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Should socialists be republicans?

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a critique of left republican writings from a non-republican socialist standpoint. It examines three claims that have been advanced by left republican authors: that workers are dominated 1) by their lack of access to the means of production; 2) by the market; and 3) by their employer. With regard to 1) and 2), it argues that alternative conceptions of freedom can identify the unfreedom in question, and that there are good reasons for pressing these complaints on the basis of these alternative conceptions. With regard to 3), it argues that, while alternative conceptions of freedom may be able to identify the unfreedom in question, republican freedom provides a more suitable basis for pressing this claim. It concludes that while left republicans have shown that socialists have reason to care about republican freedom, they have not shown that socialists should adopt republican freedom at the expense of other conceptions of freedom.

KEYWORDS Freedom; non-domination; republicanism; socialism

Introduction

In recent years there has been a radical turn in republican political theory.¹ Left republicans, as I shall call them,² advance two main claims. First, against centrist republicans,³ left republicans argue that a consistent application of republican freedom requires a socialist economy. According to centrist republicans, republican freedom requires substantial redistributive measures to ensure the economic independence of all citizens. However, it is not anti-capitalist. Indeed, '[t]here need be nothing inimical to republican freedom in the existence of a regime of private property' (Pettit, 2006, p. 147).⁴ According to left republicans, however, this is mistaken. In their view, republican freedom goes beyond reformist calls for redistribution and universal basic income to radical demands for 'collective ownership of the means of production or democratic control of productive assets' (Gourevitch, 2013, p. 598, on UBI see also Lazar, 2021). In short, 'the path to ... republicanism should also lead us to socialism' (O'Shea, 2020a, p. 549).

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The second claim – which is more implicit in left republican writings – is that socialists should make republican freedom central to their political theory. While socialists have long criticised the unfreedom wrought by capitalism, they have generally done so (or been perceived as doing so) on the basis of alternative conceptions of freedom. Against this, left republicans argue that the ‘republican theory of liberty delivers a powerful critique of economic domination’ (O’Shea, 2020a, p. 549), and has ‘enormous critical potential’ for socialists (Leipold, Nabulsi & White, 2020, p. 2). Indeed, it is argued that republican freedom provides ‘a more comprehensive account of the threats to our economic liberties’ than Rawlsian, real libertarian, or Marxist variants (O’Shea, 2020b, p. 221). Thus, there is ‘good reason for both socialists and republicans to pursue a socialist republicanism’ (O’Shea, 2020a, p. 549).

In this paper, I focus on the second claim, which, unlike the first, has not received much attention so far. I ask: should socialists make republican freedom central to their political theory, as left republicans imply? To address this question, I focus on three claims that have been recently advanced by left republicans, each of which is claimed to be an instance of domination in the republican sense of the term, i.e. subjection to an arbitrary will. These are that workers are dominated: 1) by their lack of access to the means of production; 2) by the market; and 3) by their employer. In response, I make two claims. My *primary* claim is that republican freedom is not uniquely able to identify the form of unfreedom in question. My *secondary* claim is that the alternative conception of freedom provides a more suitable basis for pressing the claim than republican freedom. With regard to 1) and 2), I argue that both the primary and secondary claims go through: alternative conceptions of freedom can identify the unfreedom in question, and there are good reasons for pressing these complaints on the basis of these alternative conceptions of freedom. With regard to 3), by contrast, I argue that, while alternative conceptions of freedom may be able to capture the unfreedom in question, republican freedom provides a more suitable basis for pressing the claim. My conclusion is that the appeal of republican freedom for socialists is more limited than left republicans imply: left republicans have shown that socialists have reason to care about republican freedom, but they have not shown that republican freedom should replace socialists’ commitment to other conceptions of freedom.

Before I proceed, some clarifications are in order. First, while I ask, ‘should socialists be republicans?’, note that my focus is on republicanism as a theory of freedom. Some theorists identify republicanism with commitments in addition to non-domination, such as popular sovereignty (Leipold, Nabulsi & White 2020). For reasons of space, however, I limit my focus to republican freedom and ask whether socialists should make this view of freedom central to their political theory.⁵

Second, while I focus on republican freedom, note that I focus on accounts that conceptualise freedom as non-domination, where domination is understood as subjection to an arbitrary will. While left republicans are united in thinking that the centrist interpretation of freedom as non-domination cannot be accepted wholesale, there is a distinction within left republicanism between those who think that a modestly revised version of freedom as non-domination successfully serves socialist ends,⁶ and those who think that the problems facing freedom as non-domination are too great and thus urge its replacement with a more expansive conception of freedom, such as constitutive domination or collective autonomy.⁷ In what follows, I focus on the strand that seeks to revise (rather than replace) freedom as non-domination. Not only is this the dominant position within left republicanism, but the alternative strand (i.e. the strand that seeks to replace freedom as non-domination with an alternative conception of freedom like collective autonomy) threatens to collapse republican freedom into positive freedom. In doing so, it appears to concede that an argument for socialism cannot be made on the basis of a conception of freedom that is distinct from negative and positive variants.

Third, let me clarify the structure of my argument. In this essay, I employ something akin to reflective equilibrium (Rawls, 1971, pp. 18–19). I begin with certain considered judgments that socialists make about workers' unfreedom under capitalism. These include the judgment that workers are forced to sell their labour power, that workers are playthings of market forces, and that workers are under the thumb of their employer at work. I then consider whether different conceptions of freedom can justify these considered judgments. My answer is that republican freedom may be able to justify these forms of unfreedom – although I am sceptical in one case – but other forms of freedom can too, and in two of these cases there are good reasons for preferring these other forms of freedom to republican freedom. On this basis, I conclude that socialists should be pluralists about freedom.

Finally, a brief word about how I am using the term socialism. (I discuss republicanism in the next section.) In discussions of socialism, a distinction is often drawn between socialist ideals and socialist institutions (Gilbert & O'Neill, 2019; Arnold, 2016a). With regards to ideals, socialists are often taken to be opposed to alienation and exploitation, and to have a positive commitment to values of freedom, equality, and solidarity. With regards to institutions, socialism is taken to involve a commitment to collective (rather than private) ownership of the means of production, and to planning (rather than markets) as a way of organising economic activity.

This distinction between ideals and institutions clarifies the left republican project. When left republicans argue that republicans should be socialists, I take them to be arguing that those committed to republican values (e.g. non-domination) should be committed to socialist institutions (e.g. public

ownership, democratic control). By contrast, when left republicans argue that socialists should be republicans, I take them to be arguing that socialists should make republican freedom a key value in their political theory.⁸ It is this claim that I consider in what follows.

Left republicanism

Having discussed socialism, I now turn to republicanism. I begin by explicating freedom as non-domination. I then consider how left republicans have applied it to the condition of workers under capitalism.

For republicans, freedom consists in the absence of domination, where domination is understood as a condition where X has the capacity to interfere in Y's affairs on an arbitrary basis (Pettit, 1997, pp. 52–58). Republicans argue that conceptualising freedom as non-domination enables one to identify forms of unfreedom that do not involve interference as such and hence go undetected by negative views of freedom as non-interference. Consider the paradigmatic case of the benevolent slave master who does not interfere in his slave's choices. Republicans plausibly argue that it would be absurd to conclude that the slave is free in this case, since however little she is actually interfered with, she is permanently exposed to arbitrary interference. Even if such interference never materialises, her enjoyment of non-interference is insecure, always contingent on her master's grace.

It is worth highlighting a further feature of freedom non-domination. On this view, the dominating party must be an agent (Pettit, 1997, p. 52). This is not to say that it has to be an individual person; it can be corporate or collective body. But it cannot be a system, network, or structure. This condition follows from the republican understanding of unfreedom as subjection to an arbitrary will. Since freedom consists in subjection to an arbitrary will, and only agents have wills, it follows that subjection must be to an agent.

As we have seen, left republicans argue that this view of freedom as non-domination has great critical potential for socialists. However, they argue that centrist republicans overlook 'the full implications of republican theory' (Gourevitch, 2013, p. 591). This is because centrist republicans overwhelmingly focus on *personal* forms of domination, that is, cases of domination where an identifiable agent intentionally acts to worsen another agent's situation. Left republicans do not deny the importance of personal domination. However, they argue that an insistence on personal domination deprives republicanism of the 'theoretical resources to address certain forms of economic domination', which are structural not personal (Gourevitch, 2013, p. 591). Moreover, they argue that this focus is not licensed by freedom as non-domination. Far from being confined to personal domination, republican freedom 'can and does comprise a theory of not just personal but structural domination' (Gourevitch, 2013, p. 592). Once these concerns with structural

domination are brought out of the shadows, we can see that non-domination 'offers a compelling account of unfreedom under capitalism, which socialists can use to articulate their own emancipatory ambitions' (O'Shea, 2020a, p. 549).

In particular, in left republican writings, the following three claims have been advanced, each of which is claimed to be instance of domination in the republican sense, i.e. subjection to an arbitrary will.

1) *Structural domination and the means of production*: – The first form of domination flows from control over the means of production.⁹ In a capitalist society, capitalists have full ownership over the means of production and workers own no productive force other than their own labour-power. Lacking access to the means of production, workers are independently unable to produce their means of subsistence. Alex Gourevitch argues that this constitutes a form of domination because it places workers in a position of vulnerability in which subjection to arbitrary power becomes almost inevitable. As a consequence of their lack of access to productive assets, workers are 'forced to sell their labor to employers to earn a living', thus subjecting themselves to a capitalist master (Gourevitch, 2013, p. 596).

Unlike standard forms of domination, Gourevitch argues that the domination suffered by workers in this scenario is structural. It is structural for two reasons.¹⁰ First, the domination is structural because it arises 'from the background structure of property ownership', in particular workers lack of access to the means of production (Gourevitch, 2015, p. 109). It is their structural position, rather than their personal circumstances, that brings workers' domination about. Second, the domination is structural because 'the compulsion . . . did not force them to work for a specific individual' (Gourevitch, 2015, p. 109). Unlike slaves or serfs, workers under capitalism need not work for any particular capitalist. They do, however, have to work for a capitalist – at least if they want to satisfy their needs.

2) *Impersonal domination and the market*: – The second unfreedom is generated by the market. In capitalist society, economic decisions about what is produced, in what quantities, and by whom, are determined by market forces. William Clare Roberts argues that this constitutes a form of domination because it makes workers – and indeed all agents in market societies – a slave to market imperatives, to the aggregated 'decisions of others' (Roberts, 2017, p. 101). As a consequence, workers do not get to decide or contest what gets produced, how it gets produced, or who produces it. They must simply submit themselves to the dictates of the market.

Roberts describes this form of domination as 'impersonal'. Such domination is impersonal, not because it does not involve agents,¹¹ but because unlike the more familiar forms of personal domination theorised by centrist republicans – such as that between master and slave, husband and wife, boss and employee – it does not involve *identifiable* agents (Roberts, 2017, pp. 94–

101). Wage-labourers are dominated by market forces, but such forces are ultimately constituted by innumerable ‘unknown buyers and sellers’ (Roberts, 2017, p. 99).

3) *Personal domination in the workplace*: – The third form of unfreedom occurs inside the workplace. In capitalist society employers wield arbitrary power over employees. Republicans highlight the way that capitalists have used this power to subject workers to various forms of humiliating treatment, from being forced to wear nappies while at work, to being searched upon leaving the premises (see, e.g. Anderson, 2017; Arnold, 2016b; González-Ricoy, 2014; Gourevitch, 2015; Leipold, 2022; O’Shea, 2019). Of course, it might be objected that many employers do not interfere in these ways. Yet for left republicans this matters not, since however little interference is suffered, workers are exposed to the threat of arbitrary interference. Moreover, this exposure is sufficient to force workers to modify their behaviour and adopt a subservient attitude towards their employers – the kind of attitude of attitude that is incompatible with socialist relations. In contrast to the two forms of freedom mentioned above, here we have a straightforward case of personal domination.

Having outlined these three claims, I now consider each in turn. In each case, I first consider whether the claim can be identified on the basis of an alternative conception of freedom, and then consider the advantages and disadvantages of making the claim on the basis of that alternative conception.

Structural domination and the means of production

Let us start with the first claim advanced by left republicans, namely that workers are, as a result of their lack of access to the means of production, forced to work for capitalists.

Now left republicans argue that this is an instance of republican unfreedom. However, the claim is also compatible with negative freedom. By negative freedom, I mean the view that freedom consists in ‘the absence of obstacles to possible choices and activities’ (Berlin, 1969, p. 18). On this view, a person is free if, and to the extent that, her possible choices and activities are not obstructed by others. There is disagreement about what constitutes an obstacle. However, we can sidestep these disagreements here, for there is widespread agreement that the obstacle (a) must be humanly (though not necessarily intentionally)¹² imposed, and (b) not restricted to constraints that make certain courses of action literally impossible but extend to other features of the agent’s environment that make courses of action less reasonable. So, for example, if I face an option of performing two actions, say going through door X or door Y, and someone intentionally blocks Y, then my freedom is severely curtailed. But it would also curtail my freedom, albeit to

a lesser extent, if someone threatens me to rob me of my worldly possessions if I step through Y. While Y remains physically open in the second scenario, the path from the door no longer represents a reasonable alternative, and my freedom is consequently compromised.

I think that negative freedom makes good sense of the socialist complaint that workers are forced to work for capitalists.¹³ Consider what is probably the best-known version of this complaint: Karl Marx's. Marx holds that proletarians are freer than slaves or serfs, for they have full ownership over their labour-power. This gives the proletarian 'a wide field of choice, caprice and . . . formal freedom' (Marx, (1857-8), p. 392). Yet Marx also holds that capitalism is not as different from slavery or feudalism as its defenders would have us believe. This is because capitalism is a mode of production in which capitalists have full ownership of the means of production, and workers own no productive force other than their own labour-power. Since proletarians lack access to the means of production, they cannot independently produce their means of subsistence. As such, they are forced – have no reasonable alternative but to – sell their labour-power to capitalists. For this reason, Marx argues that capitalism is, like slavery and feudalism before it, a 'system of forced labour – no matter how much it might seem to flow from free contractual agreement' (1894, p. 807).

As described by Marx, proletarians lack negative freedom. For, in this scenario, a feature of the worker's environment, namely their lack of access to the means of production – a lack of access that is humanly created and coercively imposed – is an obstacle to one of their possible choices, namely not selling their labour-power. So, workers under capitalism are unfree in the negative sense: their field of uncoerced choice is restricted as a consequence of the capitalist's ownership of productive assets.¹⁴

I take it that the above argument suffices to establish my primary claim, namely that republican freedom is not uniquely able to identify the form of unfreedom in question. However, I also think that there are reasons for supporting my secondary claim, namely that the alternative conception of freedom (negative freedom) provides a more suitable basis for pressing the claim than republican freedom.

Two reasons speak in favour of the second claim: one theoretical, one strategic. To begin with the theoretical reason: recall that the unfreedom we are dealing with here – workers being forced to work for capitalists – is a form of structural unfreedom. Now, republicans are often thought to have a hard time accounting for structural forms of domination.¹⁵ The difficulty is easily seen. Republicans conceptualise freedom as non-domination, where domination is understood as subjection to an arbitrary will. The paradigmatic case of domination is the master-slave relation. The master-slave relation is a good example of domination because it consists in (i) an agent centrally having (ii) the capacity to interfere in the slave's affairs on (iii) an arbitrary basis. In cases

of structural domination, of which workers lack of access to the means of production is one, republicans need to show that conditions (i), (ii), and (iii) are satisfied. This is not straightforward. With regards to (i), notice that the idea cannot be that the capitalism dominates workers, for capitalism is not an agent. With regards to (ii), notice that the position of the worker is not entirely analogous to the slave, for the capitalist only enjoys the capacity to interfere in the worker's affairs *after* the worker has sold his or her labour-power. And with regards to (iii), republicans need to show that the power held by one agent over another is an instance of *arbitrary* power.

As we have seen, Gourevitch argues that republican freedom 'does comprise a theory of . . . structural domination' (Gourevitch, 2013, p. 592; see also, Cicerchia, 2022). Gourevitch accepts that structures cannot dominate in the republican sense of the term, for structures are not agents. However, he argues that agents can dominate by intentionally creating and upholding structures that render other agents vulnerable to domination. So, on his view, the claim is not that capitalism dominates workers, but that capitalists dominate workers by intentionally creating and upholding a capitalist structure that renders workers vulnerable to domination.¹⁶

In this way, Gourevitch shows how freedom as non-domination can be squared with structural forms of domination. But notice the difficulty of doing so. In showing how non-domination can account for structural domination, Gourevitch has to show that the operation of the structure (capitalism) renders some agents (workers) vulnerable to domination by other agents (capitalists), who intentionally reproduce the structure. This is not straightforward. By contrast, from the perspective of negative freedom, matters are easier. For, unlike the republican theorist, the negative libertarian need not identify a dominating arbitrary will. They just need to show that capitalists' ownership of the means of production is (i) humanly created, (ii) coercively imposed, and (iii) results in a limitation in the field of worker's uncoerced choice. This is an easier task than that faced by the republican. Thus, while republican freedom can identify the conclusion that workers are forced to sell their labour-power, negative freedom provides a more parsimonious route to the same conclusion.¹⁷

In addition, there is also a second, strategic reason for preferring negative freedom. This is that, since defenders of capitalism typically appeal to negative freedom in defence of their claim that private property preserves freedom, it is better, in strategic terms, to do the same: that is, to show that capitalism violates freedom in the sense of 'freedom' that its defenders prize (Cohen, 1991, pp. 172–173). Appealing to republican freedom lacks this strategic value. In debate with defenders of capitalism, left republicans cannot show that their conclusion follows from their opponent's premises. All they can show is that workers are rendered unfree in the specific sense of 'freedom' they employ. This makes things easier for defenders of capitalism,

for they can then portray the move towards republican freedom as a theoretical sleight of hand, in which their own preferred form of freedom has been substituted for another, more socialist one. Thus, in criticising the structure of proletarian unfreedom in republican terms, left republicans let defenders of capitalism off the hook.

Impersonal domination by the market

So much for the first claim. What about the second claim, namely that workers under capitalism are dominated by market imperatives, in the sense that the market prescribes what workers should produce, in what quantities, and by whom, with workers being unable to contest or demand justification for these prescriptions.

As we have seen, some left republicans, notably William Clare Roberts, argue that market imperatives are an instance of republican unfreedom, and I shall soon point to some problems with seeing it as such.¹⁸ Before I do that, though, I shall first proceed by establishing my primary claim, namely that the unfreedom in question can be understood on an alternative conception of freedom.

In particular, I argue that the complaint can be made on a positive conception of freedom as self-determination. By self-determination, I mean the view that freedom consists in 'being one's own master' (Berlin, 1969, pp. 131–132). On this view, a person is free if, and to the extent that, she is herself the author of her decisions and actions. Freedom in this sense is thus primarily concerned not with one's field of possible choice (as in the negative conception) but with the question of whether those choices are one's own. This emphasis on self-mastery may sound like republican freedom, yet though the ideals are easily conflated, they are distinct.¹⁹ Republican freedom consists in not being dominated or ruled by another. Self-determination, by contrast, consists in determining or ruling oneself. Not being dominated by another (republican freedom) is a necessary condition for ruling or determining oneself (positive freedom), since one does not rule or determine oneself if one is ruled by another. But it is not a sufficient condition, since one could enjoy non-domination (i.e. not be ruled by another) and yet fail to rule or determine oneself.

Now recall that the complaint is that under capitalism economic decisions are left to the free play of market forces. On the positive conception, this is a clear case of unfreedom. For if the market decides what is produced, when it is produced, and the quantities in which it is produced, then there is an obvious sense in which human beings do not: People are not self-determining if economic decisions are made by impersonal forces. Of course, one might argue that the market does not constrain freedom because it is the cumulative effect of innumerable human actions, and hence lacks the

required type of agency. But while this point may trouble a negative or republican theorist, it presents no difficulty for the theorist of positive liberty, since such theorists take a broader view of what counts as a constraint to include impersonal structures. On this view, the fact that market imperatives are not properly agential is irrelevant to the question of whether it counts as a constraint on freedom.

Once again, I think that the above argument suffices to establish my primary claim, namely that republican freedom is not uniquely able to identify the form of unfreedom in question. As with the previous section, however, I also think that there are reasons for supporting the second claim, namely that the alternative conception of freedom (self-determination) provides a more suitable basis for pressing the claim than republican freedom. Indeed, in this case, I think that the reasons tell even more decisively against rendering this complaint in republican terms.

First, in the complaint about 'impersonal domination' in the market, notice that, on the republican view, the claim cannot be that the market itself dominates workers, for the market is not an agent. Rather, the claim must be that market imperatives are ultimately agential. As we have seen, this is Roberts's claim. Although they may not appear as such to market participants, market imperatives are an aggregation of the desires of innumerable 'unknown buyers and sellers' (Roberts, 2017, p. 99). However, it is hard to see how this qualifies as agential either, for while (on Roberts's view) market imperatives ultimately have their source in individuals' needs and wants, these individuals are 'anonymous and dispersed' and thus do not represent an agent with a unified will in any meaningful sense (Roberts, 2017, p. 99). I think there is a real question about why we should think of this as an instance of republican unfreedom, given its deviation from a core aspect of the republican view.

Secondly, the unfreedom in question lacks another key component of the republican view: arbitrariness (Vrousalis, 2017). For while the market imposes various constraints on freedom, it does not do so in the republican sense of the term: the constraints that the market imposes do not involve subjection to an arbitrary will. In fact, far from subjecting individuals to arbitrary power, the market constrains its exercise. This is because the market limits the extent to which capitalists can act on their discretion. For example, in decisions about whether to hire or fire, cut workers' wages, relocate production to another country, or introduce labour-saving technology, capitalists cannot decide on an arbitrary basis what to do. Their decisions are massively constrained by the markets in which they operate. Capitalists who continually exercise arbitrary power in ways that go against the market are likely to go out of business.

In this regard, it is important to note that Roberts thinks that capitalists are also dominated by the market. In his view, 'the impersonal domination embodied in the market is not a form of class domination'. On the contrary,

‘the dominant class in modernity, the class of capitalists, is as subject to impersonal domination as are the labouring classes’ (Roberts, 2017, p. 102). However, he fails to notice the implication that I have outlined above, namely that by subjecting capitalists as well as labourers to market imperatives, the market limits the scope for capitalists’ domination of workers.²⁰

As a final point in my case against making the traditional socialist complaint against the market in republican terms, notice that republican freedom generates odd implications from a socialist perspective. Recall that republican freedom requires not being dominated by another, not having a master. It does not require determining oneself, being one’s own master. Now, suppose that we could overcome market imperatives in a way that does not involve people ruling or determining themselves. This would happen if decisions about economic outcomes were made on the basis of a lottery, for example. Republicans must conclude that people are free in this scenario, for there is no domination.²¹ However, I think that most socialists would take the alternative view that people are not truly free here because they are not self-determining: the economic decisions they live by are not their own.

To add some support for this claim, consider Marx once again. It is true that Marx uses the language of domination to criticise the market, a language that might be thought to imply a commitment to republican freedom. Thus, he writes that whereas previous epochs were characterised by ‘the domination of person over person’ modern capitalist society is characterised by the ‘domination of the *thing* over the *person*, of the product over the producer’ (Marx, 1844, p. 221). But putting aside my earlier point that the domination in question does not involve subjection to an arbitrary will, it is clear from Marx’s writings that the positive counterpart to the idea of domination by market forces consists not merely in the absence of domination, but in collective control of social relations, i.e. positive freedom (for discussion, see Wood, 2004, pp.48–55). Freedom under communism, Marx writes, ‘consists in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature’ (Marx, 1894, p. 807).²² Engels is even clearer that the freedom in question goes beyond subjection to an arbitrary will. The transition to communism is ‘the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom . . . Man, at least the master of his own form of social organization, becomes at the same time the lord over Nature, *his own master – free*’ (Engels, 1892, pp. 82, 86, my italics).

Personal domination at work

Let us turn to the third and final claim advanced by left republicans, namely that workers are subjected to arbitrary power at work, a subjection that can result in humiliating mistreatment and ingratiating subservience.

Now, in contrast with structural and impersonal domination, I think that personal domination at work is a clear and unambiguous case of republican unfreedom. For here we have a situation in which an agent (employers) exercises arbitrary power over another agent (workers). Indeed, the situation of workers is closely analogous to the paradigmatic examples of republican unfreedom: the arbitrary power that absolute monarchs wield over their subjects, and that masters wield over their slaves (Leipold, 2022, p. 211). Unlike the first two claims considered, then, there is no difficulty in seeing this constraint on freedom in republican terms.

Can the other conceptions of freedom I have considered here capture the unfreedom in question here? Quite possibly. Negative freedom has no problem identifying unfreedom in the more dramatic cases of workplace unfreedom. If my boss forces me to wear a nappy at work, or orders me to be searched upon leaving the premises, then he or she very obviously interferes with me. My negative freedom is compromised by these actions. The trickier cases are, of course, the less dramatic ones in which my boss has the capacity for interference but does not exercise it. As is well known, theorists of negative liberty have various ways of responding to this objection (see, e.g. Carter, 1999; Goodin & Jackson, 2007; Kramer, 2003; Lang, 2012). However, these replies are not entirely satisfying (Pettit, 2008; List & Valentini, 2016). As with the difficulties faced by republicans in accounting for structural forms of unfreedom, theorists of negative freedom typically accommodate these sorts of cases (i.e. ones that do not involve interference) by subtly modifying their view – for instance, by emphasising not interference *per se*, but predictable non-interference. With such modifications, negative freedom can accommodate a broader range of cases, but some of the simplicity of the original view is lost. Republican freedom provides a more natural way of identifying the unfreedom.

By contrast, positive freedom can more easily capture the unfreedom of the modern workplace. For even if my employer does not interfere with me, they will make decisions – decisions about when I can work, what particular task I work at, what opportunities for training I have, and so on – that I will then have to follow if I am to keep my job. As this explanation makes clear, however, positive liberty offers a different explanation for why the workplace is a site of unfreedom. On this view, the reason why workers are not free is because workplace decisions are not their own. On the republican view, by contrast, the reason workers are not free is not because workplace decisions are not their own – that itself is not troubling from a republican point of view – but because they are subject to the arbitrary power of their employer. Thus, while positive liberty can account for this unfreedom, it does so for different reasons.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have considered three claims that have been advanced in recent left republican writings: that workers are dominated 1) by their lack of access to the means of production; 2) by the market; and 3) by their employer. In reply to 1) and 2), I have argued that alternative conceptions of freedom can identify the unfreedom in question, and there are good reasons for pressing these complaints on the basis of these alternative conceptions of freedom. In reply to 3), by contrast, I have argued that, while alternative conceptions of freedom can identify the unfreedom in question, republican freedom provides a more suitable basis for pressing the claim. Overall, my view is that a close consideration of these three considered judgements about worker unfreedom under capitalism reveals that, while socialists have reason to care about republican freedom, they also have reason to care about negative and positive freedom.

In conclusion, I consider an objection and draw out an implication.

First, the objection. It might be argued that, while my critique raises certain problems for left republicanism, republican freedom remains the best conception of freedom for socialists because it is the only conception that can identify all three instances of unfreedom I have discussed: structural, impersonal, and personal. So, if socialists are to have one conception of freedom, non-domination is the best one on offer.

Against this objection, I offer two replies. First, it is not obvious that republican freedom can identify all three instances of unfreedom. Republican freedom can certainly account for personal domination (this is where it is strongest), and I am happy to accept that it can account for the structural unfreedom of workers being forced to sell their labour power. But, for reasons given, the claim that the market constitutes a form of impersonal domination in the republican sense of the word is unconvincing.

Second, the objection overlooks the possibility that negative and positive freedom can identify multiple instances of unfreedom. This is clearest in the case of positive freedom, which, in my view, has the best claim at identifying all three forms of unfreedom. Yet one of the things we have learnt from the liberal-republican debate is that negative liberty can also address a broader range of constraints on freedom than is commonly thought, including ones that do not involve actual interference. Against this point, it is often argued that responding to such cases (i.e. ones that do not involve actual interference) may involve some conceptual stretching. However, this point cuts both ways: it can just as well be pressed against the left republican who wishes to account for structural unfreedom.

Now for the implication. Since Isaiah Berlin's 'Two Concepts of Liberty', it has been common to identify different political ideologies with different conceptions of freedom. On this view, liberals have a negative conception

of freedom, whereas anti-liberals (on both the left and right) have a positive conception. Republicans of all stripes disagree with Berlin that there are just two concepts of liberty, and left republicans disagree with Berlin's placement of socialists into the positive camp. However, left republicans appear to agree with Berlin that there is a single socialist conception of freedom: Berlin is wrong in thinking what it is, but he is right that there is such a thing. In my view, this is mistaken. The socialist critique of capitalism draws on different notions of freedom: negative, positive, and republican. These freedoms pick out different things, but all strike me as valuable objects of human concern. I see no reason to replace this pluralist commitment with any single conception.

Notes

1. See, e.g. (Bryan, 2021; Cicerchia, 2021, 2022; Gourevitch, 2013, 2015; Lazar, 2021; Leipold, 2022; Leipold, Nabulsi, and White, 2020; Muldoon, 2022; O'Shea, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Roberts, 2017; Thompson, 2013; White, 2011).
2. In the literature various different labels have been used. These include 'labour republicanism', 'radical republicanism', 'socialist republicanism', and 'workplace republicanism'. My use of left republicanism is intended to capture all of these.
3. I use 'centrist' here in contrast to 'left republicanism' where the dividing line is whether republican freedom is incompatible with capitalism. Centrist republicans, though on the left in other respects, answer in the negative. Note that there is also a form of right republicanism, which is friendlier to free markets. For such views, see, (Frye, 2020 and Taylor, 2019). The fact that republican freedom has been employed by writers across the political spectrum may itself give us reason to doubt its distinctly socialist character.
4. For similar views, see, e.g. (Dagger, 2006), and (Lovett, 2009).
5. In addition, note that I also only focus on whether a republican theory of freedom can capture socialist intuitions about freedom. A full answer to the question of whether socialists should adopt republican freedom would also consider how this view of freedom can account for other values socialists care about, such as equality, community, exploitation, alienation, etc.
6. This strand is represented by (Cicerchia, 2021, 2022; Gourevitch, 2013, 2015; Lazar, 2021; Leipold, 2022; Leipold, Nabulsi and White 2020; O'Shea, 2020a, 2020b; Roberts, 2017).
7. This strand is represented by (Thompson, 2013; Muldoon, 2022). These views should be distinguished from the view (closer to my own) that argue that republican freedom (as non-domination) is insufficient and requires supplementing with non-republican conceptions of freedom. For such views, see, e.g. (Breen, 2015; Krause, 2013; Markell, 2008; McBride, 2015).
8. What does a 'key value' mean? We can distinguish four different positions of the place of non-domination in socialist political philosophy: a) non-domination should be the *only* conception of freedom in socialist political philosophy; b) non-domination is the *primary* conception of freedom in socialist political philosophy; c) non-domination is *one* conception of freedom among others in socialist political philosophy, having no special priority; d) non-domination has *no* role in socialist political philosophy. Although this is not made explicit, I take

left republicans' enthusiastic endorsement of the value of non-domination for socialists to commit them to a) or b). By contrast, I argue for c). My essay can thus be understood as a prompt for left republicans to be more pluralistic in their treatment of freedom than they have been thus far.

9. This form of unfreedom is developed most fully by (Gourevitch, 2013, 2015). It is further discussed in (Cicerchia, 2022; Leipold, 2022).
10. However, it is not structural in the following sense: workers are not dominated by the structure. Gourevitch accepts that such a view, i.e. a view in which workers are dominated by the structure itself, does not make sense on a republican view, which sees freedom as a relation between agents.
11. Indeed, Roberts is critical of accounts of domination that sever the link between domination and subjection to an arbitrary will, arguing that such accounts make domination 'nothing more than a metaphor' (Roberts, 2017, pp. 91–92). Despite his somewhat looser characterisation of republican freedom, then, Roberts still belongs to the strand of republicanism that conceptualises unfreedom as subjection to an arbitrary will.
12. Berlin is notoriously inconsistent on this issue, but most subsequent theorists have dropped the intentionality requirement. For discussion, see, (Miller, 1983).
13. My account here is anticipated by (Cohen, 1983; Miller, 1983, 1989).
14. It also bears mentioning that negative freedom captures Marx's claim that proletarians are freer than slaves or serfs. Because proletarians do not face overt force, they enjoy greater negative freedom than slaves or serfs. However, the fact that not selling their labour-power effectively entails destitution means that proletarians still face significant constraint.
15. For these difficulties, see, (Krause, 2013, and Markell, 2008). Note that some republicans, e.g. (Lovett, 2010; 47–49, 71–7), accept that republican freedom is necessarily non-structural.
16. In this way, although Gourevitch describes this as structural domination, a more accurate name would be structurally-enabled domination.
17. It might be objected that since, on the negative view, not every action that restricts negative freedom is unjustified (consider a justly imprisoned criminal), the theorist of negative freedom needs to do extra theoretical work to show that the constraints that flow from capitalists' control of productive assets are all things considered unjustified. It is true that proponents of negative freedom must do extra theoretical work. But so must republicans. Suppose, for instance, that domination at work could only be alleviated at a significant cost to economic efficiency. Is the alleviation of domination justified, all things considered? Republicans no less than proponents of negative freedom must do extra theoretical work to show that it is. To say that a state of affairs constrains freedom is only to give a *pro tanto* reason in favour of altering that state of affairs. As David Miller says, it 'is a mistake to think that to describe a state of affairs as involving unfreedom is to settle a political argument' (Miller, 1983, p. 69).
18. Roberts's views are, however, discussed in positive terms by other left republicans. See, e.g. (Leipold, 2022; O'Shea, 2020a).
19. For a lucid discussion of this distinction, and the ease in which it is conflated, see, (Kolodny, 2019).
20. To be clear, I am not arguing that the market *eliminates* capitalists' domination of workers. I agree with Tom O'Shea that '[t]here is still room for considerable arbitrary power, even within the strictures of the market' (O'Shea, 2020a, p. 556).

However, the claim that the market is *compatible* with the exercise of arbitrary power is different from the claim that the market is a *source* of arbitrary power. It is the latter claim that I am questioning.

21. It is true that the outcomes of a lottery might fail to track peoples' interests. Still, the lottery does not constitute domination because it does not involve subjection to another's *will*.
22. For further discussion of this passage, see, (Kandiyali, 2014). There, I argue that Marx is committed to two different notions of positive freedom: freedom as self-determination and freedom as self-realisation. I discuss the latter again in (Kandiyali, 2020).

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