ABSTRACT. In this paper, I try to show that externalist compatibilism in the debate on personal autonomy and manipulated freedom is as yet untenable. I will argue that Alfred R. Mele’s paradigmatic, history-sensitive externalism about psychological autonomy in general and autonomous deliberation in particular faces an insurmountable problem: it cannot satisfy the crucial condition of adequacy “H” for externalist theories that I formulate in the text. Specifically, I will argue that, contrary to first appearances, externalist compatibilism does not resolve the CNC manipulation problem. After briefly reflecting on the present status of responses to the manipulation problem in the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists of various stripes, I will draw the over-all pessimistic conclusion that no party deals with this problem satisfactorily.

Standardly, incompatibilists press compatibilists hard on the consequence and manipulation argument.\(^1\) Responses to the latter gave rise to an in-house split of compatibilists in two camps: internalists vs. externalists. In this paper, I try to show that externalist compatibilism in the debate on personal autonomy and manipulated freedom is as yet untenable.

My argument for this skeptical conclusion starts from chapters 9 and 10 of *Autonomous Agents. From Self-Control to Autonomy* where Alfred Mele (1995; pbk. 2001) develops one of the most promising externalist compatibilist theories in the literature.\(^2\) I will argue that Mele’s paradigmatic, history-sensitive externalism about psychological autonomy in general and autonomous deliberation in particular faces an insurmountable problem: it cannot satisfy the crucial condition of adequacy “H” for externalist theories that I formulate below.

To conclude, I will briefly reflect on the present status of responses to the manipulation problem in the debate.
Assuming the truth of compatibilism, Mele (p. 187) claims that an agent S is (psychologically) autonomous, if:

(0) S is an ideally self-controlled (and mentally healthy) agent;
(1) S has no compelled* motivational states, nor any coercively produced motivational states;
(2) S’s beliefs are conducive to informed deliberation about all matters that concern him; and
(3) S is a reliable deliberator.

Self-control is not enough for autonomy. To the basic condition of being a mentally healthy agent who frequently and effectively exercises self-control in all domains of his life, Mele adds, what he calls, the compatibilist trio. This trio consists of requirements concerning motivational states (pro-attitudes), informational (or doxastic) states, and executive processes (deliberation). Mele intends this package of four conditions not as necessary but only as sufficient for autonomy.

Mele proposes the analysis partly in answer to an incompatibilist (libertarian) challenge (p. 179). Incompatibilists claim that compatibilist accounts lack the resources for distinguishing at a causally deterministic world cases in which S is victimized by another agent’s control of S’s mind – specifically by covert non-constraining (CNC) control or manipulation – from cases in which S deliberates autonomously. Kane (1996, pp. 64–65) usefully distinguishes between two types of control, one of which is CNC control:

The two kinds of control in question, of one agent over another, may be called ..., constraining control (CC) and nonconstraining control (NC). In the case of constraining control, controlled agents are knowingly forced to do something against their wills. They are held at gunpoint or threatened with punishment if they do not do the controller’s bidding, or they are locked in a room and simply prevented from doing what they want to do …

Nonconstraining (NC) control is another matter. It is exemplified by the cases of behavioral conditioning and behind-the-scenes manipulation ..., [brainwashing or being manipulated by a cult leader, or