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ANDREAS T. SCHMIDT 

Domination without Inequality? Mutual Domination, Republicanism, and Gun Control

“Keine Macht für Niemand!”

Rio Reiser of Ton Steine Scherben

I. INTRODUCTION

Power inequalities often lead to domination. Slaveholders dominate slaves, powerful capitalists dominate their wage laborers, men in patriarchal societies dominate their wives, colonialists dominate colonized peoples, and so on. Such cases are the bread and butter of republicanism. On the republican conception, being a free person requires freedom from domination. But power inequalities often involve such domination and thereby make people unfree.

However, while inequality is a central threat to republican freedom, I argue in this article that an exclusive focus on power inequalities is mistaken—a point often missed in current debates. Republicanism is not an exclusively egalitarian theory. In cases of what I call *mutual domination*, agents hold roughly equal power over each other but still precariously depend on each other’s will. And this can be so, even if such equal power is subject to substantial reciprocal control. Through various examples, including collective unfreedom, nuclear deterrence, data privacy, and others, I show how mutual domination draws our attention to normatively troubling cases. Such cases instantiate what republicans think is

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objectionable about dependence and domination, both noninstrumentally and instrumentally. Despite power being distributed equally, mutual domination can involve significant pressures for ingratiation, increase vulnerability, and throw one into undesirable power relations. Conversely, removing mutual domination can come with subjective and intersubjective benefits, such as reducing vulnerability and empowering agents to determine the kinds of social relationships they wish to enter and sustain. I also show how this analysis gives republicanism a comparative advantage over alternative, purely egalitarian theories. Unlike relational egalitarianism, republicanism helps us identify cases of mutual domination, brings out what makes them problematic and suggests ways to tackle them. Mutual domination highlights an important way in which independence stands as a genuinely different and attractive ideal.

Practically, mutual domination shows that republican institutions should sometimes aim to abolish or reduce power rather than equalize it or intensify its reciprocal control. As a case study, I discuss gun control. If we focused narrowly on equalizing and reciprocally controlling power, this would give us reason for equal widespread gun ownership. However, widespread gun ownership involves mutual domination, such that my republican arguments provide reasons to support prohibition instead.

I proceed as follows. In Section II, I introduce republicanism and analyze different forms of control. In Section III, I introduce the idea of mutual domination through a series of cases. In Section IV, I discuss what, from a republican perspective, makes mutual domination so problematic and why relational egalitarianism fails to capture those concerns. In Section V, I respond to two objections. In Section VI, I discuss gun control.

II. REPUBLICANISM

A. *The Republican Revival*

On the familiar, liberal picture, freedom is about a person's range of options, or her *option-freedom*.¹ So-called negative views of option-freedom

1. Philip Pettit, "Agency-Freedom and Option-Freedom," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 15 (4) (2003): 387–403. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0951692803154003>; Philip Pettit, "Free Persons and Free Choices," *History of Political Thought* 28 (4) (2007): 709–18.

focus on the absence of constraints imposed by other people.² Other theorists argue that option-freedom is not exclusively a function of noninterference but of a person's range of capabilities too.³

In recent years, the republican alternative has experienced a revival. Instead of focusing exclusively on a person's option-freedom, republicans see freedom as a status.⁴ Importantly, being free implies not being in certain types of problematic power relations. In Philip Pettit's terms, freedom requires being free from *domination* or *arbitrary power* or *alien control* or *uncontrolled power* or *unchecked power* (all of which mean the same thing). According to Pettit, "someone, A, will be dominated in a certain choice by another agent or agency, B, to the extent that B has a power of interfering in the choice that is not itself controlled by A."⁵ (Below I say more about control.) Republicans think the mere *uncontrolled power* to interfere suffices to render someone unfree, even if such power remains unexercised.

Kindly Master: being a kindly slaveholder, a master does not interfere with his slave's options.

The kindly master still dominates his slave and the slave is still unfree, even though the master does not exercise his power and the slave retains

2. Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118–72; Ian Carter, *A Measure of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Martin van Hees, *Legal Reductionism and Freedom* (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2012); Frank Hindriks, "Freedom Under an Indifferent Dictator: Intentionality and Responsibility," *Economics & Philosophy* 33 (1) (2017): 25–41. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266267116000055>; David Miller, "Constraints on Freedom," *Ethics* 94 (1) (1983): 66–86; Hillel Steiner, *An Essay on Rights* (Oxford: Wiley, 1994).

3. G.A. Cohen, "Freedom and Money," in *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice, and Other Essays in Political Philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 166–200, at pp. 196–97; Matthew H. Kramer, *The Quality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Philippe Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All: What (If Anything) Can Justify Capitalism?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) at pp. 20–24; Andreas T. Schmidt, "Abilities and the Sources of Unfreedom," *Ethics* 127 (1) (2016): 179–207. <https://doi.org/10.1086/687335>; Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

4. Frank Lovett, *A General Theory of Domination and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Philip Pettit, *On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Philip Pettit, *Just Freedom: A Moral Compass for a Complex World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014); Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

5. Philip Pettit, *On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy*, p. 50.

a broad range of options to choose from. Republicans build on liberal theories in that they agree that option-freedom is central for being free. But they think option-freedom is insufficient. Not only should one possess options to choose from, one should also possess those options independently of other people's wills. Fundamental to republicanism is the following normative concern:

Will Dependence: there is something objectionable about social relations in which one person *A*'s freedoms, and her being able to exercise them, depend on another person *B*'s will over whether *A* should have those freedoms or not.

We can also think about Will Dependence in terms of modal robustness.⁶ To be independent of another person's will relative to a set *S* of freedoms requires that I have *S* across a set of nearby possible worlds in which the other person changes her will over whether I should have *S* or not. In *Kindly Master*, the slave's freedoms are not modally robust (or only very weakly so), because her freedoms disappear in nearby possible worlds in which the master does not want the slave to have such freedoms.

Pettit classifies his own theory as falling into the Italian-Atlantic republican tradition which shares central commonalities with the Franco-German tradition. Both Kant and Rousseau see dependency and domination as anathema to freedom.⁷ The two republican traditions differ in various ways,

6. Philip Pettit, *The Robust Demands of the Good: Ethics with Attachment, Virtue, and Respect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), chap. 3.

7. Louis-Philippe Hodgson, "Kant on the Right to Freedom: A Defense." *Ethics* 120 (4) (2010): 791-819; Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Frederick Neuhouser, "Freedom, Dependence, and the General Will," *The Philosophical Review* 102 (3): 1993: 363-95. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2185902>; Philip Pettit, "Two Republican Traditions," in *Republican Democracy: Liberty, Law and Politics*, ed. Andreas Niederberger and Philipp Schink (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 169-204; Arthur Ripstein, *Force and Freedom: Kant's Legal and Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Mankind," in *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*, ed. Susan Dunn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "The Social Contract," in *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*, ed. Susan Dunn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Christian F. Rostbøll, "Kant, Freedom as Independence, and Democracy," *The Journal of Politics* 78 (3) (2016): 792-805. <https://doi.org/10.1086/685448>.

particularly when it comes to institutional recommendations.⁸ The central concept in the Franco-German tradition is *dependence*. Conversely, freedom is about *independence*. And rather than seeing any kind of interference to one's choice as relevant, Kantian theories might focus on the (nonconsensual) "use or destruction of one's body" and focus on whether a person's power to interfere is "private" or "unilateral."⁹ However, these substantive and taxonomical differences notwithstanding, all these theories have much in common, because they all accept Will Dependence. On such a picture, the mere possibility of will-imposition itself can threaten my status as a free person. In what follows, and when filling in details, I focus on the Italian-Atlantic tradition as exemplified by Pettit. But much of what I say applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to both republican traditions.

B. Control

On Pettit's republican model, a power to interfere is not always a source of domination.

Sweets Cabinet: I give my partner the key to the sweets cabinet to rein in my snacking. I retain the power to get the key back on a 24-hour notice.¹⁰

My partner's power to constrain my option to eat sweets is not dominating (or, if it is, extremely mildly so), because I still control their power to interfere such that they cannot impose their will on me. Control is the central notion for republicans and it will play a major role in fleshing out mutual domination. But for my analysis of mutual domination, I still find important distinctions and analytical points missing from the existing literature. Moreover, filling in those gaps should also be valuable for republican theorizing beyond mutual domination cases.

Let us start with some new distinctions.

8. Philip Pettit, "Two Republican Traditions," in *Republican Democracy: Liberty, Law and Politics*, ed. Andreas Niederberger and Philipp Schink (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 169–204

9. Niko Kolodny, "Being Under the Power of Others," in *Republicanism and Democracy*, ed. Yiftah Elizar and Geneviève Rousselière (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), p. 3. <http://sophos.berkeley.edu/kolodny/BeingUnderThePowerOfOthers4.pdf>

10. Philip Pettit, *On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy*, pp. 75, 171.

First, *preventive control* allows preventing other people from interfering with us. In Sweets Cabinet, for example, I can refuse to give my partner the key, thereby preventing their interference.

Second, *abortive control* lets us remove a constraint after it is already in place. For example, in Sweets Cabinet, I can get the key back after 24 hours. Nondomination requires not merely that we consent to some power but that we retain continued control over it. For example, if I voluntarily agree to become someone's slave, I consent to the resulting power. But I give away any form of future control over this power. To be nondominated, I would need continuing control, which requires abortive control.

Third, *responsive control* lets us respond to interference after it happened. Imagine a variation of Sweets Cabinet: instead of giving my partner the key, my partner steals the key and chucks it away. Here, I lack preventive and abortive power. But I might still have responsive control. I can retaliate, for example, by stealing my partner's Alf DVDs.

Finally, my control can be *direct* or *indirect*. In Sweets Cabinet, I hold direct power over my partner's power to interfere. In other cases, my power will be indirect in that someone else holds it on my behalf. Imagine my tax consultant misappropriates some of my money without my noticing. But after a while, the auditors notice. The criminal justice system then steps in to exercise abortive and responsive control (abortive, because it will get back my money). Here, I did not prevent, abort or respond myself. Rather, other agents—auditors and the criminal justice system—did it for me. But the agents' power to interfere in turn is controlled in that they are forced to track my interests that are protected by law.¹¹

Building on these distinctions, I now defend five observations.

The first observation is that real-life control typically involves a mix of preventive, abortive, responsive, direct, and indirect control. For example, whether people can enter my property depends on my will, not theirs. I might close the door to prevent them from coming in (preventive control), get people to leave when they overstay their welcome (abortive control), and, should someone break in, the police might find the intruder and the state might prosecute (responsive control).

11. Philip Pettit, "Republican Liberty: Three Axioms, Four Theorems," in *Republicanism and Political Theory*, ed. Cecile Laborde and John Maynor (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 102–32.

The second observation is that control comes in degrees. This is true for control overall as well as each type of control individually. For example, I can prevent break-ins by building a wall (preventive control). But I can heighten such control by adding spikes or an alarm system, which will make it more difficult to break in but not impossible. When I hold abortive control, I might be able to abort your interference right away, with certainty and without costs to myself. Or my abortive control might only work with significant delay, with some probability of success and at a significant cost. Similar points apply to responsive control. Overall control will typically involve different “mixes” of the different types of control and will therefore nearly always come in degrees.

The third observation is that domination comes in degrees. The strength of your dominating power over me varies with how much I control your power. But other factors matter too. How strongly you dominate me—and how strongly I depend on your will—is a function of, first, how many and which freedoms are subject to your power to interfere, second, how effectively you can exercise your power, and, finally, how well your power over me is controlled or uncontrolled.¹²

Note that domination can enter republican theories in different ways. What I call *weak* republicanism holds that nondomination is a central value but not the only one. *Strong* republicanism, on the other hand, holds that republican freedom is an all-things-considered value for normative political theory. Pettit’s theory is an example of strong republicanism. He argues that the role of institutions is to increase, or at least safeguard, republican freedom. For Pettit, increasing republican freedom is not the same as reducing nondomination. How much republican freedom I have is a function of intensity and extent.¹³ The intensity of nondomination is about how strongly I am dominated or nondominated by others (as explained above). The “extent” of republican freedom is about how many and what kinds of (sufficiently nondominated) options I have. Increasing republican freedom does not mean eliminating all dependence but increasing or safeguarding people’s range of nondominated options. And for this, both intensity and extent matter (I say more on this in Section V).

The fourth observation is that my control over someone’s power is weakened, if exercising such control is *costly*. Consider:

12. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, p. 75.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 74–77.

Night Watch: I can only prevent you from stealing my bike by staying up all night guarding it.

We can invoke *option-freedom* to spell out when control is costly. In *Night Watch*, if you are disposed to steal my bike, exercising control is costly in that my freedom to keep my bike is conditional on my guarding it all night. And this conditionality reduces my option-freedom. Imagine a variation where I could just lock my bike in a garage. My preventive control would be much less costly because I would have more option-freedom: I could keep my bike *and* be free to do whatever I want at night.

Along with most freedom-theorists, I assume that how much option-freedom I have depends on the quantity *and quality* of my options.¹⁴ Including quality makes our measure of option-freedom broad enough to cover the various ways control can be costly. For example, I will later assume that my control is weakened, if its exercise is *morally costly*. Imagine that, for whatever reason, I can only prevent you from stealing my bike by killing an innocent bystander. My control over your power is costly because my option-freedom is reduced: keeping my bike is now conditional on my doing something very disvaluable, namely killing another human.¹⁵

14. Carter, *A Measure of Freedom*; Hees, *Legal Reductionism and Freedom*; and Hillel Steiner "How Free: Computing Personal Liberty," *Royal Institute of Philosophy* Supplement 15 (March, 1983): 73–89 are theorists who think overall freedom is purely a function of quantity. Walter Bossert "Opportunity Sets and Individual Well-Being," *Social Choice and Welfare* 14 (1) (1997): 97–112; Walter Bossert, Prasanta K. Pattanaik, and Yongsheng Xu "Ranking Opportunity Sets: An Axiomatic Approach," *Journal of Economic Theory* 63 (2) (1994): 326–45; Garnett, "Value Neutrality and the Ranking of Opportunity Sets," *Economics & Philosophy* 32 (1) (2016): 99–119. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266267115000279>; Kramer, *The Quality of Freedom*; Prasanta K. Pattanaik and Yongsheng Xu, "On Preference and Freedom," *Theory and Decision* 44 (2) (1998): 173–98; Prasanta K. Pattanaik and Yongsheng Xu, "On Diversity and Freedom of Choice," *Mathematical Social Sciences* 40 (2) (2000): 123–30; Amartya Sen, "Well-Being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984," *The Journal of Philosophy* 82 (4) (1985): 169–221. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2026184>; Amartya Sen, "Freedom of Choice: Concept and Content," *European Economic Review* 32 (2) (1998): 269–94; Amartya Sen, "Welfare, Preference and Freedom," *Journal of Econometrics* 50 (1) (1991): 15–29; Robert Sugden, "The Metric of Opportunity," *Economics and Philosophy* 14 (02) (1998): 307–37, are (just some) examples of theorists who think quality matters for overall freedom measurement.

15. This assumes that options with morally bad consequences contribute less to one's overall option-freedom than those without bad consequences—a claim I do not defend in detail here (see Kramer, *The Quality of Freedom*, pp. 233–40). But I think Sen's distinction between "well-being-freedom" and "agency-freedom" provides some reasons for this claim. According to Sen, the qualitative dimension of option-freedom should track how far a person's options allow her to achieve wellbeing (wellbeing-freedom) and how far they allow her to pursue her conception of

Note that costliness reduces my option-freedom only when you are sufficiently likely to interfere. If you will never try to steal my bike, I do not have to guard it and my option-freedom is not reduced. But even so, costliness still weakens my control, because it enhances your *power* to reduce my option-freedom. Consider two scenarios. In the first scenario, you know that if you tried to steal my bike, I would guard it all night. While you now lack the unimpeded power to steal my bike, you do have the power to keep me up all night. In the second scenario, I find guarding my bike so onerous, I would rather give it up. While you now lack the power to keep me up all night, you do have the unimpeded power to steal my bike. So, in either scenario, costliness gives you power to interfere with my option-freedom in significant ways.

Finally, costliness can weaken control's authorization role.¹⁶ Imagine you end up stealing my bike in Night Watch, because I did not guard it every night. It would then be absurd for you to claim afterwards that I tacitly authorized you to do so just because I could have prevented you from doing so.

The fifth observation is that exclusively responsive control is typically less desirable than (also) having preventive and abortive control.

First, preventive and abortive control can heighten independence from another person regardless of what shape their will takes. Ideally, such control allows me to block your interference whether you act rationally, irrationally, virtuously, or heinously. Exclusively responsive control in contrast primarily indemnifies me against someone's rational will. Responsive control adds disincentives to make it less desirable for another person to interfere. But such control only works if another person responds

the good (agency-freedom) (Sen, *Well-Being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures* 1984, pp. 169–221). Moral costs might impinge wellbeing-freedom, as they typically, but not necessarily, come with feelings of guilt, shame, and regret (alongside social costs, such as ostracizing). Moral costs might also impinge agency-freedom. For most people, being causally responsible for serious harms is hard to integrate into their conceptions of the good. Moreover, choosing morally bad options can be motivationally difficult, especially so in my examples below where exercising control involves murdering or causing nuclear annihilation.

16. I wrote "weakens authorization" because costliness is not always sufficient to inactivate authorization. Imagine I am being rushed to the emergency room and must now decide whether to undergo a surgery that would prolong my life by up to six months, but with significant discomfort, or whether to die in one month. Here, having preventive control—being able to say no—is important for authorization despite it being costly. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

systematically to such disincentives. For if they act irrationally—say they ignore that they will be punished—responsive control fails to protect.¹⁷

Second, preventive and abortive control can *authorize* interference in a way that responsive control typically does not. When I let you interfere with me—say I let you build a fence in my garden—and I hold proper preventive and abortive control, then I can authorize your interference, either expressly or tacitly. Typically, responsive control does not play this role, because such control happens only after an interference has taken place.¹⁸

Standing on firmer theoretical ground, let us now move on to my main arguments. Note that what I say falls more *within* a republican discourse. I do not intend to defend republicanism or disprove its critics. But my arguments also work for weak republicanism according to which nondomination is a central value but not the only one. Accordingly, if you feel the republican pull but are reluctant to put all your eggs into the republican basket, you should still find much to agree with.¹⁹

III. EQUALITY AND MUTUAL DOMINATION

The connection between domination and inequality is tight. As *Kindly Master* shows, power inequalities can undermine a person's status freedom. Being free implies being secured against certain kinds of inequalities, namely those that lead a person to depend on, or be dominated by, other people's wills. More practically, republicanism implies relational equality and a distribution of economic goods and power that secures such equality.²⁰ Moreover,

17. I use "rationality" in a loose sense. Responsive control also works when people act "systematically and predictably irrational" such that using disincentives would still allow us to systematically steer their behavior (Dan Ariely, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions* (London: HarperCollins, 2009)). Also note that while rational will dependence is a proper form of dependence, goodwill dependence is typically a stronger form.

18. Although sometimes responsive control can play an authorization function when I can suitably indicate that I will forego future responses. Thanks to Michael Garnett for helpful pointers on these issues.

19. You might even deny that nondomination is valuable noninstrumentally. But if you think it is valuable instrumentally because it can secure other goods in institutional design, then most of my arguments should still appeal to you (although their force might be weakened somewhat).

20. Philip Pettit, "The Republican Ideal of Freedom," in *The Liberty Reader*, ed. David Miller (Edinburgh, United Kingdom: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 223–42; Pettit, *Just Freedom: A Moral Compass for a Complex World*, pp. 79–86; Kyle Swan, "Republican Equality," *Social Theory and Practice* 38 (3) (2012): 432–54, argues that the connection is indeed

nondomination also implies preventing stark power inequalities in special relations, for example between a husband and a wife, or an employer and an employee.

Given this tight relationship between nondomination and equality, one might get the impression that domination implies inequality. For example, Pettit discusses the relation between domination and resource inequality:

The resources in virtue of which one person may have power over another are extraordinarily various: they range over resources of physical strength, technical advantage, financial clout, political authority, social connections, communal standing, informational access, ideological position, cultural legitimation, and the like...²¹

He goes on to state that “dominating power over another” exists “in virtue of an inequality in such resources.”²² As Pettit also puts it more recently, in a society that does well by republican standards “you stand on a par with others” and “must count as equal with the best.”²³ Such formulations might suggest—intentionally or not—that domination is only possible where there is inequality. However, that would be a mistake. I now argue that equal power relations can involve domination too.

Let us start with a fanciful case reminiscent of the Hobbesian state of nature:

Wild West: You live in a Wild West setting where everyone, including yourself, is an incredibly good shot. Whoever shoots first will kill another person with near absolute certainty. Whenever someone shoots someone, their death is neither revenged nor – because there is no law or law enforcement – prosecuted.

Even though power is distributed equally, the armed inhabitants in Wild West are mutually dominated.

tighter but worries that republicanism still cannot go far enough in terms of justifying egalitarian economic policies.

21. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, pp. 59–60.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Pettit, *Just Freedom: A Moral Compass for a Complex World*, p. 60.

First, all their freedoms precariously depend on other people's wills. When other people do not want you to have your freedoms anymore, they can take them away by shooting you. Moreover, such power is very strong, because they can take away *all* your freedoms. Now, we might assume that people in Wild West typically lack good reasons to shoot each other and that they might even have moral scruples to do so. Nonetheless, this does not remove domination, because all inhabitants still depend on other people's wills.

Second, the power in Wild West is not adequately controlled. Individuals have no abortive control, because once someone shoots them, they are guaranteed to die. They have no responsive control either, because no one will respond on their behalf if they die. But what about preventive control? You could shoot others and thereby take away their power over you. However, doing so is costly, because you would have to do something with morally bad outcomes. Moreover, to remove all dominating power, you would have to kill everyone else, which seems neither possible nor desirable. In any case, preventive control would lose its authorizing function, given that its exercise is so costly. So, despite power being equal in Wild West, all inhabitants are mutually dominated.

Next, consider how mutual domination helps us with a well-known—and theoretically perplexing—case by G. A. Cohen:

Collective Prison: "Ten people are placed in a room, the only exit from which is a huge and heavy locked door. At various distances from each lies a single heavy key. Whoever picks up this key... and takes it to the door will find... a way to open the door and leave the room. But if he does so he alone will be able to leave it. Photoelectronic devices installed by a gaoler ensure that it will open only just enough to permit one exit. Then it will close, and no one inside the room will be able to open it again."²⁴

Cohen assumes further that none of the prisoners will leave the prison. Collective Prison is an interesting puzzle: because no one leaves, each prisoner can leave the cell. Accordingly, on the liberal model, it seems each prisoner

24. G. A. Cohen, "Capitalism, Freedom and the Proletariat," in *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice, and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. Michael Otsuka (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 147–65, at p. 159.

is free to exercise all her freedoms outside the prison and should thus count as having far-reaching freedom, a judgment that seems counterintuitive.²⁵

Mutual domination brings out a clear sense in which prisoners are unfree. Each prisoner's set of options is conditional on none of the other prisoners leaving. Accordingly, each prisoner holds extreme power to interfere with another prisoner's life, for they can lock them up for good. Even though each prisoner has the option to leave, they are not free persons, because their basic freedoms are entirely in other people's hands. Moreover, the power to interfere is not suitably controlled. Inmates have no abortive or responsive control. Once locked in, you can neither reverse this constraint nor retaliate. But inmates do have considerable preventive control. To prevent another person from trapping you, you just need to walk out and their power vanishes completely. But while such preventive control is effective, it does not remove domination. Exercising preventive control would require doing something with morally bad consequences, namely trapping all others in prison forever. And as indicated earlier, one's preventive control is limited, if its exercise comes with great costs. Finally, preventive control clearly falls short of the republican ideal, if the only way to prevent domination is to exercise domination yourself.

Consider next:

Symmetrical Destruction: country *A* has sufficient nuclear missile capacity to annihilate country *B* and vice versa. However, once one country sets off their nuclear missiles, it is too late for the other country to retaliate.

Symmetrical Destruction is structurally like Wild West. Even though nuclear capacities are equal between *A* and *B*, Symmetrical Destruction involves problematic Will Dependence: each country could destroy the other country and each is dependent on the other not acting out of a bad or reckless will. And, again, *A* and *B*'s preventive powers fail to remove domination, because such preventive power requires doing something

25. Recognizing this case as a challenge, liberals have proffered different responses. See Carter, *A Measure of Freedom*, pp. 253–55; John Gray “Against Cohen On Proletarian Unfreedom,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 6 (1) (1988): 77; Frank Hindriks, “The Freedom of Collective Agents,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 16 (2) (2008): 165–83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2007.00292.x>; Kramer, *The Quality of Freedom*, pp. 224–40. I discuss collective unfreedom in more detail elsewhere (Schmidt, “Does Collective Unfreedom Matter? Individualism and Proletarian Unfreedom,” Unpublished).

with morally bad consequences, or in this case truly horrific, and cannot play the normative role republicans would want it to play.

Consider now two cases with responsive control:

MAD (“mutually assured destruction”): *A* has sufficient nuclear missile capacity to annihilate *B* and vice versa. If *A* sets off nuclear missiles that would annihilate *B*, *B* still has sufficient time to set off their own nuclear missiles that would then annihilate *A*. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, if *B* rather than *A* initiates a nuclear attack.

Powerful Information: through an accidental data leak, you receive information about your co-worker. But your co-worker also receives information about you. You are both aware that the other person has such information. The information is so powerful that you could use it to get your colleague fired and vice versa.

In *MAD*, like in the previous examples, neither country has abortive control. But unlike in previous examples, they do not have preventive control either. But they now have *responsive* control, because they can retaliate. They are not powerless in the face of another person’s power to interfere with their lives. However, such responsive control alone does not remove domination, because it does not prevent Will Dependence: each country depends on the other country’s will, on it not acting maliciously, recklessly, or irrationally.

Powerful Information has the same power configuration. Agents have no preventive or abortive control. And while they do have powerful responsive control, such control is insufficient to prevent precarious dependence. I do not mean to suggest we can extrapolate from *Powerful Information* to a general argument about data privacy. Many worries around digital privacy, for example, are about power inequalities, such as the NSA’s or Google’s power to access and use personal information. But *Powerful Information* suggests that when data is not suitably protected, equal power can threaten independence too. Take another example. Former socialist countries like the so-called German Democratic Republic (GDR) had deeply invasive security services. The central problem was of course the highly unequal power held by the Stasi, the GDR’s state security service. But *Powerful Information* points to a second source of domination: each citizen in the GDR could act as an informant to the Stasi. Reporting someone even for minor offences could send them to prison. And many people did know

about others committing minor, and sometimes major, political offences. Accordingly, many citizens held strong power over other citizens. Such a power configuration seems undesirable despite its equality.²⁶

The above power configurations all instantiate *mutual domination*.²⁷ Two agents mutually dominate each other, if both hold equal power over each other yet are both precariously dependent on each other's will. Republican worries about Will Dependence apply to mutual domination despite its equality. I depend on another person's will. That the other person also depends on mine does not cancel out my dependence. Two wrongs do not make a republican right.²⁸

Moreover, such worries can persist even if agents hold significant reciprocal control over each other's power. In cases of mutual domination, the republican response should typically be to abolish or remove power rather than equalize it or intensify its reciprocal control. Without the data leak in *Powerful Information*, for example, the two colleagues could keep their jobs independently of the other colleague's will. Accordingly, republican institutional design and public policy should not exclusively be about equalizing and controlling power but about abolishing and reducing power too.

IV. REPUBLICAN REASONS TO CARE ABOUT MUTUAL DOMINATION

Through various examples, I have argued that domination can be a problem even when power is distributed equally. But republicans go beyond presuming domination to be noninstrumentally disvaluable and

26. Because the GDR example is much more complex—it involves government domination—I henceforth only use the more stylized examples to keep things simple.

27. The phenomenon described here is different from mutual domination where one person *A* dominates another person *B* in one sphere S_1 in virtue of having drastically more power in S_1 (say in their common professional arena) but *B* dominates *A* in another sphere S_2 in virtue of having drastically more power in S_2 (say the private sphere) such that *A* and *B* have equal power when aggregated across S_1 and S_2 . “Mutual domination” as I use it here allows for such cases but is focused primarily on cases of domination without any power inequality whatsoever (it allows for power equality both within spheres and aggregated across spheres).

28. One might respond that mutual domination is less bad than domination in unequal power relations. Maybe. But that would already admit that it *is* bad in such cases, which is all I am saying. (Remember that dependence and domination come in degrees.) Another quibble would be semantic. Does “domination” not semantically imply inequality? Maybe. If you are worried about semantics, you might prefer talking of “mutual dependence” rather than “mutual domination,” which would be fine by me.

marshal instrumental arguments too. So far, however, all those arguments are cast in terms of inequality. I now argue that, with some adjustments, they apply to mutual domination too. Building on Pettit's Ingratiation and Subjective Benefit Argument, I show how republicanism provides important insights into what makes mutual domination so problematic, insights unaccounted for by some alternative, purely egalitarian theories.²⁹

A. *The Ingratiation Argument*

Pettit argues that one way to secure one's range of options is to ingratiate oneself with someone more powerful:

A world in which strategic flattery and avoidance is rampant—a world in which women become adept at placating their men folk, for example, or at not crossing their paths – may represent the best prospect for keeping interference as such at a minimum.³⁰

The conclusion being: “it is a clear advantage of the ideal of freedom as non-domination that ... it presents a picture of the free life in which the need for strategy is minimized.”³¹ If a person is nondominated with respect to an option-set, then she can keep this set without having to ingratiate herself with someone more powerful. Nondomination greatly reduces the need for ingratiation.³²

Here, we encounter a first challenge: Does equalizing power between two people not obviate the need for ingratiation? If you can take away my freedoms and I can take away yours, does that not imply that neither of us needs to flatter and fawn? But while I think that distributing power more equally reduces the need to ingratiate, it will not always remove it.

Consider Powerful Information. Do you have to placate your colleague? The need to ingratiate is only really removed, if both persons involved are sufficiently

29. In an earlier work, Pettit also argued that nondomination makes freedoms more probable. This argument would apply to mutual domination too, although probably to a lesser extent. I here focus on Pettit's other two central arguments which play a stronger role in recent discussion. Moreover, republicans think these other two arguments set their views more strongly apart from other theories of freedom that already include probabilities in their accounts (Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, pp. 85–6).

30. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, p. 87.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Philip Pettit, “The Instability of Freedom as Noninterference: The Case of Isaiah Berlin,” *Ethics* 121 (4) (2011): 693–716. <https://doi.org/10.1086/660694>.

rational, have similar risk dispositions and similar relevant preference profiles. But imagine your colleague is vindictive, greedy, and impulsive. You cannot be sure entirely, but your colleague might be genuine when they threaten you with releasing your information. They might even later regret doing so should you retaliate, but that might not be enough to stop them beforehand. If so, you have good reason to ingratiate yourself with them. Or, at least, you should make sure not to anger them too much or unnecessarily cross their paths.

In a different scenario, your colleague might be entirely rational but simply have a very different risk attitude. Your colleague is happy to take risks, even for smallish benefits. Accordingly, they repeatedly ask you for unusual favors, such as filling in boring excel sheets even though that is their job or act selfishly by stealing your yoghurt from the office fridge. You, on the other hand, are a naturally risk-averse person. You judge it unlikely that your colleague will release your information. But why risk it? Giving up some yoghurt or filling in some excel sheets are not the worst forms of ingratiation, but ingratiation nonetheless.

Similar considerations could apply to nuclear deterrence in MAD. Imagine country *A* makes their leadership appear erratic, vindictive, ideologically deluded, and willing to sacrifice many lives (think North Korea and worse). *B* thinks it unlikely *A* would actually risk its entire existence. But *B* cannot rule it out. Now *B* is not going to do whatever *A* requests. But the probability of *A* risking escalation is still high enough to grant *A* smaller favors. For example, *A* regularly requests payments from *B* to prop up its economy (as North Korea does). *B* is a rich country and pays the money. After all, the small amounts are but a small sacrifice compared with running the risk, albeit a low one, of nuclear annihilation.

Conversely, if an agent is very risk-averse or very unlikely to make someone else worse off or to retaliate, they might find themselves more likely to ingratiate. For example, imagine country *B* is very unlikely to retaliate, if *A* initiated a nuclear attack. *B* might see it as strategically futile at this stage and would hate to take so many innocent lives. *A* knows all this and, as a result, is emboldened in its demands and its readiness to threaten nuclear warfare. The same—with somewhat lower stakes—would hold in Powerful Information: if your colleague has reason to believe you will not retaliate after being made redundant, they might act all the more audaciously.³³

33. One might object that, beyond “external social power,” the different attitudes themselves constitute power inequalities, just like false consciousness and adaptive preferences

Overall, with some adjustments, the Ingratiation Argument applies to mutual domination too.

B. *The Subjective Benefit Argument*

Another central instrumental argument is what I call the Subjective Benefit Argument: "...the fact that someone enjoys non-domination is likely to become a matter of common knowledge and to generate associated subjective and intersubjective benefits."³⁴ As a heuristic for checking whether a society approximates the ideals of republican freedom, Pettit suggests the "eyeball test": can people look each other in the eye without fear or deference?³⁵ In a society free of domination, everyone "... can savour the sense of enjoying an equal status with others in the society: they can look all those others in the eye, conscious of a shared consciousness that no one can interfere arbitrarily in their lives."³⁶

At times, Pettit's wording suggests that felt inferiority, shame, and deference are exclusive to power inequalities: "[The powerless and the powerful] will share an awareness that the powerless can do nothing except by the leave of the powerful: that the powerless are at the mercy of the powerful and not on equal terms."³⁷ This seems like a challenge for my argument. Can such subjective burdens materialize when power is equal?

can. However, the preferences and risk dispositions involved in Powerful Information are very different from the usual false consciousness cases because they seem entirely reasonable and do not originate from oppression. The adequate republican response should be to change the underlying external power relations rather than demanding that the person become more daring, for example, become more willing to risk their job. Of course, I do not deny that preferences and false consciousness can in itself lead to domination in other cases nor do I wish to defuse critics who argue that republicanism has problems fully accounting for such worries. See Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* (Random House, 2014); Marie Garrau and Cecile Laborde, "Relational Equality, Non-Domination, and Vulnerability," in *Social Equality: On What It Means to Be Equals*, ed. Carina Fourie, Fabian Schuppert, and Ivo Wallimann-Helmer (Oxford University Press, 2015). <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/2015>, pp. 58–61; S. R. Krause, "Beyond Non-Domination: Agency, Inequality and the Meaning of Freedom," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 39 (2) (2013): 187–208; Michael J. Thompson, "The Two Faces of Domination in Republican Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 17 (1) (2018): 44–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885115580352>.

34. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, p. 87.

35. Pettit, *Just Freedom: A Moral Compass for a Complex World*, pp. 98–100.

36. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, p. 166.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

In Powerful Information, for example, you seem to have no reason to appear in shame or deference. You are dependent on your colleague's will, but you are still their equal.

However, while some subjective and intersubjective benefits seem tied to inequality, others apply to mutual domination too.

First, start with subjective benefits. Besides comparative feelings, dependence can generate negative psychological states less comparative in nature. In Powerful Information, I am likely to feel a sense of *vulnerability*. Someone has it in their hands to get me fired. My freedoms—and thereby many of my projects, life plans and things I care about—depend on someone else's will. Conversely, if I am independent and my freedoms are indemnified against other people's wills, I might have a feeling of *security* and a sense of *personal control* and *agency*.

One could now respond that while mutual domination might make you feel more vulnerable, it can also make you feel more empowered. After all, you are powerful enough to drastically interfere with another person's life. However, we do not need much psychological research to believe that most people care more about their own lives than that of (most) others. Accordingly, for mutual domination, we should expect that for most people the negative emotions and attitudes—such as feelings of vulnerability—would outweigh the positive feeling of gained power, resulting in a negative net balance of psychological states.

Second, consider *intersubjective* benefits. The central intersubjective benefit of removing or preventing mutual domination is that it can increase people's freedom to choose which relationships to enter and on what terms. In Collective Prison and Powerful Information, for example, individuals are made to stand in deeply entangled relationships with other people. In Powerful Information, you find yourself in a relation of intense mutual power with someone whether you want it or not. Moreover, external circumstances—rather than yourself—set the terms of these relationships. Your life is forcefully entangled with others without your consent and control.

But independence should not prevent you from entering social relationships of course (I say more on this below). Rather, it should extend or safeguard your freedom to enter social relationships on terms you mutually decide. We want our lives entangled with some people. And often we are happy to give others power over us. But it should be up to us who these people are. Moreover, we should be able, ideally, to decide at

different points how far we want to entangle our lives with others and should retain sufficient abortive control going forward.³⁸

C. Mutual Domination and Relational Egalitarianism

As said above, my arguments here fall more within a republican discourse. Nonetheless, I think the idea of mutual domination provides an important lesson on theoretical commonalities and fault lines between republicans, liberals, and relational egalitarians. I now argue that mutual domination shows one area where republican independence remains a genuinely different and independently attractive ideal.

The intuitions and normative concerns behind domination and dependence seem strong. But some have argued that we can account for those concerns without becoming republicans. Liberal egalitarians, for example, argue that they can (i) account for everything that is attractive about republicanism (ii) without inheriting its flaws. Liberal egalitarianism is sufficiently similar to republicanism to have the same strengths but sufficiently different to avoid its shortcomings, or so the claim. I leave it to others to discuss (ii). I here focus on (i). Let us first see what speaks for (i).

The first line of argument holds that liberal option-freedom picks up enough of what makes domination problematic in real life. Domination nearly always reduces a person's range of options. Or, at the very least, domination makes options probabilistically fragile, which in itself reduces overall freedom.³⁹ More important for us is the second line of argument. Liberal egalitarians care about freedom, but they care about equality too. They can easily judge the power relation in *Kindly Master* wrong in itself—and beyond its effect on liberal freedom—because it instantiates

38. Being able to choose which relationships to enter and exit is an important freedom. Karl Widerquist, for example, invokes this issue to defend a universal basic income (Widerquist, "The Physical Basis of Voluntary Trade." *Human Rights Review* 11 (1) (2010): 83–103).

39. Bruin, "Liberal and Republican Freedom," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, pp. 418–39. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2009.00334.x>; Carter, "How are Power and Unfreedom Related", *Republicanism and Political Theory*, pp. 58–82; Matthew H. Kramer, "Liberty and Domination," in *Republicanism and Political Theory*, ed. Cecile Laborde and John Maynor (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), pp. 31–57; Gerald Lang, "Invigilating Republican Liberty," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 62 (247) (2012): 273–93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9213.2011.00015.x>. The same authors also argue that ingratiation can be modeled within a liberal framework through the co-possibility of freedoms.

objectionable relational inequality. Kolodny, for example, argues that a “concern about being under the power of others, elicited by paradigms such as the kindly master, is best interpreted as a concern about social inferiority to other individuals.”⁴⁰ A concern with relational equality accounts for our tenacious intuitions that status inequality, first, seems noninstrumentally wrong and, second, can come with significant subjective and intersubjective burdens, such as feelings of subordination and shame.

Of course, it might not just be liberal egalitarians who think their theory covers republican concerns. Those with more strongly left-wing sympathies typically also advocate removing power inequalities along a vertical dimension. “Because man is a human being,” writes Bertold Brecht somewhat optimistically, “he wants no slaves below him and no masters above him.”

However, if my arguments here are sound, then liberal egalitarianism and other, “power equalizing” views do not cover all cases of problematic dependence. Cases like Collective Prison and Powerful Information are not adequately covered by a concern for social inferiority and subordination, because they do not involve (relational) inequality. Moreover, such dependence relations seem undesirable in themselves and can come with significant subjective and intersubjective burdens, such as feelings of vulnerability. This disvalue is relational without being egalitarian. Independence stands as a separate value.⁴¹

V. OBJECTIONS

Here are two objections, both of which revolve around the worry that preventing or removing mutual domination would be excessive and undesirable.

A. *Too Much*

Every society necessarily involves power. Removing dominating inequalities already requires much interference and control. If we also tackled mutual domination, would we not go too far? In many cases, some level

40. Kolodny, *Republicanism and Democracy*, at p. 27.

41. I am here agnostic on whether, conversely, republicanism can account for everything egalitarians care about (Garrau and Laborde, *Social Equality: On What It Means to Be Equals*; Chiara Cordelli, “Justice as Fairness and Relational Resources,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 23 (1) (2015): 86–110. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12036>).

of dependence on each other's wills seems unavoidable, particularly dependence on their rational will. For example, if we all drive cars, we have the equal power to drive into each other. Of course, some measures might help with preventive and abortive control, and criminal law adds much responsive control. But eventually we still depend on each other's wills to some degree.⁴² To achieve full independence, would republicans not end up recommending a pre-social state where humans live as hermits—much like in Rousseau's state of nature—maximally free of each other's power?⁴³

The first way to answer this worry is to adopt *weak* republicanism, according to which independence is an important *pro tanto* value but not necessarily the only one. Liberal option-freedom, wellbeing, or other values might matter too. Accordingly, we can easily say that excessively reducing the power to drive cars would come at the cost of other goods, such as option-freedom or wellbeing.⁴⁴ Weak republicanism is entirely compatible with my arguments in this article. Concerns

42. Keith Dowding, "Republican Freedom, Rights, and the Coalition Problem," *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 10 (3) (2011): 301–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470594X10388380>; Thomas W. Simpson, "The Impossibility of Republican Freedom," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 45 (1) (2017): 27–53.

43. As an alternative to the response given here, we could follow Rousseau and argue that full independence would be best realized in a hermitic state of nature but that returning to such a state is impossible (Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Mankind," in *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*; Rousseau, "The Social Contract," in *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*). Rousseau thought that socialization, progress, labor share, and acquired tastes for the spoils of progress have corrupted humans and thereby blocked any route back to the state of nature. However, this response could imply that we should reduce social power as much as possible, which we might find a problematic conclusion. Moreover, I suspect for most of us the main reason against "going back to a state of nature" seems its undesirability not its infeasibility.

44. One form of weak republicanism holds that both nondomination and liberal option-freedom matter (Charles Larmore, "Liberal and Republican Conceptions of Freedom," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 6 (1) (2003): 96–119; Christian List and Laura Valentini, "Freedom as Independence," *Ethics* 126 (4) (2016): 1043–74. <https://doi.org/10.1086/686006>; Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*). Such authors seek, in different ways, to combine modal robustness with option-freedom. Such a combination would also disavow the claim that just imprisonment does not affect a prisoner's status freedom, a judgment many commentators find implausible. See Carter, *A Measure of Freedom*; Kramer, *Republicanism and Political Theory*; List and Valentini, "Freedom as Independence," pp. 1043–74; Ronen Shnayderman, "Liberal vs. Republican Notions of Freedom," *Political Studies* 60 (1) (2012): 44–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2011.00900.x>; Robert B. Talisse, "Impunity and Domination: A Puzzle for Republicanism," *European Journal of Political Theory* 13 (2) (2014): 121–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885112463657>; Fabian Wendt,

around mutual domination would then provide us with *pro tanto* reasons which can sometimes be outweighed by other concerns. (I have set up my examples such that other considerations do not seem to outweigh concerns around domination. But we could imagine variations where they might.)

While I think weak republicanism is more promising, strong republicanism also has resources to respond to the “too much” worry. I earlier explained that on Pettit’s view a person’s republican freedom is a function of the *intensity* of nondomination and the *extent* to which she has (sufficiently nondominated) options.⁴⁵ The state is the central player to secure or extend republican freedom and can do so with the following measures:

- (i) strengthen control
- (ii) reduce or take away other people’s power to interfere with me (by, e.g., removing cars),
- (iii) pursue measures that increase extent (by, e.g., increasing mobility or life expectancy).

Through type (i) and (ii) measures, the state can *intensify* nondomination.⁴⁶ But while republicans often have good reason to intensify nondomination, they are not committed to eliminating all dependence. Carrying (i) and (ii) too far carries two risks.

First, if the state carries (i) and (ii) too far, it risks becoming the dominator itself. To thoroughly control or reduce people’s power to interfere with each other might in turn require intrusive state power to interfere with individuals. The state might thus risk becoming a dominating force itself by accruing powers, such as an all-powerful security apparatus, that are far-reaching and hard to control.

Second, carrying (i) and (ii) too far, risks shrinking *extent* too much. For example, outlawing cars and lorries—a type (ii) measure—would greatly reduce our range of (sufficiently nondominated) options, as it

“Slaves, Prisoners, and Republican Freedom,” *Res publica* 17 (2) (2011): 175–92. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-011-9151-5>.

45. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, pp. 74–7.

46. Pettit, *Just Freedom: A Moral Compass for a Complex World* (chaps. 4, 5).

would greatly shrink our mobility and cause serious problems in our food supply, medical services, and so on.⁴⁷ Drastically curtailing opportunities for mobility would imply that the state vitiates some of the central freedoms it was meant to protect in the first place.

Overall then, strong republicanism, and its concern around mutual domination, does not demand eliminating all dependence completely. If the state excessively controls and/or restricts equal power relations, it either risks becoming a dominator itself or risks abrogating the very freedoms it is meant to protect.

B. Intimate Relationships between Equals

Republicans urge us to remove dominating power asymmetries in intimate interpersonal relationships, as they exist in patriarchal societies for example.⁴⁸ But we might worry that also preventing mutual domination is one step too far. Loving relationships can involve vulnerabilities toward one's partner and can require trusting them with significant influence over one's life. If we also tackled equal power relationships, would we not worsen the conditions for desirable intimate relationships between equals?⁴⁹

In response, we could first rehearse the answers from above. We can adopt weak republicanism and hold that, while preventing mutual domination is important, other values matter too. And if we encounter situations where preventing mutual domination might prevent flourishing relationships, the value of such relationships might outweigh the disvalue of mutual domination. Alternatively, strong republicans can hold that a concern with independence will at some point itself constrain how far society and the state should try to prevent, remove, or correct undesirable power relations in the private sphere. If the state or society can meddle too much in intimate relationships, such power itself becomes dominating. Or meddling too much might risk reducing the extent of republican freedom by removing

47. I here merely intend to show that Pettit's strong republican framework contains resources to answer the "too much worry." But I do not defend the framework itself. Accordingly, I do not try to resolve remaining theoretical issues, such as when an option should count as sufficiently intensely nondominated or how and when intensity and extent might have to be traded off exactly.

48. Pettit, *Just Freedom: A Moral Compass for a Complex World*, pp. 89–93.

49. Of course, much of the "dependence" in romantic relationships is psychological rather than constituted by external, social power. But although this ameliorates the worry, it does not remove it. Romantic relationships typically do involve external power too, such as when partners entangle their financial livelihoods.

too many valuable options, such as the freedom to enter romantic relationships.

But there is also good reason to believe that preventing mutual domination will not in fact prevent relationships from flourishing. If anything, it should likely improve conditions for flourishing relationships. Preventing mutual domination is not about preventing equal power in general but about reducing precarious dependence. And while some power might be unavoidable for such relationships, mutual domination is not. I earlier argued that preventing mutual domination can have important intersubjective benefits and those benefits can apply here too. For example, not only should people enter romantic relationships freely, they should also retain sufficient control over their lives going forward. Consider how until not so long ago, sexual violence and domestic abuse between married partners were not considered a criminal offence (exemptions that still exist in some countries today). Such exemptions are clearly incompatible with republicanism, as they perpetuate and intensify dominating power inequalities. But while the reasons against such exemptions might be weaker when power is equal, they do not disappear. Imagine a marriage between two equally powerful partners, say, between two “equally strong” partners in a same-sex marriage. We should expect that not exempting such relationships from relevant criminal laws should provide better rather than worse conditions for such relationships to flourish. Moreover, continuing control requires abortive control, importantly the possibility to *exit* relationships. Being able to file for divorce, for example, should thus be an important republican right—even for marriages between equals.

With my theoretical resource fully laid out, I now discuss a policy issue that serves as an instructive case study for how to apply my framework.

VI. GUN CONTROL

Guns greatly increase your power to injure and kill others. Moreover, you can employ these powers as threats. A gun allows you to scare people off your property or rob someone at gunpoint. Guns thus give you strong power. Moreover, such power is exercised relatively easily. Of course, you need some shooting skills, but the difficulties are not prohibitive. Accordingly, one important normative question around gun ownership is how to deal with the power that guns bestow.

I argue that gun ownership presents a challenge for views focused too narrowly on equalizing power, because they neglect mutual domination. Moreover, attending to mutual domination gives us a new, republican argument for gun control. Note that such an argument is merely *pro tanto* rather than all-things-considered. I here exclude other ethical dimensions besides power and domination and bracket some empirical issues, some of which I only briefly take up in footnotes.⁵⁰

Start with the view that we ought to equalize power (henceforth the Equalizing View). The Equalizing View would give us a reasonable *prima facie* argument against gun control and for widespread gun ownership. Consider three stylized situations:

Prohibition: private gun ownership is illegal, except for a few specified cases (such as some hunters, farmers etc.). Gun control works well but not perfectly, such that some few private individuals have guns illegally. Moreover, law enforcement has access to firearms.

Unequal Ownership: every citizen has the right to own guns but only some actually own guns.

Equal Ownership: every citizen has the right to own guns and more or less all citizens own guns.

Now compare the three cases first in terms of equality. In Prohibition, such strong power will be unequally distributed between myself on the one hand—someone who does not own a gun—and law enforcement and a few illegal gun owners on the other. In Unequal Ownership, the distribution is still unequal, but at least those private individuals who legally own guns are not subject to the same power inequalities as those in Prohibition. The power distribution is most equal in Equal Ownership.

Consider control next. The Equalizing View would hold that power is best controlled in Equal Ownership. In Unequal Ownership, citizens often find themselves in asymmetrical power relationship, because some own guns and others do not. Of course, there will be *some* control in Unequal

50. See, for example, Christopher Riddle, "Philosophy & Gun Control: Introduction." *Essays in Philosophy* 16 (2) (2015): 149–53. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1526-0569.1529>, for some other ethical issues.

Ownership, that is, preventive control (e.g., banning guns on campus), abortive control (the police might shoot me to stop me from shooting others) and responsive control (if I have used my gun illegally, the criminal justice system will do its work). But for the most part, control will be responsive. Now if everyone owns guns, as in Equal Ownership, there will be more reciprocal control. You can shoot me to take away my power to shoot you (preventive control). If I threaten you with my gun, you can abort this constraint by threatening me back. Or if I injure you, you can try to stop me from doing any further harm by shooting me (abortive control). Or if I injure you, you might come back to get me later (responsive control). So, if you also own a gun, you will be in a better position to exercise preventive, abortive, and responsive control.⁵¹ Overall then, the Equalizing View suggests widespread gun ownership.

However, republicans should eschew the Equalizing View, because it overlooks mutual domination. My republican arguments against mutual domination apply to gun ownership too. And together they give us good *pro tanto* reason to reduce power through strict gun control.

First, republicans typically judge domination to be noninstrumentally disvaluable. Such disvalue would apply to equal gun ownership too, particularly because guns endow us with *strong* power over each other's life. There is more overall dependence with guns than without.

Second, mutual domination can engender pressures for ingratiation, particularly when one person is more willing to risk escalation, or is erratic, impulsive, sadistic, vindictive, ideologically deluded, or in a relevant sense psychologically dysfunctional. I recently watched footage of the 2017 Neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Some protesters were heavily armed and explained they were ready to use their weapons against

51. To support the Equalizing View, one might additionally argue that equal gun ownership will have further equalizing effects. Firearms might, for example, ameliorate inequalities in strength between people. I exclude this issue here, as my argument below does not seek to establish that prohibiting guns would remove inequalities. Rather I argue that prohibition can prevent (or at least reduce) mutual domination and that this would reduce domination overall, even if it could bring up power inequalities. But for what it's worth, notice that we have reason to believe equalizing gun ownership will conversely also amplify certain power inequalities. If organized crime can only use weapons much less effective than firearms, their power over others is weaker. However, if they can use guns as organized collectives, their power over individuals—even those with guns—can increase. Arguably, gangs such as MS13 would have less power over any given individual, if neither they nor the individual owned guns.

anyone challenging their racist vision of the United States. Now imagine a person called Petra who is a member of one such group—for example, Jewish, Black, Hispanic, gay, or a progressive political activist—and lives on the same street as one of the Neo-Nazis. Petra has pretty ordinary preferences: while she hates having to stay out of the Nazi's way, she would rather do that than risk a shoot-out. Even if they are both armed, Petra has good reason to stay out of the Nazi's way and not to anger him or risk confrontation.

Third, removing mutual domination can have subjective benefits. Importantly, independence can reduce feelings of vulnerability. I also argued that such vulnerability is not neutralized by another person feeling vulnerable toward you in turn. Plausibly, such vulnerability will apply in the gun case too. When both Petra and the Nazi own guns, she might feel more vulnerable than if neither of them did.

Now, consider an important objection: Petra—and other persons in her position—can empower themselves and avoid the above problems: rather than staying out of the Nazi's way, for example, she can open-carry and do whatever is necessary to control the Nazi's power. If the Nazi is aware of Petra's disposition, he will adjust his risk assessment and back off. It is Petra's disposition to back down that forces her to ingratiate. Moreover, a more empowered disposition might make her feel stronger rather than vulnerable.

However, there are various problems with this objection.

First, gun ownership is an undesirable form of control because its exercise is costly.⁵² To exercise preventive control, Petra could preemptively kill the Nazi before the Nazi tries to kill her. However, as argued before, costliness weakens one's control. Not only would Petra have to kill another human being—which she might find morally costly—she would

52. A different, empirical worry is that firearms might not be particularly effective for abortive (and "immediate preventive") control. Numbers suggest firearms are only rarely successfully used in self-defense. According to FBI statistics, in the United States in 2014, there were only 224 incidents of justifiable killing involving a private citizen using a firearm. In the same year, there were 7,670 incidents of criminal homicides (and 21,334 firearm suicide deaths) (see "Firearm Justifiable Homicides and Non-Fatal Self-Defense Gun Use—An Analysis of Federal Bureau of Investigation and National Crime Victimization Survey Data," 2017; David Hemenway and Sara J. Solnick, "The Epidemiology of Self-Defense Gun Use: Evidence from the National Crime Victimization Surveys 2007–2011." *Preventive Medicine, Special Issue on the Epidemiology and Prevention of Gun Violence*, 79 (Supplement C) (2015): 22–7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed>).

typically also have to go to jail. (Unless she waits for exactly the moment when a threat is demonstrably imminent. But such caution would then severely limit the effectiveness of her preventive control.) The same holds for responsive control. Not all gun attacks end in death. So, after an attack, Petra might try to retaliate. But that would again come at a great cost, likely prison.

Second, Petra could reduce ingratiation pressures by adopting riskier and more combative dispositions. However, given her preferences and dispositions, Petra might find such a shift hardly liberating. With the Nazi owning a gun, Petra is trapped between Scylla and Charybdis. One option is to leave her dispositions as they are. But then Petra has to stay out of the Nazi's way. Petra's other option is to adopt more risk-taking and combative dispositions. But that is very costly for her too. She now must act in ways she finds deeply undesirable and unduly dangerous.

Finally, remember that preventing mutual domination can have *intersubjective* or *relational* benefits. For starters, it reduces the extent to which you are thrown into strong power relations. Consider first how gun possession might not be altogether voluntary. Imagine I own a gun and you do not (as in Unequal Ownership). If you wish for such power relations to be more equal, or if you just worry about me bullying you, you have an incentive to buy a firearm yourself. So, for those who would have liked to stay clear of firearms, gun ownership might move them into an undesirable arms race. But even if only I own guns and you do not, my gun ownership throws you into a power relation with me you might never have desired. Legal private gun ownership allows for power relations between people that are hard to consent to and that, once set in motion, people have reason to enter more deeply.

A defender of gun ownership might now respond that the opposite is true: owning guns *heightens* your independence, because it keeps other people off your back. You can imagine a Clint Eastwood character declaring "just stay out of my way and we'll have no problem." Because guns raise the stakes of unfriendly encounters, they might prevent skirmishes and other undesirable interactions.

However, the first problem is that this effect trades on the idea that people respond rationally to costs and benefits. We might want to first question this empirically. Many violent crimes are likely not the result of a deliberate cost-benefit analysis but happen in the spur of the moment. But, leaving empirics aside, I earlier argued that republicans should not exclusively worry about goodwill dependence. Rational will dependence

can be a proper form of dependence too. Even if my owning a gun might deter someone who rationally considers the costs and benefits of an attack, it might not deter someone irrational. Equal gun ownership typically heightens my dependence on people's rational will.

Second, even if guns were effective at keeping people apart, we might not find this effect particularly desirable. Being forced to stay out of people's ways might be an undesirable unfreedom itself, as the above example involving the Nazi neighbor shows. And, even barring extreme cases, power configurations that make people avoid each other seem undesirable, if we care about good opportunities for socializing and building interpersonal bonds. Independence should not translate into people *having* to stay out of each other's ways. Rather, independence would give one greater control over how one's life is entangled with others. And rather than being thrown into intense power relationships with strangers, one should have control over how, or if at all, to develop relationships with others. *Prima facie*, not having an intense power dynamic hanging over you might give you a greater freedom to turn strangers into friendly acquaintances or friends. And you can do so gradually and with control over how much power you want the other person to have. This seems a more desirable form of relating to each other as strangers, co-citizens, neighbors, and so on: not having to stay out of each other's way but not forced into intense dependence relations either.

Overall, republican normative concerns speak against the Equalizing View. A concern with domination urges us to prevent mutual domination. And a concern with mutual domination gives us *pro tanto* reasons for prohibiting guns—or at least highly restricting their access—rather than widely distributing them. The republican response should be to abolish power instead of equalizing it or intensifying its reciprocal control. This case study also shows that removing mutual domination can sometimes involve increasing power inequalities. If private individuals do not own guns but the police do, then there is a clear power inequality. But when state power is sufficiently properly controlled and employed in a sufficiently just manner, a concern with power relations can justify certain power inequalities if those are necessary to remove mutual domination.⁵³

53. Again, this argument is by itself not an all-things-considered defense of gun control. Moreover, my argument for abolishing mutual domination also depends on the assumption that the alternative would not involve more domination. We can imagine different scenarios where this assumption does not hold because of serious institutional failure. First, a

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Most republican examples revolve around power inequalities, such as women being subject to the dominating power of men or political dissidents being at the mercy of an unjust regime. But republicans worry more generally about people depending on other people's wills. I have shown that such dependence can exist in equal power relations too. Two agents mutually dominate each other, when both hold equal power over each other yet are both problematically dependent on each other's will.

If domination and dependence are disvaluable noninstrumentally, they should also be for mutual domination. And republican instrumental concerns apply too. Despite power being distributed equally, mutual domination can still involve significant pressures for ingratiation, can make one feel more vulnerable, and throw one into undesirable power relations. Conversely, removing mutual domination can come with subjective and intersubjective benefits, such as reducing vulnerability and empowering agents to determine the kinds of social relationships they wish to enter and sustain. Finally, because mutual domination is not "inegalitarian," relational egalitarian theories will have problems capturing what is problematic about it. Mutual domination highlights an important way in which independence stands as a genuinely different and attractive ideal.

Mutual domination should hold pride of place in republican theories. Not only is it theoretically convincing, mutual domination also provides the right concept to direct our attention to normatively troubling cases. Mutual domination shows that republican institutions should sometimes

dominated group within a society might reduce domination by arming itself. Black Panthers, for example, saw gun ownership as an avenue for Black liberation, because it could reduce the power held by racists and the police to brutalize African Americans. Second, sometimes gun ownership might be considered necessary to prevent a government from accruing dominating power over all its citizens (rather than just one group). Third, a small country such as Switzerland might see widespread gun ownership as necessary to offset the power held by more populous neighboring countries. Republicans can in principle allow that widespread gun ownership can be necessary to respond to domination in very particular settings. But considering mutual domination, this should only apply in cases of drastic institutional failure. A functioning republican constitution, democracy, criminal justice system, and international political system would obviate the need for widespread gun ownership. While I believe most existing countries approximate this ideal enough to justify banning guns—and to prioritize other institutional measures—these issues are too complex to pursue here. For the purposes of this article, I thus remain within the realm of "somewhat ideal theory."

abolish or *reduce* power rather than equalize, as illustrated through gun control. Gun ownership raises the specter of strong power. An exclusive focus on equalizing and reciprocally controlling power would give us reason for widespread equal gun ownership. However, I have argued that widespread gun ownership involves mutual domination. Therefore, republicanism gives us reasons to back prohibition instead.