

The Autonomous Self: Subjectivity and Society in Contemporary Psychology

Simone Barbagallo^a, Ciro De Vincenzo^a, Adriano Zamperini^a

^aDepartment of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology, University of Padova

Psychological literature operationalizes the concept of autonomy mainly in terms of moral development, as one of the three basic needs for self-determination, or as an index of well-being. However, as it is widely acknowledged, ideas on well-being, needs and morality reflect the values of a particular socio-historical context and the configuration of the Self which emerges within that peculiar cultural framework. For this reason, we will rather propose an investigation of autonomy as the psychological position of the individual within neoliberal society and postmodern culture. We will therefore consider the individual not in opposition to society, but rather as the form in which neoliberal society is structured. Thus we will define “autonomy” as the psychological mandate assigned to the individual: a heavy burden of cognitive and emotional work in a situation of great instability. Finally, we will argue the relevance of this theoretical perspective for psychological research.

Autonomy, Individual, Self, Subjectivity, Psychosocial Theory, Postmodernity, Neoliberalism