



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

# ON NONDOMINATION

A Comparative Study on the Distinctiveness and the Preferability of Freedom as  
Nondomination vis-à-vis Freedom as Noninterference

# REPUBLIKANSK FRIHET

En komparativ studie om det republikanska frihetskonceptets särskiljande och  
fördelaktiga kvaliteter visavi det liberala frihetskonceptet

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Magisteruppsats i filosofi, 15 hp

VT 2021

**ABSTRACT.** The recent years have seen the revival of neo-Roman republicanism through the works of Philip Pettit, who has replaced Isaiah Berlin's taxonomy of positive/negative liberty with freedom as nondomination. This essay compares the neo-Roman conception of nondomination to the liberal conception of noninterference, with the purpose of clarifying whether nondomination is a distinct concept of liberty and preferable to that of noninterference. The essay highlights the exchange between Pettit/Skinner and Carter/Kramer, wherein Carter and Kramer make their case for 'pure negative liberty', which is claimed to be the proper articulation of negative liberty. Pure-negative theorists believe that nondomination is a strand of negative liberty, adding nothing new to the concept, whereas their republican counterparts disagree. My essay argues that nondomination is a distinct, preferable concept of liberty, thanks to its view on fundamental unfreedom and the mere presence of arbitrary power, which the pure negative view fails to account for satisfactorily.

**Keywords:** neo-Roman republicanism, nondomination, arbitrary power, pure negative liberty, noninterference, overall liberty

**ABSTRACT.** Denna uppsats jämför det nyrepublikanska frihetskonceptet 'nondomination' med det liberala frihetskonceptet 'noninterference'. Nyrepublikanismen företräds idag främst av Philip Pettit, som har ersatt Isaiah Berlins taxonomi av positiv/negativ frihet med 'frihet som icke-dominans'. Undersökningen behandlar frågan huruvida Pettits frihetskoncept är ett distinkt koncept med fördelaktiga egenskaper, i relation till det negativa frihetskonceptet. I centrum står debatten mellan Pettit/Skinner och Carter/Kramer, där Carter och Kramer redogör för sin teori om 'ren negativ frihet'; denna beskrivning representerar i deras uppfattning den korrekta beskrivningen av det negativa konceptet. De hävdar att det republikanska frihetskonceptet är en form av negativ frihet, vilket republikanerna avfärdar. Min uppsats argumenterar att icke-dominans är ett distinkt och fördelaktigt koncept, tack vare sin syn på fundamental ofrihet och 'blotta närvaron av godtycklig makt'; dessa utgör aspekter som 'ren negativ frihet' misslyckas med att bemöta på ett tillfredsställande sätt.

**Nyckelord:** nyrepublikanism, icke-dominans, godtycklig makt, ren negativ frihet, icke-inblandning, samlad frihet

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I will compare freedom as nondomination to freedom as noninterference in order to see whether it is a distinct concept of liberty and preferable to freedom as noninterference. The preferability is determined by the arguments put forth by respective theorists in addition to my own independent assessment of them. My aim is to find the distinctive features in which one account does better than the other in providing reason for choosing it over the other. Freedom as nondomination brings, according to Philip Pettit, benefits which freedom as noninterference cannot – that is the subject of scrutiny here. The question is what freedom as nondomination entails in terms of distinctive features and whether it in fact compares favorably to freedom as noninterference. I will argue that it does; that nondomination is a distinct concept of liberty thanks to its view on ‘the mere presence of arbitrary power’, and *eo ipso* preferable to noninterference. I shall use the terms ‘liberty’ and ‘freedom’ interchangeably, and occasionally shorten ‘freedom as nondomination’ to ‘nondomination’, and freedom as noninterference to ‘noninterference’. In the remainder of this section I provide some background, an overview of the recent research studied, the disposition of the essay and the used literature.

### *The Republican Tradition*

The philosophy of the republican tradition can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle. It reoccurs in the works of Cicero, Machiavelli, Harrington, Adams and Kant. Among recent proponents of republicanism are Habermas, Pettit and Skinner. Central to the republican political ideal is the concept of freedom as nondomination, which in political practice consists in popular sovereignty,<sup>1</sup> the rule of law, and the checks and balances of well-structured deliberative politics. Republican politics seek to ensure freedom and to serve the common good through law and government (Sellers 2015: 477).

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<sup>1</sup> This account of popular sovereignty is different from the common notion of ‘populism’. Pettit is against populism. Popular sovereignty means that the institutions serve the interests of the citizenry. It must also be mentioned that these principles are not all exclusive to republicans, as liberals apply similar principles. Sellers explains: “‘Republicanism’ as a philosophical doctrine begins with the axiom that law and government should always serve the ‘*res publica*’ or common good of the people. ‘People’ in this context signifies all citizens or (more recently) all participants in the relevant community” (2015: 477). ‘*Res publica*’ is not easily translated, as it to the Romans signified everything that concerned their state, their republic. The preferred use in Sellers and most contemporary political philosophers is ‘republic’ (ibid.). The *res publica* was the people’s republic: “The *res publica* (republic) represented every citizen’s common interest in the public good” (p. 478).

Cicero and Livy believed that Rome's style of governance transgressed when it no longer served its people, and so in their writings they grounded an account of republican liberty that advocates resistance to demagogues, kings and emperors (p. 477). Niccolò Machiavelli aimed to revive these ideals in his *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* (1517). Republican liberty and its models of governance are further noticed in the centuries that followed, i.a. in the Italian cantons, in the United Provinces of the Netherlands (1581–1795), in various English writers' constitutional works on restraining/removing kings during the Civil War and Commonwealth (1642–60), and subsequently in the Glorious Revolution (1688), and in the events related to the American Independence (1763–83), (Sellers 2015: 478).

Neo-Roman republicanism constitutes one of two approaches to civic republicanism, the other being neo-Athenian republicanism. The latter is characterized by a civic humanism inspired by the ancient Greeks; it underlines civic virtue, a strong sense of citizenship, and the active participation in political life; principles elementary to securing the freedom of the state. The neo-Athenian strand of civic republicanism is associated with communitarianism, which emphasizes the importance of community in political life. The former approach, neo-Roman republicanism, shares many of the neo-Athenian principles; however, it opposes direct democracy (Maynor 2007). Here, individual liberty is tied to the freedom of the state. The ancient republics were susceptible to tyranny and mob rule, according to neo-Roman republican writers like Machiavelli and Madison. Therefore, in order to preserve individual liberty, within the neo-Roman approach modern antimajoritarian amendments such as judicial review, representative government and the emphasis on the rule of law ensure individual freedom. These functions prevent the exercise of arbitrary power by the state over the citizenry (Maynor 2007).

### *Republican Revival*

Quentin Skinner writes in 'A Third Concept of Liberty' (2002) that nondomination is a vision of negative liberty that strongly contrasts the Berlinian/Hobbesian conception. Berlin adopts the Hobbesian notion of liberty in his account of negative liberty; that a free person is someone who can without imposed constraints set out to achieve what he or she is capable of achieving.<sup>2</sup> This other vision of liberty, freedom as nondomination, reoccurs in the early 17<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Skinner quotes Hobbes: "'a free man' is someone who 'in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindred to doe what he has a will to'." (2002: 245). This understanding of liberty was adopted by Hume, Bentham, Mill (to some degree), and Sidgwick, among others (ibid.).

century England during the dispute between King Charles I and the English Parliament: “Critics of the royal prerogative began to argue that, to the extent that they were obliged to live in dependence on the power of the king, and obliged in consequence to rely on his goodwill for the continuation of their rights and liberties, they were living in a state of servitude” (Skinner 2002: 247).

The republican constitutional structure of modern Western politics was formed in part as a response to the constitutional controversies of the French and the American revolutions, which created an enduring commitment to liberty. In the United States Constitution (1787, Article IV, Section 4) all states of the union were guaranteed ‘a republican form of government’. Most Western democracies today have constitutional provisions of independent judges and senates in accordance with republican political theory. Republican politics and its opposition to arbitrary power is a model for many lawyers as well as philosophers. In law schools, the republican doctrine has recently been revived by lawyers like Cass Sunstein and Frank Michelman, opposing corruption and partisan legislation through judicial intervention that aims to uphold the common good (Sellers 2015: 478).

Neo-Roman republicanism has had its most detailed proposal recently by Philip Pettit, who has replaced Berlin’s taxonomy of positive and negative liberty with freedom as nondomination. Pettit’s account of freedom suggests protection from arbitrary power. ‘Arbitrary power’ includes acts of interference, and the mere capacity for arbitrary interference, against people’s interests, their choices and ideas (p. 480). Pettit’s theory holds (roughly) that government must serve the common good, that certain institutional arrangements can secure that it does, and that then liberty will materialize as a result (ibid.).

### *Recent Research*

There is a great deal of research on nondomination. Nondomination is studied from various angles; the rule of law, the role of the state and the institutions, democratic implications, and the social aspect, to name a few. As a political ideal, nondomination is frequently compared to noninterference, as domination occurs through ‘intentional arbitrary interference’ (Pettit 2021: 19). The recent research used here involves the relevant comparison between nondomination and noninterference, drawing on the works of Berlin, Taylor, MacCallum, Pettit, Skinner, Steiner, Carter and Kramer. However, among these, Pettit, Skinner, Carter and Kramer are most relevant to this essay.

Pettit's 'freedom as nondomination' has recently been criticized for being obsolete, as some scholars believe that nondomination fails at articulating contemporary sophisticated forms of domination, claiming that it is more suited for 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century feudal systems. The sort of domination that Pettit and Skinner have in mind is here considered 'pre-modern' and reflects republican struggles against monarchical arbitrary power.<sup>3</sup> This does not imply that Pettit's account of domination does not exist in modern times, but rather merely that it cannot be claimed to be an exhaustive account of domination in contemporary society. Pettit's historical references are largely addressed by the liberal discourse, claims Michael J. Thompson, who sees Pettit's concerns as 'pre-liberal' (2013: 281–82). Noninterference opposes actual interference, whereas nondomination is here concerned with a type of servitude akin to subjugation in a defenseless predisposition to interference (p. 282).

Among the different approaches in the literature one approach is recurring, and that is the rapprochement approach, which republican theorists often reject, since they (Pettit and Skinner, for instance) believe that their conception of liberty differs from that of freedom as noninterference in significant ways. Those who find rapprochement desirable claim that freedom is to be sought between the two concepts (nondomination and noninterference), as in Valentini and List (2016), who seek a logically sustainable social freedom in 'freedom as independence'. This is a common approach, in which the liberal conception of liberty and its republican counterpart are claimed to be conceptually as well as normatively similar. This approach often claims the compatibility of Rawlsian liberalism and republicanism; two such examples are Blain Neufeld (2019), and Lars Moen (2021).

Neufeld says that nondomination is integral to Rawls's political liberalism; that the Rawlsian ideal provides an equivalent to the realization of republican freedom as that of the corresponding republican ideal. Moen claims likewise that republican freedom and liberal freedom are compatible; that Rawls's political liberalism suggests the same institutional arrangements as Pettit's republicanism. These ideals are compatible in Moen due to 'politicization'. This is a process that articulates republicanism and liberalism in ways that are equally compelling to the public, which makes them homogenous.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For the history of republican liberty see Pettit (2021), Skinner (2002), and Sellers (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Moen explains how this process undermines republicanism: "Politicizing the ideal is a sensible way of making it compelling to modern societies, but it leaves republicanism incapable of demanding greater popular commitment to establishing and maintaining institutions that can protect the basic liberties beyond what political liberalism demands" (Moen 2021: 3).

According to Moen, Rawls's theory accounts for the same basic liberties as Pettit's theory. In Pettit, nondomination is preferable to noninterference thanks to protection from arbitrary power; he believes that freedom as nondomination has a stronger commitment to popular control over government than freedom as noninterference; his republicanism emphasizes the rule of law, separation of powers, contestatory citizenry,<sup>5</sup> and mixed constitution (Moen 2021).

In 'Preserving Republican Freedom: A Reply to Simpson' (2019), Philip Pettit and Frank Lovett respond to Simpson's claim that the republican conception of freedom as nondomination is self-defeating. Simpson claims namely that the popular sovereignty of Pettit, which allows control over the institutions, will ultimately also allow the public to control individuals, which Pettit and Lovett refute and reject (Pettit and Lovett 2019).

The focus of this essay is the comparison between what Carter and Kramer term 'pure negative liberty', which according to them is the proper articulation of negative liberty, and the republican theory of Pettit and Skinner (i.a. Pettit 2021; Pettit 2008; Pettit 2011; Pettit 2013; Skinner 2002; Skinner 2008; Kramer 2008; Carter 2008; Lang 2012; Harbour 2011).

### *Concepts of Liberty*

Isaiah Berlin makes the dichotomy negative/positive liberty in his seminal essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty' (1958), where the former represents freedom as noninterference while the latter represents freedom as self-mastery. Negative liberty implies the absence of interference and is viewed as 'freedom from' constraint, whereas positive liberty implies the 'freedom to' pursue one's own goals in life (Berlin 2006: 369–74).

Berlin defines positive liberty as the liberty of self-mastery. He says that it is historically prevalent in totalitarian regimes, since the self and agents' interests can be manipulated into a collective self and consequently into serving external interests. Positive liberty is in Berlin a paradox, which goes from the idea of self-mastery for the individual to the individual being enslaved by an ideology. The self has historically been claimed by tribes, religions, races and states; it has been replaced by ideals of 'higher' and 'real' selves, and so the same self-

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<sup>5</sup> There are three main political ideas in the republican tradition: 1) the primary concern of the republic/state is to ensure nondomination; that each citizen enjoys the freedom of not living under another's power, 2) in order to secure the first requirement the state must establish constraints within its structure of mixed constitution, and 3) "citizens are to keep the republic to its proper business," by having individual as well as collective virtues to contest policy: "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance" (Pettit 2013: 170).



mastery has led to totalitarianism and enslavement (pp. 373–75). However, positive liberty also entails the active participation in political life as well as Kantian moral autonomy; the freedom to act and pursuing one's goals (O'Hagan 2015).

There are other approaches to liberty, with regard to Berlin's taxonomy. Being free from constraint means precisely that you without hindrance may pursue your goals, which makes any such distinction (positive/negative) problematic. Gerald MacCallum claims that freedom always presupposes freedom from constraint upon action or deliberate inaction. His triadic analysis of freedom says that freedom always involves the same relation between agents, their goals and constraints; by this logic there is merely *one* form of liberty (Skinner 2002: 237).

Nondomination is sometimes referred to as a third concept of liberty, and in Skinner it requires the absence of dependence, whereas in Pettit, it requires the absence of domination; however, both describe freedom as nondomination. Nondomination entails the absence of mastery by others, rather than the absence of interference by others as in the traditional notion of negative liberty. It shares with the negative concept the element of absence, instead of presence, and with the positive concept the focus on mastery, rather than interference (Pettit 2021: 23).

Freedom is to be understood as the absence of domination on Pettit's account. Domination occurs when a person is subjected to the will of another, meaning that the dominated party lives at the mere mercy of the dominating party. You can also have domination despite noninterference. Subjects of a benevolent master may be left to their everyday choices within the confinements of slavery, for instance, or the day laborer may enjoy the charity of the employer. Pettit holds that despite being subjected to the will of other agents, they may suffer little or no interference, which shows that mere noninterference is inadequate as a theory of liberty, since a slave to a benevolent noninterfering master is nevertheless unfree (Pettit 2021: 19–20). M. D. Harbour quotes Pettit: "I suffer domination to the extent that I have a master; I enjoy noninterference to the extent that the master fails to interfere" (Harbour 2011: 187).

Nondomination opposes arbitrary interference only, whereas state interference is required in ensuring nondomination. According to Pettit, proponents of negative liberty consider *any* interference abrogative of freedom, while his own ideal of nonarbitrary interference aims to

further citizens' freedom.<sup>6</sup> Nonarbitrary interference underscores citizens' control over the kind of desirable interference that the republican institutions subject them to (Moen 2021: 6).<sup>7</sup>

Nondomination cannot be reduced to noninterference; it cannot be described with the mere absence of interference. Nondomination prescribes freedom from the possibility of arbitrary interference, or as Pettit later has reformulated it, the 'absence of alienating control' (2008: 122–24). However, Ian Carter and Matthew Kramer have put in question the conceptual differentiation made between nondomination and noninterference, asking whether the dangers of domination emphasized by Pettit are not in effect equally accounted for by negative liberty; since a person subjected to these conditions is deprived of negative liberty, when properly formulated; Carter terms this view 'pure negative'. Pure negative liberty emphasizes the overall liberty of the agent, with reference to 'conjunctively exercisable opportunities'. When the highwayman threatens you with 'your money or your life', the conjunctive option of preserving your money as well as your life is removed, and so your overall liberty is curtailed, even though you are given the disjunctive option of 'your money or your life' (Carter 2008: 58–82; Kramer 2008: 31–57).

### *Disposition*

The essay unfolds in six sections. Following the introduction the concept of freedom as nondomination is described in section two, which is succeeded by the part on pure negative liberty in section three; both these sections are comparative, meaning that the two concepts of nondomination and noninterference are described in relation to one another. Section four makes a thorough comparison between freedom as nondomination and freedom as noninterference, where the republican theorists state their case for distinctiveness and preferability, while the pure-negative theorists contest both claims.<sup>8</sup> In the fifth section I offer my own assessment, with regard to the distinctiveness and the preferability of nondomination,

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<sup>6</sup> Pettit has rephrased 'arbitrary interference' to 'uncontrolled interference', arguing that the opposite, 'controlled interference' (nonarbitrary interference), cannot be viewed as 'interference', since interference that is controlled by the interferee is no longer interference (see Pettit 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Pettit views 'interference' in the same manner as Berlin. Interference consists in an agent's removing or making an option less accessible to another agent, and thus restricting the agent's opportunity set. Describing 'uncontrolled interference', Moen offers Pettit's formulation: "'exercised at the will or discretion of the interferer; interference that is uncontrolled by the person on the receiving end'" (2021: 7). However, Pettit's understanding of interference demands further explanation. When it comes to individuating options, as it should become clear later In section four of this essay, Pettit underlines modification and *replacement* of options, as a contrast to pure-negative theorists' emphasis on the *removal* of options (Pettit 2008: 122).

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Kramer writes that civic republicans can perhaps "lay claim to distinctiveness" but that their analysis does not exceed that of negative liberty (2008: 56).

and in the sixth and final section there will be a brief conclusion. My aim for this disposition is to first lay out each theory in relation to the other; make a detailed comparison between the two concepts in which the republican theorists and the pure-negative theorists state their cases; assess the most relevant features of the theories in answering the essay's questions on distinctiveness and preferability; in order to conclude the essay in the last section.

## 2. FREEDOM AS NONDOMINATION

In Pettit, as should be clear in this section, noninterference does not protect against arbitrary power, and it does not secure freedom from domination through necessary nonarbitrary interference.<sup>9</sup> This distinction, if it in fact can be claimed as such, should make nondomination preferable to noninterference. Pettit claims namely that people can enjoy noninterference and still be dominated; they may avoid actual interference, and yet suffer uncertainty, unrest, and an unequal social standing. This section lays out Pettit's arguments for nondomination's advantages vis-à-vis noninterference. These arguments are based on benefits which noninterference cannot offer.

### *The Ideal*

Nondomination is an ideal that says that if an agent's options are dependent on the goodwill of a more powerful agency, the agent is not free when choosing among those options. This line of thinking goes at least back to the Roman republican view on freedom, further through the Renaissance and the English republican tradition. Pettit refers to Richard Price and Algernon Sidney, saying that a choice that is dependent on another's will is not a free choice. He quotes *Cato's Letters*: "Liberty is, to live upon one's own terms; slavery is, to live at the mere mercy of another" (Pettit 2011: 708).

Pettit argues that the history of liberty and slavery, as discussed in the republican tradition, supports the conception of freedom as nondomination, rather than that of noninterference. It is

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<sup>9</sup> In comparison with Berlin's understanding of 'interference', it appears Pettit has the clearer idea. Berlin identified negative liberty with liberalism, a political tradition that guards the individual against interference; state interference in particular; which of course contradicts Pettit's view. In Pettit, the state must interfere in order to secure nondomination (similar state functions can be found in liberal politics as well). Berlin's view on interference was built on the experience of the totalitarian regimes of his time. Furthermore, Timothy O'Hagan claims that Berlin was "ambivalent as to whether the interference must be deliberate or not" (see O'Hagan 2015: 398), which Pettit on the other hand discusses extensively.

according to Pettit evident in this tradition that subjects to ‘kindly’ noninterfering masters did not consider themselves freer as a result of the masters’ noninterference (2021: 35–36).

Subjugation may hence exist despite the absence of interference. The republican tradition shows that you may be enslaved and yet not interfered with; be dominated but left to carry on without interference (p. 23). You may also be interfered with without being dominated; Pettit adduces good interference as an example in this regard, as in someone looking after one’s interests and furthering one’s liberty (ibid.).

Domination as well as interference always involve people, meaning that the dominating party cannot consist in a system; however, it may consist in individual agents as well as collectives or corporates.<sup>10</sup> The tyranny of the majority, for instance, is a form of collective domination. There are three relational conditions in which domination occurs (p. 53):

[...] someone has dominating power over another, someone dominates or subjugates another, to the extent that

1. they have the capacity to interfere
2. on an arbitrary basis
3. in certain choices that the other is in a position to make

Nondomination suggests the absence of mastery by others, rather than the absence of interference by others; as stated earlier, what it has in common with the negative concept of liberty is the element of absence, instead of that of presence, and what it has in common with the positive concept is the focus on mastery, rather than interference (p. 23).

Freedom as nondomination is described as “the condition under which you live in the presence of others but at the mercy of none” (p. 80). The core differences between nondomination and noninterference are grounded in the fact that a person can be dominated without the exposure to interference, or be interfered with by an agency through subjection to law and government without being dominated. The republican tradition defines a distinctive freedom through its conception of freedom as nondomination, which in Pettit is further pointed out as a supreme political value; showing that a coercive state, when rightly

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<sup>10</sup> Collectives and corporates involve people. A system by itself cannot dominate, but merely the employment of a system by people: “While a dominating party will always be an agent—it cannot just be a system or network or whatever—it may be a personal or corporate or collective agent: this, as in the tyranny of the majority, where the domination is never the function of a single individual’s power. And while a dominated agent, ultimately, will always have to be an individual person or persons, domination may often be targeted on a group or on a corporate agent: it will constitute domination of individual people but in a collective identity or capacity or aspiration” (Pettit 2021: 53).

constituted, merely serves to promote that value. Furthering liberty thus becomes the republican state's chief end. Nondomination constitutes the sole yardstick by which to measure a community's social and political constitution (p. 81).

Pettit suggests a consequentialist account of freedom in nondomination, minimizing domination, with institutions upholding nondomination as a sole goal. It is, in his words, "a consequentialism with a difference." He writes: "[...] it allows us to say that the institutions which promote people's freedom as non-domination go to constitute that freedom, not to cause it; the doctrine does not countenance any temporal or causal gulf between civic institutions and the freedom of citizens" (ibid.).

Freedom as nondomination requires that institutions promote values such as welfare, equality, and utility, without introducing them as a set of distinct desiderata, unlike the approach of freedom as noninterference. The state facilitates freedom as personal self-mastery, ensuring autonomy. People may be trusted to advance their own autonomy when protected from domination. Advancing nondomination involves eliminating hurdles that diminish freedom, and promoting the domain of undominated choice (pp. 81–84).<sup>11</sup>

### *Personal/Instrumental Good*

Freedom as nondomination is a personal good as well as an instrumental good. It is beneficial to the individual enjoying it, as well as to generating other benefits qua instrumental good. It compares favorably to freedom as noninterference. The main instrumental benefit associated with noninterference is not having one's choices obstructed intentionally by others. However, despite the absence of interference, one may be hindered by other hurdles. These may consist in one's personal lack of power, or a hostile environment, resulting in reduced freedom even though one would enjoy the absence of intentional impediments related to interference (p. 83). Noninterference does not instrumentally provide absence of natural obstacles, and so you can have the presence of such obstacles despite enjoying ideal noninterference. Nondomination is in Pettit a personal good; it is deemed desirable for anyone; and since it generates certain benefits, it is further deemed an instrumental good (ibid.).

Freedom as nondomination ensures exemption from intentional arbitrary interference. It allows, however, a sophisticated nonarbitrary interference imposed by a suitable law. This

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<sup>11</sup> 'The domain of undominated choice' consists in undominated choices, i.e. choices that are made autonomously, from a position in which the agent is free to choose among options. There are available options in domination as well, but according to Pettit, a dominated person does not choose freely among options.

means that nondomination merely opposes arbitrary interference based on hostility and ideas unshared by the interfered party, while it promotes the nonarbitrary legal interference that checks and constraints arbitrary interference.<sup>12</sup> Proponents of noninterference view any coercion, by the law and the state, however well-motivated and well-regulated, just as undesirable as any other form of coercion, while proponents of nondomination only oppose coercion of the arbitrary kind (p. 84):

Devotees of non-interference look for a sphere of action for the individual that is untainted by any actual or expected coercion. Devotees of non-domination look for a sphere of action that is untainted by coercion—or the capacity for coercion—from arbitrary quarters only.

There are three key differences between noninterference and nondomination, showcasing the benefits of the latter. The first benefit is certainty. The presence of the uncertainty involved in mere noninterference arises from the volatile nature of arbitrary interference itself.

Nondomination aims at eliminating arbitrary interference, whereas noninterference provides an expectation of the total absence of interference. Pettit argues that this benefit is notable in the trivial truth that nonarbitrary interference is preferable to arbitrary interference (*ibid.*).

Exposure to arbitrary interference results in a high level of uncertainty; it goes beyond having one's choices blocked intentionally. People living in the reality of, or the expectation of, arbitrary interference suffer this uncertainty, since it is impossible for them to know when or where the arbitrary interference may strike, which consequently makes planning more difficult than it would be under nonarbitrary interference (p. 85).

Freedom as nondomination reduces the possibility of arbitrary interference to which one may be exposed, whereas freedom as noninterference minimizes one's overall expectation of interference; and so a person enjoying maximal noninterference may be exposed to significant uncertainty, unlike the one enjoying nondomination: "It is quite possible that the maximal non-interference possible for someone will be available under an arrangement where that person has to suffer much uncertainty. But it is hardly conceivable that the same is true for the maximal non-domination that they might achieve" (*ibid.*).

The second benefit has to do with another aspect of arbitrary interference being worse than nonarbitrary. Having to expect arbitrary interference brings a high level of unrest; not knowing the stance of the powerful on things and what they might expect from you next

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<sup>12</sup> Nondomination entails the active removal of all obstacles – natural, legal and cultural – that condition 'the domain of undominated choice'.

brings anticipation and constant strategic deference. Instead of pursuing one's goals and affairs, one must navigate through minefields of different potential threats. Advancing freedom as nondomination seeks to reduce others' capacity for arbitrary interference in order to lessen unrest and the need for strategic deference. Leaving people to looking after their own freedom, with reference to their own capacities for strategic deference, makes them vulnerable to high levels of unrest (p. 86).

This imposed strategic disposition may obstruct the individual's choices, and the constant need for deference may equally lead to a life of self-denial; however, it does not qualify as interference, notes Pettit, not even of the arbitrary kind.<sup>13</sup> Interference can only be done intentionally. It is nonetheless undesirable to be forced into denying oneself certain choices in order to attain noninterference. Therefore, Pettit concludes that the ideal of nondomination is preferable to that of noninterference, in that it targets arbitrary interference in one's affairs and minimizes the need for strategy (p. 87).

The third benefit derives from nondomination becoming common knowledge, making one person's social standing equal to another's.<sup>14</sup> This reflects the possibility of being able to enjoy an equal social standing to that of others, and not having to submit to their will. Not being interfered with alone does not ensure equality. Even when the more powerful do not interfere with the less powerful, there is a common awareness of unequal power relations.<sup>15</sup> Nondomination establishes awareness of equality, making it common knowledge. The mere notion of having less power than another entails subordination to that other (ibid.).

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<sup>13</sup> Not qualifying as interference does not mean that a person in this condition does not suffer domination. This is another instance of Pettit showing that freedom as nondomination covers the mere exposure to arbitrary power, whereas freedom as noninterference does not (see the discussion in section 4).

<sup>14</sup> When freedom as nondomination is sufficiently advanced, practiced and acknowledged, it becomes common knowledge, and individuals will enjoy equal standing in society; they no longer suffer vulnerability before the powerful; "They can look the other in the eye; they do not have to bow and scrape" (Pettit 2021: 87–88).

<sup>15</sup> This mere notion of disadvantage is emphasized in nondomination, as opposed to the actuality requirement of freedom as noninterference (actual interference). See for instance Skinner's 'A Third Concept of Liberty' (2002).

### 3. PURE NEGATIVE LIBERTY

In this section, arguments against nondomination will be stated, and we will have Pettit respond to them. These arguments read that those qualities which freedom as nondomination ascribes to its own conception of liberty are *de facto* accounted for by the traditional notion of negative liberty, when articulated properly. Being ‘properly articulated’ refers specifically to the overall freedom of an agent, instead of the focus on specific preferences, options and actions. This is the pure negative view.

#### *Conjunctively Exercisable Opportunities*

Ian Carter and Matthew Kramer concede that Pettit is right in that negative liberty appears insufficient, but that the problem does not lie in the negative conception of freedom as such, but rather in the way in which it traditionally has been articulated. According to them, Pettit’s insights do not legitimate the need for a third concept of liberty, but rather merely for an updated version of the existing negative view. There is a crucial difference often overlooked by Pettit as well as certain proponents of negative liberty, and that is the difference between an agent’s overall negative liberty and his or her specific negative freedoms with regard to single acts and choices. This view draws on Hillel Steiner’s ideas (1994), where Carter and Kramer describe a pure sense of negative liberty that underscores the overall available opportunities of the agent, disregarding agents’ individual interests and preferences: “Freedom, on the negative view, then, is concerned not just with the interference an agent encounters in attempting to engage in any particular act, but with the range of possible actions he or she could perform unimpeded under given circumstances” (Harbour 2011: 190).

This account takes into consideration not only actual interference, but also the possibility of any future interference that may diminish freedom. This makes negative freedom a modal concept. An agent forced into living under the threat of another may not be prohibited from performing any specific action, but the threat reduces nonetheless ‘the range of conjunctively exercisable opportunities’ (p. 190). When for instance a bully threatens you, there is no actual physical interference if you comply, but your negative freedom will be impeded as a result of not having the same possibilities available to you had the bully not threatened you (p. 190). Matthew Kramer’s definition of ‘conjunctively exercisable opportunities’ reads: “a set of opportunities that can all be exercised together simultaneously and/or sequentially” (Kramer 2008: 57).



In Carter, when an agent threatens another, it does not necessarily imply that the threatened agent cannot perform any single isolated action, but the threat rather deprives the agent of the possibility of performing various sets of actions that would be possible otherwise (Harbour 2011: 190–91). An agent could defy the threat and not comply with the demands of the bully, but it would be inaccurate to claim that the threat does not diminish the agent's freedom. This observation brings us to Pettit's 'lucky slave'; that is, the slave who is lucky enough to have a kindly, noninterfering master. The lucky slave may not suffer any actual interference at a given time; however, were the slave to defy the master's terms, the master would interfere; and so the range of conjunctively exercisable opportunities diminishes, since the slave lives at the mere mercy of the master, which stands even when actual sanctions are avoided. This changes the alleged negative liberty which in Pettit is claimed to be enjoyed by the lucky slave (ibid.).

In 'The Instability of Freedom as Noninterference: The Case of Isaiah Berlin', Pettit criticizes Hobbes and Berlin in proposing that adaptation and ingratiation can further agents' freedom; that if only an agent adapts to circumstance or sees to ingratiate the agent whose will he or she is subjected to freedom might materialize. In cases where your choices are dependent on another's taste and inclination freedom is volatile: "When I grant you the favor of choosing as you wish, it remains the case that should my will change, then I will interfere with one or the other option. You depend on my will remaining the favorable way it is [...]" (Pettit 2011: 706). This goes for the lucky slave as well.

In Pettit, it is clear, that the main difference between noninterference and nondomination is the view on actual and possible interference. He says repeatedly that insofar as someone has the means to interfere with one's choices, arbitrarily and with impunity, one is dominated (ibid.). Noninterference is claimed to object to actual interference only; however, it also accounts for the *prospect* of actual interference. In the case of the lucky slave, it appears improbable to be free in slavery, with or without the sort of noninterference that Pettit adduces. It is therefore reasonable to ask whether it at all is plausible for the slave to avoid interference. If the answer is negative, well, then noninterference accounts for the lucky slave scenario. Perhaps the slave is not so 'lucky' after all then (Harbour 2011: 191–92). For as Pettit himself points out, with reference to Hobbes: "The reputation of power is power" (Pettit 2011: 707).

Based on what we know about the condition of slavery, it would be misleading to say that slaves do not suffer interference. The pure negative view thus accounts for the subordinate

status in which the mere possibility of interference diminishes agents' sets of options. This goes against Pettit's claim that noninterference can exist in slavery, and that negative liberty fails to account for such relations. Pettit describes how the capacity for arbitrary interference limits agents' choices, as the agent may enjoy noninterference as long as he or she submits to certain terms, whereas the noninterference would be withdrawn were the agent to do otherwise (Harbour 2011; Pettit 2011). Once again it is clear how these conditions considerably diminish negative liberty. In the pure negative sense the agent is unfree to perform a range of actions that would contradict the terms, despite avoiding actual interference at any given instance. Viewed this way, it becomes difficult to see how nondomination is different from noninterference (Harbour 2011: 192).

Pettit responds by arguing that threats constitute coercion by altering the content of the agent's available choices, not by removing options. Options are defined as "a package of probabilistically weighted possible consequences, each with its own attractive or aversive aspect" (ibid.). When someone threatens you with 'Your money or your life', keeping your money does not equal the same option as if the threat were not imposed on you, and so the implications of keeping your money have changed significantly. This means in Pettit that options be contextually evaluated; they may not be evaluated in isolation. For Pettit, individuating options presupposes a sophisticated method in which options are more nuanced; we should decide options' qualitative worth in accordance with their attractive/aversive characteristics; however, it is exactly this sort of assessment that pure negative liberty ignores when referring to the range of available options. The pure negative view individuates agents' options extensionally only, irrespective of context (p. 193).<sup>16</sup>

### *Actual and Probable Interference*

Negative liberty does not merely object to actual interference. The claim that merely actual obstruction reduces liberty does not mean that solely actual obstruction of agents' chosen options reduces liberty. Obstruction of *unchosen* options curtails liberty just as much. In the negative sense, a person may suffer reduction in liberty in all cases where options are

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<sup>16</sup> On the pure negative view, actions must be assessed extensionally, rather than intensionally. This means that actions may not be treated in terms of the categories and descriptions that they adhere to, but rather in terms of the necessary physical elements involved when performing them. Actions may meet several descriptions simultaneously in the intensional sense (Harbour 2011: 193).

interfered with, given that these cases represent actual scenarios, whereas the republican conception holds that liberty may be reduced even in ‘possible’ cases (Lang 2012: 282–83).

Negative liberty attaches in practice just as much legitimacy to the prospect of actual interference as it does actual interference. The prospect of actual interference, albeit derivative, curtails liberty on the negative view. However, *probable* interference is on the negative view not abrogative of freedom (p. 84). The prospect of actual interference is thus separated from mere probable interference within the pure negative sense. Merely actual interference curtails liberty then in the negative sense, in addition to its prospect. There is a difference between the probability of interference and the prospect of actual interference; probable interference is nonconcrete, whereas the prospect of actual interference is tangible and eminent (ibid.).<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. DISTINCTIVENESS AND PREFERABILITY

In this section Carter and Kramer make their case for their theory, as will Pettit and Skinner, while both camps defend stances and respond to criticism. The issues discussed consist in the debate on theoretical distinctiveness and preferability. The pure-negative theorists claim that that which Pettit and Skinner view as exclusive to their own theory has in effect already been accounted for by negative liberty, whereas the republicans disagree.

##### *Overall Freedom and Overall Dependence*

According to Matthew Kramer, Skinner changes his view on the relationship between the two concepts of liberty; from civic republicanism being in line with negative liberty, to its being a distinct concept. Skinner does not refer to particular freedoms in his theory, as in specific actions, but rather to overall liberty and overall dependence, which makes his conception of liberty similar to negative liberty (Kramer 2008: 32–33). In *Liberty before Liberalism* (1998) Skinner says that a person may be rendered unfree by either force/threat of force, or domination. When you are prevented by someone from engaging in a particular activity, or a combination of sets of activities, you are *pro tanto* rendered unfree. Skinner admits this

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<sup>17</sup> Gerald Lang (2012) separates ‘prospect’ from ‘probability’; however, the issue of probability is discussed by Carter and Kramer, with respect to probable exercise of power (see section 4 of this essay; Carter 2008: 69–70).

similarity, but insists that dependence is a distinct mode of unfreedom that is overlooked by negative-liberty theorists (Kramer 2008: 33).

A person's overall freedom is determined by "the range of the combinations of conjunctively exercisable opportunities" available to the person (p. 34). If someone is free to take a certain action that curtails the person's further freedom in future opportunities, or if there simply are not any further options available following that first action, then the overall liberty of that person is curtailed. A dominated person is dependent on the goodwill of the dominator, and so the dependence impairs the dominated person's overall freedom; even when very few of the person's particular options are eliminated through that dependence, the overall freedom is nevertheless significantly diminished (ibid.).

In domination, the combinations of conjunctively exercisable liberties that are made unavailable are the ones the dominator deems undesirable, and which necessitate penalties. This entails that there would be countless conjunctively exercisable options available to the dominated party in the absence of domination; combinations of liberties that are not conjunctively available in the presence of domination; as a result, the dependent person's overall freedom is reduced significantly. Negative liberty includes these relations and does not need to be supplemented by civic republicanism in this regard (p. 35).

### *Conjunctively Exercisable Opportunities and Intentionality in Republican Theory*

Kramer claims that civic-republican theorists, when criticizing despotic autocracies, in effect aim at curtailed conjunctive exercisability of liberties within those regimes, which is accounted for by negative liberty (p. 36):

When a ruler wields tyrannical power, many of the freedoms of citizens to engage in non-obsequious patterns of behavior will no longer be exercisable conjunctively with their freedoms to engage in any modes of conduct that would be prevented by the tyrant's penalties for insufficient deference. There is no need whatsoever to go beyond a theory of negative liberty for this important insight into the workings of despotism. Nonetheless, Skinner resolutely endeavors to put some distance between the civic-republican approach and that of the negative-liberty theorists. He contends that the republican campaign against tyranny was informed by a more expansive sense of the nature of unfreedom.

Negative liberty is not as narrow as Skinner's account of it suggests, says Kramer. It does not limit itself to merely force and coercion for sources of unfreedom. Skinner's own account of freedom is narrower than that of negative liberty in two respects. Firstly, Skinner holds that

unfreedom arises in the moment of realization of its condition; negative liberty does not recognize this limitation on the emergence of the unfree condition. Someone who has been locked inside a room by someone else is reasonably unfree to leave whether or not he or she is aware of the door being locked. Irrespective of this notion the person will be unfree, even though he or she will not feel unfree unless the plight is realized (p. 38).

This also concerns relations of domination, since a dependent person may be ignorant of his/her curtailed conjunctively exercisable opportunities. In such a position of dependence you may not realize that were you to act any differently than you actually do, i.e. to breach the terms of the dominator, you will be punished; then you are not aware of your subordination and do not feel unfree. However, irrespective of awareness or ignorance of domination and dependence, the overall freedom of the dominated party is diminished, since access to the combinations of conjunctively exercisable liberties are either way limited (p. 39).

Secondly, civic republicans assumes that unfreedom arises intentionally through certain means, or as Kramer puts it: “by way of conduct that is intended to cause such an effect” (p. 39). Just like force and coercion, domination is exercised intentionally in generating unfreedom; a trait which is manifest in the writings of contemporary civic republicans like Pettit, who excludes ‘non-intentional obstruction’ from factors that generate unfreedom (pp. 39–40). The same principle goes for relationships of power, which Pettit claims are *per se* sources of domination; that the mere notion of inferiority causes subordination and domination. Kramer underscores the willingness to dominate. If someone in position of power, however well-known and recognized as powerful, lacks the will to dominate others, then the overall freedom of those others cannot be claimed to be abridged, and so there is no domination. Pettit’s theory does not account for these situations, he says (pp. 41–49).

Kramer concludes that Pettit’s and Skinner’s efforts to separate the republican conception of freedom from negative liberty have failed. What is termed ‘domination’ in their theory is in effect included in contemporary negative-liberty theory. Domination arises when the combinations of conjunctively exercisable opportunities are limited, which is accounted for by Kramer’s updated version of negative liberty. However, Kramer writes that civic republicanism can perhaps “lay claim to distinctiveness”, but that its analysis of liberty does not exceed that of negative liberty (p. 56).

### *Power as an 'Exercise Concept' and Power as an 'Opportunity Concept'*

Ian Carter points out the distinction between power as an 'exercise concept' and power as an 'opportunity concept'. The possibility of *A* exercising power over *B*, as in simply having power over *B*, is an opportunity concept, whereas the actual exercise of power is an exercise concept. However, were *A* disinterested in exercising power over *B*, *A* would not modify *B*'s behavior into serving *A*'s interests, despite the opportunity to do so (Carter 2008: 60). This is an instance where pure negative liberty differs from nondomination. Both Carter and Kramer hold that interest/disinterest in exercising existing power must be taken into account, with regard to power relations that potentially curtail freedom (ibid.).

On Carter's account of pure negative liberty, "a person is unfree to perform some action if and only if some other person renders that action physically impossible" (p. 61). On this view, he stresses, freedom is an 'opportunity concept', not an 'exercise concept'. Here, the emphasis is on possible actions, rather than actual ones; as in how many doors one has the opportunity to go through, rather than which doors one chooses to open or how one chooses to go through them. This implies doing something for certain reasons, voluntarily, rather than doing it for lacking other acceptable alternatives (p. 62).

### *'Freedom to Act' and 'Acting Freely'*

Carter says that Hobbes is "the most famous defender of the pure negative conception of freedom" (p. 62). Hobbes asserted that when the highwayman threatens you with 'Your money or your life', you are free in your refusal of handing over your money, since you are not physically prevented from choosing that option, even though it is extremely costly. However, Carter thinks that Hobbes's reasoning fails to separate the 'freedom to act' from 'acting freely' in a satisfactory manner, resulting in the assumption that you hand over your money freely. Hobbes's way of viewing negative freedom is in this regard inconsistent with contemporary pure negative theory, writes Carter, adding that it is a misrepresentation by Pettit to term their overall view 'the Hobbesian view' (p. 63):

The pure negative conception is not a conception of free action, and pure negative theorists are not therefore committed to the view that an agent's having a minimum of rational control over her actions is sufficient for her to be described as acting freely. The pure negative view says that where *A* makes *B* do *x* by threatening severe sanctions, *A* leaves *B* free to do not-*x*, but it does not say that when *B* actually does *x* she does so freely or voluntarily. *A*'s power can be coherently said to reduce the freedom or voluntariness with which *B* acts while nevertheless not removing any particular freedoms-to-act on the part of *B*.

In *A Theory of Freedom* (Pettit 2001) the political conception of freedom is closely related to the theory of the will, as it is in Hobbes, which Pettit, according to Carter, unconsciously projects onto negative liberty. Contemporary pure-negative theorists claim that a political conception of freedom must be separated from any metaphysical and/or psychological issues concerning free will (whose accurateness Carter points out is a different matter altogether) (Carter 2008: 63).

### *‘The Equivalent-judgments Thesis’*

Carter offers a thesis that he terms ‘the equivalent-judgments thesis’, according to which pure negative liberty is believed to imply comparative judgments on freedom equivalent to the comparative judgments implied by the republican account. While two people may disagree on the accurate definition of freedom, they can nevertheless offer similar answers when asked who is free, when a person’s freedom has been curtailed, or how freedom is to be distributed in society. The thesis aims to answer the republican critique of negative liberty; however, it does not make any claim to the two accounts of liberty being equivalent to each other, nor does it suggest that the one is preferable to the other (pp. 58–59): “equivalent judgments about freedom might be reached because the phenomena respectively identified by the two definitions are ultimately the same (one being reducible to the other), but they might also be reached because the two phenomena are distinct but empirically correlated” (p. 59).

### *‘Coercive Power’ and ‘Anticipated Reactions’*

The relationship between power and freedom is central not only to definitions of freedom, but also to the distinction between liberal and republican views on freedom. Carter says that ‘power’ is on his account short for ‘social power’, as well as/or the power in interpersonal relations. He separates ‘coercive power’ from ‘anticipated reactions’. The former represents threats of violent, symbolic or economic sanctions, which result in a person’s behavior being modified into serving another’s interests, and the same effect may be reached through attractive offers that equally modify behavior into acting to serve another’s interests in order to being rewarded. In the latter sense, power is exercised without threats or offers, through the mere anticipation of the same; that is, were *B* not to behave in a way that serves *A*’s interests, *B* would rightly anticipate sanctions from *A* (p. 60). The equivalent-judgments thesis concerns agents’ overall freedom, and so when an agent’s freedom to act, and the freedom with which the agent acts, are curtailed, the overall freedom of the agent is diminished. Central to this

understanding of freedom is the possibility of ‘acting freely’ (pp. 63–64). ‘Coercive power’ and ‘anticipated reactions’ curtail on the pure negative view one’s freedom-to-act and the freedom with which one acts equally, however (p. 64).

### *The Pure Negative View on ‘Nonarbitrary Interference’*

Carter opposes the second feature of Pettit’s account of nondomination. In Pettit, nondomination differs from noninterference in two ways.<sup>18</sup> As mentioned earlier: you can, 1) be dominated without being interfered with, and 2) be interfered with, without being dominated. This second feature is termed ‘nonarbitrary interference’, and involves interference that is in the interest of the interferee; Carter’s own term for nonarbitrary interference is “interference without unfreedom” (Carter 2008: 64).

Carter believes that there are independent reasons for rejecting the second feature. The first reason is that interference without unfreedom goes against “a basic intuition about unfreedom” shared by liberals as well as a number of republicans (ibid.). This intuition holds that the physical prevention from a certain action is in itself an unfree condition; denying it with reference to the interfered person’s own interests, and that the interference therefore does not restrict the person’s freedom is simply paternalistic; it is by definition an intervention that can reduce someone’s liberty with reference to that someone’s own interests (ibid.).

Carter’s second objection, which he says is of a more fundamental character, is that interference without unfreedom moralizes the concept of freedom. Such a moralized definition reads that as long as obstacles are morally acceptable, they do not curtail liberty. Liberty must be treated as an independent concept, not as a concept dependent on certain rights, as in the libertarian conception of freedom, for example, where obstacles generate unfreedom merely when violating the ideals of minimal state and property rights: “By defining freedom in terms of the political ideals to be defended (in this case, private property and the minimal state), it prevents us from defending those ideals as good on the grounds that they promote freedom (Cohen 2006)” (pp. 64–65).

### *The Absence of Prevention, and Unexercised Power*

Freedom consists in the absence of prevention on the pure negative view, which can be either actual or subjunctive. Consequently, you are not negatively unfree merely if someone actually

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<sup>18</sup> Freedom as noninterference is defined by Carter as “the absence of obstacles imposed by other agents” (2008: 64).



prevents you from doing  $x$ , but also if that someone would prevent you from doing it were you to attempt to do  $x$ . When this point is applied to sets of actions, rather than to single actions, it becomes clear that instances of coercion can occur even where no actual sanctions are carried out. Being coerced into doing  $x$ , means being subjunctively prevented from performing all sets of actions containing  $\sim x$ , in addition to certain other actions under the warned sanctions. And so here  $A$  would physically prevent  $B$  from performing these sets of actions were  $B$  to attempt to perform them. Furthermore, the degree of the threatened sanctions' severity equals the degree of reduction in  $B$ 's freedom, with regard to the effect of the threatened sanctions on  $B$ 's sets of available actions (p. 67).

This applies to coercion as well as anticipated reactions. On the pure negative view, what is crucial to freedom is the set of available options, and that these are not foreclosed, not issued threats. Therefore, that which limits a person's freedom is not coercion as such, but rather another factor that is present in both cases of coercion and cases of anticipated reactions. In both cases  $A$  exercises power over  $B$ , by  $B$  fearing sanctions from  $A$ , and in both cases,  $A$  is rendering  $B$  unfree to perform various sets of actions, even when no specific single action is denied. The conceptual difference between the republican theorists and the pure negative theorists lies according to Carter in the emphasis on the removal of sets of available options, as the republican view emphasizes  $B$ 's dependence on  $A$ 's will, and  $B$ 's behavioral conformity toward  $A$ 's interests. In addition, the pure-negative theorists say that the degree of the limitation on  $B$ 's sets of options is roughly isomorphic to the degree of  $B$ 's dependence on  $A$  for the achievement of goals. This feature (the limitation on sets of options) is present in all forms of unfreedom, with regard to exercised power as well as to existing unexercised power (pp. 67–68).

Republicans claim that negative liberty fails to capture instances of unfreedom under unexercised power. In both Pettit and Skinner this is a recurring theme, where they mean that the mere exposure to power renders people unfree, as opposed to being exposed to the actual exercise of power. Carter and Kramer respond by an appeal to probabilistic assessments of particular freedoms as well as the levels of individuals' overall freedom. Such judgments relate to past actions, present and/or forthcoming ones, further including counterfactual claims about putative impediments of agents' freedom. Therefore, these judgments involve a certain degree of uncertainty. Pettit and Skinner claim that the mere possession of power renders the less powerful unfree, whereas Carter and Kramer insist that the probability of the exercise of

power must be taken into account, and that agents' freedom is as limited as the degree of that probability (pp. 69–70).

### *The Removal of Options: an Act of Interference*

Skinner writes that Carter and Kramer employ the Hobbesian view on freedom, like Hillel Steiner and Michael Taylor (Skinner 2008: 94). In their analysis of the concept of free action freedom is curtailed *if and only if* the action in question is prevented and rendered impossible to perform. In the example of the highwayman, when confronted with the demand 'Your money or your life', one is free to choose among the two options of either giving him one's money or losing one's life. However, the conjunctive option of keeping both one's life and the money is ineligible. Carter and Kramer deny the distinctiveness of the republican theory of liberty in the light of the analysis of this example, which Skinner aims to assess here (ibid.).

Domination and dependence curtail *as such* freedom of action in Pettit's and Skinner's republican theory; a commitment which is further contrasted by negative liberty in both Pettit and Skinner. However, Skinner points out that Kramer, somewhat hastily, has claimed that force and the threat of force constitute the only forms of interference in Skinner's understanding of the liberal conception (pp. 94–95). This account of negative liberty is accurate in the utilitarian sense, as in Paley, Bentham, and Sidgwick. It does not however provide the right characterization of Kramer's own pure negative liberty, wherein, additionally, freedom can be curtailed in the absence of interference. This is due to the claim that freedom-limiting obstruction may be hypothetical in nature, and merely arise from the removal of options, as in the example of the highwayman. The effect of the threat 'Your money or your life' equals the removal of the conjunctive option of preserving your money *and* your life. This outcome is, however, not brought about through an overt act of interference; which allegedly shows that loss of liberty without active acts of interference cannot be claimed to be exclusive to the republican theory (p. 95).

Skinner responds that the above is indeed a result of interference, since the removal of a previously available option may only come about through the coercive force of another agent, which he contends clearly constitutes an act of interference. Republican theorists, unlike their liberal counterparts, do not take similar acts of coercion to be fundamental affronts to freedom, however. In republican theory, the 'fundamental affront' to liberty is the mere presence of arbitrary power. But republican theorists believe that threats and other coercive means that bend a person's will curtail freedom as well (p. 96).

### *Degrees of Unfreedom vis-à-vis Probable Exercise of Power*

Skinner goes on to claim that the reason Carter and Kramer reject the distinctiveness of Pettit's and Skinner's republican account of liberty is a two-pronged misunderstanding on their part. Firstly, they wrongly believe that the relationship between domination and the loss of liberty is exclusively probabilistic in republican theory. Carter maintains for instance that it is the probability of the master's exercise of power that renders the slave unfree, and Kramer that the slave who has an "almost wholly indulgent" master is "almost wholly free" (Skinner 2008: 96). Carter and Kramer conclude that loss of liberty is fully dependent on the degree of interference, meaning that the degree of the freedom of the dominated party corresponds to the degree of the dominator's noninterference (ibid.).

Pure-negative theorists misunderstand the condition of slavery as described in republican theory. The slave's entire behavior is here subject to the will of the master, whose arbitrary power determines the limits on the slave's freedom; and so slaves are not to be considered free at any time, so long as they are subject to their master's will; their whole conduct is *eo ipso* formed after that which the master is willing to tolerate; regardless of the degree of interference, the fundamental condition of slavery remains: "It is the mere fact that their master or ruler has arbitrary powers to intervene that takes away their liberty, not any particular degree of probability that these powers will ever be exercised" (pp. 96–97).

### *Fundamental Unfreedom*

Secondly, the slave's lack of freedom is *not* as Carter and Kramer assume because of the constant need for taking servile measures in avoiding the master's ill will. In this case, the slave's freedom to behave against the master's will is not conjunctively exercisable with the freedom to avoid penalties; which according to Kramer explains the way in which domination impairs each dependent person's overall liberty (pp. 97–98). Skinner points out that this is a misrepresentation of the predicaments of the slave's realization of servitude within neo-Roman republican theory (p. 98):

These theorists do not take it to be the case – and nor do they suppose that slaves take it to be the case – that anyone living in servitude will be stopped or penalized if they behave in insufficiently humble or furtive ways. Rather they maintain that the situation in which slaves find themselves is that, while they may be stopped or penalized, they may be left entirely unconstrained.

It is not certain that the master will penalize the slave for audacious behavior, and so the slave does not necessarily find the conjunctive option of behaving ‘badly’ and being penalized impossible to perform. Maybe he will punish the slave, maybe he will not, which means that the conjunctive option cannot be claimed to have been rendered impossible definitely; therefore, it seems safe to say that according to the pure negative theory, the slave’s freedom in this scenario is unimpaired (p. 99). Republican theory on the other hand, holds that the slave is undoubtably unfree. The mere vulnerability to punishment for failing at being sufficiently submissive modifies slaves’ behavior and restricts their capability for realizing available choices, which obviously curtails their freedom. The basic condition of slavery is not dependent on the prohibition of certain actions nor on the existence of certain threats, but wholly on the reality of the master’s arbitrary power. What leaves them bereft of freedom is that they are under ‘alienating control’, as in Pettit (ibid.).

The mere existence of alienating control restricts freedom of action in republican theory, whereas pure-negative theorists believe that the predicament of the slave consists in the removal of certain conjoined options. In the situation discussed, it is clear that freedom is being cancelled by the mere reality of servitude, and not because certain actions are rendered impossible to perform; this shows that the republican theory of liberty is in fact distinct from that of the pure-negative theorists (pp. 99–100).

### *Overall Liberty and Manifest Power*

Pettit notes that freedom is curtailed by the removal of options on the pure-negative view. Drawing on Hillel Steiner’s theory, Carter and Kramer equate removing an option with interference. Their central claim is according to Pettit that freedom of choice can merely be affected by the removal of options. Coercive threats of punishment do not impact the freedom of choice, but merely the blocking of options (Pettit 2008: 118–19). This negative claim is complemented within pure negative liberty with the positive thesis that freedom may be curtailed when a related potential option is rendered unavailable in cases where no actual option is made impossible. In the case of the highwayman, you have the option of keeping your money or not; the option has not been removed; however, the conjunctive option of both keeping your money and your life has been removed, which results in a reduction in your overall liberty (p. 119).

Pettit holds that the reality of personal choice is such that, in certain scenarios, a person is right to assume that he or she can do certain things; that the options contemplated are true,

available options, and that we are right to think that they are available to us; we may choose them, or we may not, at will (p. 105). In the case of the highwayman, the conjunctive choice of keeping both your money and your life, which here is related to overall liberty, is changed by the coercive force of another agent; it is rendered impossible to perform, reducing the threatened agent's overall freedom (p. 119).

Carter and Kramer, "paying tribute to the recent reworking of republican theory," in Pettit's words (p. 119), claim that in addition to coercion that affects conjunctive options in regard to actual choices, overall liberty may be curtailed by mere 'manifest power' of punitive or obstructive intervention. In republican theory, freedom is curtailed by alien control, even when that control is not manifest. So even when control is not manifest to the controlled party, it is nevertheless affecting the overall freedom of the controlled party. Pure-negative theorists claim that overall freedom may be reduced under this scenario only in the probabilistic sense; that is, your overall freedom may be affected to the degree of the probability of the existing control being exercised (pp. 119–20).

### *Unchecked Coercive Force and the Replacement of Options*

Pettit objects to this revised theory of freedom as noninterference by pointing out that it ignores one crucial explanation, i.e. that unchecked coercive force not only removes options, but replaces them. The coercive threat of the highwayman replaces the existing option of keeping your money with a life-endangering alternative; it takes away your right to think 'I can keep my money', which was available to you previous to the threat. This brings you under the alien control of the highwayman (pp. 120–21).

Pure-negative theorists may argue that the option of keeping your money, when properly individuated, remains in place; that it is not replaced despite the coercive threat; which raises the question of how to individuate options. Pettit finds it unreasonable to claim that an option can remain unchanged despite *any* coercive threats, as in your keeping your money in the face of the highwayman's threatening your life. He asks whether the presumed option of keeping your money really is still available for choice under such a threat. He finds it strange that pure negative liberty excludes the possibility of options ever being replaced, irrespective of the force of others' interventions. This line of reasoning individuates options "on the coarsest possible basis," wherein options may only be *removed*, never modified or replaced (p. 121).

Pettit suggests a more nuanced way of individuating options, in which he says the identity of an option changes by any unchecked sanctions imposed by other agents. Options are made into different options when they are modified in ways that engage one's values – regardless of whether or not they are considered the 'right values' by some other external metric; an option is replaced when its evaluative profile has changed *for* the affected person; which may change by the lights of that agent alone. Pettit underscores the importance of taking into account that unchecked coercion affects freedom of choice, *replacing* options, rather than removing them (p. 122):

Summing up this line of thought, then, my main problem with the new theory of freedom as non-interference is that it looks downright bizarre in ignoring the salient explanation for why unchecked coercion may affect freedom of choice: that it replaces one of the agent's options. Why ignore this possibility in favor of an exclusive emphasis on option-removal? Only, it seems, because options are individuated in an implausibly coarse manner.

### *Endogenous Restraints as a Source of Reduction in Probability*

On the issue of probability, which Carter and Kramer see as a deficient feature in republican theory, Pettit says that republicans concern themselves with the probability of alien control, and that they certainly welcome reduction in that probability. However, Carter and Kramer suggest further that republicans be concerned with the probability of actual interference in regard to alien control; that they should take into account the probability of someone who has control over another actually interfering with the controlled party, and "rejoice at any reduction in this probability," regardless of the source of reduction (p. 122). This reduction is alleged to increase expected liberty. Pettit is criticized for not recognizing this (pp. 122–23).

This criticism entails that if a powerful party, by shift of habits, attitude, or any other endogenous restraints can be expected not to actually interfere with other parties, then these other parties are correspondingly liberated. It is presumed by pure-negative theorists that the victims' loss of freedom equals the probability of actual interference (p. 123). Pettit can envisage two different sorts of restraint in this context, he says; one of which could actually neutralize the capacity to interfere, while the other would not have that disabling effect. The first sort of restraint, when in place, you can rightfully ascribe increased liberty to the condition of the victims, whereas the second sort would not provide any such prospect. Under the first scenario, the controller would lose the ability to control; under the second, the control would remain intact (*ibid.*).

A reduction in the probability of the controller's imposing sanctions does not remove the alien control that the victims are under. The controller's becoming soft-hearted may offer the victims some consolation, but it cannot offer an increase in their expected freedom.

Regardless of any assigned probabilities, small mercies and consolations, the controller maintains the profile of a controller. Pettit says that in order to understand this point we should consider the distinction between being subject to alien control and being subject to actual interference. The first evil arises within relationships amongst agents or groups and is interpersonally characterized, whereas the second evil does not necessarily come from persons, as it may come about as an effect of a natural accident as well as the effect of the block or burden that may come from other agents: "You may be obstructed by a tree across the road in just the way I may obstruct you; or you may be inhibited by a natural prospect of physical harm in just the way you may be inhibited by a harm I hold out as a threat" (pp. 123–24).

A lesser probability of interference does not remove the threat of alien control unless the endogenous change in the controller actually is disabling the controller of interference. Endogenous probability of interference will not affect that interpersonal evil. So long as the controller has the ability to interfere, regardless of reduced probability of interference, alien control remains in place. With regard to the natural evil, and the sort of interference that is actually practiced, a decrease in probability may provide the affected party certain consolation: "It will provide some relief from fear of the treatment that is in prospect, at least if the victims are aware of the situation, but it will not reduce the level of alien control and the associated unfreedom" (p. 124). In conclusion, it is clear, that a person who lives under the alien control of another, subjected to that other's arbitrary power, suffers the evil of alien control regardless of the exact probabilities as to where/when the sanctions may strike, or the degree of severity in the sanctions applied (*ibid.*).

## 5. THE MERE PRESENCE OF ARBITRARY POWER

In this section, I offer my own assessment. The relevant issues will undergo certain repetition, which consist in that which I have found most important to my own thesis. I assess issues that I believe are crucial to answering the questions about distinctiveness and preferability. My claims on distinctiveness and preferability are based on reasons given by the authors themselves, in addition to my own assessment. I have found certain reasons more convincing than others, on which my assessment rests. These consist of overall liberty, the absence of prevention, the absence of domination, the issue of probability, conjunctively exercisable opportunities, and exercised/unexercised power, from which all are related to the mere presence of arbitrary power and the fundamental unfree condition that it causes. The pure negative view that merely actual interference and its prospect curtail freedom, in an overall freedom, based on conjunctively exercisable opportunities and degrees of interference, when put against the curtailed freedom before the mere presence of arbitrary power in republican theory, appears inadequate to me. Carter manages to expand the negative view with his explanations of probability, anticipated reactions, overall liberty, and so on; however, these fail to account for a viable equivalent to the republican approach to fundamental unfreedom and the mere presence of arbitrary power.

In Kramer, the range of available combinations of conjunctively exercisable opportunities determines an agent's overall freedom. This shows that options are related, and that the blocking of a single action, or any other acts of interference that leave the agent deprived of access to further possible actions limit overall liberty. In republican theory, this same principle is explained by dependence and domination, as the dependence on the goodwill of the dominator brings about reduction in the dominated party's overall freedom. Kramer claims that negative liberty accounts for limitations of domination as well, and does not need to be complemented by the neo-Roman account of civic republicanism in this regard, since domination is a result of the curtailment of conjunctively exercisable opportunities (2008: 34–35).

Kramer criticizes Skinner for his proposition of realization and intentionality being crucial to the unfree condition (p. 39). These principles are further found in Pettit's account of civic republicanism, he writes, where relations of power constitute sources of domination. In Pettit, the mere reality of inferiority gives rise to subordination and consequently to domination, regardless of whether or not the powerful are willing to dominate. On the pure negative view,



when the powerful are disinterested in exercising power, the overall freedom of others is intact, which Pettit's theory is claimed to fail to account for (pp. 39–49). Kramer concludes that Pettit's and Skinner's attempts to separate the republican conception of liberty from negative liberty have failed; that civic republicanism perhaps can lay claim to distinctiveness, but that its analysis does not surpass that of negative liberty (p. 56).

Carter distinguishes between power as an exercise concept and power as an opportunity concept. Having power over another is an opportunity concept, whereas the same power, when actually exercised, is an exercise concept. *If and only if* an agent is interested in exercising power over another, the behavior of that other can be expected to be modified. Carter, like Kramer, underlines the willingness to exercise power as a requirement for limitation on freedom (Carter 2008: 60). Freedom is an opportunity concept on the negative view, and so Carter emphasizes the availability of options, using the analogy of doors, saying that what matters to agents' overall freedom is the number of available doors, not how they are opened or the way in which one chooses to go through them. The actual choosing among options is described as a voluntary process, based on agents' reasons, and not on the rationale of lacking alternatives (pp. 61–62).

The absence of prevention includes not merely the actual prevention from performing certain actions, but also subjunctive prevention; that is, you are not negatively unfree only when someone actually prevents you from doing *x*, but also if the person would prevent you from doing it were you to attempt to do *x* (p. 67). The pure negative view thus accounts for subjunctive prevention and sanctions as well; however, what curtails overall freedom is not issued threats or the prospect of them, but rather, *again*, the accessibility of sets of options. The pure-negative theorists appeal to the removal of sets of available options, whereas Pettit and Skinner underline the dependence on another's will. Carter holds that the degree of the limitation on someone's freedom equals roughly the degree of the existing dependence. The limitation on sets of options is according to Carter a feature that is present in actual exercised power as well as unexercised (pp. 67–68).

Carter rejects the republican criticism that pure-negative theorists do not account for unfreedom under unexercised power. In both Pettit and Skinner, the mere exposure to arbitrary power entails unfreedom, as opposed to the exposure to the actual exercise of it. The pure-negative theorists counter by an appeal to probability, which includes particular freedoms as well as overall freedom and counterfactual curtailments of freedom. Carter emphasizes the probability of the exercise of power, which he asserts must be taken into

account, as the degree of that probability equals the limitation on the affected agent's freedom (pp. 69–70).

On the republican view, domination and dependence curtail freedom through their mere existence (Skinner 2008: 94). Carter and Kramer, even when adducing hypothetical cases, refer to the curtailment of options, focusing on actual interference and its prospect in relation to the sets of conjunctively exercisable opportunities, which constitute overall liberty. This explanation ignores the social and psychological implications of exposure to the mere presence of arbitrary power in domination. When Kramer says that negative liberty accounts for domination, he does so with the explanation that domination arises as a result of the removal of options, effecting a reduction in the conjunctive exercisability of liberties (Kramer 2008: 36), which does not explain the state of domination as such.

We could in fact envision an exceptionally lucky slave, who lives as a 'free' man, in that he has a place to live, a loving wife, children perhaps, friends, good pay, recreations, and an overall happiness in life, but who enjoys all these things within the rules and settings of another. He must comply with certain terms or there will be sanctions. You could object, and rightly so, that this is not the condition of slavery; however, you would be missing the point, which is that those relations of power that curtail freedom should reasonably be assessed with respect to overall relations and not individuated nor conjoined options. This distinction is clear in the comparison between 'absence of prevention' and 'absence of domination'; the former describes the freedom to choose/act, whereas the latter describes a relationship. As Skinner points out, single acts of coercion are not a fundamental affront to liberty; the fundamental affront to liberty is *the mere presence of arbitrary power* (Skinner 2008: 96).

Degrees of noninterference cannot be claimed to equal degrees of liberty, as they do in Carter and Kramer, since this would require equal standing, which the relationship between 'dominator' and 'dominated' obviously does not imply. For my freedom to merely be reduced to the extent of your interference, or its probability, it must be unaffected otherwise; because if not, then my freedom is reduced irrespective of the degree of your interference or the degree of its probability. After all, as Skinner puts it, a slave to an "almost wholly indulgent" master is not "almost wholly free" (ibid.). It is not the degree of the probability of interference, or the degree of the probability of unexercised power being exercised that curtail the slave's freedom, but rather the mere fact that the slave is completely dependent on the master's will, and *pro tanto* under the master's arbitrary power – exercised and unexercised equally (pp. 96–100). This approach to arbitrary power separates the republican account from

that of negative liberty and Carter's and Kramer's pure negative view. For as Pettit points out, a reduction in probability does not neutralize alien control, as the overall unfreedom of being subject to another's will and control is neither dependent on any exact probabilities nor the corresponding sanctions; it is a plight that is best explained by the mere presence of that which is termed 'alien control' and 'arbitrary power' (Pettit 2008: 123–24).

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have compared freedom as nondomination to freedom as noninterference, asking whether the former is a distinct concept of liberty and preferable to the latter. Freedom as nondomination builds on the republican tradition, opposing arbitrary power, whereas freedom as noninterference is the liberal conception of liberty, with its updated version in pure negative liberty. Pure negative liberty underscores the accessibility of options in conjunctively exercisable opportunities, which constitute agents' overall liberty. The former understands freedom as the absence of domination, while the latter understands it as the absence of prevention. Even though these two accounts of liberty have been claimed to employ similar negative approaches, using different terminologies describing the same relations of curtailment of liberty, they are nevertheless distinctive in their respective ways of viewing the mere presence of arbitrary power. Alien control, or arbitrary power, is in itself abrogative of liberty, which is fully elucidated within the republican view on liberty. To claim, as do Carter and Kramer, that domination in effect occurs when the conjunctively exercisable opportunities are rendered unavailable, may offer a satisfactory account of how freedom in practice is reduced in domination; however, it cannot be held an exhaustive account of domination as such. Domination is best understood, as in Pettit and Skinner, through the analysis of fundamental unfreedom and the mere presence of arbitrary power. This essay has shown that freedom as nondomination is indeed a distinct concept of liberty, and preferable to freedom as noninterference, in that its description of, and opposition to, the mere presence of arbitrary power surpasses that of freedom as noninterference.

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