



# Domination and Freedom: Quality, not Quantity

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## Abstract

Does domination make us unfree? Republicans argue that it does. Thus, they contend that the liberal conception of freedom is inadequate as it is not (wholly) able to account for domination. I provide a new approach to this controversy. The liberal conception of freedom has the potential to account for domination, but we must adjust the scope of our analysis: claims about domination are best understood not as claims about quantities of liberal freedom, but as claims about the value of liberal freedom. Even if the master is benevolent and indeed does not interfere much with the slave's choices and actions, the relation of domination affects the quality of the slave's liberal freedom. To argue for this point, I provide a taxonomy of the value of freedom and then, on this basis, point to several ways in which freedom under domination lacks value.

**Keywords** Freedom · Negative freedom · Republican freedom · Republicanism · Domination

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## Introduction

The contrast between republican and liberal freedom is a familiar issue in political philosophy. The point of contention is exemplified by the benevolent master case. Suppose there is a benevolent master that hardly ever interferes with her slave's choices and actions. If we endorse the liberal conception of freedom understood as *freedom from interference*, we might conclude that the benevolent master does not restrict the lucky slave's freedom or that she does so only marginally. Thus, republicans contend, the liberal conception is inadequate: the master can do anything to their slaves with impunity and at will, and such a relation cannot be consistent with the slave's freedom. Nevertheless, taking a stance on this dispute is tricky. To overcome this shortcoming of liberal freedom, republicans propose a conception of freedom that can account for domination but that suffers from other conceptual difficulties: some versions of republicanism moralize the conception of freedom,<sup>1</sup> others apparently endorse an exercise concept rather than an opportunity concept of freedom,<sup>2</sup> and republican freedom may be subject to the coalition problem that arguably would render it an unattainable ideal.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, even though liberal freedom is usually considered to be conceptually consistent and helpful in dealing with some critical practical matters (e.g., measuring freedom), the problem of domination makes the liberal framework less attractive.

In this article, I propose a novel approach to overcome this impasse. Republicans have presented a plausible argument against the liberal conception of freedom. However, republican freedom seems to give rise to some conceptual worries. Thus, we have two possible solutions: either (1) to endorse republican freedom and propose a framework that tries to avoid the associated conceptual worries, or (2) to endorse the liberal conception and explain how this conception can account for domination. In this paper, I will adopt the latter strategy. I will argue that theorists of liberal freedom have failed to propose a satisfactory solution, but I believe that the liberal framework has the means to suitably account for domination. To do so, I will argue that we have to correct the scope of our examination: domination does not affect only the *quantity* of liberal freedom but also its *quality*.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. In section two, I will present the arguments that supporters of liberal freedom have built on to defend their view from the republican attacks (Carter 1999, 2008; Kramer 2003, 2008). I will suggest that these arguments can only partially answer the republican complaints. In section three, I present a taxonomy of the value of freedom building on Carter (1999). In section four, I apply this taxonomy in such a way as to show how domination renders liberal freedom less valuable. Thus, I will suggest that even if the quantity of liberal

<sup>1</sup> See Carter (2008). For why moralizing freedom can be a problem, see Cohen (2011). List and Valentini (2016) have proposed a version of republican freedom called 'Freedom as Independence' that avoids the issue of moralization. However, see Carter and Shayderman's (2019) rebuttal.

<sup>2</sup> See Carter (2008) and Harbour (2011). For why endorsing an exercise concept of freedom could be undesirable, see Taylor (1985).

<sup>3</sup> See Simpson (2017). Ingham and Lovett (2019) try to solve this issue by distinguishing between strong republicanism and moderate republicanism and referring to the notion of ignorability. See Jafarov and Huseynli (2022) for a critique of their position and Ingham and Lovett (2022) for a rejoinder.

freedom remains unchanged, benevolent masters fundamentally affect the *quality* of their slaves' freedom.

## Liberal and Republican Freedom

We can reduce the long-standing contention between liberal and republican freedom to one central point of analysis: whether or not the *mere possession* of power is freedom-reducing. Consider the benevolent master example again. Even if your master does not *interfere* with your actions, the slave is subjugated to the master's power. Thus, republicans argue that the liberal conception of freedom understood as freedom from interference is inadequate: freedom must imply the *absence* of arbitrary power. Even assuming the absence of interference, the master *can* interfere with the slave at will and with impunity. Such a scenario cannot be consistent with the slave's freedom (Pettit 1996, 1997, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2014; Skinner 2003, 2008).

Liberals have put forth some powerful arguments to defend their framework from this attack. From an empirical perspective, they have argued that domination does reduce dominated agents' liberal freedom, thus showing that the republican interpretation of the benevolent master case is misleading. On a conceptual level, they have counter-attacked the republican ideal according to which the mere possession of power would be freedom-reducing; if we accept this, liberals argue, numerous cases of unjustified unfreedom would follow.

To show that domination reduces the freedom of the lucky slave, liberals appeal to the idea of *overall freedom*. Liberals take an agent's overall freedom to be a set of *probability-weighted* sets of conjunctively exercisable liberties. The set is *probability-weighted* as an agent's overall freedom is composed both of present and future freedoms. Thus, we assess whether at present time  $t$  the agent is free to  $z$  at  $t$  as well as whether at present time  $t$  the agent is free to  $y$  at a future time, say, at  $t+s$ . While present ascriptions are binary (i.e., the agent can be either free or unfree),<sup>4</sup> future ascriptions will be probabilistic—there may be an  $X\%$  probability that someone will interfere at a future time  $t+s$  with the agent's  $y$ -ing.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, it is a set of *conjunctively* exercisable liberties as an agent's overall freedom is represented by the actions an agent can perform in conjunction. For an illustration of this point, consider the highwayman case. When a highwayman threatens you with 'your money or your life', you are still *free* to decide whether you want to keep your money or your life. However, you become *unfree* to keep your money *and* your life in conjunction.

If we apply the idea of overall freedom to the master/slave scenario, we can now see that benevolent masters reduce slaves' liberal freedom. Firstly, masters can arbitrarily interfere with their slaves. Therefore, when we measure the slave's overall freedom, we include the probability that the master will interfere with the slave in the future. Sometimes this probability may be very low—as in the case of the benevolent

<sup>4</sup> See Kramer (2003, pp. 169–184).

<sup>5</sup> However, note that the probability of exercise of power may not cover all probabilities of interference, while it may cover cases where it is unclear whether we should speak of interference at all (e.g., rational persuasion). See Carter (2013).

master. Nonetheless, considering the arbitrariness with which masters can interfere, it is very likely that this probability will be at least noticeable. Thus, liberals argue that masters reduce the slaves' freedom: the existence of masters increases the likelihood that slaves will be interfered with in the future (Carter 1999, pp. 239–245). Secondly, suppose that the master does not interfere with the slave's  $x$ -ing. However, it may be that  $x$ -ing is an action that enrages the master and provokes harsh penalties  $y$ -s. Therefore, while it is true that the slave may be free to  $x$  under a benevolent master, she may not be free to  $x$  and to avoid  $y$ -s. Hence, benevolent masters do reduce the slaves' liberal freedom: slaves must keep them benevolent if they want to avoid their penalties (Kramer 2008, pp. 36–41).

Furthermore, liberals have counter-attacked republicans as they believe that it would be problematic to say that the mere possession of power is freedom-reducing. Kramer's Gentle Giant example elucidates this point (Kramer 2003, p. 140). Imagine that a giant of superior intelligence and physical power was born in a village where she could subjugate everyone else to her will. However, assume that the giant's likelihood of restraining someone else's liberty is effectively zero. She loathes the option of interfering with her villagers' choices and actions; thus, she retires to some far hills to avoid any possible encounter. According to Kramer, the republican conception must be said to fail here. The giant has arbitrary power over the villagers. However, if there is only an extremely small probability that she will exercise her power to interfere with the villagers' life, it seems questionable to say that she renders the villagers unfree. Thus, Kramer contends, it must be the (probable) exercise of power that reduces freedom, not its mere possession.

I think that these two arguments bring up an effective defense of the liberal conception of freedom. However, they are not sufficient. The argument according to which domination decreases liberal freedom is based on empirical presumptions. Thus, liberals must bite the bullet and accept that it is possible to *conceive* cases in which exposing agents to domination might increase their liberal freedom instead of diminishing it. To make this point, Harbour (2011, p. 200) refers to an example from Italy in the post-war period. It was said of Mussolini that 'at least he made trains run on time'. This freedom that Mussolini allegedly granted to Italians could have had a daily impact. Therefore, because of the reliable trains able to bring Italians all around their country, it may be possible to argue that agents' freedom of movement—as well as their range of conjunctively exercisable liberties—was significantly increased. Consequently, even if Mussolini was an oppressive dictator, at least some people might have had higher liberal freedom under him than after his fall.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, it

<sup>6</sup> In his seminal article 'What's wrong with negative liberty', Taylor (1985) argued that a negative conception should be able to distinguish between different types of unfreedoms. There are certain freedoms (e.g., being free to express your religious beliefs) that cannot have the same weight as others (e.g., being free to cross the street regardless of traffic lights). Kramer (2003) endorsed these concerns by implementing what he called 'evaluative multipliers' in his freedom measures—but see Kramer (2022) on the difference between Kramer's and Taylor's view. Taylor's and Kramer's position is polemical with purely physical accounts of freedom that instead propose to not implement evaluative considerations in our assessments (Steiner 1974, 1994; Carter 1999, 2008). I do not need to take a stance here. Surely, endorsing Taylor's and Kramer's standpoint could help liberals to better account for domination as it is likely that masters and dictators would affect some important liberties (e.g., freedom of speech), thus impacting agents' freedom more seriously. But the point I am making holds even endorsing such position: there is no conceptual

is possible to imagine situations where lucky slaves enjoy more liberal freedom by remaining slaves than if freed (Harbour 2011, p. 201). Think about a slave of a benevolent master that is hardly asked for her services but is provided with plenty of resources which she can freely use. Suppose she lacks working skills and that, if freed, she would live in destitution facing continuous interference.<sup>7</sup> In some senses, the slave is *freed* by domination: endorsing the liberal freedom conception, her range of conjunctively exercisable liberties is wider as a slave than as a non-slave. Thus, liberals should admit that domination is not *inherently* inimical to their conception of freedom. It is possible to conceive cases in which domination does not decrease liberal freedom, and in some instances, it might even expand it.

I think that this inconsistency is caused by a basic standpoint that liberals have embraced in this dispute. Per se, being subject to power does not have to impact your freedom. Power can affect your freedom *only* if there is a (probable) exercise of it, either now or in the future. To pinpoint this aspect, consider the following example:

Consider two worlds  $v$  and  $w$ . In both worlds Sue can push a button to call the elevator of her apartment building, which is the only way for her to get to her apartment. In world  $v$  Tania stands in front of the elevator, blocking the button, but as soon as Sue approaches the button Tania gives way. In contrast to what this phrasing suggests, though, Tania is not a subservient assistant, for she has all the physical and psychological power to bar Sue from taking the elevator, and the current state of anarchy in the country does not impose any legal restrictions on her dealings with Sue. But while Tania has the capacity arbitrarily to interfere with Sue's going home, she never actually bars her from pressing the button. World  $w$ , in turn, is different only in that Tania does not inhabit it, and as a result of this Sue has a strictly greater degree of republican freedom in  $w$  than in  $v$ . ... But although the degree of Sue's republican freedom is different in the two worlds, she has the same degree of liberal freedom; there is no difference with respect to pushing elevator buttons, nor is there any difference with respect to other actions. (Bruin 2009, p. 423)

Even though there is no exercise of power in either world, in world  $v$  there is a power relation in place, while in world  $w$  there is none. Suppose that this power relation does not come with any (probable) exercise of power either now or in the future. In that case, it would not affect the agent's liberal freedom anyhow—just as being subject to masters or Mussolini does not need to affect your freedom. Indeed, liberals would say, why should mere subjection to power affect your freedom? As the Gentle Giant case shows, when there is no probable exercise of power, we have no rea-

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*necessity* that a case of domination decreases the dominated agent's freedom. If this is true, even Taylor and Kramer must concede that it is possible to imagine cases in which domination does not decrease someone's freedom—or in which domination could even increase liberal freedom. Examining the value of freedom, I aim to show that both the purely descriptive and the evaluative theories of freedom can satisfactorily account for the republican complaints. Thinkers *à la* Kramer could thus endorse my argument and then *ex-post* use the evaluative multipliers to show that dictators may affect one's freedom even more than the purely physical accounts of freedom can show.

<sup>7</sup> Living in destitution substantially affects your liberal freedom. See Cohen (2011, pp. 147–165).

sons to think that one's freedom would be diminished. According to liberal freedom theorists, what republicans have been arguing is fallacious precisely because if the likelihood of interference does not increase, there is no reason for which relations of domination would affect the agent's freedom.

We are at the heart of the issue here. Liberals argue that from a quantitative perspective, domination has no other effects on freedom than those that they highlight. Mussolini indeed could have expanded Italian citizens' freedom if he reduced rather than increased the interferences Italians were suffering from. Thus, treating the issue exclusively as a quantitative problem compels liberals to say that some agents' freedom may not be impaired by domination. However, this is unsound: it seems incorrect to describe the master/slave or dictator/subject relationship as not negatively affecting the freedom of the dominated party. Although it has been overlooked so far, I argue that examining the quality of the dominated agent's freedom plays a crucial role in understanding the effects of domination on liberal freedom. Domination reduces the quantity but also diminishes the value of freedom.

## The Value of Freedom

Before examining the relationship between domination and the value of freedom, we should clarify what we take the value of liberal freedom to be. I will start by illustrating two central distinctions in this debate. Then, I will propose a taxonomy of the value of freedom.

Let us start by distinguishing between the 'value of the freedom-to-do- $X$ ' and the 'value of doing- $X$ ' (Kramer 2003, p. 241). While people can disvalue performing some specific  $x$ -es, they may value upholding the freedom to perform those same  $x$ -es. Take the case of smokers and non-smokers. Most smokers likely value both the act-of-smoking and their freedom-to-smoke. However, although non-smokers probably disvalue smoking, they may value their freedom-to-smoke. Non-smokers may appreciate that it is only up to them whether to smoke or not, even though they disvalue smoking. Thus, when we talk about the value of freedom, we should be aware that the value of a specific freedom does not necessarily correspond to the value one ascribes to its content.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, freedom can be valuable both content-dependently and content-independently (Carter 1999). If we consider the value of freedom in a content-dependent sense, freedom derives at least part of its value from its content. I may value my freedom to smoke because I believe it should be only up to people whether to smoke or not. However, the same might not hold for the freedom to-not-send-my-children-to-school. I may not value that specific freedom (as much) since I believe that every child in society should receive a basic shared education independently of the wills of their parents. In this sense, according to their content, we can ascribe different values

<sup>8</sup> An important question is whether the value of freedom should be understood subjectively or objectively. Here, 'ascribes' can be interpreted in either sense. In the example, I refer to subjective value (i.e., it is the agent that (dis)values smoking). However, the same would hold if we ascribe to smoking objective value. If we can assess that smoking has a certain objective value  $v$ , the value of the freedom to smoke would not be equal to  $v$ .

to distinct specific freedoms. The second way in which freedom can be valuable is independently of its content (Carter 1999, pp. 32–37). Regardless of *what* one is free to do, freedom seems to have a certain value. A clear example can be found in Berlin (1969, xliii. Cited in Carter 1999, p. 32): when a people strive to free themselves from their oppressors, they do not have any *specific* action in mind which they want to perform once freed. Nonetheless, they fight because they highly value their freedom.

Having clarified these two distinctions, we can now move to the central question of this section: why is freedom valuable? To answer this question, I will endorse a tripartite taxonomy. I will argue that freedom can be instrumentally, intrinsically, and constitutively valuable (Carter 1999).<sup>9</sup> Note that these possibilities are not mutually exclusive: we can consider freedom intrinsically, instrumentally, or constitutively valuable, or valuable in any combination of the three. We should also be aware that this taxonomy has competitors (Van Hees 2000, pp. 151–158). However, it seems safe to say that it does not matter greatly, for the purposes of my argument, which specific taxonomy that one endorses. This paper aims to show that certain valuable features of freedom are hindered by domination, whichever categorization we favor.

Firstly, nearly everybody agrees that freedom has *instrumental value*. In other words, freedom has a certain value because agents can use their freedom to reach some ends that they consider valuable. In a content-dependent sense, my freedom to  $x$  is instrumentally valuable if being free allows me to reach an  $x$  I consider valuable. I value smoking as smoking gives me pleasure (and I value pleasure); hence, my freedom to smoke has instrumental value as it allows me to reach something that I consider valuable. The instrumental value of freedom can also be understood in a content-independent fashion. Carter (1999, p. 45) claims that the reason lies in the fallibility of humans: we are ignorant of what we will care about in the future; thus, every freedom seems to maintain at least a slight instrumental value. Take the case of a non-smoking agent  $a$ . Suppose that non-smoking agent  $a$  currently considers smoking as having no value. Should we say that her freedom to smoke is instrumentally valueless? According to Carter, we should not. We cannot presuppose that the agent's value considerations will hold in the future. For example, can we rule out that non-smoking agent  $a$  will not go through a highly stressful time in which cigarettes would become her only source of comfort? Maybe it is improbable, but scenarios in which she values smoking can possibly occur. Thus, even to her, her freedom to smoke seems to maintain some (slight) instrumental value: humans are fallible in predicting what they will value in the future; thus, maintaining a wide range of freedom can be instrumentally handy.

Secondly, freedom seems to have a certain *intrinsic value*. The point is that we value freedom not (only) because it lets us reach certain extrinsic ends, but (as well) because we can consider it to be something to value as an end.<sup>10</sup> The intrinsic attrac-

<sup>9</sup> I have excluded the notion of freedom as having value above anything else. See note 10 of this article.

<sup>10</sup> Note that intrinsically valuable things can be traded off valuably for other goods. An agent could recognize freedom as intrinsically valuable while preferring a just distribution of goods over it. This is what distinguishes intrinsically valuable things from things that have value above anything else. Something has value above anything else when it 'has more value than any other thing *regardless* of the value of its consequences and is thus good in any possible world' (Carter 1999, p. 37.). If we assess that freedom is valuable in such a way, we should assume that one unit of freedom must always be better than anything else. For the

tiveness of freedom is well-elucidated by the following example from Hurka (1987). Assume that we have two choice sets, A1 and A2. Further, assume that A1 is made of two different options,  $x$  and  $y$ , while A2 is made of ten different options,  $x$  and  $y$  included. Suppose our favorite option is  $x$ . Hence, either if we select A1 or A2, our favorite option  $x$  will be available. Nonetheless, A2 (with ten different options) seems to be more valuable than A1 (with only two options).<sup>11</sup> The reason may be that freedom has intrinsic value: despite the extrinsic advantages we can get from our freedom, having more choice rather than less seems valuable as such.<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, freedom seems to have constitutive value (Carter 1999, pp. 54–60). Even not being intrinsically valuable in themselves, certain things can be a *constitutive element* of intrinsically valuable things. In other words, freedom could have value as it is an analytically necessary condition to attain certain intrinsically valuable things. For instance, think about the civic status of the free citizen. Most people may consider this to be an intrinsic good. Certain freedoms, usually referred to as *basic or fundamental freedoms*, seem to be necessary to obtain that status. It is probably true that there are at least *some* freedoms without which you cannot be said to be a free citizen.<sup>13</sup> For instance, Pettit (2014) thinks that ‘by all accounts [the fundamental liberties] include freedom of speech, religion, association ... everyone must be aware that you are secured in this way ... your status must be ... manifest to all’. But if this is true, it follows that these basic liberties have content-dependent constitutive value: if you consider the status of the free citizen to be an intrinsically valuable good, you are also implicitly considering the basic liberties to be constitutively valuable as they are a fundamental component of that status.<sup>14</sup>

A final addendum to this taxonomy should be considered. Analyzing the status of the free citizen, we have seen that freedom can be said to have constitutive value. Some thinkers have argued that freedom would have a similar relationship with autonomy and self-respect: regarding autonomy, Van Hees (2000, p. 154) argues that ‘being an agent seems indeed to entail logically that one can make certain choices freely’. Regarding self-respect, Carter (1999, p. 60) argues that ‘people’s self-respect is in part a *function* of their freedom—that is analytically, not causally, true that a person needs a certain degree of freedom in order to have self-respect’. However, some thinkers have described the relations freedom/autonomy and freedom/self-respect as

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analysis in this paper, I leave out the idea that freedom can be understood as value above anything else as it is quite controversial. Carter mentions Kymlicka arguing that ‘a valuable life, for most of us’, is ‘filled with commitments and relationships’, that can be at times be freedom-reducing, but we often actively look for them (Kymlicka 1988, p. 187. Cited Carter 1999, p. 39). It seems a marginal interpretation to say that freedom has value above anything else, and that individuals should never trade off freedom for other goods (cf. Carter 1999, p. 39).

<sup>11</sup> Carter (1999, pp. 42–43) reports some arguments that were moved against this example, but I agree with his conclusion for which they do not seem to be decisive.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion on whether the intrinsic value of freedom is content-dependent or content-independent, see Van Hees (2000, p. 157). See also Binder (2019).

<sup>13</sup> Different thinkers can have a different view on the extent of this list. For example, see Rawls (2001, p. 45) and Pettit (2012, pp. 92–107).

<sup>14</sup> To be clear, I am not saying that we value basic liberties only because they are a constituent of the status of free citizens. We can value them for many reasons (e.g., intrinsic, instrumental, etc.); one of these reasons is that they are constitutive of such status.



causal and not constitutive ones. For example, Coté (2022, p. 4) argues that being free allows you to *enhance* your autonomy: ‘by keeping one’s options open and allowing oneself to experiment with different activities, we may learn such things about ourselves and about the world as will allow us to complete our preferences, and reduce our uncertainty about our future preferences’. Van Hees (2000, pp. 154–155), *contra* Carter, argues that the relation between freedom and self-respect can be, at best, a causal one: while self-respect is a subjective measure, freedom is an objective one. Thus, an agent can be wholly unfree and still subjectively have reasons to have respect of herself (e.g., imagine someone whose freedom was heavily restricted by a dictator for a just deed). There is no need to go into these discussions here.<sup>15</sup> What matters for the ongoing analysis is to note that freedom seems to contribute to the agents’ autonomy and self-respect—either through a constitutive or causal relation.

### Domination and the Value of Freedom

In the previous section, I presented a taxonomy of the value of freedom. In the next four subsections, I will argue that domination is detrimental to the value of freedom. The purpose of this section is to illustrate that the republican arguments against the liberal conception of freedom do not pose challenges for liberals: they can account for these by considering the diminished value of liberal freedom under domination. It is important to note that this argument does not aim at vindicating republicanism. Instead, I want to show that those very scenarios that republicans appeal to in their polemic with the liberal conception of freedom can actually be wholly accounted for by liberals themselves.

I will start by analyzing the case of status, autonomy, and self-respect. Under domination, I argue, freedom loses the capacity to contribute to those three valuable goods. I will then move on to discuss the instrumental and intrinsic value of freedom. Similarly, I will argue that freedom under a master is less instrumentally valuable—agents may not know where they stand—and less intrinsically attractive—freedom is a mere concession of a master.

### Status, Autonomy, Self-Respect

Let us start with an analysis of the relevant civic status. Slaves, *by definition*, do not hold the status of free citizens: there is a master that can treat them arbitrarily, with impunity, and at will, which is inconsistent with having such status. As Rawls (2001, p. 23) put it, ‘slaves are human beings who are not counted as sources of claims ... [they are] so to speak, socially dead ...’.

What is the relation between the status of free citizen and liberal freedom? We have seen that basic freedoms are a constitutive element of such status. However, we should also note that they are not *sufficient*. Think about a lucky slave with a set of basic freedoms: for instance, she may be free to express her own thoughts—suppose the master appreciates honesty—to follow her religious beliefs—suppose the

<sup>15</sup> Note that these views may nonetheless be equally true. Freedom could be both constitutive of and foster autonomy and self-respect.

master thinks it is unjust to obstruct agents' spirituality—and so on. Nonetheless, the presence of such a set would not be enough to confer on the slave the status of free citizen: being subject to arbitrary power is the denial of such status.

Thus, there is something to note here. Even if benevolent masters do not interfere with the slaves' basic freedoms, they reduce their *quality*. Suppose agent *a* considers the status of free citizen to be intrinsically valuable. In this case, one of the reasons for which she considers her basic freedoms valuable is because they allow her to obtain such status. However, if a benevolent master subjugates agent *a*, her basic freedoms lose this quality: the freedom in question is no longer a constitutive part of some intrinsically valuable thing. As long as she is subject to arbitrary power, her freedom results from the master's concession. She cannot be a free citizen or, as Rawls would put it, counted as a *source of claims*. But if this is true, agent *a*'s freedom loses a valuable function. If you are subject to domination, regardless of the extension of your freedom, you cannot obtain the status of free citizen.

This first argument could shed light on some discrepancies within the liberal-republican debate. Consider the case of dictators again. If what I have said is true, liberals could converge with republicans claiming that Mussolini did something more than just affecting the *quantity* of Italians' freedom. Being a dictator, he reduced the value of his citizens' freedom: no matter the freedom Mussolini granted them, they would never obtain the status of free citizens, and this fact reduces the *value* of their liberal freedom.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, this argument could be of service to republican discourse. Consider the following: Pettit (1997, p. 56, n. 3) argues that: 'neither a tax levy, nor even a term of imprisonment, need take away someone's freedom'. However, arguing that an agent locked up in a cell is not significantly unfree seems incorrect. Pettit should concede that the point he is making here is another one, namely, that an agent in jail does not need to lose her *status* of free citizen. As Skinner (2008, p. 96) indeed argues: 'Citizens who are imprisoned for falling foul of laws ... can therefore be said to retain, even while in prison, their underlying *status as free-men* ...'. Thus, republicans should concede to liberals that it is true that an inmate's liberal freedom is heavily restricted. Nevertheless, if we suppose that she is not subject to arbitrary power and maintains the necessary set of basic freedoms,<sup>17</sup> her freedom can still play the valuable function of constituting her status of free citizen.

We can now move to the relationship between domination and autonomy. We have seen that freedom usually contributes to the agents' autonomy. However, when a relation of domination occurs, even if the dominated party has a significant quantity

<sup>16</sup> Republicans may argue that the issue is another one. The status of free citizen renders the citizens free as they are shielded against arbitrary interference and can rely on the stability of their future freedom. I agree with republicans that this is an important aspect, but it is a different point. Being free from domination could preserve the instrumental value of freedom. See Sect. 3.2.

<sup>17</sup> It is not obvious that one can be incarcerated and maintain a basic set of freedoms. For instance, many would argue that freedom of movement is a basic freedom. However, in jail, that freedom is heavily restricted. We can concede to Pettit that terms of imprisonment do not need to take away someone's status as a free citizen. We can think about two reasons. We could suppose that the terms of imprisonment can respect basic freedoms (e.g., one's freedom of movement could be respected but under surveillance). Otherwise, we could assume that the set of basic freedoms necessary to obtain the status of free citizen is relatively small. It may be composed only of some political liberties (e.g., freedom to vote) and some essential civil liberties (e.g., freedom of expression and the freedom to profess one's religion).

of overall freedom, her freedom seems to lose that beneficial feature. An illustrative example of this dynamic can be found in the happy-housewife case. Because of the relation of power and dependency the housewife suffers from, she may start believing that she should behave subserviently and humbly. Even if the husband is benevolent and allows her to live as she wishes (i.e., even if she has a substantial amount of freedom), she may believe that she is too incompetent to take care of herself and that her rightful place is staying at home taking care of the house and the children. In other words, she may lose track of her real interests and passions and accept the state of dependency as something good for her (cf. Christman 1991).<sup>18</sup> The freedom of the happy housewife thus loses some of its value. It is true that she can be quantitatively free. However, because of the relation of domination that subjugates her, the happy housewife's freedom does not seem to have a positive impact on her autonomy.

Again, this point could be helpful for the liberal–republican debate. Republicans have been concerned with what we can call *anticipated reactions*, or as Skinner (2008, p. 100) put it, the ‘general tendency of the enslaved to act with slavishness’. Liberals claim to solve this problem by appealing to the notion of *conjunctively* exercisable liberties. If the slave is free to  $x$  but not free to avoid some harsh penalties  $y$ , the agent's overall freedom is reduced. However, I think republicans have something else in mind. Suppose a slave is free to express her religious beliefs, and that the benevolent master would not punish her no matter her choice. However, suppose that the slave has developed a relation of deference, fear, and some sort of admiration toward her master and that she decides to embrace the master's religious beliefs in place of her own. There are two things to note here: (1) the master is benevolent and does not (considerably) reduce liberal freedom; (2) the master's presence may have affected the slave's autonomous behavior. Freedom is usually something that constitutes and/or fosters agents' autonomy. However, subjection to domination may hinder or at least reduce this feature of freedom: even if not exercised, the power that the master displays could affect the slave's autonomous behavior, prompting her to act with deference. But if this is true, the dominating relation will affect the *quality* of freedom. Hence, liberals should concede that examining the slave's degree of overall freedom cannot wholly explain this scenario. But republicans should acknowledge that the slave's tendency to slavish behavior is not a matter of quantity of freedom, but *quality*.

Finally, let us analyze the case of self-respect. We have seen that freedom seems to constitute and/or foster an agent's self-respect. Having a substantial degree of freedom comes with the expectation that others will not treat you in certain degrading ways: you have your own freedom and a certain worth. However, relations of domination witness the opposite: the master and the slave do not stand as equals. The slave knows that the master can do things to her with impunity and at will and the slave is afflicted by her powerlessness:

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<sup>18</sup> An alternative way to account for such a scenario is through the so-called ‘positive freedom’ understood as individual autonomy. Here, I am assuming that we are not positive theorists. However, I think that the relationship between the value of liberal freedom and positive freedom is a topic that deserves further attention.

[t]he powerless are not going to be able to look the powerful in the eye, conscious as each will be ... of this asymmetry. Both will share an awareness that the powerless can do nothing except by the leave of the powerful ... the asymmetry between the two sides will be a communicative as well as an objective reality. (Pettit 1996, p. 584)

In the republican framework, this scenario is famously known as the *eyeball test*. According to Pettit, we can use this test to examine whether agents suffer from domination. If *a* cannot look *b* in the eye, *a* suffers from domination. Thus, according to Pettit, *a* should be said to be unfree. However, there seems to be a more sensible way to interpret this scenario. As we have seen above, liberal freedom commands respect. The respect of others, as well as your self-respect: considering yourself to be an agent who can make her own decisions and conduct her life as she wishes can contribute to your self-respect. But when you suffer from domination, there is a factual reality you must face: you act only by the *leave* of your dominator. Even if you enjoy a relatively high degree of freedom, you know that your freedom is a *concession* of a benevolent dominator standing above you. Hence, because of the power relation that afflicts the slave, freedom seems to lose the capacity to contribute to the slave's self-respect.

I think that these three cases already show something important about the republican–liberal dispute. One of the reasons for which freedom has value is that it contributes to some significantly valuable things: we have examined the civic status of free citizen, autonomy, and self-respect. With their arguments, republicans have tried to highlight the importance of these matters for liberty. However, they misconceived the nature of the issue: rather than a matter of quantity, it is a matter of quality of freedom.

### Instrumental Value

We can now turn to instrumental value. Masters negatively affect the *instrumental value* of their slave's freedom. It is trivially true that masters reduce the *content-dependent* value of freedom: masters reduce the instrumental value of freedom insofar as they often reduce the slaves' quantity of freedom. Thus, when dominated, agents have less freedom, and it is likely that they can reach fewer of those ends that they value. But I think that there is also a second claim that can be defended about instrumental value: masters reduce the *content-independent* instrumental value of freedom. Arbitrary power adds a complication in the *estimation* of the occurrence of future freedom.

Lovett (2012, p. 149) argues:

Regardless of a person's conception of the good, she can appreciate the value of knowing where she stands, and being able to plan out a life on that basis.

Consider the following. Assume that a slave is free to 'have lunch' and to 'have a coffee' at time *t*. She can freely decide how to allocate the two actions between *t* and *t* + 1 (Table 1). Even if she would maximize her utility performing 'have lunch' at *t* and 'have a coffee' at *t* + 1 (i.e., the total amount of utility would be 20 compared to

Table 1. Slave's Actions and Utility

	$t$	$t+1$
Having Lunch	5	10
Having Coffee	7	15

17), the *uncertainty* about whether she will be free at  $t+1$  to perform any action at all (i.e., the master may require her services at  $t+1$ ) may lead her to take the coffee at  $t$  and to have lunch at  $t+1$  to try to maximize her expected utility in the scenario. However, if she is unable to accurately estimate the probability of interference, she may make mistakes and not act in a way that maximizes her total utility.

Masters can act at arbitrium and this causes uncertainty over whether they will interfere, thus reducing the slaves' instrumental value of freedom. Again, note that this is an empirical rather than a conceptual issue. It is not necessarily the case that one cannot make accurate predictions about the likelihood with which a master will arbitrarily interfere:

With long experience, a slave might become better able to predict when his master is likely to abuse him, and thus his master's decisions will appear less and less random over time ... he is better and better able to *cope with* the arbitrary power he is (and remains) subject to. (Lovett 2012, p. 138)

Lovett's position could be articulated as follows: he argues that domination causes a loss of freedom's content-independent instrumental value insofar as slaves do not know where they stand. When subject to arbitrary power, it is more difficult to foresee interferences, and this uncertainty reduces slaves' expected utility. However, with experience, they *might* be able to learn to predict the master's behavior, thus avoiding the loss of freedom's content-independent instrumental value. Nevertheless, they remain subject to the master's arbitrary power that negatively affects the value of their freedom in other ways (e.g., its constitutive value).

There may be situations where having the capacity to foresee the arbitrary interference of the dominator is achievable and others in which it is not. Think about a woman who knows her husband gets violent every time he gets drunk. Thus, when the husband says he is going to the bar, she knows what to expect on his return. She can plan her life accordingly (e.g., not sleeping at home when he goes to the bar). However, think about worker  $w$  dominated by her boss. Maybe worker  $w$  can make a rough estimation of the probability with which she could be fired, but it could be a complex task. Firstly, she cannot find patterns in her being-fired-by-that-boss since she was (probably) not fired by that boss before. Secondly, she may look for patterns by observing how the boss treats her colleagues. However, there could be a set of significant variables that are difficult to interpret (e.g., her productivity compared to her peers' productivity, the mere feeling that her boss has about her, whether firing more people will be required by the state of the economy, whether the option of relocating the workplace would be valuable for her boss, etc.), thus making even an approximate estimation difficult to ascertain. Therefore, domination may cause a *more severe* harm to the worker's instrumental value of freedom than to the housewife's instrumental value of freedom. Yet, the housewife's value of freedom may be overall *more seriously harmed* as there may be other factors in play (e.g., autonomy).

A final note on this section. The two cases we have just considered illustrate a key advantage of examining domination from the perspective of the value of liberal freedom. It is an arduous task to specify precisely *how severely* and in *what way* a specific relation of domination affects one's freedom. However, the approach I put forward allows for the *prospect* of doing so. On the other hand, the republican solution seems to disallow this possibility. Being subject to domination means lacking republican freedom: this is the case regardless of whether the relation of domination harms, for instance, your capacity to plan ahead or the contribution of freedom towards your self-respect. Indeed, Pettit says:

Think of what it is to be in a position where you may or may not suffer ill-treatment, depending on the whim of another, be it a teacher or a boss or bank manager, an insurance agent or a counter clerk, a police officer or immigration official or prison warden. Think of what it is to have no physical or legal recourse against such an uncontrolled or arbitrary presence in your life, to be under the power of that other, depending on the goodwill of the person to avoid suffering some loss or harm. Such dependence amounts to the *same unfreedom* that [the happy housewife] endures ... even if you escape ill-treatment, you can only congratulate yourself on your good fortune, not on your freedom. (Pettit 2014, p. xvi.)

Republicans seem to overlook the fact that domination can cause different harms to one's freedom and that may be important to discriminate between them. In this sense, examining domination from the perspective of the value of liberal freedom has the potential to provide a more sophisticated solution: it takes seriously the distinctiveness of these different concerns.

To wrap up, we have seen that domination causes a loss of freedom's instrumental value. Firstly, as liberals have argued, freedom's content-dependent instrumental value is affected by domination as masters reduce the quantity of freedom. Secondly, domination affects freedom's content-independent instrumental value: it is more difficult for dominated agents to foresee arbitrary interference and plan their life accordingly.

### **Intrinsic Value**

Finally, we should evaluate whether masters compromise the intrinsic value of freedom. The first thing we can note is that, under domination, the slave's freedom has instrumental value for the master. The master can use the slave to reach her ends (the slave's freedom may be seriously limited as the master enjoys having a clean house). However, it can still be that the slave's freedom is simultaneously instrumentally valuable to the master and intrinsically valuable to the slave.

But there is a worry: the slave's freedom is the master's *kind concession*. Let us look at a concrete example. Suppose that you are a slave and you can usually have either apples or pears for lunch (S1). Suppose you prefer apples. Let us assume that the master today is kind-hearted and wants to widen your choice set. She allows you to choose between apples, pears, oranges, and strawberries (S2), but you still prefer

apples over oranges and strawberries. Would you value S2 more than S1? Instrumentally, S2 and S1 are equally valuable (i.e., they have the same instrumental value to you as you can reach your end ‘eating-apples’ with either set). However, intrinsically, the answer is less clear. With no domination, we would prefer S2 as it is a wider set, and we seem to value more choice *as such*. But the choice was widened only by the master’s concession. Thus, the question to be answered is the following: can the concession of the master be intrinsically valuable?

It may be helpful to refer to Hurka (1987, p. 376). He argues that we seem to value freedom intrinsically because ‘[t]o have ten options rather than just the best among them is to be able to say no as well as yes. It is to be able to say no nine times, and to be responsible for the fact that no was said’. Carter (1999, p. 42) interprets Hurka’s argument as displaying ‘the value we place on our agency—on our ability to make an impact on the world, by intervening in the causal chains which bring about events and states of affairs’. Hurka and Carter suggest that we value freedom as an end insofar as we value our *agency*—the impact we can have on the world.<sup>19</sup> However, this may not hold when a relation of domination occurs. The issue is that the slave’s agency is threatened within relations of domination. It is true that the slave *chooses* among her options and that the slave *intervenes* in the causal chains of events. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the slave can act only by the *leave of her dominator*. The ultimate power in intervening in the causal chains of events seems to belong to the master rather than to the slave: it is the master that arbitrarily confers on the slave those options only. Thus, when dominated, the *significance* of the slave’s agency on the state of the world is attacked. But if the slave’s agency is demeaned, freedom seems to lose the conditions for the kind of intrinsic attractiveness highlighted by Hurka.

Another way to put the point is the following. A slave is like a person in a cage. Even if the cage is big enough and provided with all the things the slave likes, she knows that anything that happens in the cage is ultimately up to the master only: slaves ‘are condemned to living *in potestate* ... and consequently depend on the will of the master to whom they remain subject at all times’ (Skinner 2008, p. 93). Thus, it would not be surprising if slave *s* were to say something like: ‘I care about being free to do the things I value (e.g., the freedom to drink a beer I like), but I do not value the masters’ kind concessions as such’. Under domination, the significance of the slave’s agency is attacked. But if we value freedom as an end because of its relation to our agency, if our agency under domination is not significant, then also freedom seems to lose its intrinsic attractiveness.

<sup>19</sup> If we accept this interpretation, maybe freedom is not intrinsically valuable, but rather constitutively valuable as a necessary element of the exercise of agency. Specifically, this would be true if we understand intrinsic value as the value a thing has in isolation or the value that supervenes on the object’s internal properties: a contextual condition—or a relational property—causes the value of the object (i.e., the relation between freedom and agency). Thus, if we would endorse this understanding of intrinsic value, this argument would pertain to the extrinsic, not intrinsic, value of freedom. However, if we understand intrinsic value as the value of an object as *an end*, it is not contradictory to say that we can value something as an end for its internal and relational properties both. On this, see Korsgaard (1983) and Kagan (1998). Under the latter interpretation, it may still be the case that freedom has some sort of intrinsic value.

## The Value of Freedom Solution

I believe that the argument presented in this article can effectively address the contention between liberals and republicans. Republicans base their arguments on the alleged shortcomings of the conception of liberal freedom, asserting that an agent cannot be truly free when dominated. While liberals present compelling counter-arguments, they must concede that we can conceive of cases where domination does not necessarily diminish the extent of liberal freedom. However, when looking at the value of freedom, liberals can hold that republicans conflate matters related to the quantity of freedom with those related to quality.

One might question whether this solution similarly relies on empirical presumptions. The criticism would go as follows: the liberal freedom conception can still suffer from the republican challenge, for if this solution is similarly grounded on empirical presumptions, it is possible to imagine cases where domination neither reduces the quantity nor compromises the value of liberal freedom, and where a concern with that diminishment is not at all outlandish. However, I believe this criticism would miss the point of the liberal/republican contention. The republican quest is to develop a conception of freedom that can account for scenarios that are apparently relevant to freedom, such as the master/slave scenario, without including scenarios like the Gentle Giant, which, for most of us, intuitively do not affect the agent's freedom. The argument presented adopts a different strategy: domination becomes relevant to freedom *when* it produces certain effects that we can find in scenarios such as the master/slave one, and that we do *not* find in scenarios such as the Gentle Giant. To challenge this standpoint, republicans should demonstrate that there are cases of *relevant* domination that do not affect either the quantity or the quality of freedom. However, republicans themselves, through arguments such as the eyeball test, assume that domination is problematic to freedom precisely because it leads to effects that are freedom-quality diminishing. If this is true, the task of arguing that republican freedom has something *distinct* to add to liberal freedom is arduous at best.

Furthermore, in the analysis above, I have attempted to highlight the advantages of the liberal approach to domination and freedom. Endorsing the republican framework leads us to conclude that agents equally subjected to domination are *equally unfree*, yet this conclusion is implausible. First, because it can be helpful to distinguish between slaves with different quantities of freedom, given the distinct effects of different dominating relationships. A lucky slave has greater opportunities than an unlucky one. Some versions of republicanism lead us to overlook this (possibly important) fact. Likewise, relationships involving domination appear to affect the quality of an agent's freedom differently. For example, as mentioned earlier, an abusive husband and a dominating boss can affect the quality of the dominated person's freedom in distinct ways, and it may be useful to recognize these differences. Republicans appear to conclude that all these agents are simply *unfree*, whereas, looking at the value of freedom, we can consider the distinctiveness of these issues.

Thus, it seems to me that the liberal conception of freedom remains the most solid and conceptually consistent perspective. While ongoing debates exist regarding the conceptualization of liberal freedom, (e.g., see Kramer 2022; Carter and Steiner



2022), it appears possible to address and refute the republican critique, as long as the latter is understood as amounting to a theory about what freedom *is*.

## Conclusion

I began this article by introducing the liberal–republican contention. After examining the liberal response to the issue of domination, I have suggested that this response is incomplete, arguing for the need to explore alternative approaches. I have proposed a taxonomy of the value of freedom, categorizing it as valuable instrumentally, intrinsically, and constitutively. Additionally, I have mentioned three important goods—status, autonomy, self-respect—to which freedom seems to contribute significantly.

Through the analysis in Sect. 4, I have shown that these valuable features seem to be substantially diminished by domination. Consequently, republicans are justified in asserting that domination has a broader impact than merely reducing the quantity liberal freedom. However, they would do well to reframe the issue: we can account for the republican worries if we examine the quality of liberal freedom.

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## Declarations

**Conflicts of interest** I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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