

Planning, Democracy and Collective Freedom

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Abstract: If we defend planned economies not only on the basis of efficiency but also on the basis of freedom, we have to be able to address authoritarian tendencies of planned economies on the one hand and argue against liberals for the value of collective freedom in planned economies on the other. First, I trace the problematic theorization of the relationship between collective and individual freedom in the historical debates of liberalism and real socialism. Then I examine whether the republican concept of freedom as non-domination can avoid the pitfalls of negative and positive freedom. Subsequently I explore collective freedom through collective action theory, arguing for its inherent value and its potential existence independent of individual freedom. Genuine collective freedom relies on voluntary individual contributions and collective decisions that reflect individual will. Finally I argue that while democracy can help balance collective and individual freedoms, it cannot fully resolve the inherent tension. Alternative conflict resolution strategies may prove more effective. Ultimately, planned economies offer a unique form of collective freedom, though potentially at the expense of individual freedom. Minimizing this tension remains a key challenge.

Keywords: planned economy, freedom, collective freedom, economic democracy, republicanism, liberalism

JEL Classification: B00, B51, D63, J54, P21

INTRODUCTION

A planned economy is often portrayed as a totalitarian dystopia in which people are deprived of all freedoms. This image is still used even when the focus is explicitly on democratic economic planning rather than an authoritarian, Stalinist, centrally planned economy.¹ This view of a

¹ Barbara Wootton (1945), for example, shows that even in a centrally planned (democratic) economy, many freedoms would not have to be restricted.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I would like to thank the participants of the philosophy colloquium Passau and the Politically Engaged Philosophy group Berlin for discussing preliminary versions of this paper with me and I am also grateful for the very helpful comments of the reviewers which improved the paper considerably.

planned economy is shaped by the experience of real socialism. But it would be a mistake to associate a planned economy only with great lack of freedom, which could at best be justified by other goals such as efficiency, growth, or welfare.² Pałka (2020), for example, argues that a planned economy has always been criticized as inefficient and unfree. Since a digital planned economy could be more efficient than a market economy today, people might be inclined to accept a planned economy and thus a significant loss of freedom. Even proponents of the (digital) planned economy often defend it only in terms of its greater efficiency (Mozorov 2023). Instead, a planned economy can and should be defended in terms of freedom.³ When defending a planned economy in terms of freedom, it is not enough to stop at a purely individualistic concept of freedom. It is also necessary to argue that a collective freedom to shape society and the economy collectively and consciously can be realized through a planned economy.

The collective freedom of planning can conflict with individual freedom. Already the freedom of corporations (in capitalism as in socialism) is in tension with the individual freedom of employees, just as the collective freedom of society wide economic planning is in tension with the individual freedoms of companies, consumers, and workers. The central question is how this collective freedom (beyond an authoritarian centralized economy) and individual freedom (beyond individual anarchism) can be optimally developed together. It would be illusory to believe that the tension between individual and collective freedom could be fundamentally resolved by eliminating the class antagonism. Centralization and decentralization are at the heart of the conflict between collective and individual freedom. Kuch (2024) uses the term ‘centralization dilemma’ to describe the problem, that there are normative reasons for centralization and normative reasons against it. Interestingly he does not mention collective freedom as a reason for centralization and thus misses a crucial

² This also raises the question of whether these goals are worth striving for at all. For example, better working conditions are sometimes preferable to efficiency, growth is no longer a sensible goal in the context of ecological crises and prosperity can also be reduced in favor of lower consumption and more leisure time.

³ Van Parijs (1995) compares the gain in freedom under capitalism and socialism mainly on the basis of efficiency, because he makes the gain in freedom entirely dependent on the positive freedom that would accompany an unconditional basic income. More efficient economic systems could provide a higher basic income and thus enable greater freedom. Collective freedom due to social ownership of the means of production only plays a role insofar as it facilitates redistribution.

point. But he is right to stress that centralization has a tendency towards authoritarianism that needs to be addressed.

In the first section of this paper, I trace the problematic theorization of the relationship between collective and individual freedom in the historical debates of liberalism and real socialism. While negative freedom is unsuitable for appreciating the collective freedom of a planned economy, positive freedom has two problems: first, the concept is too vague to adequately understand collective freedom, and second, it is open to authoritarian tendencies. In the second section I examine whether the republican concept of freedom as non-domination can avoid the pitfalls of negative and positive freedom. While socialist republicans in particular offer valuable insights, they ultimately fail to solve the two problems that have arisen in the context of positive freedom. In the third section I will therefore use theories of collective action to give an account of collective freedom, that can show that: (i) there is a valuable and irreducible form of collective freedom, (ii) this collective freedom can exist independently from individual freedom, (iii) non-instrumentally valuable collective freedom requires free acts of contribution and collective decisions that are expressions of individual will. In section four I will argue that democracy is not suited for realizing collective freedom in this way and to reconcile individual and collective freedom. Instead, democracy can only mitigate the tension between collective and individual freedom and conflict avoidance strategies may be preferable to democratic decision making. In conclusion, a planned economy can be defended as realizing (collective) freedom, but this freedom comes at a price, which we can try to reduce by mitigating the tension between collective and individual freedom.

FREEDOM IN LIBERALISM AND REAL SOCIALISM

Normative background assumptions usually play an important role in the definition of freedom or liberty. The debate about collective freedom is also normatively charged. Historically it has been motivated by democratic values. Economic democracy has been seen, not only but especially by neoliberals, as a “totalitarian democracy” (Carr 1947, Talmon 1952) or as a form of positive freedom that involves extensive state intervention into negative liberty. These criticisms might be ideologically motivated, but they are at least justified in the sense that real socialism was authoritarian and—to some extent—justified its authoritarian character with reference to positive and collective freedom.

The conflict between collective and individual freedom is a central topic in political philosophy. Often it is debated as a tension between state intervention, the rule of law, or democracy on the one hand and individual freedom from interference, markets, and private property on the other. In classical liberalism the tension was resolved in favor of individual freedom, private property and markets without collective freedom playing a major role.

Rousseau tried to reconcile collective and individual freedom by arguing that individuals are free, when they participate in a collective decision making that is directed toward an (objective) general will (or common good). But this opens up the possibility of justifying interference in individual freedom in the name of the common good (Bertram 2012). Kant's solution was more substantial: if the laws are morally justified and rational individuals agree with them, then they do not limit autonomy but are an expression of it. Unfortunately, it is quite unrealistic that a democratic process will realize this form of autonomy.⁴ While Hegel—in opposition to Kant—did not believe that an ahistorical human rationality was sufficient for a moral consensus, he nevertheless tried to reconcile collective and individual freedom. Hegel has often been seen as arguing that “obedience to a code” is freedom (Podoksik and Elazar 2020, 12). These attempts to reconcile collective and individual freedom have also been influential for a socialist or communist discourse. Talmon (1952) argued that a ‘totalitarian democracy’ (where there is no conflict between the individual and the collective or where the individual can be coerced in the name of the collective) led from Rousseau to the Jacobins in the French Revolution, to communism. While this may not do justice to the history of leftist thought, it is pretty clear, that a defense of collective freedom in a planned economy cannot simply be based on the assumed unity of individual and collective freedom, of the general will and the individual will. Nor can this unity be achieved simply by ending the class conflict with the result of a working class that is united in its common interest. According to Carr (1945):

long before the adoption of Marxism as the official ideology, Russian thinkers had pondered with sympathy the Hegelian dictum that freedom consists in the knowledge and willing acceptance of the laws of necessity [...] true freedom can be conceived only as collective freedom for the largest class, i.e., the workers, who are free where no man

⁴ This motivated Habermas's more applicable neo-Kantian theory of deliberative democracy.

is compelled to work for another individual for the latter's profit. (Carr 1945, 13)

While these collectivist ideas of (economic) democracy are problematic, the idea of negative freedom does not fare much better.

One of the important tasks of the political scientist or the jurist, according to Hobbes and Bentham, was to offer an account of freedom that would undercut the democratic passion for excessive freedom from being governed and encourage moderation in its pursuit. (Podoksik and Elazar 2020, 4-5)

Democracy (and thus collective self-determination or collective freedom) was seen as a potential tyranny of the majority that endangered individual (negative) liberty by demands for state intervention and equality. Consequently, for neoliberals and neoclassical liberals, negative freedom was seen as the true form of freedom that had to be protected from collectivist right-winged fascist ideas of freedom on the one side and collectivist demands for economic democracy on the left (Podoksik and Elazar 2020, 9).

However, non-cooperative individual actions in markets lead to unintended and uncontrolled effects. Liberalism normally does not consider unintended consequences of actions as restrictions on freedom, even when these unintended market dynamics lead to poverty, unemployment, economic crisis or environmental degradation. Collective control (and thus collective freedom) of economic processes (a planned economy) just appears as a threat to negative freedom from state intervention and not as a relevant form of freedom itself.

In this context liberalism has tended to be reduced to a form of negative freedom, supposedly opposed to positive freedom. Berlin (1969) is the most prominent person who argued for this, but people like Dorothy Fosdick (1939) developed quite similar ideas many years earlier. Still, during this period, people inside and outside of liberalism saw a planned economy not in opposition to democracy and freedom, but as a way to strengthen them (Wootton 1945; Milani 2023, 616). Mannheim (1935) even coined the phrase 'planning for freedom'.

Many liberals adhered to the negative view, but some liberals, especially in new liberalism and social liberalism, saw positive freedom as essential. This positive freedom was not clearly defined. Is it individual self-realization, having the resources to do something, individual self-realization based on social background conditions, individual freedom through

participation in democratic processes, individual freedom through collective self-determination or collective self-determination? To avoid this conceptual unclarity, the term should be avoided or clearly and explicitly defined before it is used. In my view the most productive understanding is simply having the resources (internal or external) to do something.

When it comes to market relations, non-intended market effects can certainly limit positive freedom—in the sense of having the resources to do something—which is why demands for equality and state intervention in the market became relevant in New Liberalism (Hobhouse 1911, Dewey 1930) and Social Justice Liberalism (Rawls 1999, 194). But if this freedom is interpreted as individualistic in character, even a planned economy would only realize freedom indirectly by generating the prosperity that is necessary for positive freedom (as in Van Parijs 1995).

Some liberals who saw democracy as being central to freedom, were also interested in collective self-determination and collective freedom. But even when they discuss democracy, the aspect of collective freedom is not well theorized and lacks conceptual clarity. Moreover, if collective self-determination is loaded with ideas of a true objective common good, moral truth, or a homogeneous society, it runs the risk of becoming authoritarian and undermining individual freedom.

Macpherson (1962) with his Marxist-inspired ‘developmental liberalism’ was critical of a negative freedom liberalism and in favor of positive and collective freedom. He could be seen as one of the few ‘liberals’ who favored a planned economy. But usually only in an explicitly Marxist, non-liberal context was a planned economy defended as realizing collective freedom.

In the GDR freedom through planning was aggressively defended against a liberal understanding of freedom (Söder 1960; Säuerlich 1969). Three points were central here: first, the positive freedom that existed thanks to the prosperity made possible by the planned economy (consumption, education, job opportunities, social security) was emphasized. Second, it was claimed that workplace domination would be ended in a planned economy. Third, an essential aspect of the socialist idea of freedom was the possibility of consciously and systematically shaping economic processes.

The tension between a state-controlled economy and the freedom of decision-making at the workplace level was recognized (Säuerlich 1969, 563). This tension, it was claimed, was resolved by the grassroots democratic organization of the planning process. Since everyone would

participate fully and without coercion in the planning process and there would be complete freedom as to how the planning specifications would be implemented at company level, central planning would not conflict with individual freedom. This is also due to the fact that fundamental conflicts of interest have been eliminated by the abolition of class conflicts (which sounds like a ‘totalitarian democracy’): “In fact there is no contradiction between planning and freedom where the antagonistic classes have been overcome and the entire nation represents a moral-political unity”.⁵ (Söder 1960, 652) But at the same time the party's claim to leadership was repeatedly emphasized and democratic centralism was propagated as the realization of the grassroots democratic planning principle.

Social freedom is understood to mean that the working people, under the leadership of the working class and its Marxist-Leninist party, are in possession of economic and political power and use it to consciously and systematically shape their natural and social conditions of existence in the interests of the development of society as a whole and the personality of each individual. [...] In accordance with its significance for individual freedom, social freedom has primacy here.⁶ (Säuberlich 1969, 561-562)

It was mainly a small party elite that set the most important planning guidelines. The authoritarian principle of democratic centralism only allowed companies to make free decisions to a very limited extent. While the ideological description of real socialism sounds almost like a syndicalist free association with voluntary planning (see also Söder 1960, 653-655), the reality was much more authoritarian and unfree. Criticism of real socialist planning is therefore entirely justified and was also voiced by left-wing—especially anarchist—circles right from the start (Goldman 1925). How much and what form of organization and planning anarchist freedom could tolerate was repeatedly the subject of heated debate among anarchists (Rocker 1921). Workplace self-determination is central to anarchism and is intended to counteract the authoritarian tendencies of centralized planning. Plans should be developed decentral and generally without sanctions.⁷ Workplace self-determination ensures the

⁵ Translation by the author.

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⁷ If deviations from the plan are not sanctioned, this naturally increases freedom at the workplace, as they can adjust their production behavior if necessary without being punished. However, this can jeopardize the achievement of collective goals (Wootton 1945). This would also jeopardize collective freedom. Freedom from sanctions should therefore at least not jeopardize the ability to achieve important goals. In planned economies, sanctions should at least be a last resort (after arbitration procedures have failed), be

freedoms of smaller groups vis-à-vis society as a whole, but whether and to what extent the resulting decentralized planning can guarantee relevant collective freedoms is uncertain.

In summary we have seen that the limited notion of negative freedom is insufficient to address restrictions on individual freedom due to unintended effects (especially markets). Moreover, negative freedom is neutral or even hostile to democracy. Positive freedom can address negative effects of markets on individual resources to act, it can address necessary social conditions for freedom (some would call this social freedom) and (democratic) collective freedom. But three problems remain. First, the idea of collective positive freedom is often linked to an idea of the common good or moral truth with the potential of an authoritarian limitation of individual freedom in the name of collective or positive freedom. Leftist ideas of collective freedom and the idea of freedom in real socialism tended in this direction. Second, democracy is in liberal theories of positive freedom very rarely extended beyond workplace democracy and applied to the whole economic sphere (which would lead to a democratic planned economy). Instead, we find the idea of collective democratic control of the whole economy mainly in Marxism, real socialism or current models of a planned economy. Third, positive and collective freedom are not clear concepts. Without a clear concept of collective freedom, the tension between collective and individual freedom and authoritarian tendencies of centralism cannot be adequately addressed. Hindriks (2008, 165) even claims, that “given the dominance of liberalism in analytic political philosophy, it is perhaps not surprising that the freedom of collective agents has hardly been explored” and continues in a footnote (Hindriks 2008, 165n1) that also the relation of collective freedom to individual freedom is not analyzed.

So far, I have focused on positive and negative freedom, on Liberalism and on Marxist debates in real socialism. Republicanism argues to provide an alternative account of freedom: freedom as non-domination. Radical, socialist and labor republicans use this idea of freedom to argue for workplace democracy or even socialism. At the same time more civic or liberal accounts of republicanism are influential in the current debates. In the next section I will discuss whether republican ideas of freedom are suitable for understanding the collective freedom that comes with a planned

limited to the withdrawal of production factors, be as transparent as possible and be based on principles that are comparable to a legal system. Following Jewish law, Loick (2017) also considers legal systems to be possible that are not centrally based on sanctions and thus become more attractive for anarchist approaches.

economy and whether they can be used to analyze the conflict between individual and collective freedom.

REPUBLICANISM

In republicanism—as it has been increasingly advocated for several decades, drawing on ancient Roman traditions—freedom is understood as non-domination: If people are not dominated, then they are free. Like liberalism, republicanism is not a homogenous theoretical tradition and their views on economic democracy could not be further apart: Hayek is a republican (Irving 2020) but there are also socialist republicans (Muldoon 2022, O’Shea 2020).

For many republicans, an important distinction from the liberal idea of negative freedom is that freedom is conceived in dispositional terms. Not only actual interference in freedom can be a form of domination, but also the threat of interference. Pettit (1996) denies that republican freedom is just liberal or negative freedom, but in my view, it is mainly a dispositional understanding of negative freedom. Perhaps more interestingly, not all interference is seen as domination. Pettit (1997, 55) and Lovett (2010, 111–119) distinguish between a procedural and substantial understanding of arbitrary interference. In the procedural understanding, interference that is for example based on the rule of law, is non-arbitrary, non-dominating and thus does not restrict freedom. This has the counterintuitive consequence that interference based on law or bureaucracy, which extensively restricts what a person is allowed or able to do, does not restrict freedom. Also, what Max Weber would see as the essence of domination (stable orders of subordination in modern bureaucratic states) suddenly becomes non-domination. This view of freedom not only makes certain forms of republicanism—comparable to negative freedom liberalism—compatible with undemocratic rule, but also allows authoritarian state intervention to be potentially compatible with republican freedom. Substantial accounts of republican freedom are supposed to avoid these tendencies. For Pettit it is necessary that an interference tracks the interest of the affected in order to be non-arbitrary.

According to Pettit (1997, 52–53) and Lovett (2022, 34), domination in republicanism exists only if there is a threat of intentional restriction. Unintended market effects are therefore often not seen as domination and do not threaten republican freedom. What is restricted by unintended effects is not freedom that is relevant to political philosophy (Lovett 2018).

Interestingly Hayek already elaborated on this republican understanding of freedom a few decades ago using similar sources (Irving 2020). He limits republican freedom to protection against state domination ('impe-rium') and, unlike the newer republicans, is not interested in domination within private spheres of life and thus also not within the economy or at the workplace ('dominium'). These forms of workplace domination are particularly emphasized by labor republicanism, which consequently calls for workplace democracy and criticizes wage labor (Gourevitch 2014). Gourevitch also reflects Marx's idea of impersonal domination, the fact that workers are often not dependent on one capitalist but on many capitalists (or even the capitalist class). Because this form of domination is based on social structures, Gourevitch uses the term 'structural domination' (I will give an alternative definition of the term in the next section).

Markets and planned economies are in liberal republicanism and labor republicanism at most discussed as causes of personal domination and not themselves as a form of domination that restricts freedom. This freedom and domination theory of republicanism—and this is true of Pettit and Lovett as well as Hayek—cannot appreciate the freedoms that would be made possible by a planned economy simply because of their concepts. Lovett (2018), for example, cannot recognize the collective possibilities of a planned economy to shape society as freedom and he also rejects the idea that positive freedoms are freedoms at all:

Imagine a society in which extensive social planning has more or less eliminated resourcing failures, but only by subjecting everyone to the absolutely unfettered power of a caretaker state. [...] Would such a society be desirable? That can be debated. But it would not be a society characterized by extensive freedom. When we exchange non-domination for better resourcing we are not exchanging like for like, but rather one good for another, competing good. To subsume both under the heading of ›freedom‹ merely obscures the difficult problem of balancing their respective values. (Lovett 2018, 17)

This leads to a depoliticization of areas that are currently not organized cooperatively and are determined by unintended effects of actions. The debates about planned economy can therefore also be understood as a politicization of these areas. Market dynamics or climate change, for example, are then no longer forces that we are simply at the mercy of, but processes that could be collectively controlled.

Not surprisingly, Devine (1988), a proponent of a planned economy approach, takes a different view:

This planning enables the maximization of positive freedom, by contrast with the wasteful and destructive automaticity of the unregulated market in which individuals and communities are buffeted by impersonal and coercive market forces beyond their control, or anyone else's. (Devine 1988, 13)

Recently some theorists have been trying to revitalize a socialist republicanism (Muldoon 2022, O'Shea 2020) that takes criticism of civic or liberal republicanism into account. Mainly, however, only Gourevitch's account is restated. Still, Muldoon (2022, 56) criticizes that Gourevitch has "worked within the negative liberty tradition". Instead, the positive freedom to participate in democratic processes needs to be emphasized. "Third, a theory of freedom as collective autonomy should include reference to the importance of notions of self-determination and active participation in government" (Muldoon 2022, 53). While I agree with this general claim, I disagree with Muldoon's interpretation of democratic decision-making as freedom (I will return to this shortly). He is also not saying much about a planned economy in general and even less about how a (democratic) planned economy can realize collective freedom by overcoming the unfreedom caused by uncoordinated market effects. Mainly Muldoon (2022, 54) argues—in line with Gourevitch—that it is not a master forcing people into wage labor but capitalist structures. While this is important, it is still closely tied to intentionality and interpersonal domination relations. In my discussion of structural domination in the next section, I will say more about it.

Muldoon (2022) emphasizes the importance of participation in collective decision making for freedom but because he does not have a detailed account of collective freedom (or in his words 'collective autonomy') the difference with liberal positions is exhausted by criticizing the focus on negative liberty and the conflict between collective and individual freedom cannot be adequately described.

This lack of conceptual resources is particularly relevant, when Muldoon writes explicitly about collective decision making. Collective decisions are supposed to be in the "common interest" (Muldoon 2022, 58), "express the collective will of the people" (Muldoon 2022, 58) or be "in the interest of the majority of workers" (Muldoon 2022, 59). These are precisely the problematic elements we have already identified in concepts of positive and collective freedom. Muldoon (2022, 57) sees the problems of positive freedom and the sometimes assumed unity of the group or rationality assumptions. But he himself makes these assumptions. It is

not enough to say that 'collective autonomy' does not 'need' to make these assumptions. Nor is his solution satisfying:

Freedom understood as collective autonomy does not require fundamental agreement on a singular conception of the good life for citizens to participate in processes of self-government. It would be sufficient for citizens to understand themselves as free and equal citizens committed to an ongoing process of self-governance [...]. (Muldoon (2022, 57).

This is very reminiscent of Rousseau's understanding of freedom. But why should it be sufficient to be free, if people just understand themselves as being free or because they participate in a democratic process of collective decision-making? This is limited notion of freedom in the context of collective decision-making and it is similar to the liberal version of individual political freedom. It allows to legitimize weak forms of democracy as realizing freedom, even for small minorities who have no impact on the democratic decision making. In a weak democracy which is based on majority decisions, people are not very free just because they participate in the democratic process. They cannot realize their individual freedom in the form of collective actions and decisions if their will is not reflected in the collective decisions.

Muldoon is aware of the problem that mere participation in any democratic process does not guarantee collective autonomy, but he is more concerned with minorities (such as elites) controlling the democratic process (Muldoon 2022, 59) than with individual freedom in the democratic process. It is therefore not surprising that he advocates the principle of subsidiarity mainly "to break up the centralised bureaucratic power of the state and minimise the potential for state apparatuses to dominate citizens" (Muldoon 2022, 61) and not to mitigate general problems of collective decision making. This is still in the spirit of avoiding domination as a potential interference in negative freedom and not avoiding the problems of collective freedom for individual freedom when it comes to collective decision making.

So far, we have already seen, that liberal theories are either against or not interested in collective (economic) freedom or they do not sufficiently theorize collective freedom and its conflict with individual freedom. Similar problems arise in republicanism. Liberal or civic focuses on individual freedom and explicitly denies that uncontrolled effects of markets limit freedom. Socialist republicans incorporate positive freedom, collective self-determination, and democracy into their theory of freedom. But as

we can see in Muldoon (2022) because collective freedom is neither defined nor sufficiently theorized, the problems of collectivist tendencies in accounts of positive freedom and thus the danger of ‘totalitarian democracy’ remain and the conflict with individual freedom cannot be adequately addressed and mitigated. Therefore, in the next section, I will give an account of collective freedom that is capable of recognizing collective freedom as valuable while at the same time allowing to analyze the tensions with individual freedom.

COLLECTIVE FREEDOM

The collective freedom created by a planned economy, is a solution to the unfreedom that comes with the lack of control over the unintended effects of markets. In the Marxist tradition, uncontrolled social processes can be referred to as ‘structural domination’. In republicanism, ‘structural domination’ is instead used simply in the sense of structural causes for personal (intentional) domination (Pettit 2012, 63). Structural domination in the sense of domination without masters does not exist for most theorists of republicanism (Vrousalis 2021). Or as the socialist republican Cicerchia (2022, 6) puts it: “Ultimately, the problem with holding structures responsible for domination is that we risk losing the distinction between accident and intention that makes domination a serious moral harm”.⁸ Muldoon (2022, 53) criticizes Pettit for restricting domination to inter-agential relations. But following Gourevitch’s understanding of structural domination he argues that a connection to intentionality is maintained, because social structures are intentionally created or influenced. Furthermore, he also links structural domination mainly to inter-agential domination relations at the workplace. But Pettit (2012, 63) would agree: structures can be a serious problem because they make people vulnerable to inter-agential domination relations. This is what he would also call ‘structural domination’. Muldoon (2022) misses the crucial point—similar to many other republicans (Artiga 2012, Krause 2013, Hasan 2021) who criticize the lack of attention to structures—that structural domination based unfreedom in capitalism does not depend on intentionally controlled (structural) causes or inter-agential relations of domination. Hayward (2011) is one of the few republicans who sees this point to some extent.

⁸ Pettit and Lovett (2018, 113) use the term ‘vitiating’ for describing structural hindrances. But ‘vitiating’ has exactly the problem that it does not distinguish between changeable social arrangements and unchangeable ‘natural’ conditions (Koch 2024).

Structural domination (at least in the Marxist context) describes not ‘accidents’ but an unnecessary lack of collective control over social processes (Koch 2024). Lovett (2022, 49) prefers instead to use the term ‘oppression’ for this phenomenon. Postone (1993), Rahman (2017) and Koch (2024) explicitly use the term ‘structural domination’ for the uncontrolled processes of capitalism. The same phenomenon is often referred to in other ways, such as fetishism (Kurz 1993), anonymous domination (Elbe, Ellmers, and Eufinger 2012), reification (Lukasz [1923] 1968, Sensatt 1996), impersonal domination or silent coercion (Mau 2021).⁹

It is undisputed that in capitalism there are always different gradations of the extent to which processes are controlled and intentionally directed and the extent to which they are the unplanned result of non-cooperative behavior. In monopoly capitalism, individual factions ultimately have considerable influence on the market. Phillips and Rozworski, (2019), for example, point out that large companies such as Walmart plan extensively and Zuboff (2019) even suggests that large technology companies want to avoid the unpredictability of the market by using their power to influence our needs in such a way so that they can plan with them. And the state also often has considerable influence on economic events, for example in the form of planned investments. In these cases, liberals and civic republicans would rightly see personal domination and unfreedom in the imperfect market. But while this unfreedom might theoretically be possible to fix through a perfect market, the unfreedom inherent in markets themselves—structural domination—would remain. Only collective freedom is capable of overcoming this structural domination.

Collective freedom can be understood in two main ways: a) a non-reductive understanding in which the group as such is free regardless of whether the group members are free (Hindricks 2008) and b) a reductive understanding, in which the group is free only insofar as the members are free (Kramer 2003, 239). Both understandings have some plausibility and merit and may simply reflect different aspects of collective freedom. The second case, the reductive understanding, would not add much value to individual freedom, if it were only about the aggregation of individual freedom. Instead, the reductive understanding should be understood as involving some form of collectivity beyond pure aggregation as in the case

⁹ Outside of Marxist debates, there are also broader terms that describe the lack of responsibility or control over socially imposed restrictions as structural injustice (Young 2010) or structural oppression (Haslanger 2004).

of collective will formation or collective action. Quite prominent is Cohen's (1983, 16) understanding of collective unfreedom: "a group suffers collective unfreedom with respect to a type of action A if and only if performance of A by all members of the group is impossible." But this is just a case of aggregated individual freedom (every single person can or cannot do A) and does not involve a genuine form of collective freedom in the sense I will now specify.

First, I will focus on the irreducible collective character of collective action that is relevant to both versions of collective freedom. I can't exercise many freedoms on my own. I cannot perform an opera alone, build pyramids alone, play soccer alone, build microchips alone, send a letter alone, lift very heavy stones alone or get married alone. For all these things, I am dependent to varying degrees on other people behaving in certain ways or even actively doing things together with me.¹⁰ Sometimes the actions of others are simply reliable background conditions for my actions, such as when sending a letter, sometimes the actions of others have to be coordinated¹¹ with me such as when I lift a heavy stone together with others.¹² These social background conditions are part of what some people call 'social freedom' (Honneth 2014). Without this social context I am not free to do many things. If I identify with the social background conditions and thus with my action opportunities, I enjoy social freedom. But this freedom is still individual freedom and very different from collective freedom. It is also problematic to assume that I become free, if I only want the opportunities that I actually have. Already Bramhall (1999, 91) criticized Hobbes for understanding freedom just as non-frustration and not as non-interference (Pettit 2011, 696). But one thing that is specific to collective freedom is that the group creates a collective ability to act that might not be available at the individual level. This collective ability to act is irreducibly collective if this action cannot be done without the group. Being irreducibly collective does not already imply that the collective freedom that is involved cannot be reduced (Kramer 2003, 239).

I would have maximum freedom if everyone else gave me maximum support in my intentions and actions. There must be a willingness of everyone to do their part in the collective action (Hindricks 2008, 172) for

¹⁰ This is often called 'power-with' (Pansardi and Bindi 2021).

¹¹ Morriss (2002, 110) emphasizes that for a group to have the power to do something it must be able to coordinate the contributions of the members.

¹² This is often debated as a form of collective action that involves some form of collective intentionality (Roth 2017). It is productive but rarely done to have a look on collective freedom from the perspective of collective action (Hindricks 2008).

me to be individually free to perform the collective action. This would only not restrict the freedom of others if we all wanted the same thing. If the others are forced to cooperate with me, then they are not individually free in performing the collective action. If we all want to lift the same stone in the same way at the same time, then all of our freedom would be equally realized. But this is rarely the case.

Instead of looking at irreducibly collective actions from a perspective of individual freedom, we can see them as an irreducible form of collective freedom. Hindricks (2008, 166) argues that freedom is often seen as ableness. A collective agent is thus free to do H if it is able to do H. If the group would try to do H and then would be successful in doing H, it is free to do H (Hindricks 2008, 168). For the collective agent to try to do H every member of the group would have to be willing to do their part (Hindricks 2008, 173). At this point it is of course important what it means to be willing to do their part. Someone can be willing to do their part because they are forced to do their part. This means that collective freedom can exist independently of individual freedom.

This ability to do H is important in the context of a planned economy. In capitalism the ability to consciously shape the economy (in this case the collective action H) does not exist. Even if everyone would be willing to do their part there is no conscious coordination principle (just the market) and so they cannot perform H.¹³ But as already mentioned, this collective ability to do H can also be realized if everyone is forced to do their part. The collective ability to do H can thus be realized in a domination structure where none of the people who do their part are free to do their part. An individual or a small group can force the entire group to act collectively in a certain way. An authoritarian centralized economy tends in this direction. Then we would have to say that an authoritarian centralized economy realizes collective freedom even if it does not realize individual freedom, or as Mommsen (1974, 138) characterizes a position of Weber: “as much freedom as possible through as much domination as possible”.

This collective freedom can be quite important. Effective organization of groups (the state, cooperations, the military, political parties etc.) reduces the cost of coordination and extends this form of collective freedom (Morris 2002, 110). Currently there are debates about whether the ecological conversion of the economy might be a problem that requires such an authoritarian collective ability to act (Aydurmuş 2016). However,

¹³ This inability is in my terminology a form of structural domination.

it is not the case that this collective ability to act requires any form of individual unfreedom or domination structure. It just means that the coordination becomes more complicated when it is based on individual freedom.

Another aspect of collective freedom is not the collective ability aspect but the collective decision making. As in the individual case collective freedom can be seen as involving a free 'will' that makes decisions. The argument that a group can have a free will that is irreducible to its members is less obvious than in the collective ability case. List and Pettit (2011) argue that collectives can have their own beliefs and intentions and thus also have their own freedom as a collective. This is mainly based on how we aggregate individual positions in such a way that we get a rational collective outcome. Their account of freedom is very weak. If we accept it, we run into similar problems as in the case of collective abilities: we can get collective freedom without individual freedom. But normally the case is less complicated and collective decisions are simply made by a powerful member or powerful subgroup of the group, by some form of negotiation, deliberation or democratic (majority) decision making. Still, one could argue that even in these cases the collectively made decision is sufficient for a free collective will, independent of the individual free will. But this would mean that it would be sufficient for collective free will even if an authoritarian leader makes decisions for the group. Instead, it is more plausible that the collective decisions are free only insofar as they reflect individual freedom.¹⁴ But this can be interpreted in different ways. A decision can be free if everyone can freely participate in the decision making (this is for example individual political freedom) or it can be free if the collective decisions reflects the individual will of the group members. This would be the case if everyone freely agrees with the collectively made decision. This will rarely be the case. Attempts to fundamentally solve this tend to be problematic. The objective common good, moral truth (Kant), ethical life (Hegel) or the end of conflicts due to the end of the class antagonism (certain forms of Marxism and real socialism) all have the potential to take an authoritarian turn. Still, they all provide relevant regulative ideals for mitigating conflicts in collective decision making. Deliberation processes in democracies for example do not

¹⁴ It could also be seen as relevant whether the decisions making process of the group is free (negative freedom) insofar as there is no external interference in this collective decision making.

fundamentally resolve conflicts but can at least have a tendency to sometimes converge on the basis of these regulative ideas.

I have argued that collective freedom in the form of collective abilities can exist independently of individual freedom. Collective free will can plausibly only exist if it is based on individual free will. Normatively the assumption of an independent collective freedom may lead to problematic territory because collective freedom might be used as a justification for restricting individual freedom. The fear that a planned economy leads to a loss of individual freedom would then be justified. But if we assume that collective freedom has some value—and I think it does—then we have to see how we can reconcile collective freedom with individual freedom in a planned economy.

If one of the advantages of a planned economy is that it realizes collective freedom while it does not automatically realize individual freedom, then it is unclear what we gain from a planned economy. It is implausible to assume that things are normatively valuable that are not valuable to individual conscious beings. So, if collective freedom is supposed to be valuable, it must be valuable to individuals. If collective freedom is valuable and exists without individual freedom, then collective freedom cannot be valuable in itself. So, what is the value of collective freedom to individuals then?

Collective freedom can have instrumental value to individuals. Collective freedom allows groups to do things they could not otherwise do. Collective economic freedom allows us to consciously shape the economy. This might allow us to prevent economic crises, increase efficiency, achieve an ecological transition of the economy and much more (Hebenton and O'Neill 2024). Even if these things should not directly increase individual freedom, they may be very valuable to individuals. Collective freedom can be defended along these lines. But the problem is then that this collective freedom can be realized in an authoritarian sense. This would—in principle—allow authoritarian real socialist planned economies to be defended because they provide some form of collective economic freedom.¹⁵ As Wootton (1945) argues against Hayek, a planned economy need not to be authoritarian and restrict individual freedom. Nor does it have to restrict political, public, or cultural freedom. It is more

¹⁵ Of course collective freedom is often also used as justification outside of a planned economy. For example the self-determination of states is often defended as a form of collective freedom, without individual freedom necessarily being given any significant weight here. This underlines the potential problematic reference to collective freedom if it not backed up by a strong account of individual freedom.

complicated with individual economic freedom, but she shows for example that the free choice of occupation can be better realized in a planned economy and that the authority of the consumer might even be more limited in market economies. The degree of workplace democracy is at least for Hahnel (2021) and Kuch (2023) crucial. While Hahnel believes that it can be guaranteed in a decentralized planned economy, Kuch (2024) is skeptical and therefore favors market socialism.

But collective freedom can also have a value for individual freedom. Collective freedom might be possible without individual freedom, but certain forms of individual freedom (as in the case of irreducibly collective action) depend on collective freedom and collective freedom can be realized in accordance with individual freedom. In this way collective freedom can enable us to realize our individual freedom. Consciously shaping society and specifically shaping the economy can take the form of the realization of individual freedom. In this sense collective freedom is directly valuable for individual freedom. If we want to defend planned economy not only based on freedom as a value, we must keep this version of collective freedom in mind. At least Wootton (1945, 125) has something similar in mind, when she argues that certain value-based goals (such as general unemployment) cannot be achieved individually at the market but only in a process of collective self-determination.

Individualistic accounts often fail to capture the importance of collective action and the ways in which individual freedoms can be enhanced through collective agency. On the other hand, non-reductionist accounts, in which the collective's freedom is independent of or even opposed to individual freedom, risk justifying authoritarian or oppressive systems. It is therefore essential to defend a version of collective freedom that is not in conflict with individual freedom but rather is the form in which individual freedom is realized.

As we have already seen, collective freedom does not require individual freedom. Authoritarian versions of collective freedom are possible, in which only a small group makes decisions and individual contributions to the collective action are not free. This authoritarian collective ability to act only extends the freedom of the dominating agents but not that of the other participating individuals who are dominated.

But how is collective freedom exactly realized by individual freedom and not against it? The obvious case has already been mentioned: when all individuals have exactly the same goal (the collective will thus corresponds to the individual will) and their acts of contribution are free (the

intended collective action consists of free individual acts of contribution). In reality, this ideal is realized only gradually, if at all.

In addition to participation in the collective decision-making process there is the question of how we organize the individual contributions to the collective action. In the authoritarian case individual contributions are organized by orders. This is for example the case in a bureaucratic state or in private corporations. Free contributions can be organized in various ways. People can for example agree to carry out a task as part of the (free) collective decision making. Instead, the tasks can also be defined and then it is hoped that there will be people who are willing to fulfill them. Tasks can be also be defined by their output and people are free in how to fulfill the task. If these things do not work incentives come into play. Typically, they take the form of prices and wages, but they can also consist in making the task easier or in symbolic gratifications. Most convincing is the idea—used to some extent in most models of planned economy—that there has to be an interplay between collective decision making and acts of contribution. If we cannot find people who freely want to carry out the task, we have to go back to collective decision making and have to find a collective decision that includes only those tasks that we find people who are willing to carry them out. Ideally this would lead to a collective decision that is perfectly consistent with individual free will and collective actions that are perfectly consistent with individual free contributions. In reality of course this will be very unlikely. Instead, the decision and the contributions will usually be the result of some compromise. This compromise will have to strike a balance between important collective freedoms and the realization of individual freedoms to a high degree. Typically, problems can occur, that no one wants to give up their own advantage for a collective goal.¹⁶

An interesting variation of this recursive interplay between collective decision making and free contribution actions can be found in the Participatory Economy (Parecon) model (Albert 2004). The interplay is organized by a kind of market simulation instead of a deliberative process. People propose what they want to contribute and what they want to consume. If there is a mismatch between contributions and consumption decisions, prices are modified to change contributions and consumption decisions. This is repeated until an equilibrium is reached. But this quasi-market mediated decision-making reduces collective freedom (there is no

¹⁶ Famous is the free rider problem or in the context of commons is the tragedy of the commons but also more general problems can occur in bargaining situations.

conscious and collectively made decision) and it is also doubtful whether contribution and consumption decisions are really free if they are regulated by prices. Since collective and individual freedom are only a matter of degrees anyways, it is still debatable whether this model is sufficiently attractive for realizing collective and individual freedom.

The logic of emotional care work¹⁷ in particular tends not to be easily organizable in a meaningful way within the framework of collective freedom¹⁸ (Sorg 2024). It also seems unattractive if, within the framework of collective freedom, individual consumption would have to be justified to others in deliberative procedures. Quantitative procedures have a certain appeal here.

Finally, I would like to point out that there is, in my view, a productive link to further research: the different planned economic models that exist can and should be examined to determine the extent to which they can realize collective freedom. Of course, it is also important to examine the consequences for individual freedoms and efficiency aspects at the same time. This would allow us to evaluate the planned economic models in terms of the benefits of realizing collective freedom and the costs involved. However, I believe that it is not optimal to compare entire planned economic models. Instead, it makes more sense to compare individual organizational procedures that can be used in different models.

DEMOCRACY

The main strategy for reconciling collective and individual freedom is democracy. Economic democracy and a planned economy are not necessarily connected. If, for example, economic democracy is limited exclusively to the workplace, it can also be realized completely without inter-company planning. The painful experience of real socialism, on the other hand, has shown that a planned economy does not have to go hand in hand with any form of serious economic democracy.

Democracy can serve very different purposes inside and outside the planned economy. Insofar as I will be talking about the importance of democracy for a planned economy, I would like to limit myself to the relevance of democracy for freedom and ignore other aspects.

¹⁷ Feminist theories in particular criticize independence as a masculinist ideal of autonomy. As a result, care relationships are also understood as a form of lack of freedom and not as the realization of freedom. At the same time, care relationships can also be individualistically organized or socialized (Weiß 1922, 82; Müller 2021; O'Brien 2023).

¹⁸ Unless you apply the idea of collective freedom to small groups, this would at least not imply a planned economy of emotional care work.

It is obvious that collective freedom does not necessarily realize individual freedom if a planned economy is enforced in an authoritarian, centralized manner by a small elite. This authoritarian planned economy makes it possible to overcome structural domination (and thus creates collective agency) but only through personal domination (and thus lack of individual freedom). This is a problem that is supposed to be solved by democracy.

It is important to note that participation in a democratic process (especially if it consists only in voting) is by no means sufficient to realize individual freedom in collective economic decision-making or collective economic actions. It is only an individual political freedom to be able to participate in a democratic process, but it does not mean that therefore the collective actions or decisions need to reflect the opinions of everyone who participates in the process nor does it mean that the individual contributions to the collective economic actions need to be free.

The fundamental problem with democratic decisions is that they are normally not consensual—after all, the abolition of class differences (in the sense of control over the means of production) is not the end of conflicts of interest, value differences or epistemic differences and thus not the end of politics (Devine 1988, 210; Hahnel 2021, 328). Even a deliberation process will not achieve a consensus on some moral truth or the common good. Majority decisions are therefore normally necessary. When voting on decisions, it is difficult to involve people according to the extent to which they are affected by decisions. This may ultimately require a softening of the principle that each person has only one vote. Hahnel (2021, 103), for example, does not believe that the number of votes or seats could be determined in any other way than quite arbitrarily. At the same time, however, there are often ways in federal structures to give certain (often regional) groupings a special right of co-determination. Still, democracy has limits in reconciling collective and individual freedoms. A consensus-oriented democracy (Lijphart 1999) or a concordance democracy (Lehmbruch 1968) will be more suitable for this than a simple majority democracy, because they try to take into account as broad a range of opinions as possible so that collective decisions reflect these different opinions. Also, Muldoon (2022) gives some suggestions on how democracy can be enriched by applying ideas of a socialist republicanism.

Still, one of the important things to learn from analyzing collective freedom is that collective and individual freedom will be in tension with each other and that this tension will almost impossible to resolve

fundamentally without problematic reference to the objective common good, general will, moral truth or the end of (class) conflicts. A democratic planned economy has to be transparent about this unresolvable conflict and about its mitigation strategies.

In simple majority decisions, for example, the freedom of the minority is restricted by the tyranny of the majority. It is therefore not surprising that some liberal theories also consider the freedom from democratic decisions to be important. Of course, people should be able to decide freely about certain spheres of life without this freedom being taken away from them through democratic decisions without necessity.

But democratic decision making is not the only strategy available to deal with the restrictive nature of collective decision making. Another option is to organize things in such a way that conflicts do not arise or at least arise in a less problematic way. Ending the class antagonism is one example of reducing conflicts.¹⁹ But this will only end some very specific problems. More concrete conflict avoidance strategies are also possible. Conventions for coordination (such as traffic regulations), physical separation (such as remote work or city areas for people with different lifestyle preferences), organizational separation (such as splitting one company into two separate companies), technologically mediated interaction that can reduce the need for negotiation or architecture and urban planning can all help to avoid conflicts. Decentralization or subsidiarity are perhaps the most important form of conflict avoidance. But subsidiarity will only avoid conflicts if they can be resolved by having different organizational principles in different areas (regional or organizational). Otherwise, subsidiarity will at least reduce the group size in which the conflict has to be resolved.

Democratic majority decisions are kind of the last option for dealing with conflicts when it has failed to avoid conflicts in other ways. Democratic decision making should therefore not necessarily be the first choice in planned economies if conflict avoidance is possible. Since decisions must also be made about conflict avoidance strategies, democratic procedures may nevertheless have to be reintroduced on a meta-level.

Of course, one solution strategy is also to forego collective freedoms that have no added value for the freedom of those involved. For example, one can also decide to solve certain issues simply through markets or market-like principles without establishing collective freedoms. If one is

¹⁹ The arsenal of real socialism also includes indoctrination to reduce conflicts of interest. But it could be argued that also ideology in capitalism reduces conflicts of interest.

certain that a collective capacity to act is not needed, it is possible to dispense not only with the exercise of freedom but also with the capacity to act itself. Again, eliminating conflicts in this way does not completely avoid democratic decision making because on a meta-level it has to be decided not to make democratic decisions in certain areas.

CONCLUSION

If we defend planned economies not only on the basis of efficiency but also on the basis of freedom, we have to be able to address authoritarian tendencies of planned economies on the one hand and argue against liberals for the value of collective freedom in planned economies on the other. The collective ability to act is a form of collective freedom. In a planned economy it is realized as the ability to consciously shape the economy. It can be realized independently of individual freedom and thus also by an authoritarian regime. This ability has instrumental value, but it can also be valuable as freedom, if it extends individual freedom. Individual freedom is extended, if acts of contribution are free and collective decision are an expression of individual free will. Unfortunately, collective freedom will almost always be in tension with individual freedom and only by accepting this can we try to attenuate this problem. (Economic) democracy cannot reconcile collective and individual freedom, it can only mitigate the tension between them. Conflict avoidance strategies are preferable to democratic decision making whenever possible. Neither liberal theories of negative or positive freedom, nor republican theories of non-domination are adequate to account for the collective freedom of planned economies or to analyze its tension with individual freedom. Therefore, the account which was developed in this paper is preferable.

In any case, we should be wary of approaches that downplay the conflicts between collective and individual freedom and propagate an end to politics and conflict with an efficient centralized economy. At worst, this means propagating that “the entire nation represents a moral-political unit” (Söder 1960, 652). Collective freedom must not undermine a pluralism of lifestyles; on the contrary it should in fact make this pluralism possible. Individual freedom is what makes the collective ability to act a desirable form of collective freedom. Or to quote Marx (1969, 127): “In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”

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