Simon Derpmann
David P. Schweikard   *Editors*

Philip Pettit: Five Themes from his Work

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Simon Derpmann • David P. Schweikard
Editors

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Editors
Simon Derpmann
Department of Philosophy
University of Münster
Münster, Germany

David P. Schweikard
Department of Philosophy
University of Münster
Münster, Germany

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Preface

Over the last four decades, Philip Pettit has made a remarkable number of seminal contributions to a variety of fields of philosophy, ranging from metaphysics and the philosophy of mind and action to the philosophy of the social sciences, philosophy of law, ethics, and political philosophy. These works have not only advanced systematic thinking about the most pressing issues debated in the respective areas, they also – and this is particularly exceptional in a time of increasing compartmentalization of philosophy and specialization of scholars – display a continuing quest for systematic coherence. Moreover, especially in his recent work in republican political philosophy, Pettit has demonstrated a thorough concern for the historical depth of conceptual issues and arguments, thus situating his approach to the theories of freedom and democracy in a particular tradition he seeks to revive and update.

Pettit's work has received considerable attention from scholars around the world. This volume adds to the discussion, reception, and interpretation of his work on a range of issues from almost all areas of philosophy. It is based on the 16th *Münster Lectures in Philosophy*, hosted by the Department of Philosophy, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, and held in October 2012. The volume comprises the evening lecture *Freedom and Other Robustly Demanding Goods*, the proceedings of a two-day colloquium during which groups of junior faculty and students presented critical comments on aspects of Pettit's work, and a synoptic reply essay by Philip Pettit.

First and foremost, we would like to thank Philip Pettit for coming to Münster, for delivering the *Münster Lecture* in 2012, and especially for the engaging discussions of his work. We are also very grateful for the support we received from the Department of Philosophy. We owe a special acknowledgment to our colleagues and students for the work they have put into their contributions to the colloquium, as well as to the many helping hands during the event. Finally, we thank Raphael

Hüntelmann for his sponsorship of this and many previous *Münster Lectures* and Lucy Fleet at Springer both for seeing to it that this valuable tradition will be continued and for supporting the finalization of this volume.

Münster, Germany

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Simon Derpmann

David P. Schweikard

Contents

Abbreviations

CM   Pettit, Philip (1993) The Common Mind: *An Essay on Psychology, Society and Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

CP   Pettit, Philip (1997) The Consequentialist Perspective. In: *Three Methods of Ethics*: *A Debate*. ed. Baron, Marcia, Philip Pettit, and Michael Slote. Oxford: Blackwell.

DRA   Philip Pettit (2004) "Descriptivism, Rigidified and Anchored," *Philosophical Studies* 118, pp. 323–38.

GA   List, Christian and Philip Pettit (2011) *Group Agency: The Possibility, Design and Status of Corporate Agents.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

JD   Pettit, Philip (2007) Joining the Dots. In: *Common Minds: Themes from the Philosophy of Philip Pettit*, eds Brennan, Geoffrey, Robert Goodin, Frank Jackson and Michael Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 215–344.

JF   Pettit, Philip (2014) *Just Freedom: A Moral Compass for a Complex World.* New York W.W. Norton and Co.

NJD   Braithwaite, John and Philip Pettit. 1990. *Not Just Deserts: A Republican Theory of Criminal Justice*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

OPT   Pettit Philip (2012) *On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

R   Pettit, Philip (1997) *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government.* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

TF   Pettit, Philip (2001) *A Theory of Freedom: From the Psychology to the Politics of Agency.* Cambridge and New York: Polity and Oxford University Press.

Part I
Lecture

Chapter 1
Freedom and Other Robustly Demanding Goods

Philip Pettit

1.1 Robustly Demanding Freedom

1.1.1 Freedom as Non-frustration

What exactly is required if you are going to enjoy freedom in any choice between certain options? This may be a choice, at the extreme of triviality, between walking to the left, walking to the right, and staying put. Or it may be a choice at the other end of significance between going to the right in politics, going to the left or holding to the center. Or of course it may be a choice between having tea or coffee for breakfast, going to the theater or a football game, studying philosophy or science at University. For ease of illustration, let us just assume that it is a choice of the kind that we would generally want our society to protect. Unlike a choice between doing another harm or not, it figures among the basic liberties that all can enjoy at once under a fair rule of law (OPT; JF).

One story as to what freedom in such a choice requires can be traced, like much else in the realm of political theories, to Thomas Hobbes, the seventeenth century English philosopher. In his monumental *Leviathan,* published in 1651, he offered us an account of what it is to enjoy freedom in certain choices or, in a curious use of

P. Pettit (✉)
University Center for Human Values, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, USA

School of Philosophy, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia
e-mail: ppettit@princeton.edu

the term, what it is to be a freeman.[1] He wrote: 'a freeman is he that, in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to' (Hobbes 1994, Ch 21). We may ignore the middle clause in the sentence, which tells us that free choices are restricted to choices within the capacity—the strength and wit—of the agent. The point to focus on is his suggestion that it is enough to be free in a choice that you manage to do—you are not blocked from doing—that which you have 'a will to' do: that which you prefer among the options before you.

This suggestion means that to enjoy freedom between options in choices like those illustrated earlier—schematically, freedom in any choice between options X, Y and Z—all that has to happen is that among these options you can get to enact the one that you prefer. Freedom in the choice is indistinguishable, on this account, from preference-satisfaction: that is, satisfaction of the preference you actually hold over the alternatives at issue.

Hobbes did not endorse this conception of freedom just by way of an unremarked implication of his definition of a freeman. He was taken to task about his claim in a famous exchange with a contemporary bishop and philosopher. Bishop Bramhall suggests in that exchange that if you are considering whether or not to play tennis—we assume a willing partner—and you decide against doing so, then you may still have been wrong to think that you had a free choice. After all, unbeknownst to you, someone may have shut the door of the (indoor or 'real') tennis court against you. Hobbes is undaunted by the argument, asserting that for anyone in your position 'it is no impediment to him that the door is shut till he have a will to play' (Hobbes and Bramhall 1999, 91).

1.1.2   Freedom as Robust Non-frustration: Berlin

In this analysis of freedom, as on so many issues in political theory, Hobbes's influence was enormous. It continues today in the prevailing economic habit of identifying freedom with preference-satisfaction. But it is close to demonstrable that this analysis of free choice does not fit with our deeply ingrained habits of thinking: that while it may represent a possible conception of free choice, it is not the conception that most of us actually endorse in our thinking about such matters. To identify freedom with preference-satisfaction is to embrace an absurdity, as Isaiah Berlin (1969, xxxix) has pointed out (Pettit 2011; OPT).[2]

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[1] In using this term, Hobbes was almost certainly wanting to deny it to the republican tradition that he opposed. As we shall see later that tradition emphasized the importance of being a liber who is sui juris—being, as this idea was translated, a freeman—in order to enjoy freedom.

[2] Berlin most clearly focuses on this point in the 1969 introduction to the collection in which his 1958 lecture on 'Two Concepts of Liberty' was published and acknowledges doing so as a result of criticism by an anonymous reviewer of the 1958 lecture in the Times Literary Supplement. That reviewer, it appears, was Richard Wollheim. I am grateful to Albert Weale and Jonathan Wolff for throwing light on this for me.

Suppose that you are in prison and wish to live in the outside world. That means that by Hobbes's account, you are unfree in the choice between living behind bars and living outside. But according to that account you will be able to make yourself free in this choice if you can only come to prefer the option that is available to you: continuing to live in prison, say for another three years. And of course it may be within your power to get your preferences to shift in that direction. Suppose you reflect routinely on the good points about prison in comparison to life outside: a roof over your head, regular meals, the chance to read lots of books, and so on. There is a good chance in that event that you will cause your preferences to adapt and that you will become more or less happily resigned to prison. And if you succeed in this then, according to the Hobbesian view, you will have made yourself free.

By Berlin's reckoning, and surely he is not on his own, this is quite absurd. In order to win freedom in a choice, it appears that you have to shape the world so that it allows you to choose as you wish. It cannot be enough that without changing anything in the world, you manage to change your wishes. As Berlin (1969, 139) expresses the absurdity: 'I need only contract or extinguish my wishes and I am made free'. He puts the point even more forcefully in a later comment. 'To teach a man that, if he cannot get what he wants, he must learn to want only what he can get may contribute to his happiness or his security; but it will not increase his civil or political freedom' (Berlin 1969, xxxix).

Think of each option in a choice as a door, where an option is available just when the door is open (Berlin 1969, xlviii). What Berlin's argument from absurdity shows is that it is not enough for freedom of choice in the ordinary sense that the door you actually choose to push on happens to be open. It must also be the case that for any other option in the choice, for any door that you might have pushed on instead, it too is open. Suppose we are considering whether you are free in a choice between options, X, Y and Z. If you are truly to count has having a free choice in the actual world, then you must not be hindered in the actual world where you prefer X but equally you must not be hindered in the possible worlds where you prefer Y or Z. You must get what you actually want but it must also be the case that you would have gotten one of the other options had you wanted it instead.[3] All doors must be open.

Although he does not put it this way, the lesson from Berlin is that freedom in a choice is a robustly demanding good. It requires that in the actual world where you prefer X, you get X: you enjoy non-frustration by another. But it also requires that in the possible worlds where you prefer Y or prefer Z, you get Y or Z: you enjoy non-frustration in those possible worlds, as well as enjoying it in the actual world.

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[3] Strictly, there is a problem in saying that to be free in the choice of X, it must be the case that you could have chosen the alternative, Y, had you wanted to—had you preferred that option. This condition might be incapable of fulfillment because you are the sort of person who would only want to do Y if it was not an available option; the possibility will be salient from Groucho Marx's quip that he would only want to join a club that would not accept him as a member. The problem can be overcome if what is required is that you could have chosen Y had you tried to do so, where it is not required in that eventuality that you actually prefer Y. For expressive convenience, I shall ignore this complication in the text. I am grateful to Lara Buchak for alerting me to the problem.

You actually enjoy non-frustration and you would have continued to enjoy non-frustration, no matter which among the options you happened to prefer.

Freedom on this account is robustly demanding, because it requires the presence of a less demanding good, non-frustration, not just in the actual world, but in various possible worlds in which your preferences over the options are different. The worlds over which non-frustration must continue in order for you to enjoy actual freedom at our hands do not extend to all possible worlds where you form a different preference between the options, only to worlds that resemble the actual world in a distinctive manner. They are sufficiently like the actual world for the considerations that make freedom valuable to remain relevant to how we ought to treat you and to retain a greater weight than competing concerns. And they are sufficiently alike for our natures not to be transformed or corrupted there; in that sense they are modest variations on the actual world. You could hardly complain that you do not enjoy freedom at our hands, because we would interfere with you if there were good reasons to do so or if we had turned into monsters.

But however restricted in these ways, the worlds over which we must grant you non-interference in Berlin's sense, if you are to enjoy freedom at our hands, are not limited to relatively probable worlds. It might be very unlikely indeed that you should ever prefer to have Z rather than X or Y but if you are to be free in the X-Y-Z choice, then you must still enjoy non-frustration in that Z-preferring world. It must still be the case that if you had preferred Z, however improbable that is, you would not have been subject to frustration in realizing Z.

1.1.3   Freedom as Robust Non-frustration: Republicanism

Subject to the restrictions of relevance, weight and modesty, then, you enjoy freedom in a certain choice just to the extent that you can choose as you wish, regardless of what you wish. You can choose as you wish, avoiding frustration, regardless of whether you prefer X or prefer Y or prefer Z. This already shows that freedom is a robustly demanding good, in the sense defined, but it is worth remarking that on the republican tradition of thinking, as I and others have argued elsewhere, freedom is even more robustly demanding than this suggests. Subject to the three restrictions, your actual freedom in a choice requires not just that you should be able to choose as you wish, regardless of how you wish to choose, but also that you should be able to choose as you wish, regardless of how others wish that you choose (Pettit R; OPT; JF). Not only must all the doors in the choice be open; there must be no door-keepers who have the power to close them at will, should they take against you.

According to this strengthened view, the non-frustration required for your actual freedom has to remain in place, not just across worlds that vary in what you prefer to choose, but also in worlds that vary in what others prefer that you choose. There are a number of arguments for assigning this richer robustness to the value of freedom but let it suffice here to mention just one. This is that it is natural to think that you are your own boss in a certain type of choice—and that you enjoy freedom of

choice in that sense—only insofar as you are not subject to the will of another as to how you should choose. The idea is that you should not have to depend on the will of another being favorable to your choosing as you wish in order to be able to choose as you wish; you should not be able to choose as you wish only because some other gives you permission to do so. Did you depend on getting the leave or permission of another in order to make a choice, then that person's will would be in ultimate charge of what you do, not your own. And this would be true, even if it was extremely unlikely that the other would deny you permission. No matter how much goodwill they bore towards you, that person would be in control and you would not be properly free.

This thought is to be found in Roman republicans like Cicero and Livy, in modern thinkers like Machiavelli, Harrington and Locke, and in a batch of enlightenment thinkers, including Kant. If we endorse it, as I think there is good reason to do, then we must think that freedom requires non-frustration in a maximally robust sense. It requires that you should escape the frustration of another in actually exercising your choice and it requires that you would escape that frustration, regardless of what you wanted to do and regardless of what any other wanted you to do. In exercising the choice, you must enjoy the status, as it was described in Roman law, of being a *liber* or free person who is *sui juris*: under your own jurisdiction (Skinner 1998). You must not be subject to the power of any other in that respect; you must enjoy freedom in a sense in which it requires non-domination: not being exposed to the *dominatio* of any *dominus* or lord in your life.[4]

Whether or not we go along with this republican radicalization of Berlin's idea, we must admit that freedom of choice is still a robustly demanding ideal. It requires the presence of the less demanding good of non-frustration in the actual world but also in a range of possible worlds. By all accounts the only relevant possible worlds are those modest variations on the actual world in which the reasons for why you should be able to choose as you prefer in the choice on hand retain their relevance and weight. According to Berlin's view, the only such worlds crucial for whether you are actually free are those where you change your mind about what you want to choose. According to the republican view they extend also to worlds where others change their minds about how they want you to choose.[5] Under each view, freedom is a value or ideal that makes robust, not just actual, demands. Only the Hobbesian alternative would hold otherwise.

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[4] Conceptualizing freedom in this way, the republican tradition argues that under the law each citizen should be protected against domination in a range of choice that each can exercise and enjoy at the same time that others exercise and enjoy it. For a classic statement of that thought, see Kant's (1996) Metaphysics of Morals and for more recent efforts see (OPT, JF).

[5] I ignore one extra dimension of robustness. This is that either view of freedom would require you to enjoy non-interference with what you do, no matter how in particular you decide to do it: no matter which foot you put forward, for example, in deciding to turn left rather than right.

1.2   Other Robustly Demanding Goods

1.2.1   *Robustly Demanding Attachments*

Once we see the modal structure that freedom displays, it should be clear that there are lots of values or goods that we treasure in human life that embody the same sort of structure. I start with the good of love—or by extension, friendship or collegiality or solidarity—that I may confer on you and you, reciprocally, on me. There are many different styles of love, of course, as there are many different styles of friendship and other relationships, but I put aside such complications here in order to underline the point about common structure.

   A good way of showing that love has the structure of a robustly demanding good is to begin with a play—perhaps one of the great comedies of all time—by Oscar Wilde. In *The Importance of being Earnest,* Jack Worthing uses the pseudonym 'Ernest' on his visits to London, as he wishes to retain a certain anonymity in the big city. Under that pseudonym he attracts the attentions of Gwendolen, the cousin of his friend, Algernon, and they fall in love.

   Or do they? Gwendolen's attachment may not earn the name of love, since it transpires that it is only name-deep. As she explains in response to his confession of attachment: 'my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence'—presumably, we are meant to suppose, the fact that it sounds like 'earnest'. And as if that were not sufficiently bewildering, she adds: 'The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you'. Jack remonstrates with her, of course, explaining that he would much rather be called 'Jack'. But Gwendolen will have none of it, expanding with ever greater enthusiasm on the charms of 'Ernest'. 'It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.'

   Does Gwendolen really love Jack? Well, if she does, she has a strange way of thinking about it and that is part of what is so funny about Jack's predicament. What makes it even funnier is that he immediately wonders if he should be re-christened 'Ernest', as if that would put the situation right. The theme is amusing, because the passionate degree of love that Gwendolen declares for Jack fits ill with its turning on the fortuity of his name. We expect that if she loves him, then her attachment ought not to be contingent on the fact that, as she thinks, he is called Ernest. It ought to be more robust than that.

   Wilde's comedy teaches us that while the good of love—the good that consists in enjoying the love of another—certainly requires the affectionate concern that Gwendolen declares for Jack, it also requires something more. If I love you then, as things actually are, I have to offer you due care. I have to register and respond to the stimulus of your needs and wishes in the partisan manner we expect of a lover. But the due care I offer you in this way must not be premised just on how you happen to be: it must be able to survive a variety of possible changes in you, among them the change or apparent change in the name you bear. If I love you, then not only must I