



REPUBLICAN IDEA OF FREEDOM AND SCHUMPETERIAN MODEL OF DEMOCRATIC ELITISM

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Abstract

This paper examines two influential yet contrasting models of political theory—Philip Pettit's republican conception of freedom as non-domination and Joseph Schumpeter's model of democratic elitism—to explore their implications for understanding freedom and democratic practice in modern societies. The first section discusses Pettit's articulation of freedom as non-domination, which extends beyond the liberal negative conception of freedom as non-interference and the populist positive conception of democratic self-rule. Pettit argues that freedom is compromised not merely by actual interference, but by the capacity for arbitrary intervention by powerful agents, thus offering a broader account grounded in relevant shared interests, vigilance against domination, and support for redistributive policies. While Pettit's model advances a more expansive and egalitarian notion of liberty, it is critiqued for neglecting the internal, psychological barriers to freedom emphasized by theorists of positive liberty. The second section engages with Schumpeter's redefinition of democracy in Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy, where he rejects the classical participatory view of democracy and instead conceptualizes it as a competitive method for selecting political elites through elections. Schumpeter's proceduralist and instrumental understanding of democracy, grounded in assumptions about voter ignorance, the manufacture of consent, and the necessity of bureaucratic rationalization, aligns democracy with capitalism and socialism through the shared centrality of organizational efficiency and elite leadership. The paper concludes by juxtaposing the two thinkers: whereas Pettit broadens democratic participation by foregrounding vigilance, accountability, and collective interests, Schumpeter restricts participation to electoral choice, reducing democracy to elite rule. Together, these models illuminate enduring tensions between freedom, equality, participation, and expertise in contemporary democratic theory.

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I

Republican Idea of Freedom: A More Adequate Theory of Freedom

Philip Pettit in his article “The Republican Idea of Freedom” presents the conception of freedom as non-domination in contrast with the conception of freedom as non interference(negative liberty/liberty of moderns/liberal model) and with the conception of direct democratic standing (positive liberty/liberty of the ancients/populist model). I attempt, firstly, to present his views of freedom as non-domination to mean freedom from arbitrary intervention. In the second section while comparing with the liberal model, I attempt to show how it is a much broader conception than the latter. The last section provides a short analysis of this model as well as the implications that it has which can help individuals lead meaningful lives.

Defining freedom as non-domination:

Freedom as non-domination, as Pettit defines it, is freedom from domination where domination is supposed to take place when there is arbitrary interference on part of the agent. Here, arbitrary is defined as one where the interfering agent works at their own will/discretion without taking into account the interests of those affected. Conversely, an agent who takes into account the ideas, interests and worldviews of those affected automatically becomes a non-dominating interferer and consequentially such interventions do not cause unfreedom to those affected. However the interests taken into consideration are the *relevant* interests of the individuals. For example, in case of conflicting interests between what the individual desires for herself(non-punishment in case she breaks the law) and what she generally regards good for the community(punishment to offenders), the latter will be taken to be the relevant interest. The common interests are thus the relevant interests. It is an account of freedom “by” (the law) in contrast to freedom “from” or freedom “to”.

A further important point in this conception is that the agent does not have to actually exercise his interference in order to cause unfreedom. The mere capacity of the agent (caring husband, benevolent master) to do so counts as incapacitating those affected(wife, slave). However sufficient empirical basis should exist to prove that the agent actually has the capacity to do so. This can be done by taking into account comparative resources, power dynamics, safeguards that law guarantees that incapacitate the advantaged, etc. Thus it has a strong evaluative basis. Even though we undertake a tendency to always demonize those in position of powers it is not unfair because not doing so would cause the exploited to get further oppressed. A moral and political claim is thus being made here for the emancipation of the marginalized sections.

Freedom as non-domination VS Freedom from interference:

Points of Similarity: The advocates of both the liberal and republican model talk about interference but they focus only on intentional interference. It means one where there is a deliberate attempt made on part of the agent to compromise the liberty of those affected. Thus it also involves a worsening in the situation of those affected in terms of the alternatives that are now available to them or by increasing the actual or expected costs (penalty).

Points of difference: For the non-interventionalists any form of interference is arbitrary. They thus have a blanket view of blanket of interference- Law as negation of Liberty(Hobbes and Bentham). For the non-dominationists, on the other hand, further qualifications have to be made before declaring any form of interference as arbitrary (Blackstone). Some interferences which are in the relevant interests of the individuals may not count as interference (harder to lose freedom) while some interferences which, though may actually never be exercised, would still count as arbitrary interference if the agents have a capacity to do so (easier to lose freedom). Thus for the liberal model all interferences (except the natural obstacles) would be labeled as compromising factors but for the republican model some interferences may be conditioning (redistributive policies) while some may be compromising(frequent, unregulated State, unfair rules of law) factors. It depends upon the context and a case-by-case basis. Thus for the Liberal model it is an all-or-nothing freedom whereas for the republican model freedom can be available in varying degrees based on the intensity and extent of the intervening agents. It is therefore clear that Freedom as non-domination gives us a much broader view in comparison to the liberal model which totally sidelines all laws and interventions even though they may, at times, be in the interests of the individuals.

Implications and Analysis:

Since interference, at the face of it, is not a problem any law guaranteeing basic rights, goods, capacities, etc to the individuals and groups are allowed. Thus the redistributive policies are welcome provided they do not cause non-domination in some other form. The liberal model, on the other hand, believing that individuals are rational enough to decide and act upon their ends totally disregards the material conditions of individuals to actually do so. As Berlin remarks, poverty cannot be regarded as loss of freedom. Thus the negative freedom legitimizes the existing inequalities in societies and in fact exacerbates them by discouraging any further intervention that may help eradicate them. Moreover the republican model also asks the individuals to be more cautious of the State so as to prevent other forms of non-domination (unfair interventions) by it. Vigilance is thus the price paid for liberty.

Analysis: Firstly, by taking into consideration the relevant interests, the interferer uniformly treats those affected that have shared common interests. Thus it is non-discriminatory in its treatment of like-people. Secondly, by asking individuals to be vigilant about the State, he increases the vents of

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political participation for the individuals thus simultaneously making his model more democratic. However, Pettit falls back in his assessment of interferences as he fails to account for the internal barriers to freedom which is done by Taylor and other advocates of positive liberty. It is true, they remark, that there are certain inhibitors (example fear, spite, etc) within an individual that may not always be a derivative of the behavior of the interferer (example- stage fright is not always depended on external variables). These are barriers within an individual that prevent him from the realization of his freedom. These internal interventions are absent in Pettit's account of Republican freedom.

It can thus be concluded that the republican notion of freedom, if extended, can take into account the structural inequalities and help to eliminate them. It is much more expansive in scope than the negative liberty model. Attempts to reincorporate it into the public domain should be undertaken so as to have an entrenched realization of freedom and implementation of fair rules of law in addition to having increased citizen participation. However this active citizenry should not be confused with the civic republican model of Machiavelli or with that of Athenian democracy(positive liberty).

II

Schumpeterian Model of Democratic Elitism

Schumpeter in his book "Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy" explains how the three are compatible with each other. This is possible because he redefines all three of them and uses them very instrumentally in comparison to their substantive usages in the conventional sense. Moreover he posits his model of democratic elitism in contrast to the classical model of democracy that makes it easier for him to present his theory as explanatory, workable and realistic. I shall first attempt to present the Schumpeterian meanings of the three terms followed by his underlying assumptions that make such a conception of democracy possible and indeed desirable for him.

Definition of the terms:

Schumpeter believed that with intensifying **Capitalism** came the increasingly large corporations and organizations for the production and distribution of goods. Like Weber, Schumpeter believed that Capitalism gave an impetus to the rational ordering of things and thus gave rise to large organizations both in public and private domains. These organizations claimed to efficiently and speedily administer affairs in a regular, predictable and continuous manner (i.e. rationally). Like Marx, he also believed that Capitalism digs its own grave due to the internal contradictions within the system. However Schumpeter, did not accord central importance to the role of class and class conflict as shall become evident in the way he describes Socialism. Schumpeter was "a reluctant socialist". He believed that **Socialism** was just a prediction in the trends observed in the series of capitalist breakdown, not an ethical good in itself. He believed that a socialist state was nothing but a centrally planned organization that could efficiently manage the economic affairs within its territories. It was thus a technical solution.

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Democracy, for Schumpeter was “a political method” i.e. an institutional arrangement to arrive at political decisions by giving certain individuals (elected representatives) the right to decide on all matters of legislative and administrative importance by the voters. It was thus a proceduralist understanding of democracy and not a form of democracy that was supposed to guarantee substantive equality, participation and scope for individual development. It was an electoral mechanism to arrive at a supposedly legitimate government. Like bureaucratization it was also a process of rationalization that could cater to the diverse needs and values of the populace in the modern times which the deliberative and classical models failed to do.

Interconnection between the terms:

Schumpeter, like Weber, believed that the nature of administration should not be confused with problems concerning control of state apparatus. Thus nature of bureaucracy should not be conflated with the class-nature of the modern state, a mistake that the Marxists typically did. Organization and efficiency are demanded both in a capitalist and socialist state and since the different spheres can't be completely separated, rationalization seeps in democracy so as to secure to the citizens their demands and also treat them uniformly. Weber believed that democratization of masses was compatible with bureaucracy but democracy was not. Schumpeter, unlike him, believed that both democratization and democracy were compatible with bureaucracy. This was because he defined democracy too narrowly—rule by the representatives i.e. the elites. It was thus the rational management of affairs via organizations that made capitalism, socialism and democracy compatible with one another. In addition to this he had certain underlying assumptions about democracy and the role of an electorate that further legitimized his dim view of democracy.

Assumptions of the Democratic method:

Schumpeter believed that the inherently diverse needs of the large citizenry would automatically give rise to organizations that could efficiently manage their increased qualitative and quantitative demands. These organizations, in the political arena, would be the political parties. They function as machines to garner victory over a competitive struggle for people's vote, no matter what their ideological orientations or ideal principles are. The parties train their candidates to become top-notch leaders—one who can take decisions in times of crisis and give firm directions in large political organizations.

Schumpeter believed (wrongly, I suppose) that people, whether educated or uneducated, are ignorant and lack political judgment. This is so because there is distance between the individual's life and the issues concerning the national and international affairs (again a wrong assumption as matters discussed in politics—health, education, etc are very much connected to the individuals). This remoteness makes the individual disinterested in political matters and consequently makes him/her lack a sense of responsibility and remain ignorant. Moreover Schumpeter believed that there does not exist any such thing as “popular will” because all such will can be manufactured. The masses can be disillusioned into having certain false beliefs. He gives the example of advertising from the

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economic world as an analogue to prove that similar techniques of repetition and marketing can be used by the politicians into falsely duping the masses that certain interests are their ‘real’ interests when it is actually for the personal gains of the politicians. Thus according to him Democracy is “rule of the politician” and not rule of the people.

He further assumes that in order to prevent this inefficient administration, five conditions need to be fulfilled. One of which is democratic self-control which means that the electorate should play no other role than during elections (no petitioning or protesting is thus legitimate) to influence the politicians who in turn are expected to rule by the law. The other conditions- politicians with high caliber, trained bureaucracy, broad consensus over national policy and a culture of toleration are also to be ensured. Schumpeter thus assumes that if these five conditions are fulfilled, democracy is assured.

It can thus be concluded that it was the instrumental and shallow use of these terms, disregarding their substantive basis, which made it possible for Schumpeter to say that bureaucracy, capitalism, socialism and democracy were all compatible with one another. A belief in the inadequacy of the “classical heritage”, absence of human agency, ignorance of masses, necessity of rationalization of politics to suit the modern times, importance of a trained politician and an assisting trained bureaucracy, exaggerated propensity of non-democratic forums to influence democratic arenas, etc culminated eventually to give his model of democracy the anti-liberal and anti-democratic form that it tried to hide under the garb of being realistic.

References

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