NON-PRIORITY OF THE FREEDOM PRINCIPLES: NON-FRUSTRATION, NON-INTERFERENCE, NON-DOMINATION

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ABSTRACT. In reference to three competing negative principles of freedom (non-frustration, non-interference, and non-domination), Philip Pettit recently presented an argument in favor of the absolute prioritization of non-domination. I refute the absolute priority claim on both analytical and contextual grounds and prove that none of these principles is superior to the others. The contextual analysis shows that partial priority claims are unsuitable for the respective historical and theoretical contexts. The formal analysis demonstrates that the absolute priority claim is logically deficient. Rehabilitation of the non-frustration principle entails that more attention should be paid to human individuality. Additionally, my findings give rise to new theoretical conditions whereby we must make sense of the plurality of liberty principles. I suggest that we are bound to return to the pre-Berlinian state of affairs.

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As a general rule, a generous variety of definitions for the same term is an inevitable byproduct of a lengthy genealogy. The ancients invented a separate genre that is entirely focused on preserving and representing a wide array of existing opinions, doxae, on various subjects. Perhaps, in the case of freedom, it is more appropriate to determine why the corresponding list remains
relatively short, while the notion traces its roots back to the very origins of Western civilization. Soon, the list may become even shorter as one definition supersedes the others. This appears to be the purport of recent contributions to the theory of freedom created by Philip Pettit, who, along with Quentin Skinner, is the main force behind emerging “neo-Roman” or republican political theory.\(^1\) Pettit has argued that the republican definition of freedom as non-domination has a logical priority over the others, i.e., liberty as non-frustration, which is associated with Thomas Hobbes, and liberty as non-interference, which is employed in the liberal political philosophy of Isaiah Berlin.\(^2\)

In this paper, I refute Pettit’s argument for the absolute priority of non-domination. It is important to limit this discussion to the three principles; almost nothing will be said about merits of the related political theories, such as liberalism and republicanism. My focus is on principles, not theories. For this reason, the “open-doors” metaphor, first introduced by Berlin and then adopted by Pettit, plays an important role in the subsequent discussion. This metaphor, which is a useful tool for comparing competing principles of liberty, occupies only a marginal position within the elaborated political theories. In other words, republicanism itself emerges unscathed. I have nothing but great respect for the monumental achievements of both key contributors to the emergence of the contemporary republicanism, which currently dominates the field of the normative political philosophy. However, I see an opportunity for an alternative approach; discussing foundations is an inevitable first step in this direction. For me, the most interesting outcome of the subsequent argument is not the dethronement of the republican non-domination principle, but rather the partial rehabilitation of the non-frustration principle, which has seemingly lost all its champions since 19th century, when it was prominently upheld by John Stuart Mill.

My methodology is dual. I could have simply analyzed the logical side of Pettit’s argument, which is deficient, as I show below (in 5.ii). However, with freedom being such a controversial topic, a broader outlook should provide a valuable perspective. I contribute by offering a parallel argument (in 5.i) based on a contextual rather than formal analysis of the reasons to prioritize a certain liberty principle over another. I begin by comparing the two approaches and explaining my reasons for using both of them. Then, I introduce three principles of liberty and the “open-doors” metaphor. After presenting two partial and one absolute priority claim, I discuss their validity by applying contextual and formal analysis consecutively. The contextual analysis shows that neither partial priority claim is faithful to the theoretical context of the criticized principle. The formal analysis demonstrates that, even if the partial priority claims were true, the absolute priority claim would be false.
1. The Analytical and Historical Dimensions of Liberty Concepts

Those studying theories of freedom for the first time are likely to begin with Isaiah Berlin’s seminal work “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958), in which he introduces several important ideas. First, he distinguishes between two notions of liberty that can be identified throughout the history of Western civilization: the positive and the negative. Contrary to what the names imply, Berlin campaigned for the negative concept and rejected the positive concept. He argued that the negative concept of liberty forms the foundation of liberalism, whereas the positive concept, defined by Berlin as self-mastery, is the source of totalitarian ideology and propaganda. Although Hannah Arendt and Charles Taylor present favorable accounts of positive freedom in their works, in what follows, I focus on the negative concept of liberty, which forms part of a long philosophical tradition primarily associated by Berlin with Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, Benjamin Constant and John Stuart Mill. Within the latter tradition, extended through time from Antiquity to the present, Berlin registered two different theoretical approaches originating from two different negative definitions of freedom. In the first case, liberty is understood primarily in terms of non-frustration. This view can be attributed to Thomas Hobbes and John Stuart Mill, although they use different terms to describe it in their writings. In the second case, liberty is understood strictly as non-interference. Such was the position of Berlin himself. Today, this view must be supplemented with another theoretical development that Berlin did not anticipate in 1958. Recent decades have seen the rise of so-called “neo-Roman” or republican political theory developed by Quentin Skinner and Philip Pettit. These theorists define republican freedom negatively as non-domination. Though I discuss the meaning of these three negative definitions in the following section, I will first review the historical development of the corresponding theories.

As far as it concerns the refutation of Pettit’s argument on the absolute prioritization of the non-domination principle, I can leave aside questions of historical accuracy. For Pettit’s argument to be refuted, it is sufficient to follow his account of competitive positions, which I do with one notable exception. I side with Berlin and disagree with Pettit in placing Mill among the champions of the non-frustration principle. Below, I describe both my rationale and the significance of this point. Only after the argument for absolute priority is dismantled and situated within the field of liberty studies can we reach a point at which it is fruitful to pay close attention to the provenance of each definition. Together with my analytical refutation of Pettit’s argument, however, I present another separate argument that is context-specific. Thus, a brief historical introduction is in order.
The terms “non-frustration” and “non-interference” were not Berlin’s own, but were transferred by me from Pettit’s account of previous traditions. In Berlin’s works, one can easily find justification for this usage. The case of Hobbes is less obvious. Pettit states that Berlin “does not seem to have recognized him [Hobbes] as an antagonist;” nevertheless, he represents Berlin’s definition of liberty as a response to Hobbes. What we find in Berlin is either a refutation of some Stoic doctrine, which relies on a similar understanding of freedom, or a discussion of the paradigmatic practical condition of his time, the case of a brainwashed individual. Hobbes himself seems to directly or indirectly use both principles of liberty, non-interference and non-frustration, as shown in the following phrase from his treatise “Of Liberty and Necessity:” “… a free agent is he that can do if he will and forbear if he will; and that liberty is the absence of external impediments.”

For Hobbes, however, animated creatures are distinct in that their freedom involves reference to their wills. Thus, “a free man is he, that in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to;” “[the liberty] consists in this, that he finds no stop in doing what he has the will . . . to do.” By contrast, the non-interference principle has a much wider application, as it “may be applied no less to irrational and inanimate creatures than to rational.” Further, Hobbes’ theory of freedom contends that all voluntary actions are free. This justifies Hobbes’ prioritization of the non-frustration principle, at least as far as our discussion is limited to the domain of political life.

As we move to Mill, I disagree with Pettit, who finds Berlin’s association of Mill with Hobbes to be “strange.” On the contrary, it is consistent for Berlin to oppose them both on the same grounds. It is true that the keyword we encounter in Mill’s essay on liberty is “interference,” not “frustration.” Nevertheless, this means only that Mill combined non-interference with non-frustration to some extent, as Hobbes did before him and as Berlin himself did until he felt it necessary to distinguish between the two definitions, as the basis of his defense of liberty is incompatible with the principle of non-frustration. The same is true for Mill. The basis of his defense of liberty requires a principle that differs from non-interference. This point was obvious for Berlin, who, while criticizing Mill’s views, described the latter’s principle of liberty as “freedom of self-expression.” As George Kateb notes, “a background assumption of On Liberty is that the state does not administer oppression or systematic injustice.” This opposes the assumption that urged Berlin to champion his version of the non-interference principle. Mill repeatedly complained that while contemporary society provided lip service to the basic liberties, it failed to defend freedom sincerely, as this would have required an appreciation of individuality. Expectedly, he shifted the focus of his defense of liberty from the dangers of direct governmental
interference, which was not an acute issue during his time, to the repressive power of public opinion and mediocrity over an eccentric genius. Only the non-frustration principle, which is independent of any external referential frameworks, allows for a truthful presentation and defense of the individual’s position in this case. In Mill, one finds numerous instances wherein liberty is defined accordingly, although the term “non-frustration” is missing. Finally, Pettit himself in an earlier paper seems to have attributed this principle to Mill, referring to the latter’s concept of liberty as “the actual desire approach,” which is equivalent to the non-frustration principle as defined in Pettit’s recent paper, and Pettit compared this concept with Berlin’s response.

It was Berlin then, if not from the very start, who felt it necessary to compare alternative negative definitions of liberty and to prioritize one of them. Both Hobbes and Mill relied on two definitions, never directly opposing one principle to another. In this respect, Berlin’s approach is radical, and so is Pettit’s, as Pettit deemed it necessary to introduce another priority claim. Although on surface, my subsequent counter-arguments appear to state that no priority claim is justified, it is worth noting that we are able to come to this conclusion and to discuss its relevance to political theory only after priority claims have been made. Even the first priority claim introduced by Berlin, if simply refuted, was not yet sufficient to confront us with the sort of theoretical issue that we must address now if my subsequent argument proves to be sound. When we form three competing definitions of liberty, it no longer matters whether partial priority claims are refuted. No less compelling problems arise in both cases.

2. Three Principles of Freedom

Frustration occurs when an individual is unable to do what he or she wants. The corresponding non-frustration principle presents a simple and almost “natural” definition of liberty: an individual is free only if he or she can do whatever he or she wants. This definition is minimalistic with respect to the political reality it presupposes, the only indispensable element of it being the individual.

The non-interference principle makes a shift from the individual to external circumstances and introduces an external power that can meddle in an individual’s affairs. Interference occurs when an external power prevents an individual from doing what he or she wants. Therefore, one is free only if no external powers interfere with one’s life.

The non-domination principle provides even more information on the inner structure of external power. Consider the relationship between a master and his slave in Ancient Rome. Overtime, the slave can become perfectly adjusted to the master’s habits, and the master can in turn no longer interfere
with the slave’s work. The absence of interference, however, does not make the slave free. The life of a slave always depends on his or her master’s arbitrary will. Therefore, according to the non-domination principle, one is free only if there is no uncontrolled interference in one’s life.\textsuperscript{16} It is important to note that law-governed, normative interference is compatible with liberty according to republican theory.\textsuperscript{17}

3. The “Open-Doors” Metaphor

Which principle of freedom is the best? It is not immediately obvious how one should compare them. This choice is facilitated through the “open-doors” metaphor, which was first introduced by Berlin and then adopted by Pettit. The metaphor helps to distinguish between definitions of liberty and even serves as a thought experiment through which preferences can be formed. Berlin described human liberty as a set of open doors.\textsuperscript{18} Each door represents a form of liberty; if a door is closed, the corresponding freedom is denied. Berlin used this metaphor to compare only two of the three principles, the non-frustration and non-interference principles. Then, using the same metaphor, Pettit compared another pair of principles, the non-interference and non-domination principles.

Suppose there are a number of human liberties to consider; accordingly, there are several doors in front of you, one of which you are about to enter. We can recast the three principles of freedom as follows:

\textit{Non-Frustration} principle: You are free only if the door you want to enter is open.

\textit{Non-Interference} principle: You are free only if all the doors are open.

\textit{Non-Domination} principle: You are free only if there are no doorkeepers.

The non-frustration principle focuses on the individual and on her subjective desires. Suppose that there are three doors and an individual wants to enter door number 2. If all three doors are open, the individual is free. If all doors but door number 2 are closed, the individual is still free. If only door number 2 is closed, however, the individual is not free because she cannot enter the door she wishes to enter, making her frustrated. Thus, it does not necessarily matter whether the two other doors are open. Neither does it matter whether the two other doors exist at all if the individual does not care to enter them. As long as we address the non-frustration principle, an external or “objective” door plan that is independent of the individual’s imagination cannot exist. The door plan is always internal.\textsuperscript{19}

By contrast, for the non-interference principle, it does not matter which door is chosen. The individual is free as long as all the doors are open. If some of the doors are not open, the external power interferes in the life of
the individual, limiting her freedom. It is critical to specify how many doors are present. Their total number must be limited, or else the status of liberty is undetermined. Indeed, Berlin, who championed this principle, attempted to solve a very specific problem of political philosophy, for which he offered a liberal defense of human freedom. For his defense to work, the number of doors or basic liberties must be kept to a universal minimum.

For the non-domination principle, it is not doors but doorkeepers that matter. A doorkeeper can arbitrarily block entry to an already open door. Suppose that all doors are open; there is no interference. Yet, there is a doorkeeper who can block the entrance to door number 2 at will at any moment. For republicans, this means that domination exists and that the individual is not free. In general, it is not clear to what extent republican freedom is compromised by non-arbitrary interference. Some doors must always remain open as soon as they belong to the set of basic liberties, which are community-dependent and no longer universal. However, what about the other doors, the “non-basic” liberties? We can consider these doors, both open and closed, to signify the laws of the community. Formally, there is no difference between laws that permit one action and those that prohibit other actions; they are all laws. If these laws are established by a community itself, then this normative controlled interference does not endanger republican freedom. Republican liberty is compatible with laws.

We thus have three elements of political reality that were invoked both through definitions and through the “open-doors” metaphor. First, there is the individual, or the figure of first-order subjectivity. Second, there is an objective structure, which is represented by the “doors.” Third, there is the symbolic figure of the doorkeeper, which represents the uncontrolled use of power; this denotes second-order subjectivity. Berlin eliminated first-order subjectivity using his non-interference principle. Pettit did the same in regards to second-order subjectivity using his non-domination principle. What is left behind is the normative core, which is nothing other than republican freedom.

4. Priority Claims

Based on the “open-doors” metaphor, two theoretical statements were consecutively formulated and proven, allowing us to differentiate between the three definitions of freedom. I call these statements the priority claims. Both statements make the same claim that one of the definitions must be prioritized over another. First, Berlin argued that non-interference must be prioritized over non-frustration. I refer to this as the 1st priority claim. Recently, Pettit used almost the same argument mutatis mutandis to support the prioritization of non-domination over non-interference. I refer to this as the 2nd priority claim. Together, these results allow us to determine relationships
between the three principles. Combining both priority claims, Pettit concluded that the definition of liberty as non-domination takes absolute precedence. I call this conclusion the absolute priority claim; its validity logically depends on the truths of preceding partial priority claims.

At a higher theoretical level, this result proves that republican political theory supersedes liberalism. Certainly, the priority claim is not the only argument in favor of the republicanism Pettit has offered thus far. Still, it is a cornerstone of his attempt to bid farewell to the liberal paradigm. In this respect, he is more persistent than his fellow republican theorist Quentin Skinner. In a series of recent publications, Pettit attempted to show that republicanism is the only sound theoretical option left in the field and that it is, in other words, logically inevitable.\textsuperscript{22}

Below, I intend to show that Pettit’s cumulative argument in favor of the republican definition of freedom is not sound: the non-domination principle does not prevail on all accounts. Now, let us examine proofs of the two priority claims advanced by Berlin and Pettit, respectively.

**i) Berlin’s proof of the 1st priority claim**

The 1st priority claim states that non-interference must be prioritized over non-frustration. In his 1958 lecture and other works, Berlin discusses the advantages of his own definition. At one point, he offers the following argument, which is reminiscent of a classical *reductio ad absurdum*. He cites a Stoic doctrine whereby a truly wise man can be free and happy even if he is a slave. This claim is premised on the fact that the wise man knows how to control his desires. Therefore, he is able command himself to be free and happy. Berlin uses this “happy slave” case to challenge the non-frustration principle.\textsuperscript{23} Suppose that liberty is defined as non-frustration. Then, the Stoic “happy slave” is free, which is absurd. Therefore, liberty cannot be defined as non-frustration. By contrast, suppose that liberty is defined as non-interference. Then, the Stoic “happy slave” is not free; indeed, he has obviously been denied at least a few basic liberties. The non-interference principle is thus more intuitive. In other words, it takes precedence over non-frustration.

Pettit later recast this proof.\textsuperscript{24} Suppose that liberty is defined as non-frustration. Then, one can *adapt* oneself to external interference and be “free,” which is absurd. Therefore, liberty cannot be defined as non-frustration. Central to this absurdity is the realization that adaptation never denotes freedom. Pettit’s own illustration refers to the case of a prisoner, as it is counter-intuitive to conclude that a prisoner becomes free as soon as he extinguishes his wish to escape incarceration.
ii) Pettit’s proof of the 2nd priority claim

Knowing Pettit’s interpretation of Berlin’s proof matters because, in building on it, the former presents proof of his own priority claim. Suppose that liberty is defined as non-interference and that all the doors are open, but that there is a doorkeeper. Then, one can *ingratiate* oneself with the doorkeeper and walk through the door one wishes to enter, i.e., become free. However, this notion is nonsense; it follows that liberty cannot be defined as non-interference. The key insight of his argument is that ingratiation never denotes freedom. Unlike the non-interference principle, the non-domination principle differentiates ingratiation from liberty. The latter principle is more intuitive and takes precedence over the former. Pettit illustrates this concept using the case of a woman who lives under the will of her husband.

5. Refutation of the Absolute Priority Claim

Let us review the complete logical picture. First, Berlin’s proof states that non-interference takes precedence over non-frustration (the 1st priority claim). Second, Pettit’s proof states that non-domination takes precedence over non-interference (the 2nd priority claim). From the conjunctive truth of these two partial claims, Pettit’s final conclusion follows that non-domination prevails on all accounts (the absolute priority claim). Now there are at least two ways to refute the absolute priority claim, and each is independently sufficient for the refutation to come through. I will show that both routes are passable and that this is not pure pedantry. Each mode of refutation represents a distinct theoretical approach. It is therefore important that they both lead to the same conclusion.

i) Differences in context

First, we can analyze the original context of each definition. By the end of this section, I will have shown that both proofs of the partial priority claims are unwarranted due to ignorance of crucial context-dependent differences.

Each definition of liberty is situated within an interpretative context of political theory. These interpretations are determined based on political issues that concerned each political theorist in their respective historical epochs. If a definition is removed from its original context, it ceases to address the corresponding problem; rather, it loses its functional meaning. If the definition is placed in an alien political context, it appears logically weak in comparison to any other definition for which this context works properly. On the surface, the collision we encounter here takes the form of a contrast between what is meaningful and what is meaningless. This explains why both proofs of the
partial priority claims happen to have the same logical form of *reductio ad absurdum*. Neither proof pays any attention to the original context of the definition it reduces to nonsense. As specimens of abstract reasoning, both proofs sound convincing. Once the original contexts are recalled, however, both proofs become inadequate.

My use of the term “context” is instrumental, and thus I limit my explanations to show that each of the three definitions of liberty corresponds to an entirely different understanding of political reality. As noted above, the definitions and “open-doors” metaphor invoke the same three elements: the individual, the uncontrolled administration (the “doorkeeper”), and the mediating normative framework (the “doors”). Contextual differences are more easily identified by comparing the functions of these three elements based on corresponding theories.

### a. The context of the non-frustration principle

According to Thomas Hobbes, neither the private citizen nor the administration (the sovereign) is willingly law-abiding, although in a different manner, they both oppose the normative framework. From the standpoint of a private citizen, the laws of the commonwealth are fetters to individual liberty. From the standpoint of the sovereign, laws are no more than means through which to make subjects obedient. The sovereign is the lawmaker and a legal anomaly whose entire existence resides outside of the law. Although the Hobbesian sovereign may fit well within Berlin’s defensive framework, the Berlinian individual is nothing like the Hobbesian individual, suggesting that, in these cases, two different contexts must be discerned. Hobbes trusts the individual with knowledge about her own freedom. According to him, the individual knows what she wants; moreover, this knowledge is sufficient for the evaluation of her freedom. If the individual is entrusted with knowledge on everything that matters to her liberty, it is pointless to consider any other pieces of evidence that are not held within the mind of the individual.

This explains Hobbes’ adamant disputes with Bishop Bramhall. According to Bramhall, one may misunderstand one’s freedom of choice even in situations where, provided that one has the opportunity to play tennis, one freely decides not to play. Thus, it happens that, when unbeknownst to you, the same opportunity to play tennis later disappears, it becomes physically impossible for one to participate in the game regardless of your subsequent decision, e.g., if somebody locks the door to the tennis court and you decide not to play. Bramhall argued that one cannot count this decision as a form of freedom of choice, as there is no longer any choice available. However, Bramhall’s argument implies that something external to an individual’s mind is crucial to evaluating her liberty. In this respect, Bramhall’s argument goes against Hobbes’ view, which states that there is no place for an external
authority that can evaluate measures of individual liberty. Any measuring principle, i.e., any law or external norm in general, is alien to freedom and can only suppress it. At the same time, the mental activity of the individual, her fears and imagination, are powerful enough to secure social peace, which is the ultimate objective of Hobbes’ theory. He could not possibly share Bramhall’s view because otherwise, individual autonomy would have been destroyed.

As mentioned earlier, another prominent champion of the non-frustration principle was John Stuart Mill, whose political theory also supplies the required context to understand the proper function of this principle. The Millian individual, powerful enough to influence the progress of humanity, is a creative and outstanding person whose freedom is endangered by the tyranny of the majority. The Berlinian assumption that we cannot trust this individual with respect to her freedom would have destroyed Mill’s entire argument. Moreover, the Millian individual may be a genius who knows better than the mediocre majority, which is opposed to him. If we cannot trust even geniuses with private knowledge of liberty, then it is likely that humanity has never known what liberty is in the first place, rendering its discussion meaningless.

b. The context of the non-interference principle
For Berlin, it is unimportant whether his individual is brilliant or mediocre. The important lesson of the 20th century is that the individual’s private self-awareness is always too flexible in regards to confrontation with the ideological power of a tyrannical state. Berlin does not expect great achievements from individuals; his only concern is to protect human rights and dignity. He focuses not on human strengths, but on weaknesses. This is why he distrusts the individual with regards to her evaluation of her own liberty. This is utterly ironic, as no doubt Berlin’s sincerest intention was to keep the individual safe, rather than to rob her of what belongs to her. In order to protect the individual liberty, however, Berlin had to deprive the individual of one particular freedom, namely, the freedom to form one’s own judgment about one’s liberty. Of course, Berlin had excellent reasons for doubting individual capacities for self-knowledge, as his epoch witnessed millions of individuals worldwide become victims of ideological and psychological manipulation. Such manipulations impoverished the set of choices or, metaphorically speaking, decreased the number of open doors. The key insight behind Berlin’s defense strategy is that this decrease is measurable, and as long as it is no longer up to the individual to evaluate her liberty, this decrease is objectively measurable.

Berlin could not help but develop a quasi-scientific tool for measuring liberty. His objective was nothing less than objectivity, as he reformulated
his definition of liberty as “a range of objectively open possibilities, whether these are desired or not.”

Objectivity cannot depend on a private decision. Individual freedom, if it is objectively measurable, must have non-subjective foundations. Berlin’s solution was to remove any individual input, e.g., private desires, and to attach freedom to a certain quantifiable parameter, e.g., to a number corresponding to the range of open doors. This objectivity came at a price. He transferred the power to judge an individual’s freedom from one authority to another. In Hobbesian and Millian theories, the individual is the sole authority on her freedom. In Berlinian theory, the individual is deprived of this luxury, and this has some rather unusual consequences. Generally speaking, you can never be trusted to answer the simplest question regarding whether you are free. Only an external measuring authority can provide you with this vital information. While you can make judgments about yourself subjectively, this measuring authority decides your situation, founding its verdict upon objective data.

The individual we encounter in Berlin’s theory is completely alien to both Hobbes and Mill. The unlikely affinity between the latter two positions shows that the corresponding shift in understandings of human nature did not occur until the 20th century. The Hobbesian definition of liberty presupposes an active (or even a creative, as in Mill) role of the individual, whereas in Berlin’s theory, the individual is a debilitated human being who is treated protectively as a victim. Again, it is a grave mistake to forget that Berlin’s theory focused on a specific problem of his time, explaining its unusual features of defensiveness and minimalism. As a defense lawyer, Berlin had no other option than to focus on the worst-case scenario. Still, the merits of his defense strategy should not conceal its peculiar approach to human psychology.

Berlin does not need produce an elaborate notion of the individual to protect basic liberties. Moreover, any complexity plays out against his defense, as the despotic state has all the resources needed to exploit the smallest ambiguity in the trial of freedom. Therefore, he was methodically a pessimist with respect to human nature. For his defense to succeed, Berlin must adhere to the fundamentals; therefore, he reduces rich, Millian complexities of human individuality to a fixed set of basic liberties. Only in this minimalist form can human freedom be objectively evaluated and defended in a court of law. Berlin transforms human anomaly, which is intrinsic to the non-frustration principle, into legal normality. He knew that the perfect objectivity he dreamed of was hardly attainable, as “it is difficult or impossible to give rules for measuring or comparing degrees of it [sc. the range of objectively open possibilities], or for assessing different situations with regard to it.”

Still, even in acknowledging that such an objective measurement of authority is practically unfeasible, Berlin is reluctant to trust individuals with evaluating
their own freedom. If there are no scientific foundations for measuring the range of open doors, then the required objectivity must have social or political origins. Berlin bases this quasi-objectivity in what he calls the “kernel of common meaning.”\(^{33}\) The term “common meaning” refers to the ideal liberal community of “a small minority of highly civilized and self-conscious human beings,”\(^{34}\) who unlike the majority of people, would never sacrifice the minimal area of liberty. Over the centuries, this community of liberal minds succeeded in creating a definite list of the most fundamental human liberties, which has become the basis for objectively measuring freedom. This formal checklist of basic liberties is the Berlinian individual.\(^{35}\)

c. The context of the non-domination principle

After Berlin eliminated first-order subjectivity, the irrationality of individuals, Pettit did the same for second-order subjectivity, i.e., the uncontrolled interfering power. Republican theory is utterly normative; it requires a high degree of rationality and responsibility from all political agents, both individual and corporate. Two contextual changes should be noted as we describe the republican framework.

Unlike Hobbes, who opposed laws and liberty, Pettit insists on their compatibility. In fact, republicans have no other option after anomalies of all forms are removed from the political ontology. The door plan is external, there are no doorkeepers, and thus both the citizen and the administration are rational and predictable. There is no place for any individual sovereign in the republic. As for the “tyranny of majority,” which was Mill’s main concern, Pettit introduced several safeguards against it, which I discuss below.

Unlike Berlin’s victimized individual, the republican citizen is a proud and confident member of the community. The republican state is not an enemy; on the contrary, the sole purpose of its existence is to track citizen avowable interests and to thus promote the common good. This optimistic view serves as a complete reversal of the tragic reality Berlin was forced to address. In Berlin’s postwar era, the state was considered in danger of inevitably mutating into a despotic system. In Pettit’s world, an individual is trusted with nothing less than the avowal of her true interests (which is itself a daring premise and one that I intend to discuss elsewhere). Berlin needed to address the most pressing issue of his time. Pettit suggests an ideal for the times to come. The original contexts of the two theories diverge to such extent that one can only wonder if a context-free comparison between them makes any sense at all.

d. The inadequacy of Berlin’s proof

Strictly speaking, Berlin never presented a formal proof, although he discussed the issue several times. These discussions fall in one of two groups.
For the first group, his reasoning is trivial and may count as a proof only if we already share his theoretical framework. This is the case of the “happy slave” argument, which is unavoidably context-specific. From the start, there are two different contexts here: the Stoic and the Berlinian. The Stoics constructed this special case as a radical illustration of their original theory of freedom, where a distinction is made between more valuable internal freedoms accessible to wise men and less valuable external freedoms accessible to ordinary people. Because the two forms of freedom are to be distinguished, from the Stoic perspective, the case of the “happy slave” is simply a clever paradox containing no logical contradiction whatsoever. Only after we eliminate the original context, as Berlin invites us to do, does this paradox transform into nonsense and for a very trivial reason. In a formal reduction to absurdity, the absurd conclusion would emerge in the final step of the argument. In Berlin’s framework, however, wherein the individual’s opinion about freedom does not matter, nonsense is already the premise of his reduction. Indeed, a slave is not free by definition. It no longer matters which route the subsequent argument takes, as nonsense prevails from the very first step: not free is free; not A is A. In this case, Berlin presents no formal reduction to absurdity; there is no other proof save for the elimination of the original context.

For the second group, Berlin discusses situations that are more essential to him in 1950s than the fate of an ancient doctrine. These cases are less trivial because it is not immediately evident that an alternative context can be supplied for a competing definition, which would render it more plausible, or that an alternative context is quasi-suppressed, as no reader is expected to share it. For example, consider the case of a brainwashed individual who is made to feel free by a “hidden persuader” (i.e., through totalitarian propaganda). Berlin is challenged to create a defense of basic liberties for this individual, but the defense attorney cannot allow the defendant to testify, as this individual has been brainwashed. Ultimately, a person who believes that she is not free may be considered free, or vice versa. This presents a paradox of the “clueless freeman,” which is no less integral to Berlin’s theory than the paradox of the “happy slave” is integral to the Stoic theory.

Whatever Berlin’s noble motives, this reasoning is inadequate to the original context of the non-frustration principle as we encounter it in Hobbes and Mill. The case of the brainwashed individual is not essential to their theories. Although they would concede that in some exceptional cases, individuals are not the best judges of their freedom, they would never agree to generalize these exceptions, rendering this the central axiom of the theory. Rather, for Hobbes, a free act presupposes deliberation and the agent’s personal experience of freedom. He remarks that in matters of liberty, “there can no other proof be offered but every man’s own experience, by reflection
on himself and remembering what he uses to have in his mind; that is, what he himself means when he says an action is spontaneous, a man deliberates, such is his will, that action or that agent is free.”

For Mill, the individual under consideration may be a genius, a potential conduit of human progress. This person knows what her freedoms are and knows them better than the entire community. In fact, Berlin’s own quasi-objective foundation of basic liberties logically depends on a consensus between prominent liberal thinkers of past times, i.e., geniuses like Mill himself.

Pettit’s recast of Berlin’s proof is also inadequate. Its main insight is that adaptation cannot possibly denote freedom. The notion of adaptation presupposes an external “door plan” to which an individual may adapt. As previously noted, however, there is no place for such a plan within the original context of the non-frustration principle.

e. The inadequacy of Pettit’s proof

Pettit’s proof that non-domination prevails over non-interference is also inadequate, as it neglects the original context of the non-interference principle.

The key assumption of his reduction to absurdity holds that ingratiating can be confused with freedom. In this case, I can ingratiate myself with the doorkeeper and walk through the door, but in turn, I let myself be dominated, and this is not what our intuition says about freedom. This argument is inadequate because within Berlin’s original context, ingratiating can never be confused with freedom to begin with. There are two liberty-related elements in Berlinian political reality: the individual and the measuring authority. The latter objectively evaluates the individual’s liberty based on a checklist of universal rights. Now, liberty cannot be confused with ingratiating either by the individual or by the measuring authority. Indeed, for A to be confused with B, two necessary conditions must be satisfied: 1) A is not B; 2) A is confusable with B in principle.

The first condition is unattainable to the Berlinian individual, who is considered brainwashed by default. This person does not know what freedom is, and in particular, does not know whether liberty is different from ingratiating. She may take A for B from the start, under external influence. What she cannot do is escape through deliberate action (including ingratiating) from a situation where she is not free to a situation where she is free, as she does not have knowledge of freedom. Because she cannot independently free herself, any argument based on the opposite assumption is inadequate. The second condition is never met by the measuring authority. The objective meaning of freedom is that it is a fixed set of basic liberties that cannot in principle be confused with subjective psychological techniques of ingratiating. The two necessary conditions that underlie the key assumption of the proof are never
satisfied together, regardless of which viewpoint available in the original framework (either subjective or objective) we share. Therefore, Pettit’s reduction to absurdity cannot be logically constructed if we keep Berlin’s considerations in mind.

ii) The logic of the implication

Now, let us leave aside contextual differences. We can analyze the formal logic of the cumulative implication itself. In the end, I will have shown that there are no winners among the three definitions of liberty. Suppose that both partial priority claims are correct. Does this mean that the cumulative conclusion on the absolute prioritization of the non-domination principle is valid? No, it does not. Compare this situation with conditions of the traditional rock-paper-scissors game. Rock beats scissors, and scissors beat paper, but rock does not win on all accounts, as paper beats rock. Similarly, Pettit’s final implication fails if non-frustration defeats non-domination as the definition of liberty.

All the preceding proofs have been elaborations of counterexamples such as the “happy slave,” “prisoner” or “dominated wife” that turn into formal reductions to absurdity. Now, we must find a suitable counterexample to the non-domination principle. Millian legacy is highly relevant in this respect. There are structural tensions between his theory of freedom and contemporary republicanism, from which the future proof may profit. Mill intended to save individual freedom from “tyranny of majority” encroachments. Accordingly, one can picture the republican citizen majority, who make laws and function as the “common mind,” as tyrannical towards “abnormal” individuals with dissident opinions. Nevertheless, an easy quasi-Millian counterexample is nowhere to be found, as contemporary republicanism is perfectly prepared for defense. In his earlier paper, Pettit discussed and rejected Mill’s concept of liberty as “a paradoxical and intolerable result.” Pettit’s own theory enjoys all the advantages of a newcomer; it addresses every move that Mill might make. Whenever Mill blames public opinion, Pettit offers something superior to opinion, i.e., conventional norms, laws or knowledge. Whenever Mill complains about “collective mediocrity,” Pettit can argue that “[t]he normality conditions have some costs but all weigh lightly against the benefit of standardisation.” In the absence of a new and eloquent Mill who can inspire us once again to cherish human dignity, inseparable from individuality, it is more reasonable and fair to construct a counterexample based on Pettit’s material than one on Mill’s texts. Unlike Mill’s inspiring prose, the following argument lacks rhetorical quality; it suffices if it stands. Nevertheless, I would like to associate it with the Millian legacy, which taught us to appreciate individuality.
Mill believed that an individual may know better than his community does. Even if a dissenting individual errs, it is in the interest of the community to save an unorthodox opinion from oblivion, as humans are fallible and the diversity of opinions serves as a communal insurance against obscurantism. Mill’s argument in defense of individual liberty depends on his pluralistic epistemology and on his trust in the progress of human knowledge. His opponents may not share these views. One can envision an objection as follows. If the dissenting individual knows better than others do, then this person must belong to the community of knowledge. By being a scientist or scholar, she accepts quasi-republican rules of conduct and communication intrinsic to the community. Given this, it is difficult to believe that any irresolvable disagreements may arise between this individual and republican society, which functions on virtually the same normative principles as a scientific community. This is why Mill’s concerns may seem either nonessential or irrelevant within the republican framework.

Mill’s supporters mainly face the challenge of explaining how dissenting individuality may be constructed in such a manner that protects individuals from compromising accusations of irrationality. To avoid this trap, we must find sources of rational dissent that are rooted in the republican theory itself. This framework does not provide any basis for intellectual differentiation among citizens. However, it admits differences between communities; in fact, it counts this provision as an advantage of republicanism over liberalism, for all liberal communities are uniformly bound to universal values. Therefore, to construct an intrinsic case of rationally sound differences over liberties, we may compare two republican communities (C1 and C2) with different sets of basic liberties; this comparison is considered legitimate, given the theory.

Suppose that L is a basic liberty adopted in C1, but not in C2. Suppose then that it is more rational to adopt L than to deny it. As only a particular case is needed to build upon, it is sufficient to claim that at least one such situation is probable and not counterintuitive. Consider a “republican emigrant” P moving from C1 to C2. P is a rational human being who was previously a proud member of a republican community. P’s wish to enjoy freedom L is also rational and shared by the majority of her ex-compatriots in C1. Upon joining community C2, P finds herself in disagreement with the new community over the right to enjoy liberty L.

The question of whether the “republican emigrant” P is free in the new republican community C2 arises. There are two opposing answers to this question depending on how freedom is defined. Yes, P is free, according to the non-frustration principle. No, P is not free, according to the non-domination principle.

Now, all has been prepared to present the proof of the 3rd priority claim that non-frustration takes precedence over non-domination. The proof involves
a similar reduction to absurdity as follows. Suppose that liberty is defined as non-domination. Then, in cases such as that of the “republican emigrant,” you can be legally considered “free” by mistake, while on rational grounds, you know that you are not. However, this is absurd. Therefore, the non-domination principle is counterintuitive and non-frustration takes precedence over it.

Perhaps it helps to explain this proof by means of the “open-doors” metaphor. There are two competing viewpoints to compare: the communal and the individual. First, consider the position of community C2. The local set of basic liberties is secured to person P, who does not suffer from either domination or interference. All doors are open and there are no doorkeepers. Hence, P is free. As soon as we switch to the viewpoint of P, however, it becomes obvious that this evaluation of her liberty is inadequate. P has rational grounds to wish to pass through door L, as it has been certified by the normative law-making procedures in C1, from whence P came. By an apparent mistake, however, this door does not even exist on the official door plan of community C2. This causes P to experience rationally justified frustration, as P is not free. In this case, only the non-frustration principle provides us with an adequate account of P’s liberty; therefore, it should be prioritized.

This argument proves that there are no grounds to claim that the non-domination principle has absolute priority over two other principles of freedom. Although I consider this to be an important result, one should not overestimate its overall significance. Per se, the refutation of the absolute priority claim does not harm the republican political theory. Against the “tyranny of majority,” Pettit introduced a series of safeguards, ranging from the basic right for dissidents to exit the community to the elaborated system of individualized contestation, which allows individuals to appeal and reverse discriminating majoritarian decisions. I will conclude this section with a discussion of these safeguards, not because it contributes to the refutation, which is complete, but because it helps to clarify its exact meaning.

The right to exit the community, as Pettit concedes, is not viable in the contemporary world, as we can hardly change our citizenship at will. This practical obstacle does not invalidate the “Millian” proof discussed above because the reference to the alternative community C1, where liberty L is adopted, serves only one purpose: to insure that the determination to enjoy liberty L is rational. Any other attestation to the same effect will suffice. However, from the republican perspective, there are few options left for an individual to prove her point. Indeed, the republican safeguards against the tyranny of majority are tailored for minority groups, not for individuals. The suggested contestation procedure is supposed “to respond to the problem raised by sticky minority-majority divides.” By design, the atomic individuality is a blind spot of the republican theory. The indifference to atomic individuality runs through its edifice from bottom to top, i.e., from its con-
cept of agency to its concept of a mixed constitution. However, can we fully separate the concept of rationality from the individual contributions to scientific progress? Rational thinking is universal, not communal; therefore, various types of tensions are imaginable between a forward-thinking individual and her conservative community. Mill was well aware of that; a similar, though deeply buried, awareness is intrinsic to the republican theory. It resurfaces, for example, with the republican solution to the democratic trilemma, which entails that rationality in the form of reflexive deliberation is more valuable than majoritarian rule or mass participation. I believe that my argument precludes the non-frustration principle from falling into oblivion, as more attention to individuality may actually contribute to the republican theory.

6. Conclusion

Following both considerations, be they about the context of each definition or about the logical soundness of the final implication, the absolute priority claim is unwarranted. Now it is worth noting that these approaches are complementary. The first approach is historical, and applying it to political theory may lead to a heterogeneous representation of reality with different definitions of freedom corresponding to separate entities such as the individual, normative structures and state power. The second approach is analytical, which keeps the political ontology flat and accessible under a uniform but case-conditioned reasoning. It is remarkable that the absolute priority claim fails independently of this meta-theoretical preference.

Regardless of the success or failure of my refutation, a general question arises regarding how to confront the plurality of liberty principles. Berlin presented an alternative to his definition only to reject it. Pettit discussed three definitions only to reject two of them. Each time, this radical approach presupposes that there is only one way to define liberty. However, what are the implications if there is no clear resolution to competitive claims of different principles?

One expected reaction involves detachment. A similar answer was provided on Berlin’s differentiation between positive and negative concepts of liberty when Gerald MacCallum presented a formula for both sides of spectrum. Nevertheless, his catchall definition was not introduced to improve the concept of liberty within political theory. Instead, MacCallum’s conviction was that freedom was the wrong concept to focus on in the first place. It is easy to imagine that the prospect of several competing definitions of freedom may be met with an equal desire to dismiss the significance of the very concept rather than tolerating pluralism.
A pluralistic answer serves as another possible option. Indeed, this worked for Hobbes and Mill and works today for Skinner. Nonetheless, Skinner does not seem to embrace the non-frustration principle, while Hobbes and Mill seem to have prioritized non-frustration in certain respects. In other words, to some extent (which remains to be clarified), issues of comparison and selection persist. Pluralism is not a solution in and of itself. However passionate Berlin was in connecting the ideal of negative liberty with merits of political pluralism, he was careful enough to avoid mention of pluralism in his definition of liberty. His reasons were practical. When presented with the slightest choice between definitions, his strategy for defense of liberty fails. Indeed, a similar logical issue renders the entire positive concept of liberty theoretically unsound, as the unresolved duality of the notion of self, which is intrinsic to this concept, paves the way for totalitarian misuse and propaganda. At some practical level, reliance on a single definition of freedom seems inevitable.

A comparison between Berlin’s and Pettit’s frameworks demonstrates a degree of flexibility in this respect. Berlin’s defensive minimalism does not leave many options open. By default, his individual is dominated by the state and is not to be trusted with her ideas about freedom. Under these conditions, the non-interference principle serves as the only viable solution. Pettit’s republican theory is counter-minimalist by design; it is ever expanding. Although he does not embrace competing principles in political theory, he cannot help but allow hybrid approaches to flourish in moral theory. This is the difference between their overall strategies, one of which is to win, and the other being to not lose. For the minimalist, the fewer options available besides the optimal one, the better, as this provides the weaker party with more control over a situation. For the maximalist, the more options are available besides the optimal, the better, as this shifts the outer limits of relevance and applicability in favor of the stronger party. If the pluralism of definitions undermines minimalism, this does not mean that some maximalist theory that appropriately combines and locally applies competing principles may not profit from a variety of means to achieve its goals.

Finally, one more response to the issue of plurality of liberty principles is plausible. Whereas an analytical purist may recommend turning away from freedom towards more promising areas of political theory while a theoretical maximalist may even welcome some pluralism of means, their motives cannot be shared by those who value freedom in and of itself and who care to understand what it is. At this point, it is important to recall two choices that historically predefined this theoretical predicament. First, Berlin isolated the explicitly negative concept of liberty from its positive counterpart, and it is within this isolated sphere that he introduced his version of the non-interference principle. Second, unlike Berlin, Pettit introduced the non-
domination principle without considerable regard for the positive concept of freedom, arguing that the latter is psychological and historical, but not political, in value.\textsuperscript{56} Against this backdrop, a comparison between the non-frustration principle and the positive concept of liberty in the Berlinian sense, although anachronistic, may provide beneficial insight. On a theoretical level, Millian individuals are not impeded from embracing the positive ideal of self-mastery. Indeed, Berlin once described Mill’s principle of liberty as “freedom of self-expression.”\textsuperscript{57} This means that in Berlin’s theory, two major arguments were intrinsically – if unaccountably – connected: the rejection of positive liberty and the rejection of the non-frustration principle. Therefore, an attempt to make proper sense of the plurality of freedom principles is bound to return us to the pre-Berlinian state of affairs in the field of liberty studies.

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NOTES

2. Pettit identifies three distinct ideals of freedom: psychological, ethical, and political (Pettit, 2015). This paper focuses on the political concepts of liberty.
4. “The sense of freedom in which I use this term entails not simply the absence of frustration (which may be obtained by killing desires), but the absence of obstacles to possible choices and activities – absence of obstructions on roads along which a man can decide to walk” Berlin and Harris (2002: 32); “[F]reedom is not the mere absence of frustration of whatever kind” (Berlin and Harris, 2002: 171).
8. “Leviathan” (1.xxi).
13. E.g., “The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way” (Mill, Bromwich, and Kateb, 2003: 83).
15. It is true that Berlin rejected the non-frustration principle and did not simply discount its value; however, his reasons for considering it politically dangerous came from his general political outlook, as shown below. Because I limit the dis-
cussion to fundamentals, the difference between rejection and prioritization is hardly important.

16. Recently, there was a change in Pettit’s terminology; instead of “arbitrary interference,” he now speaks about “uncontrolled interference” (Pettit, 2012: 58).

17. Pettit counts this as an important advantage of the republican theory over liberalism (Pettit, 2001: 134–135).


19. Mill identified this principle of liberty based on the internality of the corresponding “plan.” “[T]he principle requires liberty … of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like…” (Mill, Bromwich, and Kateb, 2003: 83).


22. We can observe similar developments in the field of the philosophy of mind, where physicalism has slowly acquired an air of inevitability. I make this aside only because there is strong parallelism between the two fields. Indeed, Pettit has coauthored several papers with prominent figures in the field of the philosophy of mind such as Frank Jackson, the author of the “No-Color Room” argument. Yet, their views on liberty are not identical.


26. A reference to context is fairly common and intuitive. For example, Berlin remarks that “our situation” is different from “circumstances of [Mill’s] age;” “the mass neurosis of our age,” agoraphobia, is actually more reminiscent of the political climate in the age of Hobbes than of “the disease of Victorian England,” claustrophobia (Berlin and Harris, 2002: 243).


29. Berlin attributed the difference between his and Mill’s positions on liberty to advances in contemporary psychology: events of the 20th century proved Mill’s psychology “outdated” (Berlin and Harris, 2002: 219). Decisive developments included the discovery of unforeseen possibilities of massive propaganda and brainwashing.


31. One can describe the exact conditions of Berlin’s defense as follows. The list of liberties is fixed and unequivocal. It is made into law. There exists a separation of powers either on domestic or international political levels so that one can use the law as a weapon against despotism. Under these conditions, defensive tactics are simple. One compares the list of basic liberties with the list of actual liberties that is accessible to the individual or group under consideration. Whenever an item from the control list is missing from the actual list, there is objective evidence that freedom has been compromised. It is worth noting that this tactic works only for the defense of the “minimal area” of freedom, as one can form a basic fixed checklist for comparison only in this case. As soon as the list expands arbitrarily, this expansion
results in various forms of misuse. By virtue of the quantitative nature of the defense, any addition of even the most negligible “open door” is logically equivalent to the most grandiose achievements of a civil rights movement. Such cases may nourish the demagogues, but this is not how Berlin intended his defense to function. Charles Taylor’s critique of liberal freedom misses the point, as it assumes that we can arbitrarily expand the list of liberties (Taylor, 1993). According to Berlin’s theory, the door plan is preexisting; moreover, it is limited, universal and always the same for everyone depending only on some historically preconditioned, and in this sense “objective,” liberal paradigm.

33. Ibidem. This is a “communal” approach to objectivity; therefore, Berlin’s preference for objectivity is politically charged, as one can interpret it as the prioritization of a specific community, albeit an imaginary community, over individuals.

34. Berlin and Harris (2002: 207).
35. “… these rules or commandments … are grounded so deeply in the actual nature of men as they have developed through history, as to be, by now, an essential part of what we mean by being a normal human being” (Berlin and Harris, 2002: 202).

38. The third element of political reality, state power, is considered potentially hostile to freedom.

44. See an example in Pettit (1989: 160).

48. Pettit distinguishes atomism as opposed to holism from individualism as opposed to collectivism; his choice is in favor of both individualism and holism (Pettit 1996; McBride 2015). In these terms, the Millian individual is atomic.

52. His example of the right concept to focus on was that of the “person” (MacCallum 1967: 325).
54. Pettit calls the maximalist approach “the rich ideal” (Pettit, 2001: 139–140) and “freedom with breadth” (Pettit, 2014: 55).

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