action that could only be realised in the status of economic independence. This question is mostly addressed in political debates on poverty, mainly in the US, whilst scholars underline to separate both concepts, argueing that autonomy can be realised (or should be realisable) in situations of social and financial dependence (Ben-Ishai 2006). Consequently, autonomy, according to my next argument must also be thinkable independent of action (to work or search a job). According to the traditional Kantian line of thought, autonomy is created not in the possibility of self-determined action, but in the possibility of understanding one's own situation. Here humanity's capacity for reason is the starting point for autonomous, collectively oriented (moral) action; as self-determined action relies on the basic ability for reflection. Feminist positions stress, that "the revised conception of autonomy is not primarily self-authorship. It is autonomous authorship as regulated by reading and writing our relations with the world. So conceived, autonomy becomes, in practical terms, a regulative and always revisable principle…" (Anderson 2003: 160). Therefore autonomy means the demand to understand and shape one's own life, i.e. one's own identity against the background of the respective social environment and thus refers to the capacity for self reflection and for assessing one's own life design. Achieved autonomy is therefore expressed not primarily in an individual's action; the action only makes it perceptible from outside. This understanding is the much cited necessity for the development of a 'free will' that is the prerequisite for the formulation of a claim to autonomy (s.a. Leu/ Krappmann 1999). It requires that one has the ability to at least partially emancipate oneself from instances of norms in the social environment but also from one's own needs. This places demands on both the individual and on the social environment.

However, understanding one's own situation presupposes not only self reflection but also the ability to perceive the social environment as essentially foreign (but not necessarily antagonistic). Darwall described this as the ability to assume a "second-person" standpoint (Darwall 2006; Darwall 2006). Here personal maturity entails individuals formulating their

needs and demands – from whatever source – not simply as a response to their perceptions but to claim them – reflexively – under consideration of superordinated (at best generally acknowledged) principles (Darwall 2006: 281f.). The formulated claim then can be accepted as justified and freedom of judgement would be attributed to the person who formulates this claim, provided that the person proves capable of recognising foreign principles.[4] This capacity for autonomy, i.e. the capability of self reflection, is by principle attributed to all persons in the Kantian perspective, even if they find themselves in a situation in which they do not exercise their autonomy, like children e.g.. Even when, for their children's wellbeing, parents intervene in their decisions and act against their wishes, this does not automatically reject a later and yet to be attained ability to make autonomous judgements (Darwall 2006). The parental limitation denies the children's *current* ability to make 'rational' decisions in the sense that they cannot reflect on their own needs, refer to general principles or recognise foreign principles as legitimate etc., but it does not principally deny the children's essential capacity to develop the ability to make rational decisions. Rather, the parents act in respect for this potential capacity for judgement according to clear and understandable rules such that children may learn the general principles (Darwall 2006). Accordingly, individuals are acknowledged as politically mature citizens through the assumption that they possess this capacity to make rational decisions which is – in a democratic welfare state - a value in its own right and should have priority over paternalistically prescribed actions.

As such, the critical moment is not the preservation or limitation of claims, but rather the acknowledgement or denial of the claiming person's ability to make rational decisions. As it is difficult to delimit legitimate constraint from structural violence, it is might be helpful to distinguish between authoritative and authoritarian procedures. Authoritarian approaches suppress the realisation of individual autonomy as they basically deny the individual capacity and right for rational decision-making. This oppression can take five forms: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and (physical) violence. Oppression does not only occur under authoritarian rule but also in day-to-day practice in the well-meaning liberal society, "it is systematically reproduced in major economic, political and cultural institutions" (Young 1990: 41). Authoritarian acts place the individual in a position of

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[4] Prerequisite here however is that there are basic principles that the individual shares to the extent that they can make reference to them. These principles can be informal customs (e.g. mutual respect) or institutionalised rights or legal entitlements.

helplessness or deprive her or his core characteristics of their cultural and social identity or require acts of heteronomous behaviour. In contrast, authoritative structures and agents acknowledge the basic value of the (potential) capacity for rational decision-making although they may ground overriding the power of judgement with reference to a superordinate principle or present this as a temporary exception. The principle of rule of law, which provides the individual with understanding and the option to appeal or place a claim, is such a principle. The requirement of respect and recognition – or the absence of oppression - applies to both, the vertical dimension between the state and its citizens as well as the horizontal dimension between the citizens and social actors. The respect for individual autonomy "…is required independently of the actual autonomy displayed by the person who is the object of that respect" (Christman 2003: 12) and does not depend on whether a person in reality currently exercises this autonomy. Consequently, the ability and the need for reflection, to understand and evaluate situations must be accorded also at times of non-action. A social policy strategy that considers the only moment of recognition to be the (active) economic participation and sets this as its sole objective does not do justice to the concept of individual autonomy chosen here.

The dimension of commitment

Form and degree of reciprocity between the citizen and the State have been subjects of welfare state research for a while: reciprocity can vary concerning the preconditions, the timing and the 'currency' of exchanged goods (Goodin 2002) or the historical and cultural setting (Lessenich/ Mau 2005) and will by principle take different shapes in different types of welfare regimes (Mau 2004). I think that the balance between the protection of individual autonomy and the realisation of collective objectives can be approached by ideas from democratic theory that demonstrate, how high-ranking principles that can be drawn on by all persons equally can be generally acceptable. There are two types of explanation which seem stimulating for our discussion here, one symbiotic and the other dialectic.

The more symbiotic form of bond is described by the communitarian perspective, in which the community and a collective principle is accorded fundamental priority over the realisation of individual needs (Forst 1996: 211). These ideas have been influential for social policy making as they have founded arguments for a "responsible" society, according to which the individuals self-responsibility would be an underestimated source of community and social cohesion (Etzioni 1993). Commitment to collective principles and values can be created in different ways, through norms, enforcement or benefits. The optimal and most durable form of commitment and social cooperation is the internalisation of a value system (Etzioni 1975) whose norms are universally acknowledged and which is supported by sanctions or benefits. This implicit consensus can be threatened through the processes of alienation and

inauthenticity resulting from industrialisation, bureaucratisation, rationality and manipulation (cf. Etzioni 1975). These arguments appear highly plausible as values and ideas indeed provide the ideational context of social policy making and have turned out to be stabilisers, constraining the number of (legitimate) policy options (Mahoney 2000).

Critics, however, have raised the question of how social differences can be responded to and how the social bond being based on a determined set of values can be maintained during social change. Concerning social differences it must be considered that for individuals (internalised) moral demands can form dilemmas of very different intensity between their own needs and the social expectations placed on them. For example, men and women are confronted in very different ways with the expectation of providing care for others (Orloff 1993), such that the same behaviour is subject to very different moral judgement. Gender in general is linked to very different moral obligations (Gerson 2002: 8f.). Consequently, the commitment to a general collective principle implies that different forms of coercion demand different degrees of 'adaptive preference formation' of individuals (see Elster 1993). Thus, the communitarian approach may rather impair than buttress individual autonomy as different identities being committed to different value systems which can by principle not be tolerated equally. Secondly, social change and altered social expectations (e.g. in the course of changing gender relations) can hardly be conceptualised, as change – i.e. placing a dominant value in question – is only conceivable as a crisis-ridden degradation of social cohesion. Dealing with periodical and surmountable phenomena of social change is difficult if the commitment to collective principles represents the major mechanism of social integration and if the individual's rationality and capacity for reflection are perceived as secondary. To put it briefly, political philosophers have mainly criticised the communitarian view of considering the collective and the individual as two stable and irreconcilable poles of a dichotomy (Forst 1996: 212).

Those scholars underline that the citizens' commitment to collective values rather rests on a dialectic relationship between the citizen and the society. Following the Kantian perspective they consider the individual's capacity for rationality as a prerequisite for individual autonomy and associate the capacity for self-determination with the ability to develop moral precepts of action. The basic assumption here (Kants 'categorical imperative') is that every human being uses his or her practical reason to reflect on moral exigencies and in doing so develops personal maxims for action. As such, the individual always possesses moral autonomy, which in fact rises from the ability to subject oneself to (objective) moral laws, so that morality is considered a fundamental principle of social organisation (Christman 2006). Basically, it is assumed that individuals will be able to find a balance between their own practical interests and collective objectives. More specifically, in the Kantian perspective individuals are *obligated* to recognise and contribute to a moral order because they are capable of reflection

and possess the power of reason (Bielefeldt 1997: 527). This idea was at the basis of the revolutionary nature of Kantian philosophy at the end of the 18th century, because it endowed the individual with the task of designing and taking the responsibility for the community (Bielefeldt 1997: 534). However, this order is generated through social interaction and not through acknowledgement of metaphysical principles: The precondition for the subjugation of personal interests or needs to collective objectives is individual insight and the individual's capacity and willingness for reciprocity and not the (once off) internalisation of higher-ranking foreign principles. In the case of doubt, judicious individuals would question the validity of collective principles (Forst 2004).

Collective values and objectives - e.g. either to guarantee a life standard like social insurance states do, or to provide a social minimum as liberal welfare states do - result from historical struggles and social negotiations, so that these objectives are legitimate and acknowledged by the majority of a population as part of a 'social contract'. Tensions arise when arguments are either too complicated or not acknowledged as valid. Acknowledgement and legitimacy will suffer, when political arenas and decisions become dominated by experts and result in a technocratic style of policy making, when policy reforms interfere with established normative expectations[5], or when social practises undergo change and tensions arise with the existing institutional and policy regime (Bothfeld 2008). Consequently, the respect for the citizens' autonomy in a democratic Welfare State requires that policy makers care for the fact that citizens may understand and tolerate the substance of policy reforms; authoritative or authoritarian policy styles will ignore this principle. The German labour market reforms represent a balancing act in these terms as a couple of stipulations concerning the basic allowance for unemployed have been considered as unjust and arbitrary measures; some of them have even been assessed as illegal by the Constitutional court. By principle, social policy reforms that limit the individual's freedom of action should be formulated so that clear and comprehensible justification for the (new) demands of reciprocity are presented, which gives the individuals the opportunity to understand and develop an – accepting or rejecting

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[5] Vivien Schmidt has underlined the governments need to legitimize retrenchment reforms by discursive coordination or communication (Schmidt 2000). There are however limits to the communication when normative tensions are too important to be resolved by strategic discourse. It is, however, an interesting empirical question, to what extent individuals may accept promises of safeguarding a common good (e.g. generational justice) and tolerate reduction in income as exchange.

– stand toward them (Forst 1996). It also applies here that social justice, in the sense of guaranteeing individual autonomy, is not identical with the concrete realisation of specific social values but finds expression that society promotes the creation of institutional conditions that are necessary for the realisation of these values (Young 1990: 37).

Affiliation, reflexivity and commitment thus represent the three constitutive components of an extended concept of individual autonomy. Here the ideal of practical individual autonomy means being able to develop a balance between one's own interests and collective expectations, to develop an individual life plan on the basis of self respect and self-awareness and to commit oneself to a community based on the conscious acceptance of common objectives and values. For policy making, autonomy is a regulative principle which acknowledges the differences between the individuals, respects the individual's essential power of reason and takes her or his capacity and willingness to collectivity as the point of departure.

IV. Individual autonomy as reference for comparative Welfare state research

Conceiving the outcome of welfare reforms in terms of increase or decrease of individual autonomy allows to take gender biases, selectivity and dysfunctions of our social security schemes into account. But how would social policy have to be shaped in order to support and safeguard the individual autonomy of the citizens?

First, it has been pointed out that affiliation, i.e. the fact of being recognised as socially bound but unique and wilful individual, results from material well-being as well as the personal respect and recognition. Autonomous individuals possess self-esteem, they are able construct coherent biographical narratives and creatively coping with conflicts and tensions. Is it at all possible for social policy to contribute to provide coherence, support creativity or balancing out a lack of self confidence or can it only play a preventative role (Leu/ Krappmann 1999: 84)? And what kind of conclusion should draw from the insight that social security has become a constitutive element of our democratic welfare states (Lessenich 2008)? On the one hand, even if capacities for individualised action have increased, individuals, in order to develop individual autonomy, still need stable and reliable context conditions (i.e. a decent income and infrastructure) that protect them from new pitfalls of a globalised and modernised world and allow them to plan their employment careers and private lives despite increasing flexibility and mobility requirements. The protection from market failure has equally to be adapted, if public social policy shall continue to implicitly guarantee a certain level of social security (Kaufmann 1973; Evers/ Nowotny 1987), On the other hand, the need for social security has changed in qualitative terms as new forms of insecurity are arising from changes in the employment and production systems and social modernisation (Castel 2003; Lessenich 2008; Van Dyk/ Lessenich 2008). As it has become

15

difficult for a growing share of employees to gain their own life and social security, public social policy has to guarantee a reasonable level of social security. This would not only require the introduction of minimum standards – into our social security schemes as well as into labour law – but also the provision of a comprehensive and good quality social service infrastructure.

Secondly, instead of strengthening control, sanctions or requirements as activation strategies do, carrying the patriarchal top-down strategy to its extremes, the individual autonomy approach on the contrary act on the assumption of judicious citizens who are basically willing to commit themselves to overarching common objectives. But how can the individual's integrity be assured in authoritative acts of public policies? What institutional precautions can be taken? First of all, to enhance this commitment, citizens have to be protected from oppression which may arise from public paternalistic interference. Irrespective of their particular biographic conditions, individuals need a maximum of authenticity and freedom from manipulative and distorting influences to maintain and further develop their autonomy– in the sense of self respect, creativity and the creation of a coherent self image. Secondly, in order to guarantee that citizens can understand and accept social policy reforms, policies and measures have to be mediated and procedures of implementation have to be made transparent in order to avoid feelings of helplessness (for the relevance of transparency for democracy see Gosseries 2006). Consequently, social policy reforms and the implementation of programmes should be as transparent as possible. Thirdly, public policy should enlarge options for participation and self-determination. One original idea of the 'activating state' was that citizens would become partners and co-producers of social security. Of course, individual activities can not replace state intervention but substantial encouragement could be developed, not by enforcement but by empowerment in the original sense of the term. Additionally, policy makers in a democratic welfare state that draws its legitimacy from the increase of its citizens' autonomy (and not from the battle against presumed and publicly bemoaned misuse of social security provision), would take a serious effort to mediate necessary reform programmes to clarify and to encourage public debates.

Thirdly, unlike the utilitarian approach, the individual autonomy perspective argues on the ontological assumption that individuals are in principle equally capable and willing to reflect on their needs and to respect each other despite crucial differences in life plans or values. How can social policy recognise and respect differences and seek equal treatment of all citizens such that it contributes to reduce differences in the citizens' well-being, instead of aggravating the segmentation of our societies? And (how) can social policy enhance mutual recognition between all citizens independently of their colour, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical and psychological capacities? Feminist research has pointed to the basic problem of bias being a constitutive feature of social policy in every welfare system. It

has demonstrated, that standardised conditions of access enjoined on different individuals (e.g. to be active in some way) can unfold very different effects as not every citizen is able to the same extent to fulfil (or to reject) legal requirements. Consequently, the problem that biographical differences result in social differences cannot be resolved by enlarging the catalogue of exception clauses in order to make selective schemes a bit less selective or even universal. More precisely: the acknowledgement of the citizens' biographical differences and of their basic capability of reflection prohibits standardised access conditions and treatment. In contrast e.g. to the universal work requirement of activation policies, the individual autonomy approach requires a diversified set of measures and programmes in order to respond to differing needs or expectations.[6] Individual autonomy from this perspective would be considered a *regulatory principle* according to which individual idiosyncrasies are acknowledged and made comprehensible. As social policy measures would not be awarded on behalf of some abstract and ascribed political objectives (labour market integration, avoidance of poverty) but respond to the particular needs of the individual, procedures of benefit and service attribution would have to be adjusted accordingly in order to avoid social differentiation and allow rather than represses wilful action. As a side effect, this strategy of diversity, would at the same time enhance social tolerance and mutual recognition and reduce stigmatisation of particular social groups and strengthen social cohesion.

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The perspective of individual autonomy appears as a quite demanding challenge to both - present social policy making as well as to social policy analysis. It offers however, beside a fundamental critique of the basic assumptions of the present dominating paradigms in welfare state research, the activating or the social investment state, a positive and new normative perspective, recalling the traditional objectives of social policy, to secure life perspectives and provide life chances. The individual autonomy perspective may overlap with the activation paradigm in that it focuses as well on the basic capabilities of the citizen and it is similar to a social investment strategy as it claims new instruments such as social

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[6] I.M. Young has similarly suggested that, rather than universalism (i.e. the input dimension), participation (i.e. the outcome of state intervention) should be taken as the reference point for social policy design (Young 1990: 105).

services and education. Its normative reference however is quite different as it does not aim at increasing the citizen's self-sufficiency for the benefit of the state's spending or at reducing social policy to its economic function (investment and return). On the contrary, the individual autonomy perspective highlights the core of democratic welfare statehood: the self-esteem of the individuals, mutual respect between the citizens and conscious commitment to common public values. It thus requires the re-design of substance and mechanisms of social policies by defining decent minimum levels of pay, benefits and regulation, adjusting benefit and service provision to volatile need and demand, rather de-standardising than standardising access and procedures of benefit and service allocation and to make arrangements that keep the citizens informed, interested and encouraged for social and political commitment.

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