

Another, more common category of criticism of Galbraith focuses on purported conceptual errors in his argument. Critics have noted that advertising cannot create wants out of nothing. Rather, advertisers must appeal to some preexisting desire and convince the consumer that their products are the means for best satisfying that original desire. Thus deodorant ads may stimulate consumers to associate Arrid with their desire to be attractive to (or not to offend) the opposite sex. But this ad can be successful only if that desire to be attractive already exists. So, critics argue, ads merely persuade consumers to want products as vehicles for satisfying their already existing wants. This is still consistent with consumers remaining autonomous. The consumer is free, after all, to buy or not buy the product.

One possible response that those more sympathetic to Galbraith would make at this point is to distinguish two senses of autonomy. We can obviously speak of behavior as autonomous, as the preceding criticism of Galbraith does. But his defenders hold that it is also sensible to speak of desires as autonomous. Even when an ad does not compel behavior, it might still interfere with autonomy in the way it shapes our desires. As an example of this, suppose a moviegoer is exposed to a subliminal ad for a cold, frosty Coke during the movie. Suppose also that the moviegoer acquires a desire for a Coke as the result of the subconscious exposure. (A famous New Jersey case similar to this generated quite a bit of controversy a few decades back. For this thought experiment, it is not necessary to settle the controversy about whether subliminal techniques are effective.) Even if the moviegoer decides not to act on the newly acquired desire, many of us have the vague feeling that the person's autonomy has been violated if he so much as desires the Coke. This feeling persists in the face of the recognition that the moviegoer freely chose not to buy a soft drink. We need some way of analyzing this feeling to assess its validity. One approach to that assessment involves getting some clarity about what it might mean to say a desire is autonomous.

One classic account of autonomous desire is provided by philosopher Gerald Dworkin, who contends that for a desire to be autonomous it must meet two criteria: (1) we do not try to renounce the desire, and (2) we are realistically able to step back and critically evaluate the desire. That is, we must not only accept the desire as our own but be able to do so on the basis of rational reflection.

Dworkin names these conditions the "authenticity condition" and the "independence condition." For him, autonomy demands that a person retain some independence. Desires can be acquired from a multitude of sources and through a multitude of influence mechanisms. As a result, Dworkin believes that independence can exist only if those acquired desires can realistically be subject to rational evaluation. Dworkin finds that desires acquired based on deception are not autonomous because they fail to satisfy the independence condition. He also suspects desires that are the product of other forms of manipulation. Note that Dworkin understands that we are often influenced in ways that do not immediately engage our critical capacity for evaluation. He is not so foolish as to suggest that our beliefs and desires are always produced by a