

Can social justice, economic redistribution and voluntariness fit into a single concept of liberty? Pettit's neo-republican freedom versus Hobhouse's 'new liberal' freedom

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Published in *International Journal of Social Economics* 2013 40 (12) 1108-22

Introduction

Philip Pettit's neo-republican theory (1997a) has managed to reunite the pursuit of liberty and that of social justice, understood as undercutting the practices of social and economic domination.¹ This union between liberty and commitment to social and economic fairness was not achieved first by his neo-republican theory – it was already there in the British idealist concept of positive freedom (Green, 1986a) and in the 'new liberal' concept of liberty (Hobhouse, 1964), both of which cast liberty in terms of ability for personal growth available to all. In other words, what Pettit's neo-republicanism has achieved at the end of twentieth century was already achieved in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by T.H.Green and L.T.Hobhouse. However, the British idealist and the 'new liberal' concepts were undermined by the overbearing impact of the anti-totalitarian, 'negative' liberalism of the mid to late twentieth century. Isaiah Berlin's famous line that 'liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice' (Berlin, p. 172) caught the spirit of the time and persuaded at least a generation of scholars in the second half of the twentieth century that liberty and social justice should be kept apart. Pettit introduced his neo-republican concept of freedom as an alternative to the negative concept, although he made it clear that his concept was not positive either (1997a, pp. 17-50). However, his ambition to reconcile liberty with social justice did represent a radical departure from Berlin's negative libertarianism as well as the 'purely negative' quantitative approach to the concept (Steiner, 1975, Carter, 1995).

This paper compares Pettit's neo-republican and Hobhouse's 'new liberal' concepts of liberty as two concepts which share significant similarities. I believe that the two concepts successfully accomplish a normatively and analytically challenging task. As mentioned, they each reconcile the demands of liberty with the demands of social justice. In both cases social justice incorporates commitment to economic redistribution - one of the most controversial and divisive issues between the political left and right. Both thinkers make arguments in favour of social and economic equality and associate freedom, although not exclusively, with possession of material resources.

However, the reconciliation of liberty with social justice, especially where the latter is taken as far as economic redistribution, entails significant costs to the former. It prohibits a significant range of actions, namely all actions that compromise social justice. A concept of liberty that prohibits a substantial number of activities would be a 'tense' concept. Voluntariness of action is an important component of liberty. This voluntariness is compromised when those who do not comply with the demands of social justice are forced to do so. How can a social justice concept of liberty account for the liberty of those who disobey, for whatever reason, the regulations that aim to foster justice? This paper examines the respective capacity of Pettit's and Hobhouse's liberty theories to deal effectively with this tension.

Does Pettit's or Hobhouse's liberty better balance the demands of liberty with the demands of social justice? I argue that because the 'new liberal' concept combines liberty, social justice *and* personal growth, while the neo-republican concept omits the

last, the former is more successful in maintaining the link between voluntariness and commitment to social justice. That link is compromised when neo-republicans assess the nature of the liberty of the dominators.

This article looks more closely at Pettit's concept of neo-republican freedom and criticises it on two accounts: its failure to address the continuity between freedom and wellbeing (voluntariness) and its failure to acknowledge the loss of liberty resulting from neo-republican policies that combat practices of domination.

I then turn to Hobhouse's concept of liberty as personal growth available to all, and argue that although the association between liberty and social justice puts some strains on the liberty concept, the continuity between liberty and wellbeing (voluntariness) is well sustained.

The overlap of ideas between contemporary neo-republicanism and British idealism – the ideological predecessor of New liberalism – has already been noted, particularly with respect to participation, contestation and civic virtue (Tyler, 2006, pp. 282-90). This paper brings to light the similarities and differences between the neo-republican and the new liberal theories of liberty. Both of these not only internalise social justice, but read social justice in similar terms – as commitment to social and economic equality. The significant difference however is that unlike Pettit's concept, Hobhouse's introduces the category of personal growth which allows the crucial adjustment between voluntariness and doing what is congruent with social justice.

1. Does Pettit's liberty account for the liberty of the dominators?

Pettit's definition of freedom as nondomination focuses on the plight of the dominated but says little about the dominators. How would social change which provides freedom as nondomination to the currently dominated affect the freedom of the current dominators? The supporters of Pettit's neo-republicanism will argue that dominators will not be less free when they lose their dominating power because they would have been subjected only to non-arbitrary interference. But we still have at least two problems here. First, these policies are likely to affect negatively their wellbeing. Although wellbeing and freedom are two different things, a definition of freedom that ignores this link would be a problematic one: Pettit himself links liberty² with wellbeing by defining neo-republican freedom as freedom from arbitrary interference against one's interest. Second, we can argue that the policies aiming to deprive the dominators of their powers will have an indirect impact on their freedom. Although, as non-arbitrary interference, these policies will not directly deprive them of freedom, they are likely to diminish some of the dominators' resources and respectively their resilience against the domination of others. Thus they may indirectly impact on their freedom.

In the remainder of this section I will explain the link between freedom as non-domination and social justice (1.1) and address the tension between the neo-republican freedom and the demands of the social justice policies experienced by dominators. I will examine more closely two cases: the tension between neo-republican freedom and the wellbeing of dominators (1.2) and freedom related difficulties arising from the resource regulation which is part and parcel of the neo-republican policies (1.3). Finally I will introduce the concept of 'justice threshold' (1.4) in order to explain the exact nature of the relation between neo-republican

liberty and resource regulation. This concept will prove very useful in drawing the parallel with Hobhouse's reconciliation of liberty, social justice and wellbeing.

1.1 Pettit's liberty and social justice

The link between neo-republican freedom and social justice can hardly be denied. Pettit challenges the standard negative freedom definition as 'non-interference', replacing it with 'nondomination,' thus moving away from a naturalistic towards a civil reading: neo-republican 'liberty is civil as distinct from natural freedom' (Pettit, 1997a, p. 66). Pettit makes the case that in order to understand freedom we need to address practices of oppression or domination. We cannot pursue freedom for ourselves exclusively – we can gain freedom only if all those who belong to our vulnerable dominated group gain it too: 'It can be enjoyed by individuals ... only so far as it can be enjoyed by the salient groups to which those individuals belong' (Pettit, 1997a, p. 125). By exposing specific forms of domination – of men over women, of employers over employees, of mainstream over minority cultures - Pettit uncovers specific practices of injustice that need to be dealt with. Thus even if his theory can be explicated in non-normative terms (Pettit, 2006, p. 78), it has some normative contents.³ The phenomenon of domination remains central to the constitution of neo-republican liberty. In order to understand the necessity of freedom, one has to be able to see the injustice involved in practices of oppression as well as to identify the vulnerable groups: those that are subjected to domination. In the neo-republican sense of liberty 'there is no liberty without equality and justice' (Pettit, 1997a, p. 125).

Pettit's critique of the 'freedom' of the 'free contract' makes the link between neo-republican freedom and social justice very obvious. He argues that the development

of the doctrine of free contract ‘saw freedom of contract invoked in defence of some fairly appalling contractual arrangements, as people ignored the consequences for domination – as they ignored the asymmetries of power established under the contract – and argued that a contract that was not actively coerced was free’ (Pettit, 1997a, p. 62; see also 1996, p.585). This makes it clear that the nature of interference which neo-republican freedom aims to resist is interference associated with domination and asymmetry of power. The inability to identify these as problematic can be very costly in terms of liberty, as demonstrated by the practice of ‘free contract’. Lack of neo-republican liberty is premised on the existence of relations of domination.

1.2 The problem of reduced wellbeing: the tension between liberty and voluntariness

Pettit does acknowledge that the ideal of freedom as nondomination will not enhance the wellbeing of the dominators. This is the logic behind his claim that freedom as nondomination as a *partially* common good. It is a *partially* common good because it promotes the wellbeing of those in subjugated positions (Pettit, 1997a, p. 124). It will become a common good, that is, good for all, once subjugators do not exist. So the process that will deprive the dominating party of its potentially oppressive power is likely to impact negatively the wellbeing of its members.

It could be argued that the possession of subjugating powers is so undesirable that the loss of wellbeing the subjugators will suffer is a reasonable penalty for the previously caused injustice. A neo-republican freedom exponent would say that this loss of wellbeing is not a loss of neo-republican liberty as the dominators will be exposed only to non-arbitrary interference. But this would be a tricky line to sustain. The dominators are likely to see the change in their status as a loss of liberty. The fact that

this will not be loss of neo-republican liberty will be of little relevance to them: their ability to do as they like will be reduced and their claim to lost liberty would be well understood by many. In the case of the dominators, there is a significant discrepancy between their own assessment of their liberty and the neo-republican liberty. It is important to note that in the case of the dominated, this discrepancy does not occur: in their case their demand for liberty will be satisfied by the provision of neo-republican liberty. In other words, those in subjugated position are likely to experience the changes that bring neo-republican freedom as coherent with their wellbeing, while those who had possessed potentially oppressive powers are likely to experience their neo-republican freedom as clashing with their wellbeing. A discrepancy between the concept of neo-republican freedom and the wellbeing of the agent of this freedom would be problematic for a neo-republican theorist. Pettit would not be comfortable with the suggestion that the powers of the powerful could be curtailed irrespective of their own judgement on the matter. On his terms, this would amount to arbitrary interference – and interference that will fail ‘to track their interests according to their ideas’ (1997a, p. 68).⁴ The case where some of the powers of the dominating party would be forcefully taken away would amount to an arrangement which ‘however well it serves the previously dominated parties, will not serve the interests of the previously dominant one: it will be a dominating form of interference from that agent’s point of view’ (Pettit, 1997a, p. 68). Pettit may even be prepared to say – and he would still be consistent with his premises - that the dominators’ subjective judgement of their situation can be overruled. It is not their interests as personally expressed that matter when we define non-arbitrary interference, but their ‘avowal-ready interests’ (2006, p. 282). But overruling one’s subjective judgement of their interests, and related to that, of what violates their freedom, is not unproblematic. My

claim here is that although neo-republican freedom does not aim to track the wellbeing of the agent but only his non-subjection to arbitrary interference, the agent's own judgement of what counts as arbitrary interference should matter. The fact that the wellbeing of the dominators comes to tension with their neo-republican freedom is an issue that the neo-republican concept of liberty does not address.

This point can be made in a more straightforward manner if we use Berlin's negative freedom concept. We could say that the neo-republican policies aiming to reduce/ end domination will diminish the negative freedom of the dominators. This will not be controversial from the premises of neo-republican freedom – or so, neo-republicans would say. I argue that this 'collision' between neo-republican and negative freedom is not unproblematic.

1.3 The problem of reduced resilience: does the link between freedom and possession of resources always obtain?

The second problem with the impact of the neo-republican policies on the freedom of the dominators is that, although these policies do not reduce their neo-republican freedom they reduce some of the dominators' resources and thus affect their capacity to develop resilience against the potential subjugating powers of others. A brief summary of Pettit's argument from 'Freedom as Antipower' would explain the link between possession of certain resources and resilience to the domination of others. The reason, Pettit argues, that some have subjugating power and others suffer from the existence of such powers is that the two sets of people have unequal access to 'resources'. The nature of the resources in virtue of which some may have power over others varies, and these resources include 'physical strength, technical advantage, financial clout, political authority, social connections, communal standing,

informational access, ideological position, cultural legitimization' among others (Pettit, 1996, p. 583). The following quote gives a vivid picture about how the unequal access to resources can explain the existence of subjugation power:

It is always a difference in resources or the difference in preparedness to use resources – a difference in effective resources – that enables one agent to interfere arbitrarily in the affairs of another. The bully, physical or emotional, has greater pugilistic resources – or at least effective resources – than the bullied. The husband has greater physical, and in most societies, cultural resources than the wife. The employer has greater financial and probably legal resources, than the employee, and so on. (1996, p. 589)

The conclusion is that in order to reduce domination we have to think of ways to compensate or redress such imbalances. Pettit offers three types of policies. The first is to give the powerless protection against the resources of the powerful and they include the nonvoluntaristic regime of law and the criminal justice system. The second is to regulate the use that the powerful make of their resources and these can be implemented by the so called 'regulatory' institutions. The latter aim to address imbalances of political and economic power and they include regular elections, democratic discussion, separation of powers, availability of appeal and review, regulations against unfair employment practices, against monopoly power and misleading representation, against insider trading and inadequate accounting, among others (Pettit, 1996, p. 591). The third set of policies aims to give the powerless new empowering resources of their own so they become able to resist various form of subjugation. This is the type of empowering related to welfare-state initiatives. The purpose is 'to enhance the day-to-day capacities of people' by providing education,

access to vital cultural services like communication and transportation, suitable insurance coverage or direct provision of medical or legal services (1996, p. 591).

We need resources in order to develop resilience against the potentially subjugating powers of those who have disproportionally more resources than ourselves. These resources allow us to develop antipower which is our ‘capacity to command non-interference’ or to enjoy ‘non-interference *resiliently*, not in virtue of any accident or contingency’ (1996, p. 589, emphasis added). The fact that in the process of building antipower for those exposed to dominating power, the resources of the powerful would be made less efficient or decreased altogether, should not impact the neo-republican freedom of the latter, because they have disproportionally more resources to start with.

The process of regulating the resources of the powerful, however, may have adverse impact on their neo-republican freedom. For example, in a dynamic world the asymmetries of resources may change faster than the regulatory policies: there is a risk that somebody’s resources may be wrongly deemed disproportionally higher while as a matter of fact they are needed to build up resilience. In other words, the more powerful may not be entitled to more resources, but if their position were to change, such resources would be needed for their freedom. In an environment of uncertainty, one would seek to have more rather than less resources in view of the long term protection of their freedom. Another pertinent consideration here is that we belong to different groups and thus take part in different asymmetrical relations: in some relations we may have potential to dominate, while in others we may be vulnerable to the dominating powers of others. So even if our resources may be

potentially threatening to the freedom of one group of people, they may also be badly needed for our own protection from another group. Blocking the resources of the disproportionately more powerful will not decrease their neo-republican freedom in the context of one particular relationship but may undermine their capacity to build resilience in the context of a different relationship where the asymmetry of power works the other way round.

This long examination of the link between the neo-republican freedom and the command of certain resources, pursues a specific objective. I do not want to argue that the disproportionately more powerful are entitled to keep their resources or to claim more: here I agree with Pettit, that they are not. My argument is that, once we have been persuaded about the link between neo-republican freedom and possession of resources, it will be difficult to explain exactly why this link obtains only for the freedom of the dominated but not for the freedom of the dominators.

We are led to the observation that the neo-republican theory implies the existence of a threshold. Beneath this threshold, one's resources are constitutive of his freedom, while above it, they are not. This is a threshold that divides the dominated from the dominators. For the reasons discussed above, this threshold would be perceived by the dominators as an external imposition. They would be likely to see their freedom as continuous with the resources they command and even with additional resources, both because they may see this as part of their wellbeing and because that would enhance their resilience against future losses of freedom.

1.4 The link between resources and liberty, and the justice threshold

Pettit's ideas from 'Freedom as Antipower' demonstrated the link between neo-republican liberty and resources. Command of specific resources, defined according to the circumstances we are in, is part and parcel of our ability to build resilience to the domination of others. We made several observations in the previous section, however, that can help us elucidate the difficulties in the reconciliation of liberty and social justice even better. The first observation is that neo-republican theory implies the existence of a threshold, beneath which freedom is continuous with the possession of resources and above which, it is not. This threshold is situated between those who are vulnerable to the domination and those who are in position to dominate. In the case of the first, command of resources is constitutive to freedom, but not in the case of the second. We can call this threshold the justice threshold.

The second observation is that the members of the dominating group may be reluctant to agree that further increase of their resources – indeed even a portion of their current resources – is irrelevant to their freedom. The reason for this disagreement is even more complex than discrepancy with their wellbeing, which is the problem we outlined in section 1.2. In the last section we demonstrated that command of resources is constitutive of the dominators' future resilience to domination. Excessive command of resources - that is more than you need for resilience against domination – may not be needed for your current freedom, but it does not detract from it either. No harm to one's neo-republican freedom is done but additional accumulation of resources, and indeed, in circumstances of uncertain future, excessive resources may become needed for building resilience – that is, constitutive of liberty.

Linking resources to liberty is a double edged knife. On the one hand, it is an intrinsic part the project of aligning liberty with social justice. On the other hand, it makes redistribution even more problematic. This is the case because limiting access to resources violates not only one's voluntary disposition, but also, in a roundabout way, his neo-republican liberty. We need resources not only to do what we like, but more crucially in terms of neo-republican freedom, to build resilience to domination.

Command of excessive resources – resources above the justice threshold – may not be necessary for building resilience, but it does not detract from it either. Would the justice threshold be voluntarily accepted by members of dominating groups? If they have to make a judgment baring their neo-republican liberty in mind, we could see why the answer may be negative. If liberty is secured by building resilience against domination, there no natural limit to the resources one could accumulate for this purpose.

However, if liberty is seen as personal growth, we may be able to argue that there is a natural limit, which in turn will make the justice threshold easier to accept.

2. Hobhouse's liberty

Like Pettit's, Hobhouse's concept of liberty takes on board social justice and redistribution of resources. The meaning of these concepts varies between the two authors not least due to the different historical contexts in which they have been working. Three differences in particular should be noted. First, the problem of poverty was much more salient in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain than in late twentieth century Anglo-American world. In this respect social justice was not focused as much on social equality as on provision on basic material conditions for the economically destitute. Second, the idea of redistribution was much more controversial in the time of Hobhouse than that of Pettit. Hobhouse had to go to great

lengths explaining why redistribution should not be seen simply as ‘robbing Peter to pay Paul’ (1964, p. 104), while Pettit viewed the lack of tension between neo-republican freedom and redistribution as a distinct selling point of his freedom concept (1997b, pp.125-8). Third, Pettit could only not neglect even though he could challenge, the Rawlsian paradigm of not defining the right in terms of the good, or of not associating liberty with specific, value laden, conceptions of the good. Pre-Hobhouse, unlike pre-Pettit, the concept of liberty had not been subjected to the pressure of being a non-normative concept.⁵ Logical positivism and the anti-idealist tendencies of the early twentieth century are part of the reason why Pettit’s concept of liberty is not an agency based concept. These differences will be easier to elucidate when we take a closer look into Hobhouse’s concept of liberty. But all these differences notwithstanding, we can still usefully compare the two thinkers as they both share the noble but taxing ambition of constructing a concept of liberty that internalises social justice. I argue that in one particular dimension Hobhouse manages to take us a step further than Pettit. Given the difficulty of reconciling liberty with the increased limitations imposed by commitment to social justice, Hobhouse succeeds better in maintaining the continuity between liberty and wellbeing.

I will put Hobhouse’s liberty to the same harsh test to which I have put Pettit’s concept: does Hobhouse take into account the liberty of those who we see as perpetrators of justice and therefore of freedom? The answer to this question is not straightforward and it will not be an easy task to demonstrate that Hobhouse’s concept fares better. His commitment to social justice is as uncompromising as Pettit’s and, to a considerable extent, his answer to this question could be summarised in terms similar to Pettit’s. Hobhouse would argue that when we are coercing perpetrators of

liberty 'no principle of liberty is violated' (1964, p. 77). However, I will make the following two arguments in order to demonstrate that Hobhouse takes us further along the road of reconciling social justice with liberty as voluntariness. First, for Hobhouse the tension between liberty and extended State action mindful of social justice is of primary concern. Indeed this tension is at the heart of his 'new liberal' project aiming to reconcile Liberalism with Socialism (1964, pp.88-90). Questions like 'How far is it possible to organise industry in the interest of the common welfare without either overriding the freedom of individual choice or drying up the springs of initiative and energy?' are central to Hobhouse's distinctive approach to liberty and they demonstrate that the pressure which social justice places on liberty is anything but neglected. Even if Hobhouse's final adjudication is that when non-conscientious employers are coerced to create better working conditions for their employees, 'no principle of liberty is violated' (1964, p. 77), this is not because he was unconcerned with the wellbeing of those who happen to be on the wrong side of social justice. Pettit, on the other hand, is not apologetic about the potentially negative impact social justice policies may have on justice perpetrators. So although Hobhouse, like Pettit, concludes that coercing the violators of liberty does not violate liberty itself, he does this only after a painstaking examination of the pros and cons of a long list of possibilities (1964, pp. 88-109).

The second, and the more significant, way in which Hobhouse offers a better solution to the tension between the voluntary nature of liberty and social justice is to be found in his agency-based liberty concept. Defining liberty in terms of personal growth allows us to judge whether we command sufficient resources constitutive of our liberty. As we saw, a social justice-based liberty concept like neo-republican freedom

entails a certain flexibility in view of one's context. One's liberty situation varies depending on whether one is dominated or dominator (see sections 1.3 and 1.4). But when liberty is defined merely as 'non domination', this flexibility is not built into the concept itself. In contrast, liberty seen in terms of personal growth incorporates flexibility. The concept of liberty as personal growth available to all offers the possibility of rethinking one's wellbeing in accordance with the circumstances one is in. If freedom is about personal growth, we have a say about when exactly we are free. A concept of freedom as personal growth allows adjustment of your demands to the social circumstances you are in. This flexibility inherent in the notion of growth allows our freedom to be aligned not only with social justice, but also with voluntariness and wellbeing. Even those who would suffer adversely from policies aiming to foster social justice would be in a position to judge coercive state action as continuous with their voluntary demands.

In this second section I will first outline Hobhouse's concept of liberty by examining the two ways in which we could interpret his idea of personal growth (2.1). I will then demonstrate how his concept connects personal growth, provision of resources and social justice (2.2 and 2.3), and will finally explain the way in which the personal growth perspective allows an easier reconciliation between liberty and social justice (2.4).

2.1 Hobhouse on liberty as personal growth

Defining Hobhouse's liberty as 'personal growth available to all' does justice to the most important aspects of his theory. It reflects Hobhouse's assumption of developmental human agency as expressed in the notion of personal growth, and his commitment to social justice, as expressed in the demand for its universal provision.

Collini offers a more comprehensive definition,⁶ but the one suggested here allows me to emphasise better what I believe are its definitive features. As we will shortly see, Collini's reading of Hobhouse's liberty does not acknowledge the capacity of the concept to accommodate voluntariness, in addition to commitment to social justice.

How exactly does Hobhouse relate liberty to personal growth? There are two distinct, even if interdependent, ways in which this connection can be understood. Both of these ways can demonstrate the ability of his concept to accommodate wellbeing as voluntariness, which is my ultimate aim in this article. But the two readings have significant, and for some, rather controversial, implications, so it is worthwhile explaining the difference. The first way in which liberty is related to personal growth expresses the belief that we are free when we are able to function in a manner that allows us to develop our abilities. We are free when we are capable of developing our faculties; when we are able to function in a way that does justice to our human nature. In this sense, Hobhouse's liberty is even better defined as *ability* for personal growth available to all. The second way in which liberty is linked to personal growth implies that we are free when the growth, in some measure, has been accomplished. We are free when we have exercised our faculties in a particular way: a way conducive to the wellbeing of others. In this sense, growth is associated with a thicker moral content and thus does not retain the larger spectrum of possibilities implied in growth seen as a process of exercising one's human abilities.

Both readings of growth can be substantiated by a good number of references. I will start with those that are more general and ambivalent and turn to some that are distinctly committed to the second sense. Ultimately, however, I would argue that

growth understood as ability to exercise our human faculties fits better with Hobhouse's 'Economic Liberalism' (1964, pp. 88-109) and his critique of philosophical metaphysics based on concepts of 'general' or 'real' will (1918, pp. 44-70), and is therefore more representative of Hobhouse's liberal theory overall (Dimova-Cookson, 2012).

In a chapter entitled 'The Heart of Liberalism' (1964, pp. 63-73) Hobhouse claims that '[t]he foundation of liberty is the idea of growth.' Growth is exemplified by 'development of will, of personality, of self-control, or whatever we please to call that central harmonising power which makes us capable of directing our own life'. Liberty is associated with a process of growth seen as 'the opening of the door to the appeal of reason, of imagination, of social feeling' (p. 66). Hobhouse's idea of growth implies both potential and a specific goal. The potential is to be found in the fact that once we start to exercise our capacities properly, we unlock powers that, otherwise, would have not existed. In this sense growth is valuable, because once one enters a developmental process, the horizon of what one can achieve is vastly extended. Such a reading can elucidate claims like 'Liberalism is the belief that society can safely be founded on this self-directing power of personality' (1964, p. 66).

Hobhouse's growth also implies a vision of a particular moral aim, and when liberty is associated with growth in this sense, it is cast as a duty and not as a right. 'Liberty then becomes not so much a right of the individual as a necessity of society. It rests not on the claim of A to be left alone by B, but on *the duty* of B to treat A as a rational being' (1964, p.66, emphasis added). Although Hobhouse associates liberty much more often with rights than with duties, the possibility of casting liberty as a duty is

founded in his specific moral vision of human development. Hobhouse speaks of ‘the full development of personality as a moral being’ where moral ‘is taken as implying “social”’, while development as moral being means ‘a development which harmonises with social life, and so fits in with and contributes to the development of others’ (1904, p.125). In a similar vein of thought Hobhouse states that ‘personality consists in rational self-determination by clear-sighted purpose as against the rule of impulse’ (1911, p. 199). We can see that if growth is determined by the distinct moral or rational nature of personality, then it loses its connotations of openness or of a wide spectrum of possibilities. And if liberty is associated with this more narrowly defined growth, then this is a different kind of liberty. It would be a liberty similar to T. H. Green’s ‘true’ freedom, where liberty is found in engagement with moral action. This aspect of Hobhouse’s thought is well registered by Collini. He claims that ‘[t]his extremely rationalistic account of personality - in which “choice” is held to be exclusive of “impulse” – means that liberty has already ceased to be defined on the want-regarding grounds often taken to be characteristic of traditional Liberalism. Instead, the value of liberty is seen explicitly in terms of the moral ideal implicit in that tradition’ (Collini, 1979, p. 123).⁷ I would not deny that Collini offers a legitimate reading of Hobhouse’s liberty, but I would claim it is a one-sided reading, based only on one of the dimensions of personal growth – its final destination, and not the other – its process. I would argue that Hobhouse’s liberty should be seen primarily as associated with personal growth as a process and therefore implying openness, potential, a wide spectrum of opportunities, and capacities to exercise one’s faculties. This reading fits better with a number of other significant aspects of Hobhouse’s philosophy including his consistent association of liberty with rights (1922, pp. 91-2, Dimova-Cookson, 2012, p. 158), his critique of Bosanquet’s metaphysics (1918,

Collini, 1976) and his justification of state action in the provision of material conditions, which I will discuss in the following section. The nature of state action that Hobhouse recommends is the provision of *conditions* for personal growth. Put in these terms, it is obvious that growth is understood as an open ended process. Securing ‘the open road for talent’, Hobhouse claims, is ‘the essence of Liberalism’ (1964, p.22).

2.2 Hobhouse on liberty, redistribution of resources and social justice

As mentioned earlier, taxation and redistribution of resources were highly controversial political ideas in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain, particularly for those who saw themselves as liberals. The ‘liberal legislation’ defended by T.H.Green (1986b, 1881) can be seen as the first step in rethinking the meaning of freedom in a way that saw state action as desirable and necessary. This liberal legislation aimed to regulate employment and land tenancy contracts, as well as to restrict the sale of alcohol, but did not extend as far as taxation and resource redistribution. The ‘liberal legislation’ was representative of a major social reform targeting the consequences of social and economic inequalities (Richter, p. 266, Nicholson, pp 132-81, Tyler, pp 1-13, den Otter), but it did not suggest economic solutions to the problems stemming from these inequalities. As a liberal, Green tried to strike a balance between the state’s helping and its interfering, which resulted in some, yet limited, level of state intervention (1986a, 1895 p. 21). It was the New Liberals like Hobhouse and John Hobson who took further the suggestion of social reform by offering specific economic policies. Hobhouse used various terms in defining his ideological commitments, like ‘Economic Liberalism’ or ‘Liberal Socialism’ (1964, pp 88, 90). His specific recommendations included the ‘right to work’ and the right to a ‘living wage’ (1964, pp. 83-4), a ‘super-tax on large incomes

from whatever source' (1964, p. 103), 'State-aided insurance ... dealing with sickness, invalidity and ... unemployment', 'public assistance' to single mothers (1964, pp. 93, 94), and 'pensions and health insurance' (Collini, 1979, p. 125).

Hobhouse was aware that at the time he was writing his *Liberalism* the state did not have the resources to fund these policies. However, he strongly believed in their utility and fairness. The prime justification of such resource redistribution was individual liberty. I will point out two lines of argumentation that demonstrate the link between resources and liberty. The first is based on the nature of liberty as personal growth. One of the implications of this understanding of liberty is that we are not free by default. Our mere existence, or to the same effect, the mere lack of obstacles, does not set us on the path of liberty. Liberty only occurs in the process of personal growth, or in more practical terms, when we are able to exercise our human faculties. But the exercise of human faculties is as complex and frail as human nature – without some element of nurturing, we may never enter that path of personal development. Personal growth, once set in motion, carries vast possibilities, but it is not guaranteed to take place simply because one is a human being. It represents in equal measure the potential and the frailty of human personality: 'human personality is that within which lives and grows, which can be destroyed but cannot be made, which cannot be taken to pieces and repaired, but can be placed under conditions under which it will flourish and expand, or, if diseased, under conditions in which it will heal itself by its own recuperative powers' (1964, pp. 65-6). There are certain minimal requirements both in terms of social environment and economic assistance without which liberty could not come into being. Our liberty is not fully in our hands – circumstances of severe economic deprivation make liberty impossible.

The second line of reasoning follows from the first. The state has to engage in redistributive policies because the free market does not guarantee to all able working people employment that pays enough to satisfy basic subsistence needs.

The careful researches of Mr. Booth in London and Mr. Rowntree in York, and of others in country districts, have revealed that a considerable percentage of the working classes are actually unable to earn a sum of money representing the full cost of the barest physical necessities for an average family; and, though the bulk of the working classes are undoubtedly in a better position than this, these researches go to show that even the relatively well-to-do gravitate towards this line of primary poverty in seasons of stress....' (1964, p. 85)

State provision of economic conditions that would allow people to meet their 'primary needs' is a vital liberty requirement. Resources and liberty are related because free exercise of human faculties, and by the same token liberty, could not exist in conditions of extreme poverty.

Is it fair, however that the rich should pay for the needed resources? We are coming to the crucial question concerning how resources are related to social justice. Hobhouse introduces the term 'economic justice' (1964, pp.104-7) which assesses both the desirability of redistribution in an economic context and its fairness in ethical terms. His idea is that some level of redistribution will increase the productivity of everyone as it will help all in functioning more effectively. But he also gives unconditional value to making provision for primary needs: that is, redistribution is normatively justified because only it can guarantee provision for the primary needs of all.

Thus the conditions of social efficiency mark the minimum of industrial remuneration, and if they are not secured without the deliberate action of the State they must be secured by means of the deliberate action of the State. If it is the business of good economic organisation to secure the equation between function and maintenance, the first and the greatest application of this principle is to the primary needs. (1964, pp. 105-6)

So resource allocation, liberty and social justice are connected because one needs basic economic provisions in order to access liberty and the free market does not offer these provisions for all. The state has to intervene to correct this deficiency of the unregulated employment market.

There is one more way in which resource distribution, liberty and social justice are interconnected, and this is the way that places Pettit and Hobhouse closely together. Inequality of wealth generates a power imbalance that allows one party to coerce another. Social and economic inequality leads to exploitation and thus to drastic deprivation of liberty. This is best demonstrated by the practice of free contract which allows 'the stronger party to coerce the weaker' (1964, p. 75). Therefore the 'extension of the functions of the state' should cover 'the regulation of contract where experience has shown that the weaker party to bargain may be forced to consent to that which, if he stood on equal terms, he would never accept' (1911, p. 201).

2.3 Hobhouse and the justice threshold

Does Hobhouse's theory of liberty imply a justice threshold as Pettit's theory did? Our analysis of neo-republican liberty led to the observation that in the case of the dominated, or those vulnerable to domination, liberty is continuous with command of resources, while the same kind of resources are not constitutive of the liberty of

dominators or those who are in position to dominate others if they chose to. There is a threshold, which we called a justice threshold, beneath which resources are constitutive of liberty and above which they are not. The positioning of this threshold depends on whether one is dominated or dominating – so it represents the dividing line between the two categories of people.

A similar threshold is implied in Hobhouse's liberty theory: he has actually defined it in numerical terms. He makes the case that there is a particular amount of income above which additional resources no longer further one's liberty.

On the whole, then, we may take it that the principle of the super-tax is based on the conception that when we come to an income of some £5,000 a year we approach the limit of the industrial value of the individual. We are not likely to discourage any service of genuine social value by a rapidly increasing surtax on incomes above that amount. It is more likely that we shall quench the anti-social ardour for unmeasured wealth, for social power, and the vanity of display. (1964, p. 104)

The logic of the argument here is that, typically, we would see financial reward as continuous with liberty as it stimulates our productivity, and by this token, spurs our personal development. But for two reasons any wealth above a particular threshold no longer serves the liberty of its owner. The first reason is this additional wealth is the outcome of an unjustly functioning economic system which produces excess wealth for some and starvation wages for others, whereas it is badly needed for the freedom of the latter. The second reason is that the wealth already owned at the given threshold is sufficient for the purposes of personal growth. So Hobhouse's theory also

introduces a justice threshold, and in his case it represents the level of resources that would allow *everybody* access to liberty as personal growth.

2.4 Liberty as personal growth, and voluntariness

The question whether resource limitation would affect adversely the liberty of those who have access to resources above the justice threshold is directly addressed by Hobhouse. The principal answer, as already mentioned, is that such limitations do not compromise liberty. But Hobhouse also gives a list of examples where individuals with opportunities for excess wealth would voluntarily give it up. 'It would be impossible to determine what we ought to pay for a Shakespeare, a Browning, a Newton, or a Cobden. Impossible, but fortunately unnecessary. For the man of genius is forced by his own cravings to give, and the only reward that he asks from society is to be let alone to have some quiet and fresh air.' (1964, p 103) But even people whose main motivation is financial success and social power demonstrate readiness 'to promote measures tending to diminish their material gain' (1964, p. 103). 'The majority of employers in a trade we may suppose would be willing to adopt certain precautions for the health or safety of their workers, to lower hours or to raise the rate of wages.' (1964, p. 77) This preparedness does not fully resolve the question of the tension between the demands of social justice and voluntariness, as the cases where people would not be prepared to do so will always exist. But this preparedness indicates where we might find the solution – in the understanding of liberty as personal growth.

As we remember, there were two ways in which personal growth could be read: as ability to develop one's personal capacities and as having achieved growth and thus become a rational and socially minded person. The second way raised some concerns

about the authenticity of the liberty it would entail (Collini, 1979, p. 124, see also section 2.1).⁸ I would argue that both readings of personal growth would help us reconcile social justice with voluntariness.

I will start with the second reading as it offers the most direct reconciliation between the agent's voluntary choices and the strain put on him by the requirements of social justice. The very understanding of personal growth in this case implies the kind of personal moral transformation that would lead to a new kind of enlightened desires. The cases of Shakespeare, Browning, Newton, Cobden and the conscientious employers are cases of people who as a result of accomplished personal growth have developed an appetite for socially beneficial work, fully congruent with the demands of social justice. These are examples of people who see their service to society as part and parcel of their liberty. But I would not wish to dwell long on this way of reconciling liberty with social justice as it does imply a more restricted, and for many controversial, reading of liberty to which I have not the opportunity to do justice in this article. I believe that personal growth understood as ability to develop one's human faculties is more representative of Hobhouse's liberty, and it is the potential of this concept that I would like to reveal here.

The concept of liberty as personal growth seen as ability to develop one's human faculties is very useful in reconciling social justice with voluntariness because it allows the agent to be the judge of her freedom. It also allows her to assess her freedom in the light of the circumstances she is in. I can tell if I am able to function in a way that allows me to exercise my capacities properly and I can also tell if my resources are sufficient for this purpose. Put in more formal terms, the concept of

liberty as personal growth available to all also offers a model of rethinking one's wellbeing and the specific conditions of liberty one needs. What counts as sufficient conditions for personal growth? When does one have enough resources that allow one to function freely? How much additional resources is it reasonable for one to expect? Finding answers to these questions is crucial for one's assessment of one's own freedom. Being able to see the location of the justice threshold from our own perspective is important in view of our ability to accept the parameters of our freedom. As we saw, both freedom as nondomination and freedom as personal growth available to all imply a justice threshold. This in turn implies that our freedom varies depending on our positioning with respect to this threshold. The concept of freedom as personal growth has the potential for flexibility that we need to find and accept the entitlement to resources relevant to our freedom.

Conclusion

Both Hobhouse and Pettit develop a theory of liberty that internalises the value of social justice and both see economic redistribution as one of the main factors conducive to it. The 'new liberal' as well as the neo-republican freedom projects depart from the 'primary'⁹ understanding of liberty as lack of external interference, as this understanding is either oblivious or detrimental to social justice. This departure is costly because it increases the scope of prohibited actions – all actions that compromise or do not align with social justice. If your interests are not 'avowal-ready' you are not free to pursue them, neo-republicans would say. The departure from the primary meaning of freedom could lead to freedom casualties, as Isaiah Berlin would be more than eager to argue. But Hobhouse's concept of liberty does not reach the same high degree of separation from the primary concept as Pettit's neo-republican freedom reaches in the case of assessing the liberty of dominators.

The paper demonstrated that for both thinkers liberty is not an endlessly expanding property: both concepts rely on a justice threshold, the boundary at which one stops receiving and starts giving. In the case of neo-republican freedom it is the boundary between being dominated and being a dominator. This, however, is an externally judged and therefore imposed boundary. Dominators are likely to be biased against this boundary and potentially bad judges of it. In the case of Hobhouse's liberty, the justice threshold is at the level of resource distribution that allows personal growth to all. This threshold is both external and internal. It is external in that judgment about what is available to all depends on an assessment of existing social and economic circumstances. But it is internal as well, in that it reflects the existence of a process of personal growth. This is a judgement over which we have personal control. It is possible for us to judge that we have enough resources to exercise our human faculties even if we are in a position to gain yet more resources. In other words, we can think of ourselves as free even in circumstances where the social justice regulations seem to be imposing burdens on us. Liberty as personal growth has the capacity to reconcile the external pressures of social justice with the internal need for personal development. It allows us to accept the justice threshold as valid not only on the rational ground of accepting the demands of social justice but also on a more personal and intuitive ground of recognising that we have enough resources to function freely.

¹ This article has been presented at two conferences: 'Liberalism and Republicanism: Public Policy Implications' in February 2013 at University College London and 'British Idealism: Consideration, Reconsideration' in May 2013 at University of

Cergy-Pontoise. I would like to acknowledge the feedback I have received from Albert Weale, Noel O’Sullivan, Colin Tyler, Alan Kahan, Catherine Marshall, Stephane Guy, Jean-Paul Rosaye and Stephen Welch, as well as from the two anonymous referees who reviewed the paper for this journal.

² I will use the terms freedom and liberty interchangeably.

³ The question of the normative nature of the republican concept of liberty has provoked debate in the literature. Pettit does state that his account of freedom ‘can be explicated in non-normative terms’ (Pettit, 2006, p. 278), but this does not preclude its reading as a normative concept. Christman claims that Pettit’s work has brought to light the distinction between normative and non-normative conceptions of freedom, where normative conceptions define freedom through moralised terms like ‘the absence of *unjust* coercive forces’ (Christman, 1998, p.203), while nonnormative conceptions make no use of moral language. He argues that Pettit’s freedom as nondomination is a normative concept. Gurpreet Rattan argues that the republican theory has ‘a moral foundation, as it is intrinsically other-regarding: it requires the non-dominated status of *others* as “the supreme limiting condition” of one’s own non-dominated status’ (p. 125). In support of reading Pettit’s theory as normative see McMahon, 2005.

⁴ See also Pettit, 2006, p. 280 where he claims that what makes a private act of interference non-arbitrary is ‘the fact that it is forced to track the avowal-ready interests of that particular person’.

⁵ See endnote 3.

⁶ According to Collini, ‘Hobhouse’s argument for liberty can be summed up ... by saying that he is demanding the freedom *of* all citizens capable of rational self-direction *from* removable socially created economic obstacles *to* develop certain

features of their personality in a morally desirable and socially harmonious direction’ (1979, p. 124).

⁷ Collini comments on Hobhouse’s indebtedness to the ideas of T.H.Green, both with respect to liberty and the common good (p.122). Therefore we should not be surprised Hobhouse differs from traditional liberals. The significant question here is whether Hobhouse’s liberty should be read in terms of Green’s true freedom. I argue that it can, but it is one of two possible readings. Hobhouse’s is primarily an opportunity-based concept. See Dimova-Cookson, 2012.

⁸ The remit of my current topic does not allow me to assess whether Collini’s concerns are justified or not. In principle, I would argue that the two different takes on personal growth lead to two legitimate but different concepts of liberty (Dimova-Cookson, 2012).

⁹ Green argues that the ‘primary meaning of the term’ expresses a relation of non-compulsion between men (1986b, p. 234).

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