

*Autonomy against Intimacy:
On the Problem of Governing
Lifestyle-Related Risks*

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I. External and Internal Risks

Since Ulrich Beck's book *Risk Society* appeared in 1986, social scientists have been deeply aware of the sociological importance of the new threats that await us around the corner: nuclear accidents, global warming, environmental issues in general, famines, lack of water, natural catastrophes, and many other calamities. These are no longer threats from nature against which human societies can and should protect themselves; they are threats created by human societies themselves. They are sociologically important not only because they are dangerous but also because they change the way modern societies work. In early industrial societies, inequalities were about the distribution of goods; in contemporary reflexive modernity, they are about the consequences and probabilities of risks. This has severe consequences for the social order, Beck argued, and many others agreed. The difference in the nature of inequalities has consequences for how people organize themselves for social and political action. Earlier interest articulation was centered on the notion of class, but today one's position in the production and distribution system for goods is less important than protection against risk.

However, we are exposed not only to external risks caused by the technologies of production. Social theorists have paid much less attention to a second type of risk, namely, that produced directly by consumption. We can call this internal risk. Our own desires and choices are threats against which we must protect ourselves. The facts are well known. In developed countries, the five most important causes of the total health burden are tobacco and alcohol use, elevated blood pressure, high cho-

lesterol, and being overweight, which are all related to lifestyle. Across the whole world, including the developing countries, the most important factors are otherwise the same but include being underweight, unsafe sex, and unsafe water—in other words, indicators of extreme inequality of resources appear at the top of the list.¹ These risks, too, are the making of human societies, not of nature itself.

Once we observe this, we also observe how poor the track record of health and welfare policy is in this area. Unlike Beck, I do not see the emergence of the new risks as the cause of changes in the way societies work. We must reverse the causal order of analysis and ask why the societies in which we live are performing so badly with the desires and choices threatening us. This incapacity is a recent phenomenon. History is full of examples of society successfully controlling the consumption and desires of individuals, including sexuality, media culture, food, drugs, and alcohol. Alcohol control has in fact been one of the first areas of social policy addressed by the emerging nation states in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Severe measures, including prohibitions, individual rationing systems, state monopolies, high taxes to keep prices up, and restrictions on selling hours and outlets have been used throughout the industrialized world.

Neoliberalism readily offers itself as one answer to the question of why contemporary societies are so weak in health-oriented consumer policies. However, to say that the rules of the marketplace have taken over the pursuit of the public good does not go much beyond restating the question. To understand the shift of emphasis in lifestyle regulation, we must analyze not only the relationship between the state and the market but its social context in a broader sense. In this article, I argue that the weakness of modern society in protecting consumers against themselves is reflected in a new mode of governance that I call “epistolary.” Perhaps “apostatic,” from Greek, would be more appropriate, with the rough literal sense of “at a distance,” or “semotic,” from Latin *semotus*, “distant.” This mode of power is itself the result of new contradictions between the principles of justification in modern society that have now reached the point of saturation.

1. *The World Health Report* (Geneva: The World Health Organization, 2002); Thomas F. Babor et al., *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity: Research and Public Policy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

II. The Model of Justification

To understand the nature of epistolary power, we need some basic sociological theory. Any society must somehow justify its existence and policies to attract the loyalty of its members and enhance their sense of belonging. The French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot have developed a model of justification that in a simplified form contains the following three elements.²

First, any society must have known and acceptable principles of the social bond that connects people as members of society and subgroups. People must be able to tell who belongs to their society, and they must accept that, according to some principles, members of the society are rewarded unequally. These are the principles of belonging and differentiation.

Second, people must have common understandings of the “meaning of dignity and worth” in society. For example, in theocratic societies the criteria of dignity and human worth are closeness to god, knowledge of the scriptures, and devotion to worship. In other types of traditional society, human worth depends on family lineage, the opinion of others (honor), or relationship with the sovereign. Finally, modern societies fall into two opposite types of order, in which either industrial efficiency or competence in taking advantage of the market is a person’s most valued characteristics.³

Third, there must be some agreement on the common good and the ways of recognizing when the common good is pursued and attained.

Different societies have different principles of justification. In traditional societies, they are stable and change very slowly, whereas modern industrial societies have been founded on the idea of social change—“modernization,” which has meant a change from mainly poor agricultural society to affluent industrial consumer capitalism. Consumer capitalism has become reality very recently, only in the course of the last half of

2. Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: The Economies of Worth*, trans. Catherine Porter (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006).

3. *Ibid.*, chap. 4 and 6. The reference in the case of Theocratic societies is to Saint Augustine. Human worth deriving from family lineage is the foundation of domestic societies as described by La Buyere in 1688. The model of societies of honor, or of opinion, is taken from Thomas Hobbes, and the society in which human worth is assessed by one’s relation to the sovereign (civic society) refers to Rousseau’s philosophy of the social contract. The opposition between industrial society and market-oriented capitalism is inspired by Veblen’s distinction between producer and predator mentality (*ibid.*, p. 80).

the twentieth century.⁴ The difficulties in regulating internal risks in contemporary societies result from the principles of justification that have progressed to a point where they have become saturated. They are still the same principles now, but just as a solution of salt in water returns to the crystal form when it is concentrated, the modern dynamic principles of justification now take on a new form.

III. Justification in Modern Societies

The nation was the most important framework of the social bond in the modern industrial societies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ To belong to a society one had to be a citizen of a nation state; one could not be just “someone.” The principles of differentiation that define the internal structure of modern society have been and still are the object of class theory. The principles of dignity and human worth have undoubtedly been associated with freedoms and the well-being of individuals, but as Honneth has pointed out, these involve three aspects—biography, autonomy, and intimacy—that may contradict each other, and do so, especially now.⁶ These contradictions are the gist of contemporary predicaments in lifestyle regulation, as I shall show in the next section. Third, the common good has been widely understood in terms of progress in these principles of nationhood and individual freedom since the late eighteenth century, until the breakthrough of consumer capitalism.

The right to have one’s own biography—a personal career as a wage earner, family member, member of a social group—was the key issue of the French Revolution, as Robert Castel has shown in his great book *Metamorphoses of the Social Question*.⁷ The first part of this right was the right to accept work outside of one’s own community. Most males had acquired this right in all Western countries by the First World War, but for women the issue has remained controversial and contested (e.g., in the

4. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1995).

5. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990).

6. Axel Honneth, “Organised Self-Realization: Some Paradoxes of Individualization,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 7, no. 4 (2004): 463–78. I have developed Honneth’s suggestions in my book *The Saturated Society: Governing Risk and Lifestyles in Consumer Culture* (London: Sage, 2009).

7. Robert Castel, *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale: une chronique du salariat* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).

lower pay levels of female jobs) until this day.⁸ The founding ideologists of the Swedish welfare state, the couple Alva and Gunnar Myrdal, as well as most Western social-democratic women's movements insisted on this right in the decades before and after the Second World War.⁹ Democratic school reforms in all Western countries have been an important element in establishing this freedom, which has been realized in the massive demographic restructuring of industrial class societies.¹⁰

In order to manage one's personal biography, the individual needs autonomy, the capacity to enter into contracts in the labor market, as a consumer and as a family member. Economic autonomy must be supported by the right to be a legal subject as a competent contract partner, and political rights are also necessary to assure individuals the right to articulate their interests. Finally, to be autonomous, a person needs to experience his or her life as selfhood, as being a separate person from others, authentically basing choices on one's own and not on someone else's desires and preferences. Let us use the term intimacy for this sense of separateness and authenticity. We do not like to be touched or stared at without our permission; we do not experience dignity and worth if we are forced into marriage or terrorized by someone else's feelings.

Theorists of modern society pointed out early on that these principles not only mutually support each other but also conflict. Marx based his critique of capitalism on the fact that the apparent freedom of the work contract, the autonomy of "the right to work," did not give freedom to members of the working class but condemned them to wage slavery. It took almost one hundred years of political struggle before labor legislation liberated the working class from the terror of the free labor market. Georg Simmel, on the other hand, rejoiced in the autonomy of individuals granted by the anonymity of money and the metropolis, but he also cautioned about the consequent loss of social ties that individuals need in their detached relationships in modern society.¹¹ Theodor Adorno criti-

8. Yvonne Hirdman, *Att lägga sig till rätta: Studier om svensk välfärdsstaten* (Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag, 1990); Raija Julkunen, *Sukupuolen järjestykset ja tasa-arvon paradoksit* (Tampere: Vastapaino 2009).

9. Alva Myrdal and Gunnar Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1935); Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State* (London: Tavistock, 1977).

10. Göran Therborn, *European Modernity and Beyond: The Trajectory of European Societies 1945–2000* (London: Sage, 1995).

11. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 2nd ed., trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 1990).

cized existentialist declarations of authenticity as merely empty jargon, since they did not observe that the individual itself was an outcome of modern society. In his immanent critique, he stressed that the passion for authenticity and difference ultimately turns into indifference and sameness in mass society.¹² The American mass society theorists from Fromm and Riesman to Mills and Kornhouser, among others, continued this theme, associating it with political nightmares in which totalitarian power takes over the society of atomized, self-centered, and unorganized masses of individuals.

In another context, however, I have shown that in modern societies in the course of the twentieth century the three aspects of individualization—personal biography, autonomy, and intimacy—have mainly been complementary and supported one another.¹³ The universal right to work for a wage (including by women) has propelled claims for universal legal and political autonomy, as well as for the right to be different and have a self separate from others. Intimacy, the construction of selfhood, the most recently developed aspect of individuality, has now entered into new types of contradictions with the right to autonomy, even the right to a personal biography.

IV. The Incompleteness of Modernity

Today we take the modern principles of dignity and worth for granted to such an extent that we do not always observe how they clash in our everyday lives, even if we are sensitive to cases in which they are obviously violated. Members of society who do not have sovereign autonomy as citizens—particularly legal or political rights, as with illegal immigrants—are an anomaly that is not in harmony with the modern social and moral order. Rape, child abuse, and maltreatment of the disabled, elderly, or sick are horrific crimes because they violate the victims' right to intimacy.

Individual biography, autonomy, and intimacy have become the norm, but this norm did not emerge from modern industrial society all by itself. It was a matter of struggles over lifestyle and freedoms for two and a half centuries. Even the labor contract was nothing more than a pretence until labor legislation was gradually established in the three or four decades

12. Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2004).

13. Sulkinen, *The Saturated Society*.

after World War I, first internationally in the framework of the International Labour Organization and then in various countries.¹⁴

Other aspects of the sovereignty of the laborer-consumer-citizen were still more seriously incomplete at the end of the 1960s, even in the Nordic countries, which nevertheless were its vanguards among Western European states. Alcohol control has had a major role in lifestyle-regulation policy, which has been at the heart of the struggle for individualism since the late nineteenth century. When the temperance movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries advocated alcohol control in its varying forms of severity, they disagreed about many things but shared the underlying principle of individual autonomy. This is what justified their use of the power of the parliamentary nation-states to adopt forms of state interference that today would be thought scandalous and intolerable. In their time, however, most temperance movements started as progressive and modern. The destruction of family life, the neglect of children's and women's needs, and the lack of self-discipline caused by working men's drinking were considered to be not only a social problem but also ignoble in terms of human dignity and worth.¹⁵

It was a great paradox that modern societies in the early twentieth century stressed individuality and self-control but turned to state-centered solutions to produce them. Furthermore, while the goal of the modern nation-state has been the civilizing process and democracy, the state itself has been normative and authoritarian. Its efforts to establish self-control as the norm have employed the disciplinary techniques of the school, the army, and the penitentiary in order to educate and keep individuals in line. The problem was that since the image of the ideal citizen was class-bound and gendered, social control tended to be disciplinary and discriminatory rather than universal. The paternalism of cultural and moral policies of the states reflected the paternalism of the old bourgeois family in their authoritative structures. Their civilizing efforts in educating the masses were seen as humiliating and bigoted against the working class, the peasantry, and women.

14. Olavi Sulkunen, *Kansainväliset ammattiyhdistysoikeudet. Tutkimus niiden synnystä, sisällöstä ja systeemyhteydestä* (Helsinki: Suomalainen lakimiesyhdistys, 2000).

15. Pekka Sulkunen and Katariina Warpenius, "Reforming the Self and the Other: The Temperance Movement and the Duality of Modern Subjectivity," *Critical Public Health* 10, no. 4 (2000): 423–38.

This is nowhere more clear than in alcohol-control policy in the two postwar decades. Traces of social discrimination were seen in many countries in the western world as late as the 1970s. In Belgian legislation, for example, strong drink could not be served in public places, and they were sold retail only in containers of two liters or more. The main purpose was to prevent workers from buying spirits. The well-known British rules on opening hours of public houses were originally aimed at disciplining the working class, and they have been relaxed only very recently.¹⁶ French working-class cafés have been subjected to similar restrictions, but here the motivation was even more explicitly political, since cafés and other public drinking places have been important scenes of political agitation since the eighteenth century, even more obviously so after the Commune.¹⁷

In the Nordic countries, serving regulations, selling practices, and the individual controls exercised over problem drinkers were selective and unfair toward the working class, the rural population and women.¹⁸ Social scientists took a major role, criticizing the normative welfare state for injustices in the handling of deprived alcoholics, mentally ill patients, petty criminals, and cultural minorities. This criticism led to the establishment of The November Movement (Marraskuun liike) in Finland in 1967, with aims and purposes similar to KRUM in Sweden and KROM in Norway. These were associations that purported to provide legal and social assistance to victims of the control system, expert activity in identifying breaches of civil justice, and mobilization for change in the legal and judicial system. This Nordic protest movement led in due course to both legislative reform and changes in the treatment structures.¹⁹

16. Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815–1978* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971).

17. Thomas Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth Century Paris* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989); Susanna Barrows, "Parliaments of the People: The Political Culture of Cafés in the Early Third Republic," in *Drinking Behavior and Belief in Modern History*, ed. Susanna Barrows and Robin Room (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991); Didier Nourrisson, *Le buveur du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1990).

18. Margaretha Järvinen, "Kontrollerade kontrollörer: kvinnor, män och alkohol," *Nordisk alkoholtidskrift* 8 (1991): 143–52; L. Magnusson, "Orsaker till det förindustriella drickandet: Supandet i hautverkets Eskilstuna," *Alkoholpolitik* 2, no. 1 (1985): 23–29; Matti Peltonen, "Olympiavuoden käytösopas," in *Rillumarei ja valistus: Kulttuurikahakoita 1950-luvun Suomessa* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1996).

19. Pekka Sulkunen et al., *Broken Spirits: Power and Ideas in Nordic Alcohol Control* (Helsinki: NAD, 2000).

The worldwide student uprisings in 1968 and the political activism that ensued was a turning-point in individualistic development. The year 1968 was both literally and metaphorically “a revolt against the father,” in Gerard Mendel’s words; and I would add, a revolt against a *discriminating* father.²⁰ It was a revolt against the father in the literal sense because it was generational; it was a revolt against the father in the metaphorical sense, because it went against all forms of paternalistic structures of domination. It was also a revolt against the father in the metaphorical sense that the younger generation was actually claiming the right to self-determination, which they had been taught to respect by their parents’ generation. The revolt took the form of “liberalism”—or I would rather say, tolerance—in cultural policy, sexual policy, alcohol policy, even in drug policy, in a wave of reforms that was not brought to completion until the mid-1980s.

The last of the principles of dignity and greatness to be protected was intimacy, and particularly women’s intimacy, as we see from the themes of the student radicalism in the latter third of the twentieth century, the rise of new types of feminism, and the legislative reforms of recent decades. Women’s rights, not only to paid work but to sexual enjoyment, to obtaining a divorce, to control of their bodies by contraception and abortion, and to personal integrity in the home have been key themes in Western European legislation and one of the most controversial public issues in the United States. Equally, legal protection of the rights of sexual, ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities, the disabled, children, the fetus, and even animals has progressed, and is still progressing, in order to stress the dignity and worth of all innocent life.

V. Saturation

Pitirim Sorokin, the Russian émigré sociologist who founded the famous Harvard Department of Sociology, sometimes used the metaphor of saturation to describe critical moments of social change.²¹ The metaphor is well justified by his idea of the immanent causation in social processes:

Through this incessant generation of consequences attending each of its changes, a system perceptibly determines the character and course of its future career. The whole series of changes it undergoes throughout its

20. Gerard Mendel, *La révolte contre le père* (Paris: Payot, 1968).

21. Pjotr Sztompka, *The Sociology of Social Change* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993).

existence is to a large extent *an unfolding of its inherent potentialities*.
From an acorn can spring only an oak.²²

External factors can only accelerate or retard imminent change, and can only facilitate or hinder the realization of its potentialities. They may suppress, distort, or overdevelop its characteristics and mutilate or destroy its secondary traits. They may even crush the system. However they cannot change its inherent structure. To the extent that the system is able to develop on its own, without the distorting effects of outside factors, it is free. But as in physics, there are limits to the processes of internal change, beyond which the regularities of normal conditions no longer hold. Thus, water can only be heated to about 100°C, beyond which it evaporates and transforms into a gas; likewise, a solution of salt and water can only be enriched as a liquid up to a certain point, beyond which the salt returns to its crystalline state.

The principle of immanent causation is essential to understanding social change, because what Sorokin called “congeries” of ideas and values are involved in the process. Societies are processes of action, and in order to act—in other words, in order to be historical subjects—agents need collective ideals and images of the good life, the good society, and the good state. Such ideals do not come out of nowhere; they are always products of earlier ideals and actions, which direct them. In that process, some of the ideals become saturated: they reach the point where ideals are no longer just dreams but realities. As a result of such saturation, the principles of justification in modern societies have now become problematic, not because they failed but because they have succeeded and become accepted as the norm. While they were complimentary and mutually supportive in the construction of the contemporary social order, they have now become contradictory. These contradictions are at the heart of the issues that we face when we talk about lifestyle regulation or, more generally, what Nikolas Rose has recently called “the politics of life.”²³

22. Pitirim Sorokin, *Society, Culture and Personality: Their Structure and Dynamics* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1974).

23. Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2007).

VI. From Pastoral to Epistolary Power

Michel Foucault used the metaphor of pastoral power to describe the authoritarian and normative state I have discussed above.²⁴ Pastoral power is a relationship of care. The shepherd knows the needs of the herd and attends to them all at once.²⁵ But such care produces outcomes that undermine its own authority, because it is not only a collective but also an individualizing power. The shepherd knows his sheep and brings back the lost ones individually; the sheep know him and follow him voluntarily.

The saturation of the modern process has led to the replacement of pastoral power by what I call the epistolary mode of governance, or governing from a distance. The exercise of pastoral power needs a centralized instance of policy-making. The central power of the state has increasingly been replaced by the voluntary activity of local and regional governments, associations, and citizens' communities. Only abstract objectives like the promotion of health, welfare, and security—or, correspondingly, the prevention of disease, social misery, crime, and violence—are set by governmental or even intergovernmental programs. They instruct members of society to follow the path of the Lord, like apostles who send instructions to their disciples in distant communities. In alcohol policy, the need to engage local communities in the prevention of alcohol-related harm reflects this new, epistolary mode of governance from a distance. Instead of implementing national policies, the state asks local communities, NGOs, businesses, labor unions, churches, etc., to establish innovative projects to promote health and prevent disease. There is often no willingness and no power to prescribe norms about how and what consumers, citizens, or local communities should or should not do. Frame laws and programs set targets, make recommendations, and define criteria for success. Social actors, like the disciples of the apostles, are expected to find the means to achieve them by themselves.

Especially in areas where lifestyle issues are concerned, such as preventative social policy, health promotion, or youth work, the official bureaucracy not only strives to engage and commit citizens but also to disengage itself from moral responsibility. Interpreting our fieldwork on

24. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 115–34.

25. Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage, 1999), pp. 72–83.

drug prevention, our research group has called this ethos “the ethics of not taking a stand.”²⁶ Citizens were literally seen as “clients of the preventive or promotional work,” as it is now called, rather than as subjects of control policy, as it was previously called. Epistolary power shifts moral responsibility from the state to communities and citizens, who are expected to operate without a centrally directed plan and to decide what is good for them under the sole constraint that they should respect other peoples’ rights.²⁷

VII. Conflicting Principles of Justification

The apparent moral neutrality of epistolary power is a reaction to the saturation of the principles of justification in modern society. The same neutrality extends to our everyday morality. We do not judge badly those who practice non-normative sexuality even when they are political figures; but our moral sentiments arise if they are not acting fairly toward their partners or honestly toward us, their public. Free-riders, polluters, risk-takers, and drug dealers are not a problem because they manifest their freedom of choice but because they do it at the expense of others. Criminologists talk about the victim’s point of view, which in penal policy means shifting the emphasis from curing the perpetrator to rendering justice to the innocent.²⁸

What we see here is the victory of the principles of autonomy and intimacy over the authoritarian and normative state as the consequence of the post-1968 reform wave. Modern societies have come a long way from the severe conditions of mainly agricultural economies, where the large majority were dependent on family, employers, and the local community. Geographical and social mobility was limited to the elites, and the idea of intimacy was barely known to the lower classes. Struggles for labor laws, legal equity, and political rights have been necessary to adjust the

26. Pekka Sulkunen et al., “The Ethics of Not Taking a Stand: Dilemmas of Drug and Alcohol Prevention in a Consumer Society: A Case Study,” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 15, nos. 5–6 (2004): 427–34.

27. The concept of epistolary power comes close to the governmentality literature inspired by Foucault’s work, in which he suggested that modern societies tend to internalize power and turn submission into a voluntary mentality. For example, Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), argues that governing from a distance in advanced liberalism is possible because it is governing through the mind. The notion of epistolary power emphasizes that the ethic of not taking a stand results from real struggles of emancipation, and that its effects should not be seen uniformly as suppression of agency.

28. David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 121–22.

principles of justification to conditions in which the free contract-making individual is the primary unit of social action. Lifestyle policy has been an indispensable element of forming a modern character structure that is capable of assuming that role. It has liberated individuals to become agents of their own lives.

However, the full maturity of the principles of justification tends to lead to contradictions. To respect intimacy means to respect difference, but the difference of one person tends to cut into the autonomy of others. This contradiction takes three principal forms. First, free choices impose costs on others in health care, care for the environment, and policing the social order. Second, it causes third-party victimization, such as passive smoking, violence, accidents, and child neglect. Third, difference may violate the integrity of the norm and can be considered as a threat toward the institutions, such as homosexual families questioning the monopoly of the normal heterosexual marriage, the Muslim head scarf violating the principle of laicism or even personal identity, or forced marriage violating the norm of individual freedom of choice. These are the kinds of cultural conflicts we observe daily in the main media, and to which there seem to be no easy solutions. Universality is replaced by an emphasis on difference, and difference can only be respected in contractual consent. The sense of justice will be transformed from considerations of equity to considerations of the negative freedom of the other. We are no longer asked to respect the positive right of others to be like us; we are instead asked to respect their negative right not to be constrained by our actions. We are at liberty to do whatever we like with ourselves and our lives as long as we are not taxing the liberty of others to do likewise.

Another serious lifestyle-policy issue is related to the norm of autonomy. Autonomy that is almost universally gained is transformed from a right into a duty. Those who are not able to assume the self-control it prescribes, or who use that autonomy to violate the rights of the innocent, may lose not only their autonomy but also their right to a personal life career. Examples are debates on the involuntary treatment of substance-abusing mothers, enforced custody of their children, and even sterilization. Involuntary treatment of alcoholics and drug addicts has long been widespread in many Western countries; the difference is that now the user is wanted in treatment not to cure *her* but to save the innocent *child*.²⁹ The mother's

29. Anna Leppo and Riikka Perälä, "User-involvement: The Hybrid of Control and Emancipation," *Journal of Health Organisation and Management* 23, no. 3 (2009): 359–71.

right to be different, and even her personal career as a mother, is questioned by society's right to healthy children. Similar policies have been increasingly imposed on recidivist criminals, and the long-term unemployed are put under pressure by activation policy to resume and demonstrate their efforts to stay in the labor force as a condition for social assistance. The "contracts" that they are required to sign but cannot keep are intended to empower them to regain control of their lives. As a consequence, they may lose not only their right to intimacy through the minute control of social assistance programs; they may also lose what is left of their life opportunities, as masters of their personal biographies, to an endless cycle of marginalization.

To conclude, it is a mistake to believe that the epistolary mode of governance is simply a retrenchment of state power to leave free rein to the markets. Instead, the public powers are struggling to find a balance between the ideals of intimacy, autonomy, and biography that have gained full maturity and often contradict each other. The public powers have the moral authority to produce only weak and unstable solutions to such contradictions. The state's mode of governance is like the epistolary role of the apostles, overseeing the fair distribution of merit and blame, guiding the faithful who want to hear from a distance, giving advice for the road to salvation, but leaving the responsibility for following the advice to their public. The risk is that autonomy is no longer simply a measure of human worth; capacity to exercise it has turned into a principle of belonging. Those who do not have it may lose even the rest of their dignity as individuals and members of society.