I wish to begin by making five key points with respect to the role of social norms in the exercise of subjective and moral autonomy.

The first point is that social norms contribute to the perception of certain forces as dangerous, and of others as securing. For example, subjects may learn to perceive germs, mental illness, self-defeating thoughts, and unprotected sex as dangers, and they may learn to perceive aseptic environments, mental health, productive thoughts, and protected sex as securing. I have called these problems and their solutions objects of fear and desire, while I have called the signs that trigger their experience signs of danger and security.

Social norms promote the discrimination between bad and good forces through cultural means—through producing the meaning of these forces in representations—as well as through positive and negative emotional outcomes. Thus agents will be more likely to fear germs if these are associated with a force already determined to be bad like dirt or illness, or with a painful outcome like the feeling of dirtiness or of illness, and they will be more likely to desire aseptic environments if they are associated with a force already determined to be good like sanitation or health, or with a pleasurable outcome like the feeling of cleanliness or of health. Similarly, agents will be more likely to fear mental illness if it is associated with a bad force like violence or ugliness, or with a painful outcome like the feeling of shame or of stigma, and they will be more likely to desire mental health if it is associated with a good force like youth or freedom, or with a pleasurable outcome like the feeling of self-esteem or of belonging.

The second point is that social norms contribute to the determination of the means of power through which security is implemented, when these are acquired by subjects in the course of their social norms.
interactions with others, whether through mass mediatized means (e.g., in a chat group, on a sitcom, in a government pamphlet) or through more proximate contact with others (e.g., in a doctor’s office, chatting with a neighbor, through notes from their child’s teacher). Social norms may prompt subjects to move away from the painful consequences associated with germs, mental illness, self-defeating thoughts, and unprotected sex by washing their hands, taking an antidepressant medication, reading self-improvement literature, and using protection during intercourse, much as they may prompt subjects to move toward the pleasurable consequences associated with aseptic environments, mental health, productive thoughts, and protected sex through the same means.

So far we have established that through interacting with social norms, subjects may learn to associate some forces with already existing bad forces and painful outcomes, and others with already existing good forces and pleasurable outcomes, and to develop socially normative means of moving away from the painful outcomes associated with these objects of fear (problems) and of moving toward the pleasurable outcomes associated with these objects of desire (solved problems).

My third point is that social norms contribute to the determination of the experiential structure of threats and promises in the form of felt in/capacities. We have seen that relational threats are structured as problems and that relational promises are structured as solution orientations to these problems that themselves pose the problem of the determination of the means of power required in the implementation of security. While they are not the only forces involved in this process, social norms are fundamental to the production of the structured experience of relational threats and promises that I have called emotional norms.

To know how to respond to a threat in a manner that moves one away from pain, one must determine the form of one’s in/capacity. For instance, social norms might suggest that the form of one’s fear of germs is disgust (where disgust/purging is the felt in/capacity to avoid further contact with disruptive forces), or that the form of one’s desire for sex is precaution (where risk/precaution is the felt in/capacity to prevent a harmful outcome based on a calculation of its probabilities, whatever the form taken by this estimation). And to know how to actualize a promise in a manner that moves one toward pleasure, one must determine the means of power through which to implement security. We have seen that social norms are influential in the determination of these means. For instance, social norms might